EDUCATION, EQUALITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY
Actions Speak Louder than Words

EDITED BY
FARHANG MORADY

✳️ DEN
https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/den/

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER⌗

IJOPEC
PUBLICATION
London ijopec.co.uk Istanbul

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Cover Design
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Democratic Education Network (DEN) is a collaborative initiative founded by students, academics, and local and global communities. Based at the University of Westminster, DEN aims to promote democratic education by creating opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaborative learning with individuals and communities in London and worldwide.

This publication of DEN's book has been possible because of the invaluable support and contributions of several communities and universities across the globe. These universities have played an active role in promoting DEN's initiatives aimed at fostering cross-cultural exchange and learning opportunities for students worldwide.

Through their unwavering support, these universities have helped to ensure that DEN's vision of creating a more interconnected and harmonious world becomes a reality. Their encouragement and participation have enabled DEN to carry out its mission of facilitating cross-cultural learning, understanding, and collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

It is through these collective efforts that DEN's book serves as a testament to our collaboration and promoting mutual respect, understanding, and learning among individuals and communities worldwide.

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Ismail Siriner from Batman University in Turkey, Dr. Tien Thi Minh Nguyen, and Dr. Thi Nguyen Do

FORWARD

At this moment in history, people across the planet and the planet itself face extraordinary challenges. Those challenges can only be tackled through a shared, cross-cultural endeavour. The Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 sustainable development goals, focuses on poverty, hunger, health and justice as areas for urgent action through global partnership.

It is these goals that students and graduates from the Universities of Westminster (UK), Hanoi (Vietnam) and Kasetsart (Thailand) speak to in this latest edition of the Democratic Education Network (DEN) book. Together, DEN members explore topics such as fuel poverty, state sovereignty, LGBT equality, and social movements.

DEN is an extraordinary endeavour, bringing members together from across the world to work collectively on shaping these diverse articles that represent a united and urgent call for action. I urge you to read them.

Dr. Sal Jarvis
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Education,
University of Westminster

FORWARD

The work of the Democratic Education Network (DEN) shows the University of Westminster at its best. Students and academics drawn from across academic disciplines and across the world work together to address real world issues in a spirit of openness and enquiry.

One of the highlights of the work of the DEN is the annual publication of a book comprising chapters written by DEN members. This 2024 edition of the DEN is exciting and challenging because it is very much a call to action. DEN members address the big issues of education, equality and sustainability and directly in their work that introduces us to complex problems related to culture, identity, language and sexual orientation in settings ranging from South Africa to Egypt to Thailand and Vietnam.

The chapters in this book are the result of hard work and sustained engagement outside of scheduled teaching hours. None of this work is driven by the need to obtain credentials. It is the result of students finding and bringing problems to the DEN that move them emotionally and politically and looking for solutions. I am proud and privileged to have been asked to comment on their work for this book.

Alan Porter,
Head of the School of Social Sciences

INTRODUCTION

This is the 6th volume of DEN books since its inception in 2016, and it aims to expand its vision and develop a new strategy of student engagement. Our publications foster a comprehensive and inclusive learning environment that promotes critical thinking and encourages students to engage in meaningful discussions with their peers. At DEN, we recognise the importance of understanding different ideas' historical and cultural contexts to develop a nuanced and critical worldview. Our approach has always emphasised collaboration, respect, critical thinking, diversity, and a deep appreciation for knowledge and history.

This book showcases the students' unwavering commitment to positively impacting the world. It demonstrates their deep understanding of education's transformative potential and eagerness to apply this knowledge to real-world problems. The students have brought together diverse perspectives, innovative ideas, and best practices from around the world to offer a comprehensive and thought-provoking analysis of the role of education in shaping our collective future.

One of DEN's significant projects is the annual publication of its book, which involves a number of students from Westminster and around the world. These students contribute by writing, reviewing, supporting, editing, designing, and developing the book. DEN has been doing this democratically and respectfully to ensure that the book promotes diversity and equality. The book comprises articles showcasing the projects students have undertaken during their academic journey. This year, DEN has launched a new module for year 2 undergraduate

students by combining some of its projects and providing students with credits for their contributions. Twenty students from various disciplines, including biomedical science, cognitive and clinical neuroscience, criminology, international relations, law, politics, psychology, and counselling, have enrolled in this module.

Their final assessment of the module was a report that required them to reflect on cross-collaborative research after their ten-day field trip visit to Kasetsart University in Bangkok, Thailand. After completing the module, we worked with the students to develop their final coursework into an extended article for this book.

The book also includes articles from students who presented their papers at DEN's International Student Conference in May 2023. The students have worked with us to turn their papers into articles for this book.

In part one of the book, the focus is on education, cross-cultural research, and identity. Gabrielle Marciano da Silva investigates the interconnection between science, culture, and education. Using a case study of studying a module, "Democratic Engagement in an International Context", and her field trip to Thailand, she explores the impact and benefits of cross-collaboration for science students. Yasmine Diwany discusses the importance of culture in shaping one's identity. She challenges the Orientalist analysis and offers a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of culture, using the case study of Thailand. She acknowledges the influence of historical, social, and political factors in shaping cultural practices and beliefs. Saba Malik employs international relations theories to demonstrate the interplay between tradition and modernity. Finally, Alina Maksakova assesses the cultural characteristics and history that shape the critical features of the legal systems in the UK and Thailand.

In the second part of the book, the focus shifts to social psychology, mental health, and language development. Pinyapatch Meksakunwong takes a deep dive into the complexities of human behavior, exploring how individuals react and experience a wide range of situations and conditions. Laraib Akram sheds light on students' mental health challenges in higher education. Her article illuminates various factors, such as academic stress, financial difficulties, and societal expectations, that contribute to mental health issues. Using a case study of

students from the University of Westminster and Kasetsart University, she compares the causes and solutions. In the last two articles of part two, Layecha Fidahoussen and Kaneezah conducted an in-depth analysis of the influence of language on culture, education, bilingualism, brain structure, and language disorders in two different cities: London and Bangkok. Their research resulted in two comprehensive articles that shed light on the topic and offer valuable insights into the matter.

