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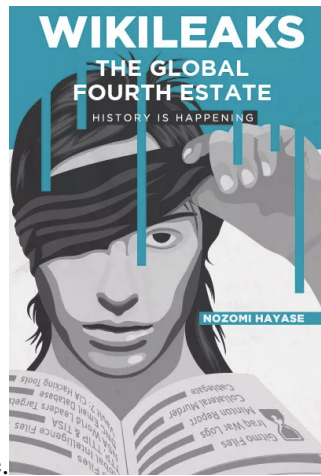
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زبانهای اروپایی

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History Is Happening: WikiLeaks, the Global Fourth Estate

Nozomi Hayase dedicated WikiLeaks, the Global Fourth Estate: History Is Happening to “the youth who grew up on the Internet,” then added, “The future of civilization depends on great acts of courage inspired by the heart.” Hayase is a psychologist, essayist, and activist, and her book is a chronological collection of her essays about WikiLeaks, written from 2010 to 2017. It’s a thought-provoking look back at how WikiLeaks made history during these years by publishing leaked documents that exposed the malfeasance of governments from Russia to Australia and most famously that of the US State Department, Pentagon, and Democratic National Committee. Since 2018, I have joined Hayase in a number of actions to defend WikiLeaks and call for the freedom of Julian



Assange.

She and I both live in the San Francisco Bay Area, and share the experience of riding Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), the subway and aboveground that connects its far corners and urban centers. In Chapter 3 she writes, “Even though I have no interest in sports and

don't know much about them, I know when the games are on, as I experience immediate changes in the familiar scenery of my commute. Whenever there is a game, the station is transformed into a kind of zoo, or maybe a shopping mall. The train is packed with people wearing uniforms and San Francisco Giants [or Golden State Warriors, Oakland As, Oakland Raiders, or San Francisco 49ers] hats. The people are filled with excitement, finding kindred spirits and sharing cheers for their team."

I do take interest in one sport, basketball, and one Bay Area team, the Golden State Warriors. Sometimes I even join a rowdy crowd cheering for the Warriors in a local sports bar during the NBA playoffs. However, I'm well aware that it's a cheap thrill, a short-lived, faux community or, less charitably, tribalism. What would I share with these fellow rowdies before or after a Warriors' playoff game? And besides, the players aren't hometown boys; they're hired guns who work for billionaires and bring in billions in corporate advertising, broadcast rights, and merchandise sales. Asian sweatshop labor is the grim reality behind all their Nike advertisements and player endorsements.

So the morning after I always ask myself, as Hayase does, "What would be possible if all those people who had crammed into the train to go see the game went out onto the street and expressed grievances toward the actions of their government?"

That's not a wholly unfamiliar experience here. In the run-up to the Gulf War, tens of thousands of protestors filled the streets of San Francisco, blocked both the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges, and covered large parts of downtown with anti-war graffiti. Thousands surged at the Federal Building, including ACT UP and Queer Nation activists chanting, "We're here! We're queer!" Greenpeace joined in, and I remember marching behind a group of young African Americans chanting, "Martin Luther King! Martin Luther King!" One night I climbed up some construction scaffolding to watch a march that ended in a spontaneous, illegal bonfire in downtown San Francisco where we were all chanting, "Fuck the deadline!" (The deadline that the first President George Bush had given to Saddam Hussein.)

In the 2003 run-up to the Iraq War, people traveled from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and more to make the anti-war march through San Francisco the largest on the West Coast. The almost successful campaign to make Matt Gonzalez the Mayor of San Francisco created another intense, thrilling, but once again short-lived sense of community, as did the 2011 Occupy Oakland marches and general assemblies. Looking

back one could cite the huge anti-Vietnam War protests in San Francisco, and the massive outpourings over the assassination of Mayor George Moscone, the last progressive mayor of San Francisco, and Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California. Protestors filled the streets with silence and candles, then with rage—the White Night Riots—after their coldblooded killer, Dan White, was sentenced to a mere seven years.

None of these movements had the institutional foundations that the pro sports spectacles have for staying alive to enrich the oligarchy and distract the masses. Only a few NGO professionals were paid, meagerly, to continue the struggle. Nevertheless, those uprisings were like light breaking through clouds of apathy, alienation, loneliness, cynicism, desperation, and drudgery. People spoke freely and relished the thrill of joining a community of equals united behind a single goal.

Nozomi Hayase recounts many liberatory moments like these, damns the oppression and exploitation that inspire them, and considers the role that WikiLeaks played in them. “April 2010 was a typical spring day in San Francisco,” she begins. “The world I knew was about to change. The WikiLeaks publication of the ‘Collateral Murder’ video became an international sensation. The cruel scenery in an Iraqi suburb viewed from a US military helicopter gunsight was laid bare for the whole world to see.”

