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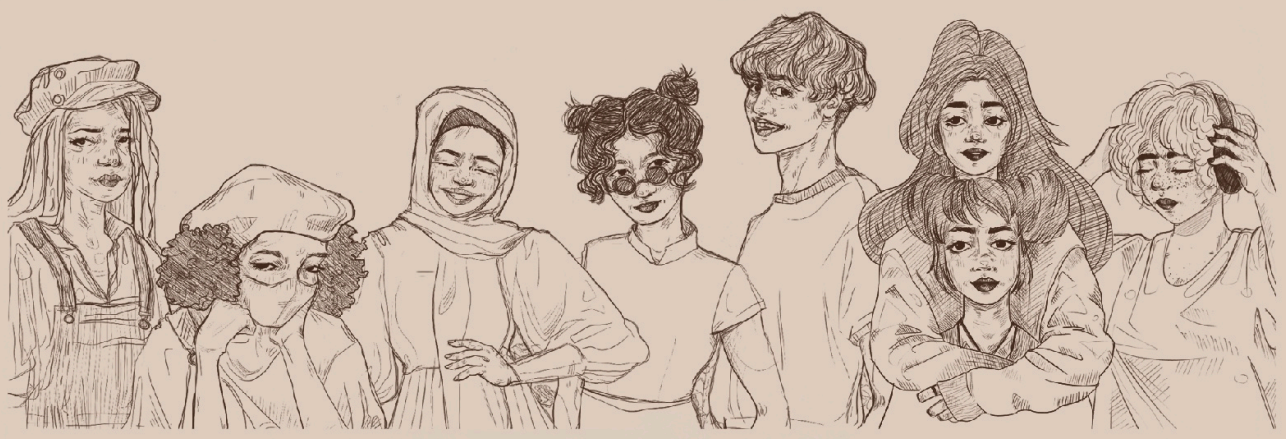
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Hanna & Gustavo talks.



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HANNA&GUSTAVO TALKS. THE HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021.

By Hanna Okurowska



My name is Hania, I am almost 18. I am Polish, I live in Warsaw, and I attend high school here, I am starting my final year in September.



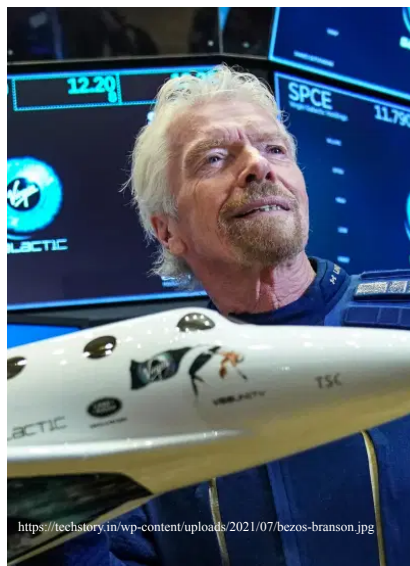
My name is Gustavo Viegas, I am 22, I study Economics at University of St Andrews in Scotland. I am originally from Rio, Brazil, I was born and raised there, and I came to study in the UK, and I am happy to be here with you.

The next twenty pages is a written down conversation I and Gustavo had in mid-July. The point was to highlight the most important, interesting, and influential occurrences of the first six months of 2021. We talked about events that happened around the globe; from Bidens presidency in the U.S. through rising dictatorships in East Europe to Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East and many more. Also, we couldn't forget to touch down on topics that are the closest to our hearts- our homelands, Poland and Brazil. I am positive that the conversation between two young people born on the complete opposite sides of the world that share a similar view for its future is hard to be found anywhere but here. That's why I encourage everyone to the lecture and to join our discussion through our social media!

~ Hanna Okurowska, Head of current affairs

Hanna: Let's go right into conversation, I wanted to start with a topic that has been with us for way too long now, almost two years actually, I am obviously talking about the pandemic. And so, it is July 17th today and everyone is talking about Jeff Bezos going to space in a couple of days. And I actually read a very critical article about him and Branson who are almost fighting each other on who's going to be the first one in space, and the author said that its almost as if they are "escaping" from the earth and from "human problems", and that they should stay and help governments fight the pandemic, so I wanted to ask you is it moral is it not moral? What do you think about it?

Gustavo: I think people should mind their business. I honestly believe that if you believe that travelling to space and space exploration is bad for humanity, then you're probably mistaken. I think that none of these goals is mutually exclusive, they are actually spending a relatively small percentage of their net worth on these space adventures. Also, this



is a potential business, remember that it's space tourism. Both Virgin Galactic and Blue Origin, so there is both Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos in this race to develop this market and I think that if they are able to provide a cheaper service in the future then that actually allows for more people to travel to space and I think that would be a net positive for humanity, I think that's good. Many people actually do dream about going to space and it could be a source of happiness for many people. So right now, of course, it's a very expensive service, we have very little experience with it, there are lots of things that could go wrong, one accident is probably enough to prevent other people from wanting to go to space, so a lot could happen but if the technology improves, and technology is only able to improve if you actually try it. Right? If you actually use it. Experimentation- this is what leads to innovation, we need to be able to operate. So, I don't see why going to space could be a bad thing and as for vaccines, the main issue right now, in my view, is supply bottleneck it's not even just funding, although more funding wouldn't hurt this funding should come from governments in my opinion, I don't think we should blame private individuals for not funding certain causes. Most of this funding should come from governments and international organizations. But the main issue seems to be supply bottlenecks and the fact that many rich nations are storing vaccines when I believe only 1% of people in

lower-income countries is fully vaccinated. And this is in the context of the Delta variant which is at least 2,5 times more transmissible than the original variant of the virus. So, I think we should definitely think about ways to improve the supply lines and make sure that vaccines are produced faster and distributed faster, and we also need to find vaccine hesitancy which is huge in certain areas. But I think we shouldn't mix these two, and I hope that we get to go to space someday, I think it's a great idea. And also, we, as humans thrive in frontier environments, we are natural explorers, voyagers. If you've seen the movie "Moana", you know what I'm talking about. She lived on this isolated island, and she was told her whole life that "we've always been here, we'll always be here, the outside world is not for you", and then she finds out that actually, her people were voyagers, they were sailors, they colonized the islands of the Pacific. So, I think we as humans should recognize that, not only in terms of space exploration but also ocean exploration, there is so much we still don't know. And knowledge and science are worthy causes. Sorry for a very long answer but I love space!