Part III of the book focuses on nationalism, development, social movements, and NGOs. Devika Nambiar's article addresses the rise and fall of Japanese Pan-Asian ideology, while Momina Nehmat examines how neoliberal policies affect development in Egypt, particularly in terms of equality. Maliha Hussain uses a South African case study to emphasise the significance of social movements in raising awareness about important issues, mobilising people to take action, and challenging established power structures. To Thanh Thai evaluates the role of NGOs in Vietnam since the Doi Moi policy was implemented in 1986. Sirawhich Sanohjamnong and Thanakrit Thongchantr explore mythology as a powerful rhetorical tool in Thailand's domestic and international affairs through their analysis of Suvarnabhumi (the "Golden Land"). Lastly, Navodi Kuruppu examines fuel poverty in London and the measures taken to combat it.

The final section of this publication discusses the conflict between national sovereignty and individual human rights from various regional perspectives. Despite the existence of universal human rights, they are often overshadowed by the focus on national security. Hence, preserving these rights may require legal action and improvements in essential services such as education. In the article, Lucas Iacuzzi explores NATO's role in eradicating conflict and providing security and support to governments threatened by stronger states or groups. He cites NATO's interventions in Kosovo and Libya as examples of their role in this process. Lucas concludes that despite differences among its members, NATO remains an influential organisation in the world. This has been evident in the war between Russia and Ukraine, where Marharyta Andreieva argues that Russia's imperialistic approach towards Ukraine is the main factor behind their intervention in the country.

Any conflict can cause a lot of problems for people, especially those who become refugees and have to leave their homes to find a safe place to live. This has led to

increased migration in Europe, which has become a political issue in many countries. Jake Beasley has explored some of the consequences migrants face when they are affected by changes in UK policy. This has led to the mistreatment of detainees in both state-run and privately-run migrant detention centres. In response to this issue, several organisations and groups, such as the UK-based charity INQUEST, offer support to families who have lost loved ones in state custody or detention. INQUEST has launched three campaigns to address the challenges within the inquest system and make it easier for family members seeking justice for their loved ones to access the system. Euan Southwell has written a report highlighting INQUEST's role in driving change and advocating for a more accessible and fair justice system.

The increase in tourism all over the world has resulted in many people being forced out of their homes. Mariana Bernardes Ciolfi argues that such displacement and dispossession only serve to strengthen the power dynamics of colonialism and further weaken the sovereignty of indigenous communities. By examining the cases of Argentina and the Philippines, Mariana illustrates the harmful effects of global tourism on human rights and self-determination. Meanwhile, Que Anh Mai discusses the issue of LGBT rights in Vietnam, highlighting that despite the country's rapid economic growth, there are still challenges to be faced when it comes to advancing human rights and achieving full equality for the LGBT community.

The final part of this volume is a tribute to DEN, a student network dedicated to promoting innovation, creativity, and inclusivity in education. It is committed to providing exceptional and collaborative educational opportunities to its students. This section diverges from traditional academic writing and delves deeper into the topics previously discussed in the book. In the concluding part of the book, an intriguing question is posed: what is the significance of art in progressive education? The remarkable artwork of Artemis Rafaella Port Rabello brilliantly highlights the liberating potential and inspirational impact of creative expression. As a result, DEN has been delighted to participate in numerous projects alongside this talented artist throughout the year. The book's concluding portion features an interview with Artemis and several of her sketches.

Overall, this book is a valuable addition to the ongoing discussion about the transformative impact of education. It showcases the intellectual curiosity and

dedication of the students who contributed to its creation by presenting a variety of theoretical, cultural, educational, and political perspectives. These writings address the challenges of power, development, human rights, and governance.

The students' contributions in this volume are inspiring. They approach important issues with a thoughtful and critical perspective, reflecting on the possibility of a better world. While acknowledging the crises and emergencies we face, their voices remain optimistic about the potential for positive change. Their articles provide valuable insights and ideas on working towards a better future. They are well-informed and passionate about making a difference in the world. Their contributions serve as a reminder of the power of young voices and the importance of fostering an environment that encourages thoughtful reflection and critical thinking.

Dr. Farhang Morady
the Director of the Democratic Education Network

PART **I**

EDUCATION, INNOVATION
AND CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

1 |

MULTICULTURAL APPROACH TO LEARNING: FROM BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES TO DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Gabrielle Marciano da Silva

Abstract

This article discusses the advantages of interdisciplinary studies. It draws on my personal experience with a course called "The Democratic Engagement in an International Context" that I took during the second year of my Biomedical Sciences degree. The course was designed to bring together students from various fields, such as Psychology, Law, Politics, International Relations, and Development. By bringing together students and faculty members from Kasetsart University in Bangkok, Thailand, the course created a blend of unique perspectives and international contexts that led to meaningful discussions. These discussions showed me how culture, diversity, inclusion, and institutions can influence my understanding of science. I understood how studying outside of my chosen field could positively impact me. This article aims to delve deeper into the advantages of interdisciplinary learning.

Introduction

Over the course of several weeks in semester one in 2023, the module on "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" fostered a lively exchange between the professors and students. Unlike science's often complex and technical theories, equations, and metabolic pathways, this module offered a lighter yet still substantive content pathway. It allowed for the formation of intellectual academics and critical thinkers as students engaged in open and lively discussions on various topics each week with diverse speakers. The module provided a unique opportunity for students to explore matters related to democratic engagement, including the challenges and opportunities that arise in such a context. The discussions were academically stimulating and practical, as speakers shared their personal experiences and insights, and students were encouraged to engage with the material meaningfully. From a scientific perspective, the module appeared to foster a more open and democratic approach to learning. The students were encouraged to think critically, express their opinions, and respectfully debate with others. This provided a valuable opportunity for students to develop their analytical skills and to learn to think critically about complex issues.

To be sufficiently prepared for class, students have been responsible for prioritising the cultivation of their perspectives rather than solely memorising theories. Students are encouraged to think critically and develop their ideas about the subject matter.

