



POWER

- ✕ Vem bestämmer våra löner?
- ✕ Yelp for people
- ✕ Empowered but indebted?
- ✕ Power, Passions, Interests, Voice, and Exit
- ✕ The power pulse between Guatemala's president Jimmy Morales and CICIG
- ✕ Who's getting the last laugh? !
- ✕ The power of discourse





Letter from the Editors



This year of Utblick is coming to an end – you are now holding (or at least reading) the last issue of 2017. Something that on the other hand won’t end is the topic of this issue, power. Power will keep influencing our lives and interpersonal relations as long as human society is characterized by inequality. This inequality might be expressed in terms of economic resources, knowledge, an idea’s ability to attract followers, to name a few. Power has a lot of different expressions and manifestations in different areas of investigation – one example of this might be the distinction between hard and soft power, representing different means of achieving ends (if any).

However, power is a complex concept. What is power, who has it and what are the consequences of power being exploited? None of these questions can be immediately and easily answered; they require careful analysis and critical thinking on the ever-changing rules of power. In this issue, we try to shed some light on these faces of power. Covered aspects are the power of discourses, the role of money, and the authoritarian state mechanisms of disciplining the masses. These are however only scratches on the surface, yet we hope they give some insights and trigger some thought about the role of power in a modern society.

We would like to take this last Letter as an opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in the creative process during the year. In particular, we are grateful to Linn Posse, who has done an amazing and hard work doing layout and illustrating articles – the magazine would not be the same without her contributions – and Brea Pluta, who has generously contributed to Utblick with her knowledge of the English language in the proofreading process. .

That was all for this time. We wish you a nice winter and, of course, a very pleasant read.

Best wishes

Mikael and Axel

<u>Vem bestämmer våra löner?</u>	4
<i>Axel Christoffersson</i>	
<u>Empowered but indebted?</u>	7
<i>Ella Petrini</i>	
<u>Power, Passions, Interests, Voice, and Exit</u>	10
<i>Egil Sturk</i>	
<u>Yelp for people</u>	14
<i>Markus Pettersson</i>	
<u>The power pulse between Guatemala’s president Jimmy Morales and CICIG</u>	18
<i>Lucrecia Charchalac</i>	
<u>Who’s getting the last laugh?</u>	22
<i>Mikael Lassa</i>	
<u>The power of discourse: how meaning and expectations created Fortress Europe</u>	26
<i>Malin Lampio</i>	

Vem bestämmer våra löner?



TEXT: Axel Christoffersson

I VÅR MODERNA kapitalistiska ekonomi har frågan om produktionens fördelning alltid varit hett debatterad. Medan kapitalägare sällan haft bekymmer med att klara livhanken har arbetet stundom haft det sämre ställt. Under kapitalismens verkliga genombrott i mitten på 1800- talet slet många arbetare på bruk och i textilfabriker för knaper penning – ett mönster som går igen också idag på platser av kapitalet nyligen funna. Huruvida detta är ett bekymmer eller inte ligger förstås i betraktarens öga, men att förstå drivkrafterna bakom fördelningen mellan arbete och kapital torde vara av intresse för alla. Ytterst är det en fråga om lönesättning.

Att lönearbete är en central aspekt av den moderna kapitalismen är förmodligen de flesta idag överens om. Den vinstmaximerande, rationelle kapitalisten skulle aldrig kunna nyttja sina investeringar utgjorda av bland annat maskiner om inte mänskliga händer i tillräckliga mängder fanns att tillgå. Delade meningar råder dock kring hur förhållandet mellan arbetstagare och arbetsgivare ser ut. Här kan främst två spår urskiljas; ett klassiskt nationalekonomiskt där fokus ligger på utbud och efterfrågan på arbetsmarknaden samt ett kritiskt, som söker svaren i de institutioner och maktrelationer som omgärdar lönearbetet.

I mitten på 1700- talet formulerade Adam Smith sina berömda teorier om arbetsdelning och marknadsutbyten. Genom att bryta ned produktionsprocessen i små, förfinade moment skulle produktionskapaciteten öka, samtidigt som marknadsmekanismen med sin handel säkerställde att resurser fördelades effektivt mellan olika aktörer i ekonomin. Ur arbetsdelning föddes fabriker, som i allt högre utsträckning efterfrågade arbetare. Denna efterfrågan möttes på arbetsmarknaden, som i industrialiseringens tidevarv utgjorts av arbetsgivare å ena sidan och (historiskt sett) bönder som lämnat jorden bakom sig för att söka lyckan i staden å den andra.

På en väl fungerande marknad finns alltså omöftast ett pris. Detta pris ger signaler till köpare och säljare om förhållandena på marknaden – vad finns i överflöd, vad råder det brist på, vad ska bjudas ut och vad är gynnsamt att köpa? Priset på arbetsmarknaden utgörs av lön, där säljaren är den arbetstagare som önskar ta anställning och köpare är arbetsgivaren. Lönen bestäms som en relation mellan mängden utbudet arbete och efterfrågan på detsamma på marknaden, det vill säga utanför varje enskilt företags och arbetstagares kontroll. Detta är centralt – på en fungerande marknad koordinerar priset aktörernas handlingar utan att aktörerna egentligen behöver ha med varandra att göra. På så vis blir marknader anonyma och utfallen mer eller mindre oberoende av enskilda aktörers handlande, något som förstås får väldiga implikationer på lönesättningen.

Enligt denna teori skulle de under den tidiga industrialiseringens dagar låga lönerna kunna förklaras av att urbaniseringen kommit igång på allvar, vilket bör ökat mängden utbudet arbete i städerna och pressat ned dess pris, alltså lönen (produktivitet är ytterligare en potentiell faktor som jag för nu lämnar därhän). Men lön sätts i praktiken inte enbart på arbetsmarknaden, utan också av det enskilda företag där arbetaren är anställd. Detta (och

mycket annat) har uppmärksammats av Max Weber, en tysk sociolog verksam i slutet av 1800- talet och början av 1900- talet.

