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Editorial office: Kloveniersburgwal 48,
room E2.04/2.05, 1012 CX Amsterdam

Editor-in-chief: Yael Pless

Editors: Yael Pless, Christina Govaerts,
Viktorija Greidāne, Miranda Selimovic,
Twan Hover, Muska Nur, Davide Distaso,
Francesco Bernabeu Fornara, Emilia Juch-
no, Annelie Ní Dhálaigh

Design: Irina Petrescu, Agnette Dobloug.

Editorial

Yael Pless

Dear reader,

The months of midnight dusk have passed, and we find ourselves faced with the period of yearning for an earlier dawn. As we wait for the nightly curtains of darkness over the city to lift, we eagerly hope that the first light will reveal a cerulean sky. Winter can be a challenge, so when the crisp morning air caresses your face in a kiss of ice, remember to embrace the comfort of the colder months - the dance of flickering candlelight, the warmth in a cup of mulled wine, and the cosy holiday atmosphere.

As 2023 draws to a close, we exhale memories made and lessons learnt in the past year, while we breathe in all of the possibilities the following trip around the sun holds. The last months of the year are synonymous with festivity and tradition, much of which finds its roots in ancient myths. Let me tell you a secret - elements of myths can be found in countless aspects of your day! For instance, when you step outside and see the sun, lazily yawning its greetings over the picturesque buildings of our quaint city. The centre of our solar system was, in mythical times, known as Helios, the God and personification of the Sun. Or do you hesitate to open your umbrella indoors before leaving the house to face the endless Dutch downpour, intimidated by the myth that doing so will attract bad luck?

Our talented writers have cleverly explored the theme of myth in distinct ways, creating thought-provoking articles for you to read. While Christina illustrates the widespread Dutch housing crisis through various mythical metaphors, Viktorija addresses the influence of tourism on climate change, and teaches us about the tragic paradox of people chasing sights that are at risk of being erased as a result of humanity's own doing. On another front, Emilia reflects on the lure of populist politics in the United States and Poland, and the role that class myth-making plays in it.

Vincent uses the mythical tale of the Trojan Horse to describe the geopolitical implications of the Belt and Road Initiative for Europe, while Francesco utilises powerful symbolism to discuss the EU's path to finding its place in today's political landscape, which teeters on the edge of a steep cliff. Miranda captures our attention by unpacking and debunking the myth of Sweden being a perfect utopia by opening our eyes to the drastic increase in gang violence which has evolved over the past years.

If you fancy an existential trip down memory lane, Muska's article will guide you through a journey of discovering various world creation myths. In an ode to ancient Greek philosophy, Davide explores the contemporary tendency towards superficiality and materialism by drawing on Plato's Myth of the cave. Facing a debate that stretches from mythical times to the present, Twan tackles the contentious Israel-Palestine conflict and discusses the EU's role. Finally, I tell a tale of consumerism in a contemplative piece on Amazon Inc., weaving in the tale of its mythological namesake.

Dear reader, as you dive into our musings on myth, I hope that you ease out of this year in a state of contentment. Above all, I wish you an abundance of blessings in 2024 — may we all contribute to a more peaceful world.

Magically,

Yael Pless, editor-in-chief.



From Washington to Warsaw, class myth-making is the populist's most deceitful tool

Emilia Juchno

I would like to think that we have found ourselves at one of those historical turning points with Poland finally rejecting its populist government in the latest parliamentary elections. "Populism can be defeated!", "Democracy fights back!" exclaimed international newspapers in late October of this year. While these election results have given well-founded reason for a sigh of relief in Brussels and beyond, on the other side of the pond, the populist hand once again reaches for the highest office, casting a frightening shadow.

American politics operates very differently from Polish politics - there are two different systems, very peculiar voting and party traditions and distinct distribution of power and responsibilities, among many others. However, interestingly enough, in both countries, certain tools have proven effective for politicians willing to rise to power and gain popular endorsement. I refer to those tools as class myth-making, in other words, the creation of a false narrative which aims at levelling the politician with an average citizen to spread the message that "he is one of us". It is anti-elitist, anti-technocratic and it is extremely compelling. The Polish right-wing Law and Justice party has been quite successful at it, and Donald Trump is a true master of this method.

The populist government thrives on the ideas of community, normalcy and oneness. In the US,

Donald Trump has taken the idea of a government "Of the people, by the people, for the people" and applied it to his own fabricated regime which impersonated a populist government while being administered by one of the richest, most upper-class politicians in the entire country. Today, leading newspapers give significant weight to the possibility of Trump's return to power, with The New York Times reporting that the former president now leads in five critical states of Arizona, Nevada, Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Could we say ... no wonder?

There are valid reasons for the continuing endorsement of Trump, despite his double indictment and an ongoing civil fraud trial against him.

"To his electorate, Trump is a figure of heroism, a leader who understands their everyday struggles and sympathises with them."

When in 2018 Alexandra Pelosi (the daughter of the former House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi), travelled around the US for her documentary entitled "Outside the Bubble", she engaged ordinary Trump supporters in discussions on various issues. She also asked them about their personal feelings toward Trump. In one of the interviews, Pelosi sat down with a working-class

mother of three named Rebecca. Rebecca believes that the ascension to power by Trump, a man with a net worth estimated at 2.6 billion dollars and the owner of several private and commercial properties across the country, has given her hope that the people in America who are not rich would have a chance. Rebecca explained her family's strenuous economic situation, having, until recently, been earning seven dollars an hour. When asked about Trump, she said that she felt he was her family's best option. "We are suffering ... If he can do good for us, give him a chance" she said. On another occasion, a former coal miner named Paul tried to convince the director that although Trump had promised him that the mine where he had been working would not be closed and that his job would be guaranteed, when the exact opposite happened some months later, he did not blame Trump personally. Despite a broken promise of Paul's job being saved, he said with full confidence: "I believe in Trump ... I feel like Trump personally supports me".

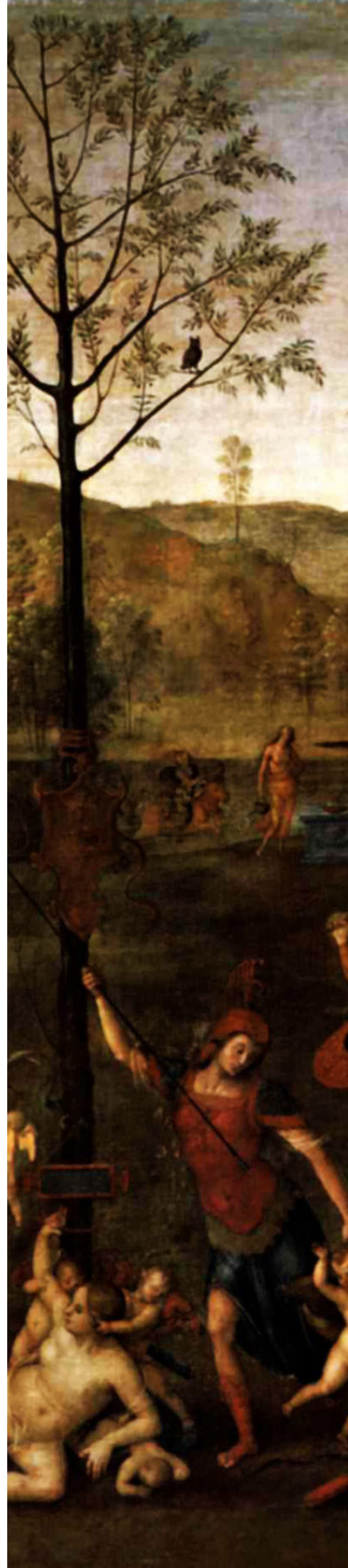
Listening to people like Rebecca or Paul argue in favour of Trump, I was inevitably reminded of similar words of feeling personally cared for and cherished by their political leaders, expressed by my fellow citizens here, in Poland. In the weeks leading up to the elections, journalists in Poland had taken to the streets to interview passers-by about who they were planning to vote for. In every such material