Participating in class discussions is an excellent way for students to refine their perspectives and enhance their understanding of the material; even if caught off guard, engaging in class discussions allows students to think on their feet, which is an important skill to develop inside and outside the classroom. Lecturers prioritise student engagement and involvement with the material, which creates a highly interactive classroom environment. This approach helps students retain information better and ensures they leave the class with valuable knowledge.

By promoting critical thinking, active participation, and engagement with the subject matter, students are given the necessary tools to learn and grow dynamically. Adjusting to a new environment outside of a scientific study background can be challenging; in scientific fields, students need to know how to express their opinions despite their extensive world knowledge. It can be

challenging to articulate this knowledge in a non-scientific context because the usual medium for sharing it is writing articles and case studies.

As attendees of a multicultural institution, students are encouraged to transcend their personal backgrounds and gain a holistic understanding of society. This involves developing an appreciation for different cultures and communities' diverse perspectives, values, beliefs, and practices. This approach fosters intercultural interactions, enhancing inclusivity and nurturing creativity, requiring students to actively explore various aspects of Thailand's culture, language, history, and traditions. This methodology for imparting multicultural awareness and advancing education thus aimed to promote a deeper understanding of Thailand's rich cultural heritage and the academic framework of university life there.

Furthermore, this approach to education is designed to provide students with a platform to reflect on their own identities and biases and in the process to challenge their assumptions about themselves and others. This self-reflection and critical thinking can help students develop a better understanding of their cultural background and a more profound respect for the diversity of human experience. The methodology for imparting multicultural awareness and advancing education is a multifaceted approach that aims to promote a deeper understanding of the world around us. By engaging with different cultures and perspectives, students can develop a more inclusive and compassionate worldview and become better equipped to navigate the complexities of our globalised society.

During the investigation conducted by the module, the focus was on cross-cultural interactions to help students understand the cultural differences between themselves and Thai students. This understanding was seen as an opportunity to expand their knowledge. As the module progressed, I learned that in social sciences, knowledge is constructed by interacting with different societies and discovering their thoughts based on their backgrounds. This approach helped us to form our own opinions and understand others better. The experience of travelling to a different continent to gain new perspectives was invaluable in this regard.

The field of science is highly reliant on knowledge derived from experts or textbooks and is supported by past and current scientific experiments. However, cultural knowledge is more easily shared than scientific knowledge. This is because culture and science have distinct approaches to disseminating knowledge. As a result of this distinction, I have come to appreciate the equal significance of culture and science in generating knowledge. In this article, I will delve into the evolution of science in society over time, its current status, and the significant contributions of culture that have influenced how society perceives and conducts science throughout history.

This article's primary objective is to investigate the role of cultural diversity in science: I will analyse whether (1) cultural diversity benefits science and (2) I will explore the interconnection between science, culture, and education.

Science and Cultural Diversity

From the beginning of human civilisation, people have been seeking knowledge to understand and explain the world. However, "true science" - which refers to the systematic and organised study of the physical and natural phenomena of the world through observation, experimentation, and theory testing - emerged during the Renaissance period, almost five hundred years ago (Iaccarino, 2003). Complex systems research is a significant challenge, and science provides the appropriate methods to unravel the complexity of the natural world. Science aims to analyse the world systematically through a set of rules, not to discover absolute truth but to facilitate our understanding of it.

Culture is a way of perceiving the world; it is a social organisation made up of rational beings who assign meaning to the world around them, transforming that meaning into ideas, beliefs, customs, and works of art. Culture is also an educational process that teaches a particular system to each person. Education is a process in which human beings are conditioned to a pattern of habits representing their sociocultural mean. Education is thus the means to socialisation (White, 2022).

Science, culture, and education are interconnected. Education is the pathway to understanding and practising scientific knowledge, while culture is the first educational process every human being goes through, beginning at birth. Science

is influenced by culture, and how science is done depends on the culture in which it is practised. During the Renaissance, science played a crucial role in European culture, revolutionising how society perceived the world. An example is the shift from the geocentric model to the heliocentric model. The explanation that the orbits of the planets went around the sun rather than the earth, was hardly accepted by society, as it challenged high society's institutionalised power supported by the church (Sweetman, 2008).

Science, culture, and education are vital components of human progress and are interdependent. Science provides the appropriate methods to unravel the complexity of the natural world, whilst culture is the mechanism through which humans assign meaning to the world, and education is the means of socialisation. By understanding the relationship between science, culture, and education, we can gain greater insight into the world around us and progress towards a better future.

The study of social sciences has been instrumental in helping to understand the institutions that govern our lives, including the state, economy, morals, and religion, in the same way that study of life sciences has helped us understand the physical world and natural phenomena (Greenfeld and Nisbet, 2024). Social sciences have a rich history dating back to the ancient Greeks, who were fascinated by human nature and social organisation and whose ideas were later adopted in the Renaissance. Today, social sciences encompass a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology, and are concerned with the study of social interactions and the development and operation of societies (McDonald, 1996). While both life sciences and social sciences seek to discover truths about the world and human civilization, they employ different methods to do so. Life sciences rely on established theories and experimental discoveries, while social sciences rely on discussions and arguments to defend ideas and arrive at a consensus (Gorman, 2002). This module has given me a glimpse into how the social sciences approach attempts to answer some of the world's most pressing questions.

Culture, Education and Science

When I first started studying in the multidisciplinary field, I struggled to envision how science could benefit from cross-cultural exchanges and discussions.

However, once I began studying social sciences, I quickly realised that this field offered a more interactive and dynamic method of learning.

As a science student, studying the module "The Democratic Engagement in an International Context" benefited me and helped me to develop academically. The lectures provided an in-depth understanding of the theoretical knowledge related to comparative research. The lecturers were experts in their fields, and their teaching methods effectively conveyed the material in an easy-to-understand manner. They used various visual aids, including diagrams, graphs, and charts, to help us understand complex concepts. Moreover, the discussions held between academics and students from Westminster and Kasetsart universities allowed me to engage with my peers and develop my critical thinking skills. The discussions were lively and informative, and we were encouraged to share our opinions and ideas. It was an excellent way to explore different perspectives and learn from each other.

Finally, the coursework, such as writing four blogs of 400 words, was challenging, and I constantly checked and monitored my progress. I had to apply what I learned nearly. It helped me understand the subject matter more profoundly and meaningfully, linking science to culture and diversity. I could use my theoretical knowledge to solve problems, further strengthening my understanding of the subject matter.