"Weber såg inte marknaden enbart som en anonym arena för utbyte av varor och tjänster, utan som en plats för intressekonflikt och kamp"

Weber lade i sin analys av kapitalismen stor vikt vid dess rationella natur. För att kunna driva ett företag effektivt är dess ledning tvungen att kalkylera företagets intäkter och kostnader. Då kostnaderna i viss mån utgörs av arbete måste arbetets kostnad kunna kalkyleras och förutsägas. Detta får två grundläggande konsekvenser. För det första vilar kapitalismen tungt på lönearbetet som institution, eftersom lönen är det enda rimliga sättet att precist värdera arbetets kostnad i monetära termer. Vidare innebär detta att det för att kapitalismen ska frodas krävs fria, kontraktbara individer som är villiga att sälja sitt arbete i utbyte mot pengar – det fordras en ickeäggande arbetarklass. För det andra måste företaget kunna kontrollera kostnaderna för arbetet och anpassa dessa efter rådande förhållanden på produkt- och arbetsmarknaderna. Detta skapar enligt Weber maktobalanser inom företaget, där ledningen när som helst kan säga upp arbetare för att minska kostnaderna. Beroende på antalet arbetsgivare i området kan detta få fatala konsekvenser för arbetaren, som istället för arbetslöshet kan tvingas gå med

"Genom att sätta marknadens spelregler samt reglera förhållandet mellan arbetsgivare och arbetstagare skulle politiken kunna spela en åtminstone mer än marginell roll"

på låga löner. Marknadsförhållandena spelade alltså en avgörande roll också här men med en viss twist; Weber såg inte marknaden enbart som en anonym arena för utbyte av varor och tjänster, utan som en plats för intressekonflikt och kamp. Marknadsutfallet, låga löner, var en konsekvens av maktförhållandena på marknaden.

Enligt detta synsätt spelar alltså maktrelationen mellan arbetstagare och arbetsgivare en avgörande roll i bestämmandet av rådande lönenivå. Dessutom medför resonemanget att någon form av (med marxistisk terminologi) utsugning kommer äga rum, eftersom företaget alltid kommer anpassa löneutbetalningarna (det vill säga arbetsinsatsen) så att vinsten för kapitalägarna maximeras. Därmed inte sagt att marknaden saknar betydelse – det innebär enbart att kapitalägaren genom organisation och rätt i sitt bolag har ett övertag gentemot arbetet.

Detta öppnar i mina ögon upp för helt andra tolkningar av vad som avgör lönenivån i ett kapitalistiskt samhälle. Istället för marknaden allena kan finnas mängder av aspekter av betydelse för hur mycket betalt arbetaren får, där lagstiftande församlingar spelar en extra framträdande roll. Genom att sätta marknadens spelregler samt reglera förhållandet mellan arbetsgivare och arbetstagare skulle politiken kunna spela en åtminstone mer än marginell roll. I Sverige sköts som bekant lönesättningen av arbetsmarknadens parter (fack och arbetsgivare) men arbetsmiljö är reglerat i lag, något som till sin natur inte helt kan skiljas från lön.

Ansenlig tid har förlöpt sedan Smith och Weber lade fram sina teorier om vad som styr förhållandena inom den kapitalistiska ekonomien som vi ännu lever i. Utvecklingen under 1900-talet har i västvärlden i allmänhet och Sverige i synnerhet gått mot allt högre löner i absoluta tal, något som bör spegla den enorma produktivitetstillväxt som pågått under hela perioden. Fördelningen av inkomster över tid mellan arbete och kapital följer däremot inte samma tydliga mönster. Även om introduktionen av bilen och fungerande (nåja) kollektivtrafik drastiskt ökat möjligheterna för arbetet att finna alternativa sysselsättningar i tillfälle av uppsägning finns spänningen kvar.

För att avslutningsvis besvara rubrikens fråga är det mycket svårt att säga vem eller vad som egentligen sätter våra löner. Att förhållandena på arbetsmarknaden är centrala råder det inga som helst tvivel om, men maktrelationer inom arbetsmarknaden påverkas också av faktorer som traditionellt inte beaktas i strikt marknadsteori. Företagsledare, lagstiftare, opinionsbildare och förstås arbetsmarknadens parter är alla i bred bemärkelse potentiella kandidater till lönesättare. Något att ha i bakhuvudet nu när valrörelse stundar, oavsett var sympatierna ligger.

Empowered but indebted?

– The feminist potential of microfinance questioned

TEXT: Ella Petrini

MICROFINANCE IS AN intensely disputed subject in the development research and policymaking. While microfinance has been praised as both the solution to poverty and as a means of women's empowerment, it has also met heavy critique for its contribution to debt traps and further impoverishment. Despite this, microfinance is still championed as a method of success by the aid community and NGOs, many of them focusing on women's rights. In a moment of reinvigorated critique of the individualisation of feminism, I think microfinance is an important issue to revisit.

Nancy Fraser, in her article "How feminism became the handmaiden of capitalism", published in the Guardian back in 2013, describes how microfinance appeared in the context of the dismantling of

large welfare-state oriented development policies. Fraser argues that feminist critique of the paternalism of welfare states helped this development, and how microfinance came to be presented as a grassroots, bottom-up remedy to poverty. As a means to create gender equality, microfinance is fractious and uneven. There is no guarantee of access – the poorest women will be excluded as they won't live up to the criteria of creditworthiness. While it may provide a way out of poverty for some, others end up indebted. If one struggles to pay interest, the only way out of the situation is in many cases to take another loan, the interest rate of which further adds to one's monthly expenses. It goes without saying who are the winners in this situation. As feminists, we therefore need to question whether we can expect microfinance

"Feminist autonomy is not just about autonomy from men – but a general social and economic emancipation"