that I have seen, the electorate of the Law and Justice party comes across as particularly eager and devoted, practically ready to go through fire and water for their beloved politicians. They tend to speak with an exceptional warmth of the party's leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, describing him as a man of faith and goodwill, someone who cares personally about the everyday struggles of the average Pole. Kaczynski's sympathisers have been easily impressed by the party's efforts to alleviate the people's economic struggles during a period of the highest inflation that we have witnessed in the country in several years, through programmes of direct social transfers.

Both in the US and in Poland, a politician who can convince the people of his anti-establishment and anti-elitist position, is essentially a politician who can convince them of his realness. He makes evident his averageness, even his mediocrity, and in such a manner he gives many people a politician that they can not only understand but who, they feel, sympathises with them. It is the kind of politician who does not use overly complicated words and phrases but rather speaks bluntly, almost primitively. Many people, upon hearing someone like Trump or Kaczynski speak on public television, are deceived by that compelling manner of speaking enough to pay more attention to it than to the actual ideas being expressed. They look at those politicians and they think: „Finally, a guy who speaks the truth!". Except that the "truth" rarely refers to the honest intentions of the speaker, but rather, to his ability to convince, compel respect, and paint himself as an ordinary man. How else can it be explained, if not as a form of myth-making, wizardry almost, that a billionaire accused of repeated fraud who, during his time in office, has proposed severe cuts to Medicaid, the food stamps programme and other elements of the social sa-

fety net, has convinced millions of Americans that he personally cares for a working-class mother on the brink of extreme poverty? Or that elsewhere, the prime minister, who, as it has been recently discovered, has been signing his properties worth altogether almost 27 million euros over to his wife, continues to be described by his sympathisers as an honest, hard-working man who cares for the interests of other, similar, hard-working people. The intriguing difference between the methods used in Poland and those adopted in the US is that, unlike the representatives of the Law and Justice party, Trump is not even trying to hide the truth about the actual size of his wealth. While Kaczynski claims to advocate for a government that does not accumulate wealth at the expense of its citizens (while being involved in tens of obscure investments), Trump brags about being a billionaire left and right and is somehow able to achieve the same result. Perhaps, it has to do with the mythological "American dream", the idea that everyone has the opportunity to grow rich thanks to the workings of the American liberal capitalist system. Donald Trump surely is, to many, an embodiment of exactly that dream becoming true.

Of course, sentiments shift, both in Poland and in America, with some former Trump supporters now looking unfavourably at the potential reelection of a charged criminal, and on the other side, some Polish voters who opted for the Law and Justice party in 2015 having turned in the 2023 Parliamentary elections towards politicians presented by the opposition bloc. However, we should continue to keep a close eye on this particularly dangerous and deceitful rhetoric of populist politicians around the world, in order to be able to recognise their insincere intentions. The greatest strength of the class myth-making lies in its extraordinarily compelling nature.





Worlds in Genesis: A Journey Through Di- verse Creation Myth

Muska Nur

According to astronomers, the Big Bang theory explains how the universe began. However, this differs from how our world was formed according to the oldest creation myths. These myths are from across the world. Be that as it may, how creative and unique were these creation myths? The following myths still affect our societies today. When we look at literature, films, TV shows, art, games, and music, we can trace many stories and figures back to different creation myths. Others are part of ancient religions and deeply rooted in cultural heritages.

Our trip around the world starts in Scandinavia in the 1200s, with the Norse Creation Myth. In Norse mythology, the world started as a primordial nothingness known as Ginnungagap. The first to arise from this void was Ymir, a giant made from ice. Ymir was killed by Odin and his brothers, using his body to create the world. From his flesh, they created the Earth, his skull, the sky, and the ocean from his blood. From the Muspelheim, the kingdom of fire, they made the sun, moon, and stars. Odin and his brothers found two trees on the shore and created the first humans, Ask and Embla. Odin gave them life and intellect, whereas his brothers gave them physical qualities.

Going further in time and to another continent, the Hindu creation myth in 1500 BCE starts with the cosmos existing in chaos and darkness, without shape or structure. From

this chaos, the god Brahma arose and built the universe by dividing the elements of Earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Brahma subsequently made the first living beings, the gods and the demons. Although the gods and the demons could not live in harmony, they engaged in a fierce war in which the gods triumphed. The gods then requested Brahma to create humans to glorify and serve them.

The first people were made by Brahma, but they were flawed and lacked wisdom. The gods corrected this by teaching mankind how to conduct rituals and ceremonies by giving them the Vedas, a compilation of holy writings.

West from India we find ourselves in Mesopotamia, in 1600 BCE. The Eridu Genesis is a Mesopotamian creation myth depicting the world's roots and humankind. It starts with the creation of the gods. Enki, the god of wisdom, built a home for them on Earth. Following this, Enki created humans out of clay and assigned them to serve the gods. As time passed by, however, humans multiplied significantly and became loud, which aggravated the gods. The gods chose to kill humanity with a flood, but Enki warned one man, Ziusudra, to tell him to build a boat so he and his family could survive. After surviving the flood, Ziusudra received an endless life as a recompense from the gods. The story ends with a hymn honouring Enki for his wisdom and his part in creating the world and rescuing humanity. The Eridu Genesis is one of the oldest documented

versions of the flood myth in many cultures worldwide.

For the next creation myth, we only need to go further in time, to around the 12th century BCE, because we are staying in Mesopotamia. The second creation myth from this region, Enuma Elish, narrates the story of Marduk, the principal deity of Babylon. He becomes the Lord of the Gods of Heaven and Earth after subduing the elder goddess Tiamat and restoring order to chaos.

The epic starts with the universe as a watery mess without a sky or land. The god Apsu, who represents the sweet waters under the surface, and the goddess Tiamat, who represents the sea, mix their waters. The gods are born amidst them. Lahmu and Lahamu, the first pair, symbolize the powers in the silt; Anshar and Kishar, the following pair, represent the powers in the horizon. The sky god Anu, born of Anshar and Kishar, fathers the god Ea, often called Nudimmud or Enki.