Hanna: It's okay, it is perfect. Because when I first read the article, the author was pretty harsh on them, and I was kind of thinking "is it okay for me to tell them what they should do?" Cause at the end of the day it is their business. And then actually my next question was who should fund the vaccines? But you already said that it shouldn't be private people but governments which I definitely agree with because at the end of the day it is not really their duty to do that. And what would you say about the idea to share tech for vaccines with developing countries so that they can produce the vaccines themselves? Is it something worth trying?

Gustavo: Yeah, so we have COVAX which is the international alliance for the distribution of vaccines. After G20 rich countries have already announced that they would donate, I don't even know how many billions of doses of vaccines to developing world, still probably not enough, we need many more. The world will not be safe until most of the world population is fully immunized, because we can always have different variants developing and this is always going to be a threat to humanity if we don't accelerate the process of vaccinating the emerging world and lower-income countries. And what's happening right now is rich countries storing vaccines in anticipation of giving people a booster dose, and the WHO has already come out saying there is no evidence that we do need a third dose yet. And this is actually hindering the distribution of vaccines to the emerging world that desperately needs these vaccines. And then there was also a patent issue, a patent discussion a while back, so we lift patents.

Hanna: Oh yeah, and wasn't Bill Gates against that?

Gustavo: Yeah, I think there were good arguments for and against. But the biggest fear was that it wouldn't even matter that much. I saw some interviews with vaccine manufacturers, and they were saying that it wouldn't actually make that much of a difference, and it could be more detrimental because it could crowd out the supply lines because vaccines are extremely complex products, they require very specific ingredients and the inputs, so this is already a very stressed supply line. If you rent full permission to so many manufacturers across the world this could actually crowd out the supply line and lead to inefficiencies which could hamper production. I think we'll probably be better off if we have massive production, even in the rich world, that's fine, so not being disrupted but then efficient and equitable distribution. We should focus on distribution because we are producing billion of vaccines. So, there are reasons to be optimistic, I think.

Hanna: That's good! And what would you say to someone who doesn't want to get vaccinated? Is there even something that could be said to convince them?

Gustavo: Well, the first thing is that the states will not come to you and force you to get vaccinated, they are not going to grab your arm and vaccinate you by force. But then I do agree that there should be penalties or sanctions for those who decide to willingly not get vaccinated, for example, you might not be able to travel, you might not be able to be a healthcare worker, you might not be able to go into public school and actually, I am from Brazil and Brazilian Supreme Court upheld earlier this year that this is constitutional, at least in Brazil, that sanctions can be applied for people who do not want to get vaccinated as is the case for many other different types of vaccines, in many different parts of the world. In Brazil at least it is mandatory to vaccinate children, even if you are antivaccine, you have to vaccinate your children against measles and all that.

Hanna: Yeah, in Poland it's the same, I believe.

Gustavo: And actually, if you look at what's happening in France right now, the French president announced penalties for those who don't want to get their dose of vaccines and vaccine registration shot up to over two million in like a day, it was literally overnight. So, I think it could help to incentivize people to get vaccinated because obviously, people want to go to parties, travel so I think we should work with incentives and I don't think its authoritarian, because if you are carrying Covid you're generating negative externalities for individuals who don't even know you, so it is a social responsibility that we should have. And there are other ways we can incentivize as well, so U.S. states like Ohio for example they have lotteries, if you get vaccinated you have a chance of winning one million dollars and the psychological effect that this causes leads people to get vaccinated and we do have evidence that

this did indeed increase vaccination rates. So, there are many ways people are experimenting with this and I hope we get even better for future pandemics for example.

Hanna: Absolutely, and also what triggers me is that even if someone doesn't want to get vaccinated when they do get infected and sick, they still expect to be treated by public health care.

Gustavo: Yeah, but also in certain countries like the USA vaccine hesitancy is highly correlated with a political affiliation. So, it's more about political tribalism than about ignorance of science. You know most of us don't even know how these vaccines work exactly, right? We're not scientists, but we do accept the experts and we do accept the science because of the consensus and the methods of science that we trust, but we saw the biggest predictor of whether you're going to take the vaccine in countries like the U.S. is whether you're a democrat or a republican which is crazy.

Hanna: Yeah, it literally shouldn't have anything to do with each other!

Gustavo: Unfortunately, that's the reality. We are primates with brains that are a result of evolution and we are tribal.

Hanna: And also, for me an argument that "I don't know how this vaccine works" is pretty foolish because it's not really like you know how any other vaccine works as well.

Gustavo: Yeah, and if you want to you always can learn. I got vaccinated two weeks ago, here in the UK, with the Pfizer vaccine and the moment I entered the vaccination centre they gave me a leaflet explaining everything about the vaccine. So: how it's made, what are the ingredients, what are the potential side effects, who should I contact if I have any unusual side effects. So, I really feel like we're doing a good job here in the UK and we should replicate that around the world.

Hanna: Here I must agree, Poland could definitely take some examples from the UK, but I also can't complain because vaccinations are going pretty quickly here actually. Okay, so let's move on to the United States maybe. Joe Biden's first 100 days of presidency passed in April. So, how would we rate it and what does it maybe tell us about the possible future?