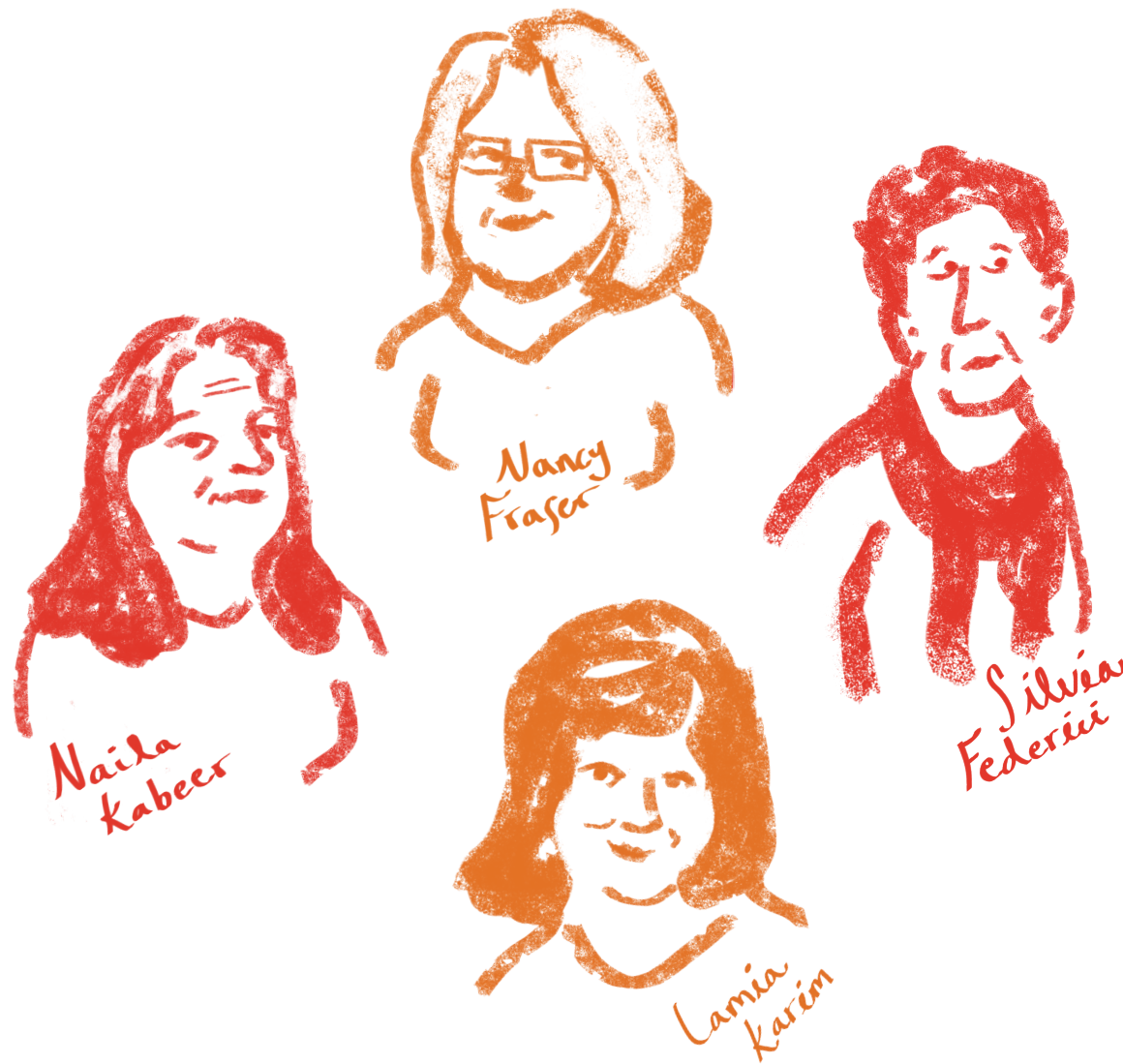


ILLUSTRATION: Linn Posse

to contribute to equality for all women. Many microfinance projects are targeted especially towards women. Underlying this is a picture of women as better, more responsible loan takers than men. However, we should ask why women are "better" loan takers. Silvia Federici argues that it can be explained by the fact that women are more economically dependent on the loans and that they often bear the main responsibility for the reproduction of their families.

Microfunding entangles women in a system that fundamentally builds on their vulnerability to poverty. Who does this picture of women as good loan takers, in comparison to men, who are selfish, lazy and wasteful, serve? It creates local conflicts between women and men, as it discredits men as victims of poverty as well. When we focus on men's inability to make sound financial choices, the power relation between loan taker and lender is concealed.

Microfinance fosters a view of poverty as an individual concern. The "good" borrower can use their microloan to make sound investments, increase production and household incomes, and thereby escape poverty. However, failing to pay back or meeting interest payments cannot only be explained by failing to be a "good" borrower. Rather, reasons can be that the buffalo bought with the lent money died due to an exceptionally cold winter, or that the "productive loan" had to be used to pay hospital bills when a family member fell sick, or the school fees that suddenly increased.

Lamia Karim, in her book "Microfinance and its discontents – Women in debt in Bangladesh", shows that although loans might be given to groups of women, this cannot truly be regarded as a measure in the spirit of cooperation. Instead, it fosters control and individualises responsibility amongst these female collectives. As such, micro-finance can contribute to undermine already existing community-based cooperative solutions that women have created to cope with poverty and violence. Women's enterprises and small scale production thereby become tied to the economic interests of banks, aid agencies and NGOs.

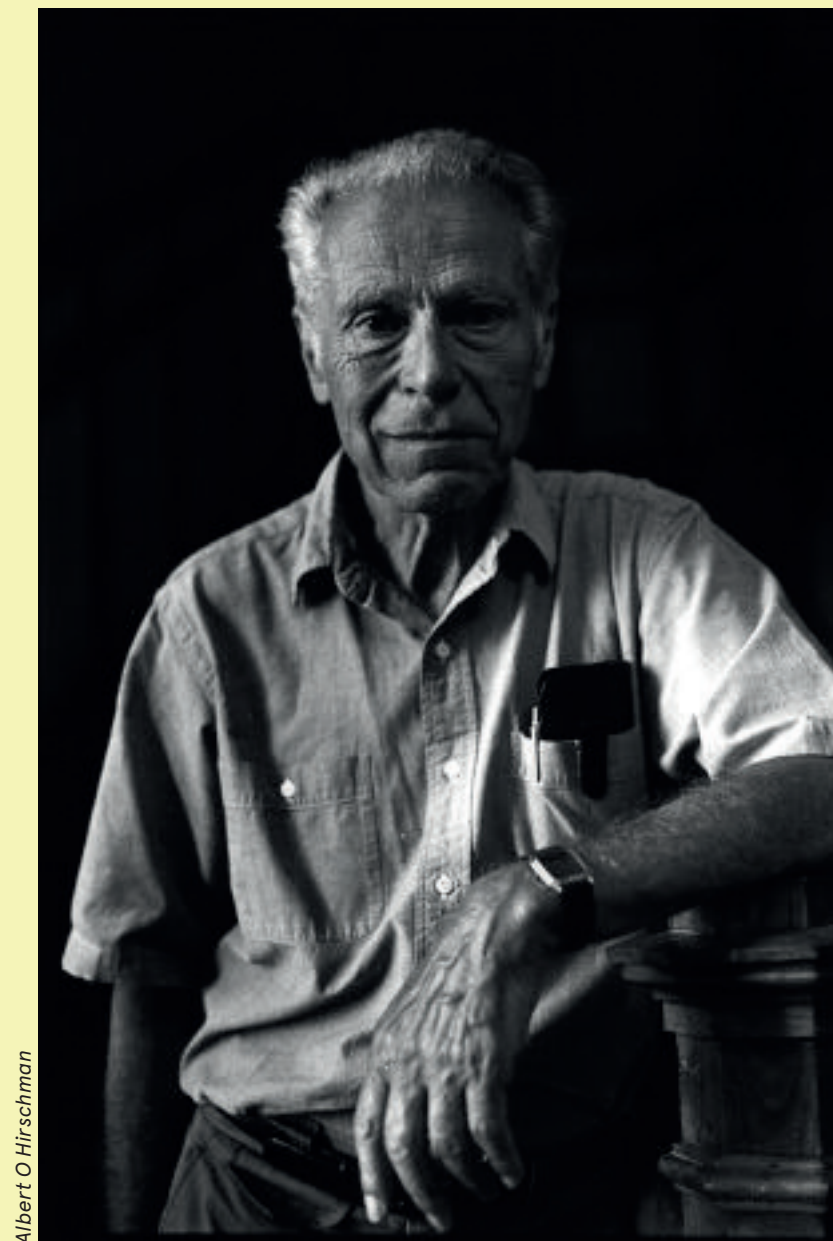
Further, micro-finance stimulates a move from subsistence farming to producing for markets. Of course, starting to sell products can bring larger incomes, but subsistence farming has an immensely important social security function, and often producing for markets means producing cash crops for