The elder gods, Apsu and Tiamat, were displeased with the younger gods' noisy gatherings because they were full of energy. Apsu plans to kill the younger gods, which outrages Tiamat. However, Ea casts a spell that kills Apsu and sends him into a deep sleep. After that, Ea and his wife Damkina reside in the shrines he has built for themselves and the other gods on Apsu's corpse. From their union, Marduk is born, and he develops into a magnificent and robust figure. Tiamat gives birth to an abundance of dragons and monsters out of her rage over Apsu's death. She then challenges the other gods to combat them. Marduk murders her and divides her body in two, utilising one half to form heaven and the other to form Earth. The rest of the tale

centres on Marduk's structuring of the universe, his creation of humanity, and his assignment of the gods' different cosmic roles and responsibilities.

Our trip is now headed to Greece from about 3000 to 1100 BCE. Greek mythology attributes the creation of the universe to the primordial gods Chaos, Gaia (Earth), and Eros (Love). The story describes chaos as the universe's original state—a void filled with emptiness and darkness. Gaia, the embodiment of the Earth, and Eros, the force of attraction and love, emerged from Chaos.

Then, Gaia gave birth to the sky's Uranus, and the two became the first celestial couple. The twelve Titans, the three Cyclopes, and the three Hecatonchires were among their numerous offspring. However, the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires were imprisoned in Tartarus, the lowest realm of the underworld, by their cruel and tyrannical father, Uranus.

"Many of the gods and goddesses worshipped by the ancient Greeks, such as Aphrodite, Apollo, and Athena, have origin stories included in the Greek creation myth."

Heading south, we arrive in Egypt during the period between 3100 and 2686 BCE. In the Egyptian Creation Myth, Nu, an endless and lifeless sea, was the starting point of the world. A mound of Earth known as the Benben emerged from this water, and the god Atum materialized atop the mound. The first god, Atum, spoke his name into existence and created himself. Atum then created the gods

Tefnut, who stood for moisture, and Shu, who stood for air. The earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut were born of Shu and Tefnut. Geb and Nut were in love, but Shu, their father, kept them apart by dividing the Earth from the sky. The story describes the world's creation, the gods' creation, and their relationships. It was fundamental to the religion of the ancient Egyptians, upholding their society's social and political hierarchy and providing an explanation for the global natural phenomena.

Finally, arriving at our last destination, we find ourselves in Oceania, Australia 65,000 years ago, where we find one of the oldest and most intricate creation myths in the world, Dreamtime. The Indigenous Australians, who have lived on the continent for over 60,000 years, hold it dear to their culture and belief system. The Dreamtime myth tells of the world's creation by strong spiritual beings that travelled over land, sea, and sky, creating rivers, mountains, and animals along their way. These entities, sometimes called Ancestors or Ancestral Spirits, are credited with creating everything that exists today.

The concept of the Dreamtime is intricate and multidimensional, encompassing art, ceremonies, rituals, and storytelling. It serves as the foundation for the spiritual and cultural beliefs of Indigenous Australians, a belief system which still impacts their way of life and worldview today. Dreamtime is acknowledged as an essential aspect of Australia's cultural past and is continually celebrated and preserved.

In retrospect, the oldest creation myths from diverse corners of the world share remarkable resemblances, reflecting universal

themes in human storytelling and perception of the world's origins. Regardless of geographical and cultural disparities, common threads weave through these narratives.

To begin with, in Norse mythology, Hindu cosmogony, Greek beliefs, Mesopotamian narratives, and Egyptian lore, a recurring motif is the emergence from primordial chaos or nothingness. Furthermore, creation involves shaping elements; we saw that Ymir was created from ice, and the Earth, sky, and ocean from his body parts; Brahma divided elements (Earth, water, fire, air, and ether) to create the universe; humans were made from clay according to the Eridu Genesis. Moreover, divine beings, like Odin and his brothers, as well as Brahma, Marduk, and Greek primordial gods such as Chaos, Gaia, Eros, and Uranus, play critical roles in constructing the universe and establishing cosmic order. Similarly, divine intervention and teachings to correct human flaws are evident in Norse, Hindu, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian myths. Finally, conflict among deities leading to creation or after is a prevalent theme in Mesopotamian, Greek, and Egyptian mythologies. In hindsight, the Dreamtime creation myth might be the most unique one compared to the others.

Despite these common characteristics, the myths also display the richness of cultural diversity, with each civilisation infusing its narrative with distinctive deities, symbols, and cosmological complexities. The parallels in these creation myths suggest a fascinating glimpse into the human collective imagination and the universal pursuit to make sense of existence, emphasising the imaginative similarities that transcend time and place.





Like Father, Like Daughter?

Yael Pless

They say that the apple does not fall far from the tree. In Greek mythology, Ares is the God of War. His daughters, the Amazons, reflected his warrior nature. Shortly before the turn of the century, Jeff Bezos created a modern-day warrior, Amazon Inc., the infamous label seemingly drawing on an ancient myth. The Amazon we know also wields a spear, not of metal, but of enormous market power. Delivering anything you can imagine to the comfort of your home in rapid-fire fashion, is a name that has come to represent the desires of twenty-first-century adults. It is synonymous with speed, choice, and efficiency. However, its dominance has been under the watchful eye of competition authorities since its debut, while they scramble to find their footing amidst the nebulous digital aspects of antitrust law. Allow me to spark a debate in your mind, to let the wheels turn and drive down a road of myth and materialism.

I will not write a manifesto on why you should refrain from shopping on Amazon. Instead, let me tell you a story. Just a few weeks ago, I decided that I needed new towels. The combination of working, studying and procrastinating drew me to the conclusion that the best solution was to order them on Amazon. Although the layout of the website was so infuriating I could almost see steam billowing from my ears, in just a few minutes, I was sold on an 'Oasis towel set' with free delivery. The very next day, my eager anticipation of this new purchase was satisfied by the shrill ring of the doorbell, heralding the arrival of my warrior prince, the delivery man. In the passion excited by such triviality, I came to a realisation - how had walking five minutes to the nearest HEMA become so inconceivable to me that I no longer thought twice about ordering online? Only then did I become aware of how habituated I was to the ease and efficiency of the internet.

Granted, during the COVID pandemic online stores for any goods and services were a saving grace. The endless isolation left many of us fearing that even breathing the outside air would assault our lungs with illness. Consequently, we began to feel that anything keeping us tucked safely indoors was a solace. Perhaps this conditioned the world to normalise choosing a screen over a walk or an interaction. Undeniably, some people are geographically removed from the necessary stores, are genuinely too busy, or ill...but me? I have few excuses to succumb to the lure of the vast material jungle we call e-commerce. Ergo, my need for new towels quickly turned a simple errand into a spiral of revelations about the significance and consequences of online retail giants.

It is no secret that to reach a wide range of consumers, placing your product on a website such as Amazon is realistically one of the best courses of action. To a certain extent, Amazon acts as somewhat of a 'middleman' for companies and could thus be

seen as a platform aiding smaller businesses in reaching a larger audience. However, the controversy stems from Amazon's almost indisputable dominance and the fact that the platform is essentially unavoidable. Many search engines present you with a product's listing on Amazon first, rather than giving precedence to the actual website of the merchandise. When other issues are factored in, such as the costs of advertisement charged by Amazon to ensure that one's product even sees the light of day, the puzzle pieces come together.