Our cultural differences contribute to resolving social, political, economic and scientific problems. These unique perspectives and experiences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds help to identify new solutions or approaches to scientific challenges. Additionally, I became aware of the role that cultural diversity plays in promoting and limiting innovation and creativity within scientific research. This was especially true when studying abroad, where I had the opportunity to interact with students and academics joining from Kasetsart University.

Challenging Perception

My experience in studying this module in multidisciplinary settings has provided me with diverse perspectives on culture and science. When students from different backgrounds come together to discover and learn, they bring with them

a wealth of knowledge and unique perspectives that enrich the learning experience for everyone involved. In addition to the social and cultural benefits of diversity, there are also significant scientific benefits. Embracing a wide range of perspectives and ideas leads to more innovative and effective problem-solving and discovery in science. When people from different backgrounds collaborate, they are able to approach problems from a variety of angles and come up with more creative solutions. Moreover, the inclusion of diverse perspectives helps to ensure that scientific discoveries are relevant and applicable to a wide range of people. By including the perspectives and experiences of people from different cultures and backgrounds, we can ensure that scientific progress is not limited to a narrow group of people but benefits more members of a society.

As we prepared for our field trip abroad, we delved deeper into the subject of higher education. In the third week, we had the privilege of attending a lecture by Dr. Pitchford, who shared his insights on the dimensions of higher education in a global context. He explained how universities often follow organisational models to provide standardised learning and services with efficiency. However, this approach sometimes prioritises time over education delivery therefore students are left on their own which makes their learning stationary, uneffective and less enjoyable.

Throughout my academic journey, I had the opportunity to delve into the world of science education and the ways in which it can be approached. I realised that traditional methods of teaching science can be static and isolating, leading to disinterest and detachment from the subject matter. Students often find it challenging to engage with the subject matter and may find it difficult to apply the concepts learned in practice. However, I also discovered that social learning can help promote critical thinking and encourage students to question their sources of information. Interacting with peers and sharing knowledge can lead to a better understanding of the subject matter and can help simplify complex concepts. When students work together, they can challenge each other's ideas, leading to new insights and a deeper appreciation of the scientific world.

As I continued to pursue my study of the module, I realised that there are multiple ways to approach science and education. I learned to utilise different methods while studying science, which I mainly acquired through my interactive experience with colleagues to share knowledge. This collaborative approach

helped me gain a new perspective on the subject matter and encouraged me to think critically about the concepts I was learning.

Science education is a dynamic field that requires an open mind and a willingness to learn. By engaging in social learning and collaborating with peers, science students can better understand the subject matter and develop critical thinking skills that will benefit them throughout their academic and professional careers.

Field Trip to the University of Kasetsart

As part of the module, we were taken on a field trip to provide us with a deeper insight into comparative research. The trip was meticulously planned, and we had the opportunity to engage in various activities, including visiting educational institutions and cultural landmarks. These experiences allowed us to observe the connections between the seemingly distinct fields of culture, education, and science and how they are intertwined.

During the module on cross-cultural research, students had the opportunity to experience Thai customs and interact with students from Kasetsart University. This gave them a chance to explore a different educational system based on diverse backgrounds, which highlighted the link between education and culture. It was easy to understand that since culture is the first educational process humans go through, educational systems worldwide could be as diverse as cultures are. Although various educational systems follow some universal rules, the influence of society on their community is also reflected in culture.

Growing up in Brazil, more specifically in a small town in the countryside, careers in science from my personal cultural background were always seen as a distant and ureacheble goal. In South America, scientific progress is widespread yet limited by our technological focus and political investments: as an economically progressing nation, priority is given to the reduction of striking inequalities and the promotion of structural fiscal reforms to increase financial growth. Therefore, this context creates a wide influence of social sciences discussions and ideals which highly influence the formation of young students. The study of science, on the other hand, is perceived as a complex subject mainly achieved by financially stable students due to the privileged route of school preparation to higher education and high university expenses.

Similarly, in Thailand, which shares some economic circumstances of poverty and development with Brazil, it was clear that science is seen as complex and challenging. Science is not as incentivised by the government in both countries, as opposed to first world nations. Coming to England, I realised that science is studied by a variety of students and the government investment in various sectors of scientific research is clearly visible, making various professional pathways significantly more achievable than in South America. Moreover, such differences between nations comes from a historical cultural background where science was most valued due to coming from Europe. In the past, there was a common belief that the most valuable scientific knowledge came from Europe because of the Renaissance movement, which brought about great progress and study. However, it is important to note that other civilisations in areas such as Asia, Africa and South America also made significant contributions to the understanding of nature.

My field trip to Thailand helped me broaden my understanding of scientific knowledge beyond my previous limitations. In my own country, science and the Catholic Church were often in conflict because the scientific method relied on objective testing and experimentation to calculate answers, which caused some in the scientific community to develop an attitude of arrogance towards religion, a significant symbol of culture. Religion has historically tried to refute scientific theories that challenged the church's long-held beliefs. However, I learned that Buddhism and scientific thinking have been encouraged to coexist in Thailand. After interacting with students and professors in Thailand, I realised that Buddhism benefits from scientific discoveries as they clarify Buddhist beliefs.

Moreover, scientists often research Buddhist practices as tools to improve human health. For instance, the scientific investigation of meditation aims to track and understand how meditation affects the body and mind functions such as attention, perceptual sensitivity, anxiety, regulation of emotional states and even neurophysiological responses to stressful stimuli. These correlations between science and Buddhism make them progress alongside each other. This was fascinating to learn, as Buddhism could relate to various scientific fields, including biology, physics, neuroscience, and psychotherapy.

During the module and field trip, students could connect their academic pathways. In my case, I gained an understanding of how science, culture, and

education are interconnected, and my role as a scientist has vastly benefited from this knowledge. It highlights the benefits of academic engagement on a global scale.