Gustavo: I mean, also the question you sent me earlier, whether Joe Biden was the best democratic candidate. You know it's hard to define what best even means. I am sure everyone has their favourite candidate that they identify with, but best could also mean the most strategic candidate, meaning the one that has the highest chance of winning. And in that sense, he was the best candidate by far. He was the



consensus candidate, he already had a national profile, everyone knew him, he was not controversial, he was a moderate with a long-standing experience in government, he was a senator for many decades then he became vice president. So, he was able to do, what Obama was able to do in 2008 which was to get the votes from the centre, that's how you win elections. We seem to forget that certain people from the most progressive wing of the democratic party like AOC (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) or Bruno Sanders they may seem very popular in democratic party primaries but mostly they hold safe seats. AOC is a congresswoman from New York which is a heavily democratic city. So, to win elections you need moderate candidates that appeal to median voters, you know, economists and political scientists they talk about the median voter, which is the voter that defines the election and to appeal to that you need to be a moderate and I think that Joe Biden was the consensus candidate and he proofed to be more than capable of winning against Trump, and he won maybe not by the wide margin that polls predicted because polls are always somewhat wrong, the problem is when they are all wrong in the same direction and they all underestimate Trump, but still he won by a wide margin. But obviously, everyone is going to have their favourite candidates, and this is not just America because the whole world is affected by what's happening in the U.S., we all want to know what's happening.

Hanna: Yes exactly! I remember during the election in November everyone was only talking about the results and all the TV news stations were broadcasting it live.

Gustavo: Yeah, probably similar situation was in many countries and also, it's important to remember that 70 million people still voted for Trump. So, for many people, their favourite candidate was Trump, not Biden.

Hanna: But well with Biden, kind of what you said but I think he was just a safe choice. He was known by many as Barack Obama's right hand, and everyone loves Obama.

Gustavo: Exactly, we even had moderate republicans coming out in favour of Biden. Like Cindy McCane, the widow of late senator John McCane, a hardcore republican his entire life. She came out in favour of Biden, and she helped him win Arizona, which was a huge win.

Hanna: Oh yeah. Okay so let's move on to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which caught a lot of attention in May due to rocket attacks on Israeli and airstrikes targeting the Gaza Strip. We even interviewed an Israeli girl and a Palestinian guy.

Gustavo: Oh, that's interesting! Was their opinion diametrical different?

Hanna: Kind of but not always. Because we asked them the same questions to get both sides perspective, and what I am getting to is that the guy from Palestine said that the biggest misconception he has come across is calling it a conflict and it has also been a big discussion in media, especially social media, so I wanted to ask you what do you think? Is it all right to use the word "conflict" in this case?

Gustavo: I mean, it is a conflict. We can talk about semantics all day but it's not going to change the reality on the ground. And its conflict for I thinks two main reasons. The first reason is historical, anyone who understands and reads history knows that this problem goes back to even before Palestine or Israel even thought about becoming countries. It was when the British moved Palestine with a colonial mandate. And since we've had, how many wars?



Hanna: Four, I believe

Gustavo: Yeah, four Arab wars, so we had wars. And what I was quite shocked about is that when this whole thing was happening, very few people were actually going back to the history, to try to understand from a historical perspective what was happening, because you can't understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or issue or problem or whatever you want to call it if you don't understand the history. And what we had was first of all the War of Independence, 1938, when Israel received a mandate from United Nation to create their state, as had been promised by the British, the UN also recognized that its Palestinian state and proposed a partition plan which was rejected by the Palestinians and then the Arab neighbours joined forces against Israel and that caused the first Arab war. And then that's when Jordan occupied the east Jerusalem and Egypt occupied West Bank. Then in 1967, we had the Six-Day War which is when Israel attacked first, but in anticipation of Egyptian and Jordan attacks and that's when they conquered the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula and east Jerusalem. And then we had the Yom Kippur War, and then we had the recognition of Israel by Egypt then Jordan, then we had the foundation of the Palestinian authority, then Israel came out of the West Bank. And now Hamas rules in Gaza and the Israelian Authority in West Bank. So, this is history, there is a lot of conflict in history, there is war, one person is trying to annihilate another. And no one is going to convince me that if Syria, Jordan or Egypt had won any of these wars, they wouldn't have committed atrocities, just like the Israelian government is committing an atrocity against Palestinians today, and we know this. So historically speaking the word "conflict" is extremely appropriate. And then there is another side of the story, which is Hamas firing over two thousand rockets against Israel and Israel responding with what many say is disproportional military, aerial bombardments against Gaza, which killed over 200 people was it?

Hanna: I think it might have been 250 even.

Gustavo: And about 8 Israelis, right? And that happened in Gaza. So, I think it is a conflict. I don't know about you but firing two thousand rockets and then military bombardments, for me that's a conflict. So, there is definitely a conflict there, but people who say there is no conflict are pointing out something that is true, which is that right now Israel holds most of the cards, but this is right now. Let me emphasize, right now. Because for most of history Israel was on the verge of collapse, on the verge of being annihilated. So, if you understand the history, you understand where their extreme defensiveness comes from, that's not excusing their behaviour, of course, that's explaining their behaviour. You need to understand how the world is before you can formulate opinions on where to go from here, so I think the word conflict is appropriate and let's see what happens. I am very sceptical of one-sided narratives, when the whole thing was happening my Instagram was flooded with infographics from frankly, I mean none of us is experts on this issue, the most

experienced diplomats' humanity has ever produced were not able to solve this problem, so much diplomatic, political capital has been invested into trying to solve the Palestinian conflict, so many rounds of negotiations, still nothing. This is a testament to how complicated and complex this issue is, so for any frank discussion about how to solve this and actually improve people's lives, you can't rely on a one-sided narrative. And what I saw on Instagram and some parts of Twitter was one-sided narratives and outright misinformation and people actually sharing very antisemitic things using certain catch words like "Zionism" and "Islamism" as scapegoats and many generalizations. And yeah, Hamas is deplorable, and we should be very clear about that but also going against the Israeli government is not antisemitic because Israel is a democracy, a flawed one, but it is a democracy and Israelis are allowed to criticize the Israeli government and that has to be recognized. But then at the same time, is saying that Israel doesn't have the right to exist in the first place, right? Is that antisemitic? Maybe. I don't know. This is a conversation that we should have because if someone came to me and said that Brazil has no right to exist, obviously I would be implied that they had some prejudice against Brazil. So yeah, I don't know, I don't have a fixed answer for that, but complicated conversations need to be held and that's why we shouldn't be seduced by one-sided narratives. And there is a problem also of who do you call when it comes to Palestine because Al-Fatah hates Hamas, so the West Bank is completely cut off from Gaza.