markets in the West – which relates to food security, an increasingly important challenge on the global agenda. Subsistence farming is often seen as a "last way out", but it can be, and has been, an active choice of many women. For example, as an act of resistance towards exploitation as workers in industrial agriculture. Participation in the formal workforce sometimes means working for below-subsistence wages and an extreme lack of influence of one's own situation.

The concept of empowerment emerged as a way to upgrade women's power and as capable agents – not merely as passive victims to patriarchal violence and economic oppression. Naila Kabeer is one of the feminists who has argued that "empowerment" has become appropriated to serve economic interests. Kabeer argues that in order for empowerment to translate to a broader change of structures, resistance must be organized. Taking Federici's argument, feminist autonomy is not just about autonomy from men – but a general social and economic emancipation.

Power, Passions, Interests, Voice, and Exit

*An introduction to the ideas
of Albert O Hirschman*



Albert O Hirschman

TEXT: Egil Sturk IMAGE: Pablo Hojas/CC

In the concluding section of his book "The Passions and the Interests" Albert O. Hirschman made a point of the ignorance of the history of ideas, criticizing John Maynard Keynes for making an argument remarkably similar to Montesquieu et al without being aware of it. I seem to have made the same mistake in my essay "Does the Future have a Future?" unwittingly making a distinction that is centuries old, namely between the passions and the interests. The former being associated with public involvement, and the latter with private accumulation, associating the passions with ideology, and the interest with "the icy water of egotistical calculation". In fact, this distinction has a strong strategic component. Capitalism, or interests, as conceived by early advocates such as James Steuart, John Millar, and Montesquieu, was supposed to act as a countervailing and neutralizing force to the unruly passions manifested in the form of interest groups, political parties, and absolutist kings; the desire for power, honor, and glory. Interests being constant, predictable and harmless, in contrast to the capriciousness, violence, and arbitrariness of public passions. In terms of the theoretical framework presented by Montesquieu in *De l'Esprit des lois*, commerce – especially in the form of mobile capital, being harder to appropriate than fixed assets – was conceived as an institution that would disperse, check, and balance the power of the sovereign. James

Steuart compared the economy to a watch, fine-tuned and precise, but vulnerable and complex, arguing that these characteristics would force the sovereign to voluntarily restrain himself and defer to the laws of the economy. It would also create a spirit of liberty and peace among the people according to them. It was an attempt to establish order and control as opposed to the anarchy of passions and arbitrary abuses of power that these thinkers feared; civil war, aggression, intolerance, persecution, bigotry and hatred. A capitalist peace. What they sought to accomplish was exactly what capitalism has been accused of as one of its worst features: that it inhibits the full development of the individual, it sought to "domesticate" or "tame" humanity, to repress certain destructive inclinations, and create a less multifaceted personality, to pacify and civilize mankind.

But capitalism, and the cultural, ideational, and political changes induced by it, was not praised by everyone. Even Adam Smith complained that the doctrine of private interest led to the demise of heroic virtues, taming humanity; making her mind dull, and her life monotonous and boring. Tocqueville and Adam Ferguson – the latter a contemporary of Smith – denounced the division of labor, claiming that its repetitive and excessively meticulous character would dissolve the organic bonds of society, leading to a deterioration of

civic virtues, participation and an increased atomization of society. Creating an atmosphere where nothing but comfort and economic efficiency is desired, facilitating a desire for a strong leader promising to limit participation and repress challenges to the economic order on behalf of “the people”. Rather than being intrinsically connected to order, security, freedom and peace, these critics argued that commerce was more likely to be conducive to conflict and despotism. As Hirschman makes abundantly clear, concepts such as alienation, anomie, *gesellschaft/ge-meinschaft*, and “One-dimensional man” was formulated long before Marx, Durkheim, Tönnies, and Marcuse.

In sum, the objections I raised in my previous essay about the endless continuation of the present, the dissolution of the fiery passions furnished by ideology, the reduction of politics to administration, the pacification of the dissatisfied, and the retreat to the private sphere, are nothing but a repetition of arguments raised hundreds of years ago. Nonetheless, there is a point to be made about the pacification of dissatisfaction, and the subsequent retreat to the private sphere. As Hirschman argues in his book “Shifting Involvements” commercial societies oscillates between periods of intense pursuit of private interests, and public involvement, on a – roughly – 20 year basis. The mechanism behind these waves is attributed to unfulfilled expectations of enjoyment by him. Consumers are inevitably unable to achieve the degree of satisfaction that they expect from durable goods, due to diminishing marginal utility, elasticity, and habit, at best they experience comfort rather than pleasure. The accumulation of dissatisfaction in important social groups eventually create frustration, boredom, and a desire for change. Consumerism collapses due to its own “internal contradictions”, it contains the seeds of its own destruction. Subsequently, a wave of public involvement in the form of political participation, community activism etc. takes

place. This is due to a change in preferences induced by the accumulation of dissatisfaction, with the public appraising values such as; solidarity, cooperation, participation, sharing and belonging, rather than values associated with the pursuit of private economic gain. This can also be interpreted as a shift from the interests, to the passions. For this shift to be possible, the transition from private to public has to be relatively smooth, the costs cannot be too high, since this will deter people from becoming involved. It might be the existence of such entrance barriers that accounts for the lack of civic engagement and collective political mobilization today. In addition to the opportunity costs in terms of time and energy entailed by public involvement – which are negligible due to the presumed change in preferences – such barriers might be high search and information costs, making it difficult to find relevant “providers” for public involvement. However, I believe that the aforementioned pacification and transformation of dissatisfaction is the main cause, as I argued in my previous essay, this pacification is induced by a variety of ideological instruments; the discourse of perpetual crisis, the state of exception, self-improvement, mindfulness: “a narcotic inducing us to stop wanting, to stop desiring and dreaming, a numbing of the senses”.

Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that the wave of civic participation, resentment, and political passions we are now witnessing is at least partly attributable to a widespread dissatisfaction with global capitalism (interests) and an inability of the interests to tame the passions, just as in the wake of the financial crisis, with movements such as “Indignados” in Spain, “Kínima Aganaktisménon-Politón” in Greece, and “Occupy Wall Street” in the US. Albeit now dissatisfaction, regrettably, takes the form of right-wing populism. In “Exit, Voice and Loyalty” Hirschman made a distinction between different strategies that individuals, firms, organizations, or states, can utilize when faced with dissatisfaction,

decline or a decrease in benefits, real or perceived. The options for expressing their discontent are: voice; attempting to improve or solve the situation or relationship through deliberation and negotiation, and propose changes, or exit; withdrawing from, and destroying the relationship. In relation to the populist movements, we are seeing an increase of exit: The UK leaving EU, and The US leaving The Paris agreement.

In the case of right-wing populism, voice seems to coincide with the passions more often than with the interests (as in the case of i.e. lobby groups) these are voters feeling disempowered, ignored and disenfranchised, wanting to disrupt the entrenched interests in the political system, and make their voices heard. Having witnessed the volatility of public opinion, the lack of knowledge on most political issues, the prevalence of partisan bias, the inability to discern causal relationships and attribute responsibility among the public, makes the desire to create safeguards – such as economic institutions – against the disruptive, aggressive, yet transient nature of “mob-rule” more reasonable. Yet, one has to acknowledge that while the continuity, stability and predictability of interests might create a sense of safety and comfortability, it is by nature resistant to change, favoring the status quo, as argued by Ferguson and Tocqueville. Furthermore, shocks to the system – such as the financial crisis – has revealed the volatility and uncertainty of the economy, with ensuing deprivation, anxiety and precariousness among millions of people. Thus, it has been revealed to us that the contemporary economic – especially the financial – system, is characterized by the same capriciousness, volatility and uncertainty that the political system was accused of centuries ago. Consequently, creating a legal framework, and institutions capable of “taming” the passions of the economy seems more urgent today, than restraining political power. Letting the economic “passions” reign free, while restraining and reducing the

role of political institutions is hardly a viable model anymore. An empowered demos, public power, is necessary to counteract the accumulation of private economic power, otherwise, only the loudest voices will be heard, and their private interests will be favored at the behalf of the public. This clearly disrupts democratic ideals such as giving equal consideration to every voice, which facilitates discontent and disillusionment, and indeed; exit. The responsiveness to the voice of people and states is of utmost importance if democratic governments wishes to maintain their legitimacy, it ensures that citizens feel that they can participate in decisions affecting their lives, and that their voices are being heard and taken into consideration.



Yelp for people

*How China plans on using Big Data
to rate its citizens*

TEXT: Markus Pettersson IMAGE: Netflix (Black mirror)

IN THE EPISODE **Nosedive** from the British sci-fi series **Black mirror**, people's place in society is governed by their ratings on social media. A low score disqualifies you from living in certain neighbourhoods, booking certain flights and even having certain occupations. Your score is set by how you interact with the people around you, and the easiest way to improve your rating is befriending those with a higher score. Sounds like just another sci-fi dystopia where social media obsession has run amok? In China it will be humdrum by 2020.

In 2014 the Chinese government presented its plans for what they called a "Social Credit Score", that's supposed to roll out by the end of the decade. Credit scores aren't usually cause for much controversy, but this system goes a lot farther than checking for overdue phone bills. It is not supposed to be

a measurement of your fiscal responsible, rather an assessment of how trustworthy you are, in the eyes of the Chinese government. By 2020 all 1.4 billion Chinese citizens will be given a score ranging between 350 and 950 points. Your rating will be publicly ranked against your fellow citizens and used to determine your eligibility for a job or an education, whether you can skip security at the airport, and even where your family can go on vacation.

At this point it isn't clear what parameters will be used to set a score, and judging by the Politburo's track record on secrecy, we probably never will. However, we can make some educated guesses thanks to a couple of pilot projects. The Chinese government has authorised eight private corporations to come up with their own versions of the system and run trials in delimited regions of the country.

"The social credit score is not as much about surveillance as it is about self regulation"

These tryouts are, unlike the real thing, completely voluntary. For some of them, you even get a gift card for participating.

As one could expect, the largest pilot schemes are run by some of China's data prolific internet behemoths. The Alibaba group, most commonly known in the West for their e-commerce branch, is one of them. They're planning on using the vast amount of data generated from their search engine, messaging app, web store and other internet services to paint a very thorough picture of its users. The company has admitted to account for a person's "behaviour and preferences" when setting a score. People who browse the web for cribs will be categorised as parents, who in general will be considered to feel a higher sense of responsibility. If you stream a lot of movies the company classifies you as unproductive and will judge you thereafter. This is something that's at the very core of the system. The social credit score is not as much about surveillance as it is about self regulation. By promoting behaviour that the government consider favourable they hope that people themselves will change their way of living.

Perhaps the most obvious objectives with this are political ones. In Alibaba's trials, users get a higher score for sharing 'positive energy' (read 'good news about the government') on social media. It's not hard to see how this could escalate even further. Posting criticism of the regime has never been wise in China, but now the authorities have a new tool to carry out retributions, swift and easy. What's perhaps most startling is that your own score will influence the score of your peers. If you have connections to a friend on social media who frequently shares criticism

of the government, your own credit will take a hit. On Alibaba's website they warn users about the consequences of befriending people with a low score. Would you unfriend some of your old classmates if it meant that you could finally get a flat within walking distance of your workplace? Doesn't seem too far-fetched, does it?

This aspect has come under an unusual amount of criticism in China. An article in the state-owned paper China Youth Daily was remarkably critical. It said "political" data (such as petitions) should not be included, declaring that "people should have rated government employees and instead the government has [rated] the people." In the Beijing Times, another state-run newspaper, the scheme was even compared with the "good citizen" certificates issued by Japan during its wartime occupation of China.