As part of the WikiLeaks movement and the movement to free Assange, Hayase heralds its basic creed—borrowed from Jeff Bezos’s specious Washington Post—that “democracy dies in darkness.” Those who do evil, who rob, bomb, and devastate entire populations, conspire behind doors in corporate boardrooms, government offices, lavish estates, and extravagant global gatherings like the Bilderberg Conference and the World Trade Organization. Their plans are hidden in corporate and classified documents, as are the consequences, but WikiLeaks made it possible for whistleblowers to expose them anonymously.

The organization has never been compelled to retract a publication, and it has never busted a source. (Chelsea Manning confided in an unstable and untrustworthy online connection who turned her in for leaking the Iraq War Logs, the Afghanistan War Diaries, and the US diplomatic cables.) Cryptocurrency has secured the donations that keep WikiLeaks alive, even after Paypal and all the banks and credit card companies moved to cut them off.

Because of WikiLeaks' ingenious distributed technology, no army or intelligence agency has been able to destroy its searchable archives of well over 10 million leaked documents, including video and audio recordings. Sites using WikiLeaks technology and sharing its goals have proliferated.

Hayase quotes Julian Assange speaking to the Splendour in the Grass Festival in 2011:

“This generation is burning the mass media to the ground. We're reclaiming our rights to own history. We are ripping open secret archives from Washington to Cairo. We are reclaiming our rights to share ourselves and our times with each other, to be the agents and writers of our own history. We don't know yet exactly where we are but we can see where we're going.”

Then Hayase herself writes:

“The economic and political events seemed to be saying outwardly that justice is losing and greed is winning. Is it too late? It's too early to say. WikiLeaks released material, pushing the ball across the centerline. We need to move it further forward. First, those who are willing to do the research and journalistic work need to do the heavy lifting of the material to tell the stories. Then lawyers and those who are driven by justice need to dig into the evidence of crimes and create a case. All the while, artists around the world sing and speak freely to enliven the cultural sphere, cultivating compassion that makes it possible for us to share the suffering of the world. Together, all this can bring justice into the court of public opinion.”

It's a beautiful vision, but it raises the question, “Can we recruit the people-power?” Do we have enough journalists willing to do the research and “the heavy lifting of the material to tell the stories”? If so, do they have outlets with a wide enough audience? Do we have the lawyers to dig into the evidence of crimes and create a case? That seems unlikely unless they've been assigned to a case about crimes exposed by WikiLeaks or to cases in which WikiLeaks can serve as evidence.

I have written at least ten stories about truths exposed by a single WikiLeaks document or by a collection of them, and these stories are extremely time-consuming. I've been paid for some, but the pay works out to so little per hour that I can hardly call it working.

In many cases, I am able to see the significance of particular WikiLeaks only because I have already spent considerable time studying their context. I'm working on a piece about WikiLeaks that reveal decades-long Western designs on Burundi's nickel reserves, and I

understand their significance only because I've been following the East/West tug-of-war over those nickel reserves for the past five years.

Browsing through batches of WikiLeaks, I've come across a number of other stories I could write, many of them less obscure, but they will take more time than I can find in the foreseeable future. Before closing down the Edward Snowden archives, Glenn Greenwald said that the Intercept had stopped producing stories about them in part because they take so much time. The "Collateral Murder" video is immediately gut-wrenching, but few other documents reveal so much so readily.

Nevertheless, stories about particular WikiLeaks are being published, academics are citing or writing whole books around them, and WikiLeaks are being submitted as evidence in courts.

The most pressing question right now is the fate of Julian Assange. Will he be extradited to the US, tried in secret, and thrown in prison for life? There's little chance of success in the British court where the judge accused Assange of being a narcissist before sentencing him to an unprecedented 50 weeks for skipping bail. She has ruled against him in earlier cases brought by his defense team, and she refuses to recuse herself despite conflicts of interest posed by her husband's military industrial engagements. The greatest hope seems to lie in an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, but despite its formal commitment to objectivity, success seems unlikely without a mass movement to free Assange. A protest of 20,000, the number who typically pack basketball arenas, or the 100,000 who typically pack soccer or football stadiums, would jump-start a movement that would be hard to turn back, but how likely is that? How many of the millions who took to the streets to try to stop the Iraq War will take any action in support of the man who did so much to expose its cruelty?

If Assange is convicted of espionage for publishing classified documents, the walls will close in on the freedom of speech and press, and on the transparency movement's promise to expose the sociopaths who conspire to impoverish, exploit, and destroy us in their drive for ever greater wealth and power. Our destruction, at this point, is just "collateral damage."

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