Hanna: Both geographically and politically.

Gustavo: Yeah, so who is leading the Palestinian cause? Because if you look for example at South Africa you called Mandela and the ANC, if you look at India you called Gandhi if you look at the supervised move from the U.S. you called Martin Luther King. There isn't a legitimate, proper Palestinian leadership, that international



negotiator can count on, so that's really hard as well and that was almost completely absent from the debate that happened. All I saw was just people saying how oppressed Palestinians are and maybe that's all true, but then how do you actually solve the issue. Palestinians should start by cleaning up their own house, basically, first of all, getting rid of Hamas- they are more concerned about killed Israelis than actually helping Palestinians and second of all, the Palestinian authority which is led by Al-Fatah in the West Bank the president Abbas has been in power for 17 years and it was supposed to be a four-year term. And he postponed elections again, there was supposed to be an election on April 30, and he postponed it, blamed it on security reasons. His government is extremely corrupt, extremely incompetent, has not been

able to achieve better life for Palestinians within the Palestinian Authority territories. So, Palestinians should also look within because they need proper leadership if they are to succeed, hopefully, in negotiations ahead.

Hanna: Yeah, I think it's really interesting what you just said, that it is so easy to just jump on a hate train wagon for Israelis or Palestinians without much consideration. And there is also the question of land occupation.

Gustavo: Yeah, there is definitely occupation, which is illegal. Yeah, well, obviously transfer national law, right?

Hanna: Right. I just think it's way more complex than what many people want to think. And also, just on margins my friend is actually now going to a school in Israel that's goal is to have part of Israeli students, part of Palestinians and part from other countries so that in the future when they are important politicians, they will be able to work together on the solution.

Gustavo: Oh, I think that's a great initiative. I think that what causes so much of the hatred and violence is the dehumanization of the other side. You know, things we do as humans. We do this all the time. We're very tribalistic. What we do is that we try to rationalize our tribal warfare by dehumanizing the other side, saying that they're not as good as us and they are outsiders. There is evidence that more contact, living together with different people, from diverse backgrounds, does improve tolerance, so that should be a way forward and also the underlying assumption there, which is that maybe the way forward to solve this conflict is not with big prestigious rounds of diplomatic negotiations by government officials, with grand awards. Maybe the way forward is to focus on individual people. Individual welfare, human rights. Improving the conditions on the ground, maybe that's more important than drawing some borders on the map. And I agree with that, probably the way forward right now is that. Because all the negotiations, we could possibly have, we already had. All kinds of rounds of negotiations, there were times when we were optimistic, there were times when we were pessimistic, in the end, the pessimists probably won, because we haven't had a breakthrough for a long time. So, I think probably the way forward is to focus on improving the lives of Palestinians, human rights, conditions on the ground, fighting poverty and ensuring that people have the same rights.

Hanna: And then there is a whole question- should we have two states?

Gustavo: You know theoretically the two-state solution is still the preferred one, but in practice, I think it's pretty much dead. I don't know if it's going to happen. I find it very hard to believe.

Hanna: Because then there's going to be trade-offs, right? Should everyone live in one country, Israel? However, Israel cannot be a Jewish state because half of its population is going to be Palestinian Arab slash Muslim?

Gustavo: Yeah, so you know questions are going to need to be answered, but in order for that to happen you need productive debate. You can't have toxic name-calling insults and frankly stupid misinformation that I saw on Instagram. Very well-educated friends of mine sharing things like Zionism is Nazism, I don't even know what to say, it's embarrassing.

Hanna: And kind of touching on what you said earlier. Do you think the UN did all that they could or is there something more that could be done?

Gustavo: Oh, I mean it's easy for us to judge now, right? We have a hindsight bias. We can look back and point out all the flaws that they made, all the things that went wrong but when things were happening, I think they did their best honestly. And they still recognize the two-state solution, and there several partition plans that were all rejected or simply couldn't be implemented because of conflicts and wars. So, you know it's just the hard path of diplomacy as opposed to the easy path of destruction in war and conflict. But I think they were right to recognize Israel's right to exist, especially after the Holocaust. But that was just a trigger, it was a much older issue, you can trace it back to the Zionists or this whatever obscure 19th-century philosophy you want to pine on history books. But at the end of the day, you had a lot of Jewish people who migrated to Palestine over the 19th century probably most of whom had no idea what Zionism was. They just migrated because their families were migrating as well. The land of Palestine means the promised land, it means a lot to them symbolically so yeah let's see what happens.

Hanna: And coming back to the roots of the conflict for a second. Is it even possible to point whose fault it is?