So why are millions of people voluntarily signing up for these pilot projects? Well, in the words of the communist party, the system will "allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step." The system would be harsh towards those who don't fall in line, but many citizens could see some of their everyday complications resolved. If they get a score of 600, they can take out a loan of up to 5,000 yuan (around €640) to spend on one of Alibaba's sites. Reach 650 points and they can rent a car without leaving a deposit. They can use faster check-in at hotels and are also entitled to the VIP check-in at airports. Those with more than 666 points can get a cash loan of up to 50,000 yuan (€6,400), naturally from Alibaba's own financial service. Those with more than 700 points can apply for Singapore

travel without supporting documents such as an employee letter. Reach 750, and they will get fast-tracked application for a European Schengen visa. Tencent, a social media company with its own competing pilot project, even has a cooperation with China's largest dating site, Baihe, where users with a higher score will be more likely to show up in other users' feeds. If one leaves aside all integrity arguments—which one should not—many Chinese could end up with more personal freedoms than ever before.

“What’s perhaps most startling is that your own score will influence the score of your peers”

Shaping public behaviour isn't the sole objective of the system. Confidence in public institutions is approaching an all-time low, largely due to a series of scandals regarding everything from unsafe school buildings to poisonous milk that got through official quality supervision. By collecting vast amounts of data, the state hopes to crack down on corrupt companies and officials. It also plans to use the data to keep track of public opinions. In a democracy, rulers get feedback on which reforms are popular through referendums, elections and the free press, all of which are alien to the ruling communist party. By analysing citizens' behaviour the government hopes to get a grip on these opinions and adapt their policies thereafter to increase both efficiency and public approval. Paradoxically, big data might help make otherwise monolithic institutions more accountable.

When I've told my friends about the Social credit score all of them have reacted with dismay, and it isn't hard to see why. From the perspective of someone living in a democratic society that highly empathises individual rights, such a system sounds like a nightmare. Someone who has lived their whole life under authoritarian rule might however have a different take on it. Free speech is already nonexistent in China and it's common knowledge that the government is scrutinising what's being posted on social media. The notion that authorities should shape public behaviour isn't new either. The most famous example of this is the now abandoned one-child policy, but citizens are also required by law to visit their elderly parents on a regular basis. China is also in desperate need of some new form of credit system. Two thirds of Chinese citizens have never had a traditional credit score, which severely limits their access to necessary credit. According to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, the annual economic loss caused by lack of fiscal information is more than 600 billion yuan (€77bn). If you agree with the regime's views on what makes a good person it isn't hard to see why weighing in someone's trustworthiness into the equation would be a good idea. A fresh graduate from college could then be eligible for a loan to ignite her start up, despite never having had a full-time job.

The Chinese leadership seems determined to create a social credit score that will have a widespread impact on people's day to day lives. Like it or not, those who follow and those who oppose the government's way of life will soon find themselves living in two vastly different Chinas.

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The power pulse between Guatemala's president Jimmy Morales and CICIG



Jimmy Morales

TEXT: Lucrecia Charchalac IMAGE: CC

SINCE 2015, the Public Prosecutor with the support of UN backed anti-corruption body CICIG (International Commission against Corruption in Guatemala) in the current fight against corruption, has left Guatemala under constant political constraint. However, fighting corruption hasn't come easy and is creating conflict between governmental levels, now including a personal discrepancy between President Morales and CICIG's director Ivan Velásquez.

After the political crisis in Guatemala, in which CICIG played a crucial role investigating then President Otto Perez Molina's and Vice President Roxana Baldetti's linkage to a custom corruption ring called "La Línea", both CICIG and the Public Prosecutor's office gained citizens' trust and have relied on civil society and international community's

support to successfully fight against corruption in the country. It was a shock when, in August 2017, Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales decided to expel CICIG's Commissioner Ivan Velásquez by declaring him "non grato". Reactions to this decision were split between those who supported the president – traditional media, congressmen from his party – and those who supported CICIG and Velásquez's work. Among which there was a high percentage of the population, ministers, civil society organizations, a diversity of journalists, newspapers and other media, as well as the international community represented by the US embassy and the G13 – which includes the 13 most important donor countries and agencies. In a country where the Constitution and National Political System remain superior to any international law decision-making, it

would seem valid that the President would decide to expel a foreign Commissioner under the argument that he was overruling CICIG's mandate. However, since Guatemala depends greatly on international donations, and given the high levels of trust that citizenship has put on both CICIG and Velásquez, this action was just the beginning of an open fight between the President, other governmental bodies and the economic elite of the country, against the CICIG, the Public Prosecutor and all those within civil society and international community that support them.

CICIG was created in 2006 as part of a treaty level agreement between the United Nations and the Guatemalan government to strengthen the national judicial system; its main objective is to provide support to

the Public Prosecutor's office into fighting the mafias and organized crime that weaken the State. However, according to President Morales, Commissioner Velásquez violated the mandate of the Commission and threatened the autonomy and sovereignty of the country by allegedly promoting selective prosecution due to personal bias, and he tried to manipulate several parliamentarians into approving reforms to the Constitution. President Morales's decision comes as controversial within the context that CICIG's and in particular, Velásquez's work has been widely recognized by national and international media and institutions due to the dismantling and prosecution of huge corruption rings within the State structure in Guatemala. This happened in a moment when both President Morales's son and his brother had been accused of committing

"President's Morales decision comes as controversial within the context that CICIG's and in particular, Velasquez's work has been widely recognized by national and international media and institutions"

fraud, with the President himself facing the possibility of losing his immunity and being investigated over the accusations of illegally financing his political party during the electoral campaign of 2015.

After the decision of President Morales to expel the Commissioner, different sectors from both the national and international communities reacted, expressing their surprise, while many of them also expressed their support to Velásquez. The General Secretary of the UN, António Guterres, immediately stated his support to the Commissioner; the US Embassy and the Embassies from Sweden, Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union released a public communique to manifest their support to CICIG and Velásquez; moreover, the Swedish embassy's official Twitter account posted a picture of the Commissioner surrounded by all the ambassadors who had come to personally express the full support from the international co-operant countries. After a few days of confusion in which both national and international forces mobilized to express their support to either the President or the Commissioner, the Constitutional Court overruled the presidential decree emitted to expel Velásquez from the country, therefore confirming his continuation as head of CICIG, an action that was applauded by the media and the International Community. However, the US government continued to express their concern over the political stability in the country through a statement released by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which mentioned: "President Morales has acted

and now the United States Congress and the State Department must examine the future of our foreign assistance to the Guatemalan government". This addressed directly the issue of financial assistance as a possible sanction to the government in relation to the attempt to expel Velásquez from the country. Furthermore, the visit of nine US congressman to Guatemalan deputies continued the discussion of the role of CICIG in the country and highlighted the importance that the US government placed on the work of both the Commissioner Velásquez and the Public Prosecutor's office to fight corruption.