"Suddenly, the big guns of monopolies, matters of anti-competitiveness, and abuses of dominance join the conversation."

In 2021, Amazon made a revenue of 51 billion EUR from solely its European market. There has also been an increase in the financing of lobbying activities in the EU by Amazon since 2021, mainly concerning topics of digital retail and its place in EU legislation. We have seen the European Commission legally bind Amazon to abide by EU antitrust rules, which has given way to a prohibition on using marketplace seller data. Precisely the access to non-public data gives way to the fiercely discussed debate surrounding data protection laws. As the world navigates the legal implications of data selling and buying in its highly digitised age, privacy (or a lack thereof) has become a serious concern. Ultimately, this has resulted in more than a handful of wary sideways glances at Amazon's modus operandi.

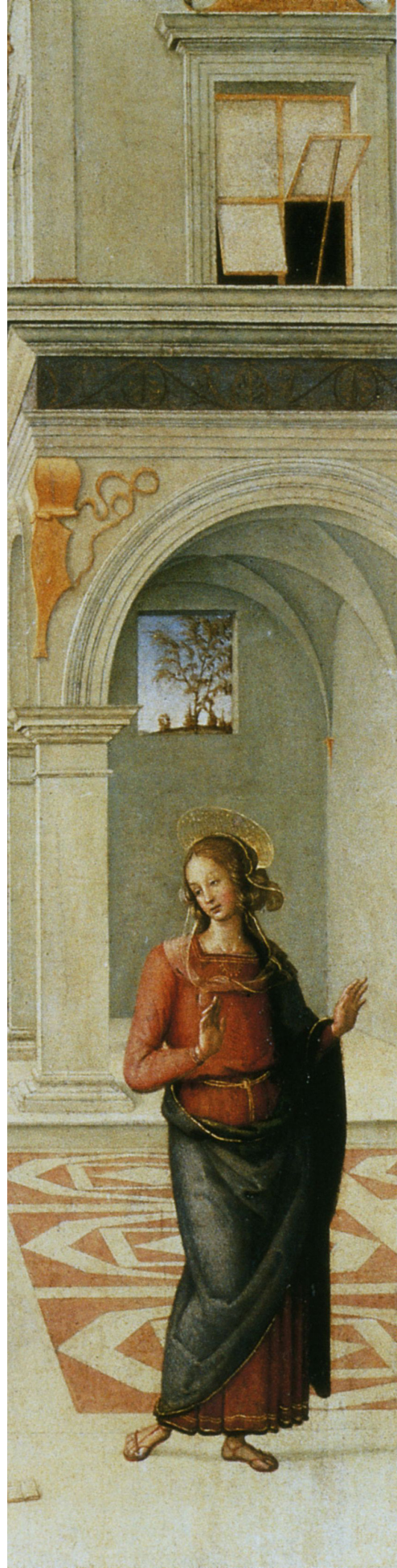
Nonetheless, the world is changing, and there is not always much success to be found by relentlessly swimming against the stream. Therefore, it would be foolish of me to

suggest that anyone should boycott e-commerce, or cease to shop on Amazon entirely. The market is becoming digital, whether we like it or not - how the future unfolds remains to be seen. If I were to suggest anything, it would be to remain mindful of the amount we purchase goods online.

The mythical era of Greek gods and goddesses, fierce warriors and monsters, has long passed. Having survived aeons through the collective minds of many, we remember that Ares, the God of War, was never highly regarded by his fellow deities. His warrior daughters, the Amazons, descended from him but forged their own path to becoming a tribe of warrior women. Which path will our Amazon's future, or perhaps even its successors, take? Will it leave a trail of smaller, local businesses perishing in its wake? Will it be the first to entirely replace manual labour with artificial intelligence, or go down swinging as the last?

If digital giants took moral lessons from their mythological namesakes, we would be looking at a very different tableau. Mythology has typically been incarnated through art and literature, and has taught us a great deal about the Greek gods of our ancient past. If you look closely enough and read between the lines, you will see that we were left a message and a lesson, communicated to us from long ago — Ares was not liked for his brutal force and aggression, nor his affinity for war. What you take from that, and the way you apply it to our world today, is in your hands now. Will you, dear reader, choose to reflect on these topics and fight back?

As for all of the other questions, who really knows the answers to any of them, anyways? Not me, unfortunately. I am no economist, nor a psychic, just a storyteller...



Fancy a Trip to Doomsday?

Viktorija Greidāne

Winter is right around the corner, but the fantasy of ice skating on the frozen canal in Amsterdam seems so out of reach. It leads me to wonder whether it is just a myth, or are the winters getting warmer, and the canals are not freezing anymore?

Inside the Schengen area reaching Amsterdam has never been easier via plane, train, car, or for some, even by bike. 20 million tourists annually visit the city, no doubt that tourism has become a staple in many people's lives. A parallel trend that has been escalating is global warming. Temperatures are rising globally, icebergs are melting, and heatwaves are hitting records, but tourism is flourishing. A century ago, traveling to remote areas, like Antarctica, was unimaginable.

Tourism could be described as a complex phenomenon, that is partly associated with curiosity and the desire to learn and to see the otherness and unknown (Zygmunt Bauman wrote about mixophilia). It is a way of entertainment and leisure, absorbing unfamiliar environments and experiences, that shapes our identity, a tool to broaden the horizon.

Today, tourism reflects a social status – being successful equals being mobile. Nevertheless, tourism allows one to indulge in one-of-a-kind experiences. One's wishes and resources allow access to places and activities, however rare and extraordinary. Those can be paintings (80 per cent of Louvre visitors are there for the Mona

Lisa and most of them leave unhappy), sanctuaries (in Japan visitors have a notebook to collect stamps from temples), painters' homes (although some visitors mention missing a bit of authenticity in Rembrandt home) and nature objects (if safari in Serengeti is out of reach, there always is a zoo to see a zebra, an improvement from watching solely National Geographic).

A type of tourism that craves and chases this one-of-a-kind experience emerged recently and is called doomsday tourism. Providing opportunity, a chance to see places and things going extinct, whether icebergs or rhinos, tourism companies use the slogans - See while you can! - a chance for consumers to celebrate their success and desirability. How can the nature objects be adjusted to suit the desires and needs of tourists, for instance, creating a luxury polar campsite in Antarctica where a can of Coke costs \$53. Some might argue that the environmental education the visitors receive will outweigh the damage, but realistically - this sort of tourism is damaging. Let's leave the research to the scientists at the South Pole.

While some travel to see the changing world, others live through the change. A neologism to describe the emotional distress caused by the environmental change - solastalgia. In contrast to nostalgia, which is homesickness when separated from a loved home, solastalgia occurs when individuals directly experience the transformation of a loved environment. It

is the sorrow of seeing their home change and helplessly observing it. This element of ecological grief is also present in doomsday tourism, but unlike solastalgia, it has a far different purpose.

Problems with doomsday tourism start at the core of it, understanding why these destinations are disappearing in the first place. Tourists can call themselves curious and nature-loving, but many do not realize the harm they inflict. A trip to Antarctica to see the melting icebergs and polar bears is not just expensive to your wallet, but also causes CO2 emissions which lead to higher temperatures.