Gustavo: Oh, I think all sides are to blame, all sides made mistakes, all sides committed atrocities. The Palestinians and their Arab neighbours wanting to annihilate Israel. Fought wars against Israel. Their current leadership is very incompetent or violent in the case of Hamas. Israel holds most of the cards now. One,

with all the wars and second, is actively discriminating against Palestinians in many ways so for example, Palestinians don't have the right to appeal to get their homes back. After 1967 many Palestinians lost their homes and they don't have the right to appeal but Israelis have the right to appeal to the homes that they lost after 1948, which is the whole controversy that happened in Jerusalem, right? With that specific neighbourhood, so why do Israelis have the right to appeal, and Palestinians don't, when they also lost their homes when they fought wars of Independence and the Six-Day War. And the fact that many Palestinians in East Jerusalem are considered "residents" but not citizens. Which means they have access to Israeli healthcare and Social Security. But they're not full citizens, it is a problem. I think all sides are to blame. And there's going to be a compromise at some point, right now Israel is on top, and the status quo favours Israel. That's objectively true, but it was not always the case, and the situation could change. But I think we should appeal to both sides, and there's going to be some kind of restorative justice, right? We're going to have to forgive people to move forward.

Hanna: Absolutely, and just last matter on that topic. In the interview we did that I was talking about, both of our interviewees said that for the peace is the most important objective of all and that no holy place, no land will ever come above that. So, would you say that me saying that it's the media that's adding fuel to the flame is a too far going statement, or no?

Gustavo: Oh yeah, the media does that, it's their job. We have evidence, we have data and studies which prove that media does have a deep negative bias. There was a study where they gave editors the same event with different headlines, one headline was more positive and the second one was a bit more negative using more negative words, and in all cases, they chose a more negative. So, the media profits on that, that's their business, so I think it will always over exaggerate many things. But it's also important to report the facts. I mean I follow the Arab and Israeli media on Facebook and it seems like I'm reading about the different things, even though they're talking about the same, it seems like it's a completely different thing, they have completely different narratives. They use completely different examples. They don't report certain things, and the other one reports it, I think the media does play a role in it and not just traditional media, but social media. And that was the difference, we've had so many Palestinian uprisings. OK, we've had so many of these. Tit for tat conflict, Hamas versus Israel, Palestinian Liberation Organization against Israel. We've had so many of these before. What we haven't had before is this massive social media mobilization, which I didn't see the last time there was violence, I think it was 2014, right? I don't remember seeing this kind of massive social media uprising taking place. So, I think in the future we should look to social media for clues as to what people are thinking? What kind of international pressures the players are under? And that comes with certain disadvantages. As I told you rampant misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and one-sided narratives.

Hanna: That's a good observation. In 2014 I was 11 so I didn't even pay attention to the whole thing but do you think that if the media was to not exist. Like no social media, no traditional news outlets the conflict might have taken a completely different direction.

Gustavo: No, I don't think so, I think there would have still been conflict. We kind of know this from history. Before the printing press was created, we had conflicts. War is as old as human civilization. We have the capacity for violence in human nature, but we also have the capacity for cooperation, and that's why over the last 50 years we've managed to reduce the number of war deaths and deaths from conflict and the number of wars. We haven't had a great power war since the Korean War in 1950, which ended in 1953, right? So, we've made tremendous progress on that front, but conflict is as old as civilization, but you are right to point out that the media, and we know this because the printing press did lead to the massive spread of Protestantism in Europe, which led to the wars of religion. At one point I think they killed 2/3 of the population of Germany, it's crazy. So, media can certainly exacerbate conflict. But at the same time, they can be solutions as well because if they're reporting the truth, when it comes, for example, to war crimes. This is super important because this is how we know what happened, who are the people to blame, which crimes against humanity were committed. If it wasn't for modern technologies and the media, we would know nothing about what's happening in Xinjiang in China, right? With the Uighur minority that is being put into labour camps. There are advantages and disadvantages. Definitely more pessimistic about social media today than I was five years ago. But overall, I'm still very positive about it. I could not have imagined lockdown without social media, without modern technology, without the Internet, and I mean it's a relatively new thing. Even when I grew up, when I was a child, there was no Facebook. I didn't have a phone until I was, I don't even know but my first iPhone was in 2013. And the iPhone just was launched in 2007, right? So, this is a very new thing, so it's normal at this early stage of a technological revolution or a very influential consequential innovation for us to screw up. But with time we're going to develop regulations, we're going to get used to it. We're going to develop a different modus operandi. And eventually, I think we are going to reach a much more balanced spot. How long this is going to take? I'm not sure. What kind of regulations are needed? I'm not sure. Is big tech to blame for everything? Probably not. And the Internet is a very complicated space, but I'm optimistic for the long future. But right now, when I see the effects of what's happening for democracies and the polarization, then probably social media does play a role in it and the mental health crisis for teenage girls and teenage boys.

Hanna: But I love how optimistic you are for the future.

Gustavo: Oh yeah, I'm very optimistic and it's not blind optimism because I work for an American Thinktank, the Cato Institute and I worked for their project, which is called humanprogress.org, and my job was basically to gather data and evidence on human progress, and it's extremely impressive what's been done. And very few people are aware of these statistics. How much we've reduced extreme poverty globally. It's crazy, we're talking about over 1 billion people since the 1990s being lifted out of extreme poverty, we're talking about a doubling of the average life expectancy around the world in the last century. We're talking about the industrial revolution and all the economic progress that came with it. So, if we have rational faculties, we have science. And if we have good intentions if we want to maximize human flourishing, we put our intellect in our cognitive capacity in our collective effort into a problem- we can solve it. As long as it doesn't go against the laws of nature, we can solve it. Given the right knowledge. And we've been able to do this and this problem solving has intensified over the years, and it's impressive. A long wait with come, and this is only for the past 200 years. You know, the 1000 years, 10,000 years of human history? Before that, we barely saw any progress. I mean, the fact that we were able to develop a vaccine, not just one, but multiple vaccines in less than a year. This is a testament to human ingenuity. And this is not wishful thinking. I think it's just empirical reality and we need to accept that if we want to make the world a better place because the world is awful, but it's getting much better and these are not mutually exclusive statements. You need to acknowledge the progress if you are to have more of it. And that's where I think our generation, even though our generation is in the rich world is a bit lost because we are the most prosperous generation that has ever existed. And still, we act like we are on the verge of doom. You know all the time, so maybe we should look back in history and get some perspective. Do you know what I mean?