Conclusion

In this module, the most fascinating aspect is the opportunity to cultivate critical thinking skills that foster the development of informed opinions and a global perspective in a multicultural environment. The diverse cultural and educational backgrounds of the students in the class influence their way of thinking and provide unique insights into various topics. While science is the most reliable method for understanding reality and achieving innovation, culture and religion are also essential components of education that teach individuals how to perceive the world and provide the initial motivation to pursue further knowledge and understanding of the natural and physical world.

Initially, it was challenging to understand how participating in a multicultural program that aimed to engage democratically in an international context would benefit my scientific knowledge. However, participating in this module and the accompanying field trip had a significant impact on my journey as a scientist. Learning in a multicultural environment provided me with a better understanding of how different cultures perceive science and how the European educational system often limits science. I discovered that new ideas, advancements, and theories are present worldwide and deserve to be studied globally.

Furthermore, this module emphasised that education is not just about textbooks and theories. It is a gradual process that is reflective of each student's way of thinking, something most apparent during the field trip to Thailand. Most of the learning took place outside the classroom, where students observed first-hand how the country functioned, including the economic situation, cultural background, and religious considerations. I conclude, therefore, that participating in study in an international context is beneficial to all academic pathways. Understanding how other cultures perceive various aspects of the world challenges students to identify gaps in their knowledge that they were previously unaware of.

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NAVIGATING THROUGH THAI CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

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Abstract

This article explores the constantly evolving nature of culture in the context of global economic, political, and social factors. It examines how various societies perceive and conceptualise culture, with reference to theoretical frameworks like Orientalism and McDonaldization. Additionally, the text shares personal experiences from a transformative field trip to Thailand to highlight the role of cultural identity in shaping perceptions.

Introduction

At the young age of 17, I had the opportunity to travel to London and was immediately struck by the diversity of individuals that I encountered daily. Even simple activities such as grocery shopping brought me into contact with people from all walks of life. This experience led me to ponder the meaning behind "cultural identities." Cultural identity is a powerful sense of shared connection amongst a group of people, which is shaped by common values, traditions, language, and ways of life. It is a crucial aspect of how we perceive ourselves in relation to the world around us. However, I have come to

understand that cultural identity is not fixed: it constantly evolves and shifts, particularly when we find ourselves in new and unfamiliar environments as a member of a minority group.

Recently I had the opportunity to travel to Thailand, one of the most beautiful and culturally rich countries in Asia. The purpose of my trip was to learn about Thailand's history, culture, and traditions. I was part of a group of 20 students from the University of Westminster, in the United Kingdom, hailing from different parts of the world, including Bahrain, Italy, Ukraine, Brazil, and Hungary, as well as second-generation Brits whose family originated from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. Our group was also joined by two Vietnamese students, who added a unique perspective to our journey.

As a year 2 student, I decided to take an optional module called "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" for a semester. The module involved eleven weeks of studying education and comparative research methods from a global citizen perspective and 3 weeks about Thailand. Following this, we spent eight days in Thailand where we learned about the country's history, politics, and economics at Kasetsart University in Bangkok. The faculty members were highly knowledgeable and experienced, and they helped us understand the intricacies of Thai culture and society. During the trip, we visited Bangkok and a nearby cultural capital, where we saw some of the most iconic landmarks such as the Grand Palace, Wat Phra Kaew, and Wat Arun.

Through our education and cultural exchange program, we were given the unique opportunity to delve deeper into our studies beyond the confines of the classroom. We connected with local students, participated in cultural workshops, and immersed ourselves in the surrounding communities. As an international student who has lived in various parts of the world, this module and subsequent field trip to Thailand inspired me to reflect on my experiences through the written word. Having spent two years researching the complex topics of politics, international relations, identity, and culture, I felt compelled to take my research to the next level by penning this article. The main objective of this piece is to challenge the notion of a fixed relationship between cultures and to question the orientalist and essentialist views of culture. Instead, I advocate for a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of culture that acknowledges the influence of historical, social, and political factors in shaping cultural practices and beliefs. By

doing so, we can move beyond simplistic and stereotypical views of culture and embrace a more open and inclusive approach that recognises the diversity and complexity of cultural expressions.

Culture and Identity: A Fixed Relationship?

In Oriental studies and nationalist movements, many scholars rely on a specific depiction of culture to support their arguments. This depiction usually portrays culture as inherently distinct and incompatible, especially compared to the 'West'. It also assumes that culture and the 'West' are inextricably linked and that they represent two fundamentally different ways of life. Furthermore, this portrayal conceptualises culture as an all-encompassing, unchanging, and determinative system. In other words, it sees culture as a homogeneous social and cultural entity resistant to historical change. This view of culture is often criticised for being essentialist, as it assumes that culture is a fixed and unchanging entity rather than a dynamic and evolving one.

The concept of culture as an essential and unchanging construct has been widely accepted. It has become a fundamental part of public knowledge about culture in many countries, both in the West and beyond. This mutual discourse of difference between Eastern and Western cultures reinforces the belief in their uniqueness. The idea of essentialism in culture is often associated with Western Orientalists, who tend to view non-Western cultures through a Western lens and impose their own values and norms on them. However, it is important to note that some people in the East also conceptualise culture in an essentialist way, treating it as something that is fixed and unchanging.

Cultural identity is a complex concept that is shaped by various factors, such as historical, social, and political contexts. Scholars have extensively explored the intricate relationships between cultural identity and individuals' perceptions, shedding light on how these perceptions contribute to the ongoing construction and negotiation of cultural identities in diverse societies.