"The approaching election of the new Public Prosecutor will be key to determine the future in the fight against corruption in Guatemala"

As of November 2017, the political crisis and the power pulse between the President and the Commission remain unresolved; Velásquez has continued to work in collaboration with the Public Prosecutor's office, threatening those hidden powers that for a very long time have inhabited the Guatemalan State structure. President

Morales has avoided press conferences and limits his public appearances to protocolary acts, refusing to talk with the press. The Congress has discussed on two occasions the suppression of the President's immunity, but it hasn't reached the necessary votes to do so.

In the meantime, the discussion on whether CICIG's work in Guatemala is completely legitimate and whether President Morales is acting in personal interest continues; both were supported by allies and attacked by other sectors during the peak moment for the crisis. Currently, some sectors such as the economic elite represented by CACIF, a high percentage of the Congress, and the traditional communication media have expressed their open support to Morales, while the International Community, the indigenous groups and independent journalists and media as well as civil society organizations continue to support CICIG.

The approaching election of the new Public Prosecutor will be key to determine the future in the fight against corruption in Guatemala; on the other hand, CICIG will finish its mandate in 2019 and the final achievement into the cleansing of the Guatemalan state remains to be seen.

Constitution which were directed to strengthen and update the Justice system of the country as well as recognize consuetudinary law, however this initiative created controversy and tension between the economic elite in Guatemala and the indigenous communities. Further reading on this topic: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/JusticeReformInGuatemala.aspx>

⁴ Available at: <https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/news/press-releases/engel-state-ment-guatemalan-presidents-expulsion-cicig-commissioner>

⁵ CACIF (spanish acronym for Coordinator Committee for Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Finance Associations) is a business association that unifies the corporate sector in Guatemala. It has been called the "political party of the bourgeoisie".

References:

¹ Three Ministers -included Foreign Affairs who was to carry out the expelling order against Velásquez- quitted to their positions as a way to show their discomfort with the presidential decision.

² Selective Prosecution is defined as a procedural defense in which a defendant argues he/she is only being prosecuted because of a bias.

³ In early 2016, the Presidents from the 3 State Powers (executive, judicial and legislative) with the support of several other institutions -such as CICIG and the Public Prosecutor's office- presented a package of reforms to the National

Who's getting the last laugh?

TEXT: Mikael Lassa

THERE'S ALWAYS been a thin line separating comedy and politics, humor and power. Yet now more than ever, comedy breaks the old boundaries, forcefully bursting in into the political. In the current climate of political turmoil, comedy is not a funny business.

In this day and age, what does it take to successfully entertain people? The question is not a simple one: times change, audiences become more sophisticated, and what was funny a decade ago might not amuse the nit-picking crowds of today. So the art of humor writing is constantly moving forward, pursuing newer angles and twisting the burlesque out of the mundane and the political alike. But the larger picture now tells another story: comedy is not what it used to be anymore. A perceptible shift has been taking place in the last couple of years: humorists are, more explicitly than ever, pulling the

power games out of smoke-filled rooms to feed them to the public, shrewdly exposing them in their naked absurdity.

From the acclaimed late-night shows that from the US reach viewers all around the world, to the witty topical cartoons from the humor section of The New Yorker and many other publications, a tendency is clearly visible. Comedy has always tackled political issues, sparing nobody from sharp witticisms and tailored jokes. However, in spite of the political leanings of late-night show hosts and the like, humor has usually maintained a relatively on-the-fence character. This was bound to change, and 2016 was arguably the year in which the shift was most evident: comedy now became plainly politicized.

To be sure, comedy and politics have never been two completely separated realms,

"In the current climate of political turmoil, comedy is not a funny business"



Political satire is a common element in The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

IMAGE: Arforv/CC

sharing a complicated relationship throughout human history. Wherever there have been systems of governance, political satire has been a constant presence, used as a tool to express dissatisfaction and resentment towards governing elites. It was a popular genre in ancient Latin and Greek theatres, and it later developed through medieval and modern times. People in virtually every community in history had their fair share of bad governance, and making fun of it was a way to overturn perceptions of power balances and gain an advantage, however small and futile, on rulers and political enemies. Comedy and politics are close to each other in other terms as well. The two genres are somewhat similar in the use they make of language and the ways they relate to power through it. As in political speeches what is said matters as much as what is left unsaid, so comedy builds up on the silences and the carefully constructed breaks – not

to mention the centrality of soundbites and tension building to get audiences to react. Despite their long shared history, the 2016 American presidential elections and the whole campaigning preceding it were likely the main trigger of the current politicization of comedy – the ultimate practical joke. There's barely any comedian who hasn't joked about Trump or American politics lately. And rightly so: the old classic tropes of comedy could not be more out of place in the confusion of the political events in the last two years. The stakes are higher, and enraged viewers demand someone to address and express their disappointment. In the stormy maelstrom of contemporary American politics, humor is increasingly used as a performative tool to overturn power balances. The balances indeed change when a joke can shift perceptions of a policy, when a public appearance of a politician is ridiculed in front of millions. Getting

laughs almost becomes a form of political mobilization, deeply intertwined with the mechanisms of power. This makes comedy a much harsher environment: everybody is potentially a target, and the guns of satire are fully loaded. Power enters the comedy scene in a way that has likely never been this explicit outside of classic political satire. And social media, perhaps unsurprisingly, has led the way of this development: no other channel is faster in communicating anger and dissatisfaction, and mocking one-liners have the potential to reach millions of people in a matter of few seconds.

*"humorists are,
more explicitly
than ever, pulling
the power games
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to the public"*

And hence humor obstinately – and increasingly so – enters the ceaseless mechanisms of power by virtue of its employment as a means of resistance, in some significant cases at least. For instance, the social criticism directed towards the current US government in most of recent comedy, even though at times labelled by critics as one of the symptoms of a latent liberal contemptuousness or even elitism, has proven an alternative way to highlight discrepancies and deficiencies in governance and policy-making.

Perhaps all it took was an easier target. The political scenario in the last year or two, on both sides of the Atlantic, has been shaky at

best, possibly providing an optimal fishing ground for whoever found in humor an effective vehicle for criticism. With politicians riding the waves of popular dissatisfaction, and tired institutions failing to live up to expectations, comedy provides an external standpoint ready to expose politics for what it has become. After all, maybe all humorists did was adding a punchline to a bitter joke.



The delegation of UF Gothenburg at the International Model United Nations conference in Leuven (Belgium), March 2016.

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The power of discourse:

how meaning and expectations created Fortress Europe

TEXT: Malin Lampio

THERE IS NO gender identity behind the expression of gender, that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results, said Judith Butler while explaining that gender is not biological. We act toward things based on the meaning we assign to them, said Alexander Wendt as he argued that anarchy is what states make of it. The central idea is that we, through the collective use of language and practice, socially create and shape our reality. Partly through the meaning we give things and partly through the expectations that follow.