"While a photo under the arch of the iceberg that looks just like Arc de Triomphe will get many likes on Facebook, is it not like taking a selfie on a sinking Titanic?"

While doomsday tourism and solastalgia have sadness about the environmental changes at their core, however, doomsday tourists do not feel it profoundly because they do not live there. Many are witnessing daily change and destruction of their loved homes, hurricanes, or simply winters without snow. It shows doomsday tourism is simply self-centered, and there is no afterthought, just the question - will the canals freeze for ice skating when I visit Amsterdam?





The Trojan Horse, an ancient Greek myth, recounts how the Greeks used a wooden horse as a disguise to invade and conquer Troy from within. Some argue that this myth serves as a metaphor for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious Chinese infrastructure project that aims to create a global network for enhanced connectivity from China to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. While many European nations have embraced the initiative for its financial benefits, others view it as a modern-day Trojan Horse concealing China's true geopolitical objectives.

Introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, the BRI has become a key foreign policy instrument, involving around 140 countries and investments exceeding an impressive 1 trillion dollars. While comparisons to the Silk Road or the Marshall Plan are made, Chinese discourse challenges these due to the BRI's extensive scope and unique global placement. However, the broader conceptualization has also led many to question China's underlying ambitions and aspirations that are associated with the BRI.

In Asia and Africa, emerging nations view the BRI as an opportunity to enhance their economic ties with China and foster regional development through impressive infrastructure projects. Numerous European countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, totalling 34, have taken part in the initiative. However, other Western countries, in particular the United States, expressed concerns that China may exploit the initiative to gain political and economic influence in the nations involved.

An example that could be given of how these influences are evident, is in Greek and Hungarian policy decisions. In 2016, both nations

How European Countries Welcomed a Trojan Horse

Vincent Lubach

refrained from supporting the European Union External Actions Service's (EEAS) critique on China's actions in the South China Sea, after the international arbitration court in The Hague dismissed Beijing's legal justifications for the asserted territory. The argument made is that this is because Greece and Hungary have been receiving Chinese investments. This division between the EU Member States demonstrates how the BRI has a polarizing influence. Furthermore, the Chinese claims in the South China Sea have been particularly contentious due to the construction of Chinese military outposts on numerous manmade islands. If European allies close to the US do not take China's military expansion seriously, one could wonder to what extent China's economic dominance through the BRI is not also political.

Besides the critique on the investments through the BRI, there are also concerns related to extensive loaning programs for participating countries' infrastructure developments. The terms of these loans include significant interest rates and repayment conditions. These conditions have given rise to what some describe as "debt traps", which is a scenario in which debtor nations, having accepted Chinese loans but facing challenges in repayment, become susceptible to exploitation. This vulnerability enables Beijing to wield influence over both their domestic and foreign policies. For example, the Greek port of Piraeus has been vitalised under the BRI project, as Greece serves as an important geographical loca-

tion for trade between China and Europe. Furthermore, the Greek economy has been very vulnerable since the euro crisis and this could potentially be exploited by China. In fact, some even argue that Greece sold Piraeus to China, as the Chinese COSCO shipping secured a majority stake in the port. In other countries, the reconstruction of maritime infrastructure has also sparked criticism and renewed doubt. For example, the country of Sri Lanka struggled to make repayments on Chinese loans and was forced to lease its Hambantota port to Chinese multinationals for the next 99 years.

"This example shows how China can use its projects to gain influence over countries that take part in the BRI. In addition, it could strengthen China's military power."

There are other cases where nations were at the point of being exploited through the BRI and in one case it has even led to the construction of China's first overseas naval post.

More recently, the uncertainties surrounding the BRI have prompted numerous countries to reassess their participation in the project. Notably, Italy is contemplating an exit from the BRI, aligning itself with new policies of both the EU and the US concerning China. The EU strongly supports Italy's withdrawal from the initiative, viewing it as a means to decrease relian-

ce on China and advance the EU's objective of "de-risking" itself from China. This strategy aligns with the EU's broader goal, initiated in June 2023, to safeguard itself from potential risks linked to China. This is especially important considering the EU's dependence on China's supply chains which became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The de-risking strategy is employed as a disguise for an unofficial "decoupling" approach, wherein the EU aims for a more independent stance from China concerning its long-term interests. In essence, these measures signify a deliberate distancing from China and a reduction of Chinese influence in Europe. Therefore, the decisions of countries to step out of the BRI align with the EU's overarching objectives in reshaping its relationship with China.

The examples of the investment and loans through the BRI have led to doubts concerning the true nature of the Belt and Road Initiative. While it offers economic development opportunities, it could potentially expose countries to exploitation or unnecessary influences. Currently, criticism has emerged from participating nations, notably in Europe where countries like Italy are seeking to withdraw to safeguard their national interests. The analogy of the Trojan Horse could serve as a warning, suggesting that beneath the outward appearance of economic assistance and connectivity, the BRI may involve strategic and political motivations capable of reshaping the geopolitical landscape in ways that are not fully comprehended.

Navigating the Labyrinth: The Dutch Housing Crisis and the Quest for Resilience

Christina Govaerts

In a land known for its tulips, windmills, cobblestones, canals, overwhelming supply of bikes and stunning weather, Dutch politics are currently undergoing a metamorphosis. One that could make even the most legendary Gods of ancient Greece proud. The Netherlands, once widely recognised for its progressive policies, now conceals a dire housing crisis, one that bears the hallmarks of a profound transformation, much like the mythical tales of yore. Homes have become elusive treasures, with students fighting tooth and nail for this coveted gold, forcing many to deal with a life full of uncertainty owing to the fear of ending up without a roof over their heads. The transformation of Dutch politics is a tale of a society in flux, where housing has become the labyrinth through which citizens must navigate, much like the tale of Theseus and the Minotaur, only this time there is no special thread.

The Dutch political landscape has been basking in the glow of economic prosperity while ignoring the brewing housing crisis. The focus on economic growth and foreign investment has led to soaring property prices and an increasingly unaffordable housing market. The transformation that takes place now is essentially the modern-day equivalent of Sisyphus, condemned to endlessly push the boulder of rising rents and unreachable mortgages uphill, only to have it roll back down again, growing more and more exhausted by the hour. Young families are delaying their dreams of homeownership, while the middle class struggles to secure a property to call their own. In the face of this crisis, the government's policies have often seemed to exacerbate the problem. While

well intended, they leave many feeling as though they were living in a Kafkaesque world, where bureaucracy is an inescapable maze and home seekers are but tiny helpless cockroaches.

The incompatibility of Dutch politics and the housing crisis should be seen as a call to action rather than a lament. In the face of this housing crisis, the Netherlands has an opportunity to embrace its own mythological journey. This could be one that leads to a brighter future; one where those in charge address the root causes of the crisis and seek to focus on sustainable and equitable solutions. This 'quest' masquerades as the Dutch government's greatest enemy, as the goals set in place to fight this dilemma include a goal to build 900,000 new houses by 2030 and possibly setting up a rent cap in the mid market housing sector.