Hanna: Totally, but also just coming back to the vaccine for a second. How crazy is that because of technology which enabled us to produce these vaccines in less than a year, which is an amazing achievement, people still say that it's "fake" or that because it was produced that quickly it's not safe.

Gustavo: Yeah, but you know, we that it is safe. We've done multiple clinical trials over many months now, with thousands and thousands of people. There is research and studies going out on the most prestigious science journals every day about this. We know the vaccines are safe and they were developed so quickly, and we need to give credit where it's due to the Trump administration. Operation Warp speed was essential to develop vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna. The messenger RNA vaccines, which is the new technology that has been developed for years now, but it's the first time we're actually seeing M RNA vaccine being used by a regulator, which is really promising not just for COVID, but we could be looking at future vaccines for cancer,

malaria, AIDS using these technologies. So, I think this decade we can expect great medical innovations coming out because the pandemic forced our hand, showed our complacency because we were being complacent about vaccines about public health, and it showed a path forward. It's terrible I wish it hadn't happened, but now that it has happened, we have to make the most out of it in the sense that we need to improve our technologies and our solutions for public health problems. And I think we're going to see many innovations coming from the field of vaccines, biotechnology, medicine, preventive medicine. I think there are reasons to be optimistic.

Hanna: That's good so lastly, this year was quite plentiful of two Eastern European countries presidents trying to seal the lips of their opponents. I'm talking about Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenka, and Alexei Navalny who was poisoned last summer, and this January got arrested and sentenced to 2,5 years at the penal colony and Roman Protasevitch whose plane got hijacked this May. When in your opinion did Putin and Lukashenka cross the line and went too far?

Gustavo: The moment, I think, they crossed the line was when they decided that they wanted to become a dictator. When they decided that they wanted to dismantle democratic institutions in Russia and then in Belarus democratic institutions never existed. They didn't even have time to develop, Lukashenko came to power so quickly after the end of the Soviet Union, and they really haven't had democracy yet,



and neither has Russia properly, right? There was hope in the 90s that democracy would flourish. Liberal democracy would flourish in Russia, but those hopes were crushed with Putin in power. But the few democratic institutions that Russia had were dismantled by Vladimir Putin, and I think that's when they crossed a line. And, what's

happening with Belarus and Lukashenka, journalists have been predicting his downfall now for a year and he hasn't fallen yet. Same with Venezuela, and I think what people need to understand is that the problem is authoritarianism. Whether it's left-wing or right-wing to me is completely irrelevant. I don't care if a dictator is considered left-wing or right-wing, I care that he's a dictator, and there shouldn't be dictatorships. And Alexei Navalny is in prison right now. He almost died, because he was on a hunger strike. They denied him access to proper health care, to his doctor. In the end, they allowed him to have access to a doctor, so now I think his health is

improving. And then we also had the journalist, right? Who was on Ryan Airplane and then the plane was forced to land in Belarus so he could be arrested by the largest dictatorship, the regime. And, we have the rise of authoritarianism in Poland and Hungary.

Hanna: I even wrote an article on the situation in Belarus, so I kind of dug deeper into it, it's crazy. I even read that there were a couple of KGB agents on that plane who were following Protasevitch the whole way.



Gustavo: I wouldn't be surprised.

Hanna: And do you think, that maybe one of the reasons for Putin and Lukashenka still holding reigns is that there never was a proper democracy in these countries, so people maybe don't fully know what they are missing out on?

Gustavo: That's probably true, especially for the older generations. I think younger generations have a greater awareness of human rights and the need for liberal democracy and for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly. Also, but this is like I don't know the data on this, I'm speculating, so we should check surveys if we have any on whether you know a democratic, what you're talking about is not just the actual government being a democracy, but the democratic culture, that hasn't been able to develop in places like Russia and Belarus because they have never had the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of full democracy, right? Well, probably. But then at the same time people nowadays, because they have more access to information because they are more educated. After all, they live longer, because they have higher wages, better jobs. I think people care more about issues because I mean if you're starving if your children are starving, you don't care whether the government is a dictatorship or democracy because you have to survive the day, you have to be able to feed your family. But when you have the basics, provided you start worrying about other things, right? You start worrying about why I can't express my opinion, why is the environment being that degraded. Fighting poverty is also the best way to raise awareness about these issues, and I think that nowadays people have a much stronger democratic goal even in dictatorships because they have access to information because they've seen Western democracies and the freedoms people have here and they are aware of it. That doesn't mean that most of the world has a democratic culture and therefore they are going to be democratic next week. But it does mean that the long-term trend is in favour of greater democratization because it is the best

system we have, it is liberal democracy. It's not perfect. It doesn't lead us to heaven, but it keeps us from hell, and we've seen what hell is. If you study history, you know the 20th century was flooded with extermination, genocide, dictatorships so we have to avoid that, if we're avoiding that, that's already a victory. But we need to go beyond it as well. Of course, we need development, we need progress, we need economic growth, we need environmental protection and all of it.

Hanna: And is the West or US or you know different organizations doing enough or could they do more?