Stuart Hall's work on cultural identity is fundamental to understanding the concept. He argues that cultural identity is not fixed but rather a dynamic, ongoing process that is shaped by various contexts. According to Hall, cultural identity is not a given but is constructed and negotiated over time through

historical, social, and political processes. I share Hall's perspective, which implies that cultural identity actively informs individuals' perceptions of reality and consequently shapes how they interpret and make sense of the world around them. (Hall and Du Gay, 1996)

To understand this better, we can compare cultural identity to a pair of glasses, a metaphor used by Farhang Morady, the module leader for the course we studied, to explain the role of theories in politics and international relations. Cultural identity is a lens through which individuals perceive and experience reality, influencing their understanding of self and others. Therefore, cultural identity is a crucial element in shaping individuals' perceptions and experiences, informing their understanding of themselves and their place in the world around them.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism is a significant contribution to the field of cultural studies because it provides a framework for understanding how power dynamics shape perceptions and cultural identities. Said argues that dominant cultures, through their hegemonic power structures, impose their perspectives on other cultures, influencing how people perceive themselves and their cultural backgrounds. The concept of Orientalism helps us explore how Western societies have historically constructed and perpetuated stereotypes and narratives about the "Orient" or the East, which encompasses regions such as the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. When Said uses the term "dominant culture," he is referring not only to the West in a geographical sense but also to the hegemonic power structures that have historically dominated global discourse. This domination has been carried out through various means such as colonialism, imperialism, and economic influence. According to Said, these dominant cultures, primarily Western powers, have used their influence to portray the Orient as exotic, inferior, and in need of domination or control. This portrayal serves to justify political, economic, and cultural domination over these regions.

Said's critique is a call to critically examine how cultural hegemony shapes identities and relationships between different cultures. It highlights the need for a balanced and empathetic approach to cultural exchange. Said's work is not just relevant to the study of the East-West relationship, but also applies to the study of other cultures across the world. Overall, Said's work encourages us to be more mindful of the complex ways in which cultural hegemony shapes our

understanding of ourselves and others and to work towards creating more equitable and respectful relationships between different cultures (Said, 2003).

This theory can be compared to the McDonaldization theory, which Andy Pitchford also discussed in the third seminar of the Democratic Education Network module. Developed by sociologist George Ritzer, this theory explores how the principles of fast-food restaurants, mainly McDonald's, have come to dominate various aspects of society. Ritzer argues that McDonaldization is characterised by efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, mirroring the standardisation and rationalisation of fast-food chains (Ritzer, 2020).

Both Ritzer's McDonaldization theory and Said's concept of Orientalism examine power dynamics and cultural hegemony. They shed light on how dominant cultures shape perceptions and identities, albeit in different contexts. While Said focuses on the Western construction of the East through Orientalist discourse, Ritzer's McDonaldization theory examines the global spread of Western corporate culture and values, illustrating how Western values of efficiency and standardisation permeate various aspects of global culture, often at the expense of local traditions and identities. This globalisation of Western values can be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, similar to the imposition of Western perspectives in Said's concept of Orientalism. In both cases, Western culture asserts dominance, whether through economic influence (as in the case of McDonaldization) or through cultural representation and discourse (as in Orientalism).

Overall, both theories highlight how dominant cultures exert influence and shape perceptions on a global scale, whether through economic systems or cultural representations, ultimately impacting how individuals perceive themselves and their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we can deduct from the above that cultural identity can be a dynamic, ongoing process shaped by various contexts. It plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions and experiences, informing their understanding of themselves and their place in the world around them. Understanding the complexities of cultural identity is essential in building more inclusive and diverse societies that value and respect different cultural backgrounds. To illustrate the theoretical frameworks we have explored in this section, I will use my DEN module field trip to Thailand as a case study, as the experience prompted the idea of writing this article.

An Immersing in the Culture

While in Thailand, I realised that cultural identity is shaped not only by one's upbringing and surroundings but also by how one perceives and interacts with the world around them. I began to explore how cultural identity shapes our realities and how these perceptions, in turn, construct and negotiate cultural identities, particularly in the diverse societies we navigate. The Thailand field trip is a significant case study offering the opportunity for me to delve deeply into these concepts and shed light on the dynamic interplay of cultural identity in real-world scenarios.

As I reflect on my journey to Thailand, I find myself revisiting the photos I took, which served as a personal travel diary. Each encounter left an indelible mark on my perception of Thailand and myself, making this trip a transformative experience and a perfect case study for this report's central question.

Thailand greeted us with unexpected warmth and hospitality, which emanated from everyone we encountered, be it the cheerful local Grab drivers or the unforgettable interactions with locals in bustling markets. This experience prompted me to reflect deeply and ask myself how my culture and identity influenced the way in which I absorbed this experience.

On the first day of our trip, we visited the "Arts of the Kingdom" museum. The museum was an impressive showcase of Thai art and culture from various historical periods. It was noticeable that the Thai monarchy and royal family had a significant presence and influence throughout the country. The exhibits showcased the Thai king's patronage of the arts and demonstrated how the monarchy has been a significant driving force behind the preservation of Thai culture. This can be seen as a good example of a local culture standing up to what Said described as Orientalism but also to the hegemonic influence of Western cultures described by Ritzer: by displaying and valuing local artworks, the museum highlights the diversity of their culture but also what distinguishes them.

Throughout our trip, we interacted with tour guides and people in general who showed us warmth, hospitality, and a willingness to connect. Our tour guides shared their extensive knowledge of Thailand's history, culture, and customs with us, making us feel more connected to the places we visited. Similarly, Grab drivers

went out of their way to ensure our safety and comfort during our rides, often sharing their personal stories and insights into Thai life.

One experience that stood out was in a local market in the old capital of Thailand, Ayutthaya. Me and some of my friends were looking for the toilets and asked an old lady who was selling spices if there were any nearby. She immediately proceeded to lead us through the market's labyrinthine alleys to the restrooms. While waiting for my friends, I stumbled upon a captivating temple next to the restrooms. As I sat down listening to the monks' chants and admiring the architecture, I found myself completely cut off from the world for five long minutes. The temple was a serene oasis amidst the bustle of the market, and the chants created a calming atmosphere that made me feel at peace. When I left the temple, I couldn't find any of my friends around, and to make it even worse, there was no phone service. Luckily, one of the local merchants noticed me looking lost and pointed me in the direction that my friends had gone. This simple gesture of kindness stood out distinctly, as, despite the linguistic differences, they helped me without asking for anything in exchange. Nevertheless, what was even more unexpected to me was being amazed at this kind of gesture because this is supposed to be a prevalent thing in my culture, as a North African, born and raised in Morocco. However, when I reflected on it, living in London has influenced my perception of these kinds of warm behaviours and I started unconsciously to view them as very alien to me, despite it being a very central part of my cultural identity.