In summary, the Dutch government has tried to tackle these crises by relying on traditional tenures such as ownership and rental housing. However, given the specific characteristics of the Dutch housing system, there could be room to experiment with alternative methods. One sensible approach would be to change the Housing Act of 2015 and to allow the housing associations to build housing for those for whom the market does not provide affordable housing. A second approach urges the universities in the Netherlands to reconsider how they use certain spaces in the buildings where they provide classes. A lot of untouched space in general, could provide a new type of hybrid learning where students work lives and social lives share the space.

Leiden University College in the Hague is at the forefront of pioneering novel hybrid buildings, such as their Wijnhaven building, where students have an apartment of their own on campus. This method of student housing has been a long-standing practice in the US, and various universities outside of Europe. This has allowed many students, international and local alike, to secure a temporary residence in a space that would otherwise have not been in use. This approach suggests refurbishing the existing spaces into useful and functional accommodation, serving as a solution to aid students housing quests before they find their permanent home.

"By demanding transparency, accountability, and innovative solutions, the destiny of the Netherlands may change."

The Dutch housing crisis is indeed a metamorphosis on its own, but it need not be a tragedy. There is the potential to emerge from this transformative period stronger and more resilient than ever. Both the Dutch people and their governing bodies have the power to steer the nation's narrative in a positive direction. In doing so, they have the potential to craft a contemporary legend—one marked by resilience, progress, and the triumphant human spirit. And to my fellow students, don't despair. You may have got your own place, a room to share, a student dorm or perhaps you are still looking for your home in this elaborate labyrinth. Keep up your courage and keep checking those Kamernet alerts!

EU's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Twan Hover

A political dilemma more divisive than ever has been circulating UvA's university grounds and beyond for weeks now. Obviously, I am talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict, taking place in the area that has been a battlefield for as long as humanity has inhabited the area. This is also the place with the most religious significance across the world, and which, one might say, is the cause for its never-ending violence.

First of all, a human life is a human life, no matter the person's origins, status or beliefs. Just like the UN's definition of equality "all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to just, fair and equitable laws and are entitled without aunty discrimination to equal protection of the law". This is why it is so disappointing to see people picking sides as if it's a sports match when in fact it is a matter of human lives being taken. Clearly, both the Palestinians and the Israelis are in the wrong, they both have blood on their hands. The amount of killings Israel is accountable for is indeed significantly higher than the number of killings Hamas is responsible for. But one must take into consideration that neither are committed by the entire populations of these countries, but rather on the Palestinian side, this violence is being carried out by the terrorist group called "Hamas" and the killings committed by Israel are doings of the Israeli army. Currently, Israel has a far-right-

wing conservative government that mandates actions to be taken against the people living in Gaza. Moreover, the majority of Israelis believe that what is being done in Gaza is justifiable since the attacks by Hamas happened first and they have the right to fight back.

Another point of attention is the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. This was a turning point in the conflict's history. Rabin was an advocate for peace negotiations, and his death caused political turmoil and changes in Israel's political landscape. This influenced the dynamics of peace efforts and contributed to the challenges faced in the pursuit of peace.

The European Union (EU) has actively participated in diplomatic efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As a member of the Middle East Quartet, the EU has issued joint statements and sought to promote direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Association agreements with both sides leverage political and economic relations, with a focus on promoting human rights and international law. EU financial support to the Palestinian territories aims to stimulate economic development and provide humanitarian assistance. Unfortunately, it is a common occurrence for these aids to end up in the wrong hands instead of reaching the Palestinians in need. Some European countries have individually recognized the state of





Palestine (most of the former Soviet Union, plus Iceland and Sweden), highlighting their commitment to the two-state solution. In addition, the EU conducts diplomatic dialogues and engages critically with Israel on issues such as settlements and human rights. By participating in international peace conferences and negotiations, the EU seeks to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians. These various efforts illustrate the EU's commitment to seeking a just and lasting solution to the complex conflict.

This conflict has left Europe scattered, as to which stance should the country's leaders take in this conflict. Many might say that the sole reason that Israel exists is due to the West's aid. If it were not for the West, Israel would have been erased from the map a long time ago. After the Second World War, many European countries supported the Zionist idea of a Jewish state in the British protectorate 'Palestine', this support came out of a place of guilt for many European countries. This is the reason why it took such a long time for the West to criticize Israel's actions towards Palestinians. European leaders believe it is not their place to condemn Israeli activities.

On the other side, there is also the religious motive, certain Jewish groups in Israel believe it's their God-given right to claim Israel, "that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants, I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." – Genesis 15:18–21. This verse is the reason why many Jewish Israelis believe they can take land owned by Palestinians because God told them they are the legitimate owners of this land and not

the Palestinians. People who hold a different belief often call these people 'colonizers' because of the striking resemblances they have to the European settlers in the Americas and other regions of the world. They believe the Jewish Israelis are foreign invaders of the land of Palestine while the Jewish Israelis believe they are the indigenous people of this land who are decolonizing themselves of foreign invaders. Hence, they have the exact opposite ideas about what is happening now.

A crucial milestone in the efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the Oslo Accords of the 1990s. Signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), these accords provided for the gradual transfer of powers to the Palestinian Authority and represented a hopeful sign of progress. The EU actively engaged in supporting the implementation of these accords, both politically and financially.

"In the early 2000s, there seemed to be a chance for a breakthrough in peace negotiations. Under the leadership of then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter and with EU involvement, intensive negotiations took place."

The talks culminated in the proposal during the Camp David summit in 2000, where it appeared that a possibility for a resolution existed. Unfortunately, this opportunity was thwarted by the outbreak of violence, known as the Second Intifada, which began in September 2000.

Nevertheless, without doubt, the

Europeans have contributed greatly to the breakout and escalation of the conflict. May it be the Romans who chased away the Jews from their homeland or the British who made the promise of owning the historical land of Judea to different groups of people, namely the Jews and the Arabs while not telling either group that they would be sharing this land with one another. Although Europeans caused these divisions and unclarity among the people, after the establishment of the Israeli state they left the region with an attitude as if it is not their problem anymore and the inhabitants of the region should solve these issues by themselves. Only recently, European leaders have made diplomatic efforts to ask Israel's army to not be so hard on the people living in Gaza. Although it is just a mouse's step, compared to the previous efforts, it's an elephant's step. Additionally, The EU has been a significant donor of humanitarian aid and development assistance to Palestinian territories. This aid aims to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians, improve living conditions, and promote economic development. The only hindrance was the Israeli army not allowing anything in Gaza, therefore the aid has not always been able to reach the Palestinians. The EU has often aligned itself with the United Nations' position on the Israel-Palestine conflict. It has supported resolutions and statements calling for the end of violence, the resumption of negotiations, and the creation of a Palestinian state. On the one hand, there's Israel, a firm believer in the two-state solution and on the other hand there's Palestine, in strong opposition to the idea of a two-state solution. This rigidity on Palestine's end has made it almost impossible for Israel to come to terms with Palestine. This unclarity is also the reason why

the settlers can just go their way since it is not set which territories are owned by which nation. The inflexibility of Palestine has torn the country into two pieces, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Palestine wants all the land that it had before 1948, but this would mean an end to the existence of the Jewish state. Without imminent cooperation, peace between the two seems to appear as only a dream we long for. If we want to stop the piles of deaths, cooperation between the nations should be an inevitable objective. Unfortunately, people's mindsets are still in the way and not likely to change soon. The only thing that's up to do, is to spread information, have debates and discussions and stop polarization and to support each other in coping with grief and loss. Because without cooperation, this war will never come to an end.