Gustavo: No, I think they could definitely do more, for sure. I mean the UN doesn't have that much power. Unfortunately, it's more

of a forum, right? I think especially when it comes to international security. I mean we do have the Security Council, but permanent members are still the victors from World War Two. The mechanisms haven't been updated. They keep vetoing each other's projects. I think where the UN really thrives is the other organizations, that branched out of the main focus. The main, original focus of the UN was to prevent war. Prevent another World War and prevent conflict in general, chief peace, but then out of that, out of that original primary objective, other organizations, and objectives frenched. So, let's fight poverty, let's protect the environment, let's make sure that people have access to public healthcare. And this is where the UN really thrives in my opinion. These developmental projects and the research they carry out. As I said, I work with data on human progress and most of this data comes from international institutions. World Bank, the UN, this is how we know what's going on because again, people are very willing to say their opinion, the challenge is to have an informed opinion, in order to have an informed opinion you need to know the world, you need to know how the world is. For that you need data. You need evidence. There's no better way of doing this. Anecdotes are not enough. And international institutions provide you with that. It provides research and they do work on the ground. So, I think they're definitely a net positive. Obviously, there's so much more we could do, they are probably underfunded, and The WHO is definitely underfunded. It's crazy that the Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation, before the pandemic they gave more money to WHO than France, OK, a country, a government?

Hanna: Oh yes, that's right.

Gustavo: So, they're probably underfunded. And then we blame them for things that go wrong when they're underfunded, and they don't have much power. There is no world government, is there? There are forums and places where we can discuss. And as long as people are talking and not fighting each other, I think that's progress already.

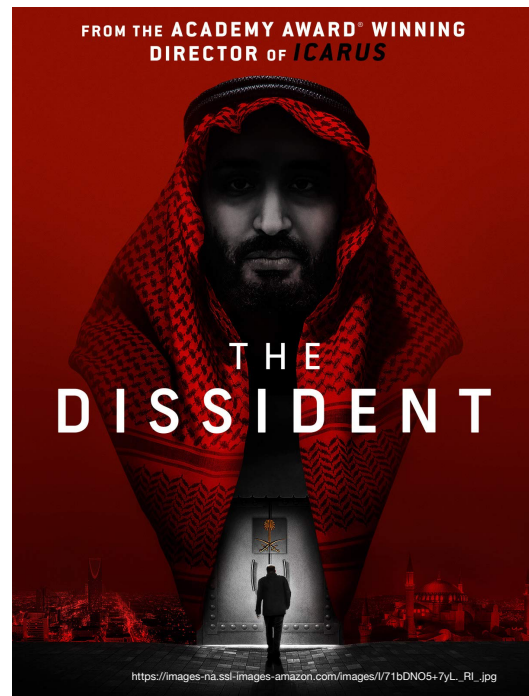
Hanna: And coming back to Lukashenka and Putin are tyrants like that, because I don't know how else to call them, a threat to how we perceive democracy?

Gustavo: Umm, what do you mean?

Hanna: Because, a lot of times I get the impression that they think they are absolutely untouchable and in a way it looks like they are because clearly for so many years now other countries couldn't manage to stop them, so I guess what I am asking is if they are just an unscary anomaly from a generally working system or living example that no system is perfect and with right means you can do whatever you want to, not always in a good way.

Gustavo: Ohh yeah, that's a very good question. I think that for most of history dictators and kings and rulers and theocrats were the rule, not the exception. Now we have more democracy since the 20th century, since the end of the Cold War, right? And the liberation of communist societies and globalization and it's the first time in history that we have more democracies than autocracies. Having said that, the recent trends over the last decade we've seen a horrible, terrible increase in autocracies and decreasing freedom of speech around the world, which is concerning. But still, we're in a much better place than we were 50 years ago. That's why I'm stressing this, but I can't stress this enough. We need to look at the data long term data. We need to look at the trends, not the headlines. This means you look at the trends to have perspective. So, we are in a much better place than we used to be, and I think most people around the world. Uh, I don't know if most people, but I think it is widely accepted now that the best way to go is to have freedom. People say they are in favour of freedom of speech or religion or assembly, of democratic institutions being able to vote for their rulers. I think that's considered right now the morally acceptable form of government and that's a major improvement. For most of human history, we were so happy to go along with dictators. Since the agriculture revolution, since we started settling cities and countries, we've been too comfortable with having a dictator in charge of it all and this change in behaviour and people realizing that actually, it might be a good idea to limit the government's powers. Because we've been there. We've seen hell,

right? But going back to your question, which is whether they are an anomaly or an actual threat to liberal democracy around the world. I think some of them are threats and I think China has shown that they've mixed a market economy with a one-party dictatorship. And that provides a model for other countries, emerging countries, which is not the best model, right? Because you want to have a market economy, but you also want to have the freedoms. And you have active campaigns by authoritarian regimes, like, for example, Russia of undermining western democracy, like by interfering in the election. I just watched a very good documentary that I totally recommend which is called "The dissident", it's on Prime Video and it's about the assassination by the Saudi government of Jamal Khashoggi who was a very important opposition Saudi journalist, who had to flee Saudi Arabia. He was murdered by operatives ordered by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia who personally ordered his death. He was killed in a stumble in his country's consulate, but the documentary goes beyond that, and it talks about surveillance. Dictatorial surveillance by the Saudi government and other dictators across the world, about freedom of speech. About government dictatorships persecuting dissidents outside their borders, not just within their borders but also in other countries. That's a worrying trend, so I think there is a threat there, but we should treat them as anomalies. That's the thing we should never treat them as the rule or as something to be normalized. That's really important. Dictatorships should be treated as anomalies, as problems that need to be solved. Doesn't matter if you're right-wing or left-wing, we need to treat them as anomalies because we need to push for liberal democracy.



Hanna: Absolutely. Because also for me, I am looking from my perspective and obviously in Poland now the situation is a bit, not great let's say, with freedom of speech and I don't know if you have heard but now the government is trying to implement an act to not prolong the concession of a private media outlet and not let them broadcast their news, which is absolutely insane for me.