Our trip to Thailand was an exceptional experience that allowed us to gain a profound understanding of cultural identity, diversity, and the continuous process of identity formation. We spent several days in the country, visiting various cities and immersing ourselves in the rich tapestry of Thai culture. We explored the unique customs and traditions of the country, including the art of Muay Thai, the Thai cuisine, and the country's rich history. These opportunities to interact with the locals and learn about their way of life led me to reflect that cultural identity is a complex and multifaceted concept, shaped by various factors, including shared and non-shared values, traditions, and customs. We learned how cultural identity creates a framework through which people interpret social cues, expressions, and gestures. The vibrant local markets were a microcosm of cultural exchange, highlighting how individuals navigate and negotiate their identities within the broader global society. The sights, sounds, and aromas of

the markets were both overwhelming and captivating. We observed the ongoing negotiation of identity within the globalised world, as people from different backgrounds come together and interact.

As foreigners in the country, we were in the minority within the local culture. This heightened our sensitivity to cultural nuances and made us more aware of standing out. We learned how cultural identity influences perceptions and how it can serve as a bridge or a barrier in connecting with individuals from different cultural contexts. This experience prompted us to re-examine our cultural norms and values in contrast to those of the Thai people, resulting in a dynamic shift in our cultural identities. Our journey to Thailand provided us with valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of cultural identity within the broader framework of diverse societies. We learned that cultural identity is a continuous process of formation that is influenced by various factors, including historical, social, and political contexts. Furthermore, the warm hospitality we received from the locals was remarkable and added to our understanding of the undeniable influence of cultural backgrounds on shaping perceptions.

Conclusion

My time in Thailand was an eye-opening experience that made me realise the profound impact of cultural encounters on individual perceptions and identity formation. I came to understand that cultural identities are not fixed but adaptable and fluid, depending on how individuals relate to and define themselves within diverse cultural contexts. More than that, I have learned about the ethical dimensions of cultural exploration. I realised that travelling to another culture requires sensitivity and respect for differences, recognising the potential for misinterpretation and the need to acknowledge the responsibility inherent in sharing narratives about a culture different from one's own.

My trip to Thailand prompted me to reflect on the role of travellers in contributing to positive cross-cultural understanding and fostering mutual respect. I realised that cultural exploration should not be a one-way street but a dialogue between the traveller and the host culture. I learned to appreciate cultural diversity and recognise the similarities that unite us as human beings. Overall, my experience in Thailand was a life-changing journey that left an indelible mark on me. It helped me become more open-minded, empathetic, and

respectful towards different cultures and people. I hope that my experience can inspire others to embrace cultural diversity and promote mutual understanding.

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NATIONAL IDENTITY: INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY IN CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

Saba Malik

Abstract

This article explores the vital importance of innovative cross-cultural research in comprehending Thailand's complex layers of identity formation. Through an in-depth analysis of political and international relations theories, we will examine their influence on Thailand's national identity development. By applying the tenets of realism, constructivism, and post-colonialism to Thailand's historical trajectory and cultural landscape, we can gain valuable insights into the interplay between tradition and modernity. This study offers a unique opportunity to contribute to academic discourse and deepen our understanding of the forces that shape the nation's identity.

Introduction

The phrase "Innovation, cross-cultural research, and national identity" underscores the vital role of innovation and cross-cultural research in shaping a country's national identity. Innovation is essential for progress

and change, and it involves transforming ideas into practical applications that improve people's lives. Cross-cultural research, on the other hand, focuses on exploring and understanding cultural differences and similarities between different nations, promoting respect and appreciation for diverse perspectives.

National identity is a complex concept that encompasses a shared sense of identity and belonging, united around a set of common beliefs, values, and symbols. National identity is shaped by a variety of factors, including history, culture, and politics. A country's history provides a rich tapestry of experiences that shape its identity over time. Culture, on the other hand, refers to the shared customs, traditions, and practices that define a country's unique way of life. Political factors, such as the form of government and the political ideology, also shape a country's national identity.

Innovation and national identity are closely related. Innovation is a way of expressing national identity by showcasing a country's unique strengths and expertise. For instance, Thailand's reputation for precision in believing in harmony, religious values, and hard work to develop is an example of how innovation, past and present, can express national identity. National identity can also guide innovation priorities by emphasising areas of research and development critical to a country's future success. For example, a country facing environmental challenges may prioritise research into sustainable technologies. This is also clearly the case with Bangkok's environmental problems and the government's policies of using electronic cars.

Cross-cultural research is another essential tool for shaping national identity. It helps us appreciate the diversity of cultures and perspectives that exist around the world. By understanding cultural differences and similarities, we can build stronger relationships and promote mutual understanding. Cross-cultural research can also enrich our understanding of our own national identity by showing us how our culture and history shape who we are. Innovation, a cross-cultural research, and national identity" are interconnected concepts that shape a country's identity and its place in the world. By embracing innovation and cross-cultural research, we can enrich our understanding of our own national identity, as well as that of others.

This article looks closely at the relationship between cross-cultural research, political and international relations theories, and the formation of Thai national identity. The article analyses the contributions of three major theories - realism, constructivism, and post-colonialism - to the formation of national identity in Thailand. Realism emphasises the importance of power and self-interest in international relations, while constructivism focuses on the role of social norms and shared beliefs. Post-colonialism, on the other hand, highlights the impact of colonialism and imperialism on the cultural and political identity of colonised nations.

I will provide a detailed analysis of the construction of Thai national identity and the role played by political and international relations theories in this process. This article highlights the importance of a nuanced and contextualised approach to understanding national identity and the need for innovative and cross-cultural research skills in this complex field.