Global Europa: *The Elephant amidst the Bear, the Dragon, Uncle Sam, and God Shiva*

Francesco Gabriel Bernabeu Fornara

The international arena is moving towards a new global order, one epitomised by a multipolar world. The old giants, the United States and Russia, with their renewed brawls and proxies, have now been joined by new contenders such as China and India. This has left the European Union (EU) at a balancing act, a role yet to be sincerely embodied.

Considering its great economic weight, the EU is relatively ignored as a geopolitical actor in high politics. Due to its need to accommodate 27 differing foreign policies, it also conveys an attitude of placidity and doublespeak towards contentious international events, continually expressing a *langue de bois* in international affairs. For the same multilateral reason, it also moves slowly and without agility in reaction to such unexpected events, often tagging along behind the US.

In other words, the EU is an old elephant who has been dropped in a highly dynamic and contentious jungle, one with great weight but one who moves slowly and is easily domesticated, as argued by former EU Ambassador to Russia, Michael Emerson.

Russia, as Emerson highlights, is big but smaller than the EU, yet it is strikingly more aggressive, punishingly harder to tame, and contrastingly more militarily and politically agile. As portrayed since the 19th century in political cartoons, Russia is a bear: big, fierce, and unyielding. Still, bears are not always aggressive. Following the Cold War, Russia entered hibernation before revitalising its attitude of antagonism in the late 2000s.

Yet, both beasts' contrasts apply also to international relations theory. Whilst an elephant is reflexive and empathetic towards others, a bear is pragmatic and commonsensical. Indeed, whilst the EU embodies an idealist conviction in international relations, Russia has historically preferred a realist outlook.

But a natural habitat is home to more than two. For long silent, under the rubble has risen a powerful

dragon. Though ambitious, he is patient and has good fortune. In Chinese mythology, dragons have stood amongst the most important creatures, having been often used as state symbols. Undoubtedly, China has become yet another polarity in the international arena, emerging as an economic superpower ready to use its weight to assert its interests abroad.

But amid the Dragon's endeavours rests an unsettled neighbour, god Shiva. Ostensibly benevolent yet fearsome in Hindu mythology, Shiva has lingered uneasy with the Dragon's new daunting ambitions to quietly expand its influence over the jungle. Thus, with determination, Shiva has taken initiative too. Rivalling with China over clout, India has indeed taken steps to become a principal player in the new world order. India's new ambitions are clear: backed by its immense population and increasing relevance, it looks forward to expanding its voice and becoming a new economic superpower.

All the more, overlooking beyond the Atlantic has stood Uncle Sam. Confident and tall, he stands uninhibited to flex his muscles to others. As so for decades, he remains one of the mightiest, attempting, though sometimes unfruitful, to police the jungle whilst maintaining his position as ruler. Indeed, ensuing a long rivalry with the Bear for king of the jungle, America emerged as the undefeated and unparalleled hegemonic power following the Cold War. But rising beasts have now seen their opportunity to rival Uncle Sam, not least the (still-withered) Bear itself.

For decades behind Uncle Sam's protection, the relatively defenceless Elephant has become unsettled by the rising beasts around it. Can Uncle Sam, considering his own problems and swaying views towards Europe, single-handedly and sincerely protect the Elephant forever?

With the United States increasingly oscillating between interventionism and protectionism depending

on its president in office, the EU is facing a crossroads in its foreign and defence policy. Indeed, the EU is nearing a juncture in choosing whether to become a unified geopolitical actor in its own right, not only in light of the Bear's war against Ukraine but, more importantly, because of the larger global power dynamic shifts.

In an increasingly antagonistic and uncertain world, decisiveness and agility are key in order to defend one's interests. But the obstacle the Elephant faces to achieve this is not an external one, but one embedded in its own DNA.

"Ever since the beginning, European integration has aspired towards peace, prosperity, and multilateralism, which in essence, contradicts the notion of a hawkish quest for power that the other beasts have largely ascribed to."

In practical terms, however, the Elephant simply does not possess the tools to exert power. Embedded in its modus operandi is a set of rules that prevent it from acquiring decisiveness or agility, understandably placing respect for Member States' sovereignty among its principles. Notwithstanding, the EU's need to first satisfy all 27 differing foreign policies not only precludes its agility but also makes its foreign policies weak as it finds the lowest common denominator among every Member States' position. Not least on top of this is the lack of a unified European military. The reality that geopolitical actorness inevitably relies on the backing of a military to defend one's interests was and remains patently clear. Though

having rhetorically preached its aspiration for 'strategic autonomy' or 'geopolitical actorness', the Elephant simply cannot compete as a single actor among all other beasts who are ready to use the intimidation of their militaries to defend their interests across the jungle. At the heart of this crossroads is the dilemma of the future of the EU, whether it should remain as is or whether Member States deem pooling further sovereignty for a more unified and geopolitical Union a better alternative.

But walking this delicate tightrope between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism is not easy for the large and weighty Elephant. What is more, though sincere friends, it is clear that the Elephant and Uncle Sam do not always see eye-to-eye in jungle affairs. As Uncle Sam and god Shiva look nervously onto the increasingly powerful Dragon, the antagonistic Bear has encroached closer and closer towards the vulnerable Elephant. If ever, it is now the time for the EU to re-evaluate its institutional foreign and defence policy capabilities and truly materialise a 'strategic autonomy' in the name of safeguarding its values, its interests, and peace in Europe.

A new era is undoubtedly dawning on the jungle, an era which will not wait patiently for the Elephant to finally decide on its fate.





Ancient and Contemporary Shadows: From Plato's Myth of the Cave to modern society

Daide Distaso

In a society where the main values seem to be superficiality and materialism, the Myth of the Cave, as told by the Greek philosopher Plato, resonates stronger than ever.

Indeed, Plato, through this allegory, provides a universal metaphor used by philosophers and intellectuals to try to overcome the blindness that contaminated Ancient Greek society, preventing it from knowing and appreciating the reality of things.

Plato, in his myth, recounted a group of people living in a deep cave underground. They lived here from infancy, with their legs and necks bound in chains, condemned to seeing only what is in front of them, without turning their heads around.

As a matter of fact, such captives would consider the truth to be nothing but the shadow of the carved objects, projected by fire on the wall in front of them. It is the fire itself that makes vision of the shadows possible, that is why this element is used by Plato as the figurative representation of knowledge.

The allegory ends with a cruel conclusion: the realization that all humans resemble captives who are chained deep within a cavern, who do not yet realize that there is more to reality than the shadows they see against the wall.