Gustavo: Yeah, typical authoritarianism. I mean they do that. Democracies, the way they died today is not the same way they died last century. I study history and a 1964 military coup in Brazil, there were tanks on the street. We don't see that anymore that much. I mean, we mostly see authoritarians gradually incrementally dismantling democratic institutions. We saw that in Hungary, we're seeing that in Brazil, we're seeing that in Poland, which is that they're coming for democracy in the shadows,

little by little, the Polish Government trying to pack this, the Polish Supreme Court, and the judicial independence. And then they're coming after the Free Press, that's how democracies die these days, so we need to be aware of these because we need to protect the institutions. And again, to protect the institutions, you can't, and I'm addressing students and people our age, you can't have a "burn the system" attitude, because that doesn't work. "Burn the system" is very detrimental and if you have a basic understanding of human progress, you see that actually, it's about reforming the system and amending the system and actual policies and evidence and analysis that solve problems, and so we need to have a different attitude. So sometimes we do need to defend the status quo. I know it's unpopular, but in the case of Poland, you need to defend, Polish democracy that came out of Communist dictatorships in the past.

Hanna: But because it happens so gradually there are still so many people here that don't see any problem and that's the problem. How to show them that it actually is.

Gustavo: Exactly.

Hanna: So, the last topic I have is the Canadian residential schools and last month the graves of children who were forced to attend those were found. And my question is how did these schools even manage to last that long?

Gustavo: My friend, the person who lives with me here in London, she's Canadian. She was telling me about this and yeah, it's I mean the government. These were Catholic schools; they were administered by the Catholic Church but funded by the government and the last one I think was closed in the 1990s and they started in the 19th century, and it was part of a concerted effort to actually erase indigenous culture and the unify Canadian culture into one homogeneous idea of what Canadian culture was supposed to be. And right now, I mean, it's crazy, right? It's so many graves now, and you know, diseases probably ran rampant. So, health conditions were probably dismal. These children were basically abducted by the state from their families, from their cultures, put into these residential schools. Many of them died, their cultures were being dismantled little by little. I think it's terrible, and I think the truth needs to be found like the truth needs to come out. I'm a big defender of truth, the truth liberates. It's really important, so we need to have this knowledge and it needs to be put out there.

Hanna: And what do you think should be done now? Is the apology enough, because I think the Canadian government stated an apology already, haven't they?

Gustavo: Yeah, they've already apologized in 2008.

Hanna: Yeah, but it's definitely not enough, right?



Gustavo: I mean, it is good, but it's definitely not enough. And still in 2008 we weren't aware. I mean we weren't; indigenous people have been aware of this, they just weren't heard. But now I think that the spotlight is on it, and now that the graves have been discovered, I think there's going to be much more work being done. Historical, archaeological investigation. It's a needed work to find out exactly who's to blame, what happened, how did these people die. Who are they even? If we can find out more about their identities. They did apologize but more is needed and also the Catholic Church, right? We're talking about the Canadian government and we're missing the other party in this story, which is the Catholic Church. Pope Francis now said that he's going to meet with indigenous leaders. I went to Catholic school, I lived my whole life in the Catholic country, I'm very sceptical of the Catholic Church. I think they are terrible in many ways. They're much better than they used to be, but still, they haven't truly acknowledged the role they played in so many atrocities in human history. And we were talking about dictatorships, I mean censorship was historically one of the church's main weapons against dissonance, right? And yeah, I mean they want to hide it. They want to suppress the truth in many ways because it's inconvenient to them. Let's see if they cooperate. Let's see the church open up its archives to investigators and apologize so that we can move forward. I mean, now most perpetrators of these mass deaths are probably dead, but you know, we need restorative justice. And maybe this opens up other discussions like, OK, what kind of social programs should we develop to help indigenous communities? Do you know what I mean? To fight poverty and improve their health conditions. So yeah, I think the truth is good.

Hanna: Yeah, and also just quickly coming back to the social media because I feel like that might have played such a crucial role between 2008 and now, because then indigenous people weren't heard. But I do believe that now they are, and it's mostly because of social media to be honest because that's how most of the people today learn about situations like that.

Gustavo: Exactly, and I read a very interesting article from The Economist saying that Twitter and Facebook's policies fighting hate speech and censoring sensitive photos or videos is detrimental to human rights because this is evidence of human

crimes. And then, crimes against humanities need to be investigated. And social media, therefore, becomes a new database because people post it there. I mean, that's how the Arab Spring began, right? Ten years ago, it was a massive failure in the end, but you know, that's how it began at least. So social media does play a role in spreading information. Some of this information is going to be false, but some of it is also going to be true. The question is, how do we create an online environment where true information is quickly vetted and found out to be true and emphasized and how fake news and false information, misinformation, disinformation is quickly taken out and addressed. Do you know what I mean? So, we haven't been able to strike a balance so far. It's hard, right? We're talking about billions of people connected to the Internet.

Hanna: Absolutely, I think that was a great way, to sum up, the whole conversation and actually, just on the topic- I'm having an interview on Monday with a survivor of one of these schools, so I'm curious what will come out of it.

Gustavo: Oooo, that's so interesting!

Hanna: Yeah, I'm very excited, and also interested in what she has to say, because you know she sees things online so I'm really curious what she thinks is a misconception, what is true and so on.

Gustavo: Yeah, let's see, let's see what happens.

Hanna: So, thank you so much. Is there anything you'd like to add, or no?

Gustavo: I think I talked too much. I'm too passionate.

Hanna: No, it was perfect. It's better to be too passionate than to not care at all.



Hanna Okurowska

Hi! I am 17 years old high school student. My job in GAM is to be up to date with current political and social events and write them up for my GAM Highlights section, as well as run a GAM Facts series. In my free time you'll usually find me with a good book in hands or watching my favorite movies.



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Global Awareness Movement is an initiative created by young people from Poland, which is spreading all over the world. Our mission is to spread awareness amongst young people by educating them and engaging in the social and environmental issues of the modern world. We believe it is important to show global problems from local perspectives, in order to highlight that they affect all of us and our everyday lives no matter where we are.



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