Discourse is central for how we navigate our world. A discourse is the way we speak of things, the jargon surrounding a given phenomenon. It can be seen as the melody flowing through society that reflects meanings and ideas connected to specific things, a collective understanding of our

reality. Judith Butler argued that sex and gender do not exist naturally, but that they are something that we collectively perform and create through practice and discourse. Likewise, Alexander Wendt argued that the anarchic state structure doesn't simply exist in the international sphere, but it is collectively created through acts and discourse. Discourse, in turn, consists of expectations derived from meaning. This is the decisive mechanism in shaping reality because expectations are, to some extent, coercive in that they exert social power that makes others conform. Expectations shape how we treat others and how we act ourselves. For example, if we expect other states to be selfish, we will act towards them as if they are and this will cause them to perceive us as selfish, which creates a state system of selfish states which will rather guard themselves than cooperate. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Discourse and frames shape policy, and policy helps sustain and reproduce the discourse"

In the political sphere, discourses can be catalysed into reality through political decisions and legislation. Most notably by affecting the deliberate frames we use to portray societal problems which inevitably shape the potential political solutions. Discourse and frames shape policy, and policy helps sustain and reproduce the discourse. The power of discourse lies in the potential creation of reality. A contemporary example of this social process is how the discourse on refugees and asylum seekers has shaped policy and the asylum system in the European Union.

The historical evolution of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) starts with the economic crisis of the 70s, when European states found themselves having difficulties absorbing the large flow of immigrants, which led to a reduction of legal routes into Europe. This restriction, motivated by changes in the labour market and by the desire to protect the domestic workforce, was fuelled by a political rhetoric portraying the asylum systems as abused by fortune seekers and economic immigrants in no real need of protection. In 1985 asylum seekers were linked to international crime, human trafficking and security issues through the creation of the Schengen Agreement, which put asylum in the same framework as internal security. The border cooperation of the Schengen Agreement eventually led to the creation of

the Dublin Regulation in the 1990s, which regulated responsibility for asylum seekers seeking international protection under the Geneva Convention in the European Union. The main objectives of the regulation are to prevent asylum applicants from submitting multiple applications in different member states and to prevent applicants from choosing which state to apply in. Therefore, it was decided that asylum seekers would apply for asylum in the country of first contact. This member state is responsible for accepting or rejecting them and the purpose was to harmonize the asylum systems across the borders in Europe.

This was an early attempt to harmonize the different asylum systems across the EU and establish cooperation in the policy area. However, the Dublin Convention had the consequence of introducing strategy into asylum applications because of the first contact country policy. Applicants had one chance of being granted asylum and they therefore tended to choose the member states with the most forgiving asylum systems to maximize their chances. This triggered a race to the bottom where member states tried to make their asylum system as unattractive as possible in order not to attract more applicants, leading to a general downgrading of asylum protection. It soon became evident for the EU institutions that a common solution was needed, and in 2011 the CEAS came into force. The motivation for solving the collective action problem of asylum seekers through harmonization came partly from the realisation that the creation of free movement needed to be compensated with cooperation on the external borders, in order to reduce the negative externalities of separate national immigration policies and to share the burden. It was also motivated by the need for a more efficient asylum system and to remove any incentives of free-riding caused by the Dublin Regulation. These rather instrumental motivations were fuelled by domestic actors who turned to

"political actors connect asylum seekers and refugees with crimes, posing them as potential security threats to further their xenophobic agendas"



the European level to further their agenda on creating more restrictive asylum policies because they assumed they would face less opposition there than at the liberal domestic level. This strategy allowed domestic actors to avoid judicial constraints and to find other allies willing to cooperate.

The CEAS consists of four directives with the purpose of establishing a lowest acceptable standard for receiving, processing and removing asylum applicants. This harmonization was shaped by a discourse portraying refugees and asylum seekers as economic burdens threatening our welfare systems, and as security threats threatening the European culture, the European way of life and – by connecting refugees to increased crime rates and terrorism – the very lives of European citizens. Refugees are perceived as dishonest people coming to Europe to raid our welfare systems and as potential terrorists, ignoring the fact that most terrorists operating in Europe are European nationals radicalised in the suburbs of the major European cities. This image has effectively been created through a securitization in which political actors connect asylum seekers and refugees with crimes, posing them as potential security threats to further their xenophobic agendas in European parliaments. Such a framing legitimizes the use of more restrictive asylum policies and it has led the European Union to cooperate on asylum policies because it feels it's necessary for the sake of protecting Europe from external threats entering its core. This has effectively created 'Fortress Europe' by making it increasingly difficult for asylum seekers and migrants to safely reach Europe and apply for asylum.

The Dublin Regulation, Fortress Europe and the lowest common denominator asylum system in the EU have reduced the number of safe and legal ways into Europe and this is the main reason we see thousands of refugees risking their lives by crossing the Mediterranean on overcrowded boats, and it is the reason Italy, Malta and Greece have been forced to carry such a heavy burden during the recent refugee crisis. The discourse on refugees as economic burdens and as a security threat has led to restrictive asylum policies designed to protect Europe from a perceived threat created by cost-effective solutions to a collective action problem and by deliberate framing by xenophobic politicians – not refugees fleeing war. It is the result of member states hiding under the protection of harmonization, sharing the burden and fragmenting accountability.

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Letter from the President



What is the definition of power? Is it a relationship, something you can have, or is it something that is exercised? Are there different kinds of power, or is it possible to boil it all down to a handful of fundamental characteristics?

Attempts at answering questions such as the ones posed above have been made by great minds such as Niccoló Machiavelli, Hannah Arendt, Joseph Nye and Steven Lukes. But still, the question has endured. Part of the reason why may be that times are constantly changing. Among other things, power is contingent on economic relations, social hierarchies and political and social structures. 'Power through fear' might have been a satisfactory definition in the sixteenth century, but due to societal changes, the question now demands a different approach. This issue of Utblick – the last of 2017 – aims to discuss some of these topics, from the abstract to the concrete, from the macro to the micro level.

Moreover, I would like to take this opportunity to express a huge thank you on behalf of the entire board to everyone who have taken part in our activities throughout the year; lecturers, external partners, members and participants. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with us, thank you for contributing to our events week in and week out, and thank you for making this one of the best years our association has ever seen.

Finally, I would like to wish you a pleasant read!

Mikael Hemlin

President, The Society of International Affairs in Gothenburg