However, this attitude does not only refer to antiquity, but also conforms perfectly to the characteristics of modern humans.

The media, commercials, social networks, films and TV series have argu-

bly become the contemporary shadows of Plato's cave.

Furthermore, some historical figures were able to instrumentalize these means of dissemination, making them the most powerful weapons for subjugating humanity, becoming the ultimate truth-tellers, making people believe what they see, read or hear, forgetting that they have their own rationality.

As European history tells us, such historical figures were perhaps best embodied through Fascist propaganda actualized by Benito Mussolini in Italy or, similarly, through the great manipulation of radio and newspapers carried out by Nazism by Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda for the German Third Reich under Adolf Hitler.

Such dictators have succeeded in establishing totalitarian regimes precisely through the manipulation of the masses, casting new shadows on the cave wall, which represented the fictitious reality in which Italy and Germany were trapped in before and during the Second World War.

Therefore, like the men chained in the cave, the Italians and Germans were convinced that the fictitious reality made by shadows corresponded to the truth, being deprived of their freedom, in all its forms. They ended up prisoners of chains they could not even see, slaves of a destiny of which they were no longer the owners.

These instances merely demonstrate what Plato theorized, notably the human attitude to consider as an inescapable truth what is visible or what is





chosen to be seen.

the system of which they are part.

"Yet, how has this attitude towards materialism and superficiality evolved from Greek to modern society?"

It follows that, just as the men in Plato's cave considered shadows as truth, or again, as Italians or Germans regarded Nazism or Fascism as self-evident, people in contemporary society are still alienated from reality.

There was a philosopher who, in the second half of the 19th century, studied it and formulated the theory of historical materialism.

The shadows continue to wrap humankind, shaping the world as a cave that seems to no longer receive light.

Karl Marx in fact, postulated that all institutions of human society, including its historical past are the outgrowth of its economic activity, constituting the structure on which reality is based.

The laziness that dwells in every human has now taken over, turning into the chain that makes everyone a slave of themselves.

Moreover, according to Marx's view, the economy that underpins human society is itself composed of a hierarchy in which the capitalist, the person who holds the means of production, is at its peak.

After all, the shadows of materialism and superficiality will continue to win over the desire to know the truth, until there will be those who, instead of using light to cast new shadows, will choose to share it in order to free society from the yoke to which it is subjected.

Therefore, as aforementioned with the dictators, also capitalism arguably distorts reality for the workers who contribute to the production process.

Indeed, workers after all, do not produce for themselves but for

When Scandinavia I realised was cool.

Miranda Selimovic

Sweden, and Scandinavia in general, has a glorious reputation. It seems to many like the ideal place for buying a house one day, a medium sized house, in one of those suburbs where your children can ride their bikes to football practice, and you don't have to take a bus to get to the metro station. I doubt inhabitants feel the same way in today's Stockholm.

Have you ever been to France? Have you ever been struck by that helpless feeling when you are faced with a harsh, irritated, (sexy), person who doesn't understand your wobbling French. Yes? Me too.

Last year however, I learnt that saying you're Swedish equals a definite increase in respect. Suddenly I became someone of interest, and I escaped being just another tourist. My Scandinavian identity ended up getting me several jobs.

For many, not only the French, to live in Sweden is to enjoy complete economic prosperity, political stability, and freedom - and doing all those things to exactly the right extent. Scandinavian countries are seen as the utopian modern societies. For me, having emigrated from Sweden for the "continent" I struggle to understand the origin of these ideas. I see right through them. I see acute problems drowning in them. Segregation, gang-criminality and gun violence do not fit into the idealized mental image other Europeans have of Sweden.

The Chief of Swedish National Police said in a press conference that the recent escalations in gang criminality and death shootings in the Stockholm region is "the most vio-

lence we have ever had in the country". The supposed reason behind the recent explosions of violence in the Stockholm-region is the conversion of a 21-year-old man from one gang to their rivals. Since then, men, women, children, guilty and innocent, poor and rich, have been killed in acts of vengeance. In 2022: 391 shootings. So far in 2023: 324 shootings.

The criminal networks are upheld by both teenagers/young adults from low socio-economic backgrounds, but also older, usually men; experienced, educated and organized. Death tolls increase, and the rest of Swedish society stands by the sidelines, helplessly observing.

"Two parallel societies exist next to each other, only sharing the motorways, 4G and kebab shops."

The two collide when a 13-year old boy is shot next to an ongoing children's football practice.

When the violence stayed at the far end of the metro-line with the immigrants, the media portrayed the crimes as normal consequences of poverty. I have even read articles where the gangs were called "them", and the non-criminals "us". But when the crimes nestled their way into middle-class suburbs, suddenly Swedish society was described as in a state of crisis, and the whole Swedish society in decline.

This is not an attempt to say "feel-sorry-for-the-Scandinavians-we-also-have-issues". Evidently,

Sweden and its neighbors are rich countries with low unemployment, freedom of speech and well-functioning welfare. But the external idea of Sweden is twisted and exaggerated. It undermines acute issues. How can these myths prevail? Why do people think I exaggerate when I talk about the gang-criminality in Stockholm?

Maybe, we need myths. Maybe, we create our identities from them. Maybe, the myth of utopian Sweden is crucial to the stability of its liberal climate? Through other's impressions and exaggerated ideas about "us" we construct our self-image that we come to hold so dearly. To push the thought to its extreme; maybe Swedes unconsciously hide issues of gang-criminality and segregation in order to uphold their prosperous, free, Scandinavian, identities.

We can and should criticize the use of myths, especially when they support propaganda, oppression or war. But we should also question their origins, and the reason for their monopoly in constructing others' socio-cultural identities. The following question would be; What comes first? Myth or real life? Would liberal Europe still be so liberal if we hadn't upheld our own myth? Would the Italians still cook so well if we hadn't assigned them their myth of being excellent chefs? Would liberal Europe still be so liberal if we hadn't upheld our own myth? Would the Italians still cook so well if we hadn't assigned them their myth of being excellent chefs?

P.S. Try googling: why is Scandinavia so... and see what suggestions appear.



SES Calendar

Winter Wonderland Borrel - 5th of December 2023

The Party Committee would like to invite you to the first festive borrel of the year. Come together to have a drink during the cold but cozy winter months before the holiday rush starts!

Model Security Council Debate - 7th of December

Step into the shoes of global leaders on December 7th in our Model Security Council debate. Together, let's confront the tragic Srebrenica Massacre (1995), sparking discussions that could rewrite history and foster a future of lasting cooperation.

Gingerbread House Contest - 12th of December

Join the Activity Committee on the 12th of December at 5pm in the SES office for the contest of the holiday season! Show your creative skills or take this as an opportunity for revenge after the beer pong tournament. Pair up with one of your friends and be ready for an afternoon of cozy fun.

Study trip reveal borrel - 12th of December

The travel committee has been working hard to organise one of the most anticipated events of the year, the studytrip! On the 12th of December they will finally reveal the destinations of the trip, be ready for a reveal video of high calibre with lots of surprises!

**WANT TO WRITE FOR EUROVISIE?
SEND YOUR ARTICLE TO EUROVISIE@SES-UVA.NL**