Identity: A Theoretical Assessment

As Thailand has navigated its historical trajectory, various political and international relations theories have sought to unravel the intricacies of the nation's identity formation. This evolution is deeply intertwined with socialisation processes and the exercise of state power. Socialisation, encompassing societal norms and shared beliefs, is pivotal in shaping individual and collective identities. Individuals actively engage in rulemaking and meaning creation, contributing to Thailand's national identity's dynamic and ever-changing nature. Furthermore, the transition from an absolute to constitutional monarchy is a testament to state power's influence in shaping the narrative of Thai identity. Governance structures implemented during this transition were not merely administrative shifts but integral components of the ongoing construction of Thailand's national identity. Realism, with its focus on power dynamics and state-centric perspectives (Karpowicz, 1970), provides insights into the role of the Thai state in shaping and asserting its identity on the global stage. In contrast, constructivism, a prominent theoretical framework in international relations, emphasises the 'role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping the behaviour of states and other international actors' (Guzzini, 2000). In contrast to realism, constructivism posits that identities are socially constructed and shaped

by shared beliefs, norms, culture, and discourse in shaping how a community or nation perceives and interacts with others.

In the context of national identity, constructivism posits that identity is socially constructed and evolves through interactions within and beyond borders while shedding light on how shared beliefs and cultural elements contribute to the Thai sense of nationhood. Postcolonial theories bring forth the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, delving into how power dynamics, cultural influences, and historical imprints continue to influence the identity formation of postcolonial societies (Williams, 1997). This will illuminate how external influences have left an indelible mark on Thailand's national identity.

With reference to Thailand, Wendt (1999) argues that the Thai people actively shape their collective identity through shared meanings, cultural practices, and interactions with other states. National identity is not a static or predetermined concept but is socially constructed and subject to change based on how individuals and communities interpret and define their identity. Similarly, to sustain their national identity, individuals in Thailand actively engage in a process of rulemaking and meaning creation that defines and sustains their collective identity (Onuf, 1989).

Postcolonial theories contribute significantly to understanding the construction of national identity by highlighting the enduring impacts of historical legacies. In the case of Thailand, while it avoided formal colonisation, it was not immune to the influences of colonial powers in the region. The postcolonial lens allows us to examine how power dynamics with neighbouring colonial entities, such as the British Burma and French Indochina, shaped Thailand's identity. Thus, these legacies are evident in the negotiation of cultural boundaries, linguistic influences, and territorial distinctions that persist in Thailand's contemporary identity landscape.

Furthermore, Thailand's historical narrative is a tapestry woven with threads of cultural richness, political shifts, and external influences. Applying the theoretical lenses of constructivism and postcolonialism, we navigate through key epochs and events that have left an indelible mark on Thailand's national identity.

The early 20th century marked a pivotal period for Thailand (then referred to as Siam) as it navigated the challenges of colonial pressures and embraced modernisation. The shift from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy during the reign of King Rama VI reflected not only political changes but also evolving ideas about governance and identity. Constructivism asserts that these shifts were not mere political manoeuvres but part of the ongoing construction of Thailand's national identity in response to internal and external dynamics.

The transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy is a pivotal point in Thailand's political history, and its impact reverberates deeply in the construction of national identity. Analysing this shift through a political lens unveils the complex relationship between political decisions and the evolution of Thai identity. The governance structures implemented during this transition played a crucial role in shaping the narrative of Thai nationhood. Political decisions, such as the move towards constitutional monarchy, were not merely administrative shifts but integral components of the ongoing construction of Thailand's national identity. The interplay between state power and the identity narrative becomes evident as political structures are not only tools for governance but also instruments in the formulation and expression of the collective identity of the Thai people. By scrutinising these political dynamics, one can gain insights into how the state actively participates in shaping and projecting national identity. The political landscape serves as a canvas on which the evolving ideas about governance and nationhood are painted. therefore, the examination of political shifts and governance structures is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of how identity is constructed and moulded in the Thai context.

Thailand's national identity is deeply rooted in its cultural heritage, which serves as both a source of pride and a guiding force in shaping the nation's ethos. The coexistence of traditional values with modern aspirations presents a dynamic tension that defines contemporary Thai identity. Traditional elements, such as religious practices, ceremonies, and artistic expressions, continue to play a central role in shaping the collective consciousness of the Thai people. However, the embrace of modernity, technological advancements, and globalisation introduces a new dimension to this narrative. The impact of economic development, urbanisation, and exposure to global media influences the way Thais perceive themselves and their position in the world. The political sphere becomes a crucial

arena where these tensions manifest, as policymakers grapple with the challenge of preserving cultural authenticity while fostering progress.

Political decisions and governance structures play a pivotal role in mediating the interplay between tradition and modernity within Thailand's identity landscape. The political arena becomes a canvas where the nation's values are negotiated and translated into policies. In recent years, political movements and shifts have reflected the diverse perspectives within Thai society regarding the preservation of cultural heritage and the pursuit of modernisation. The dynamics of political identity in Thailand are also influenced by global geopolitical trends. The nation's diplomatic engagements, international alliances, and responses to global challenges contribute to the formation of its identity on the word stage. The political choices made by Thailand in international relations reflect not only pragmatic considerations but also the nation's self-perception and how it wishes to be perceived by the global community.

In the realm of international relations, Thailand faces a balancing act. The nation's historical resilience to formal colonisation positions it as a unique actor in the Southeast Asian region. The diplomatic strategies employed by Thailand, shaped by a realist understanding of power dynamics, aim to safeguard its sovereignty while actively participating in regional and global affairs. Thailand's identity is intricately linked to its ability to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes. As the nation seeks to assert its position in international forums, address global challenges, and contribute to regional stability, the question of how to integrate traditional values with contemporary aspirations becomes paramount. The ability to project a coherent and adaptive identity on the global stage hinges on a nuanced understanding of the intersection between domestic politics, cultural identity, and international relations.

Innovation emerges as a critical factor in addressing the challenges posed by the convergence of tradition and modernity. The infusion of innovative methodologies in policymaking, cultural preservation, and international engagements allows Thailand to carve a unique path in the global arena. This adaptability is not only a response to external pressures but also a proactive stance in shaping a national identity that reflects the dynamism of the Thai people. The delicate interplay between tradition and modernity, mediated through political decisions and international engagements, defines the contemporary landscape of

Thailand's national identity. As the nation navigates the challenges and opportunities presented by the global stage, the synergy between tradition, modernity, and innovation becomes the key to a resilient and authentic identity, continuously shaped by politics and international relations in a rapidly changing world.

From Theory to Practice

Having delved into the complex and multifaceted theoretical aspects of identity, I have explored its intricacies in the context of comparative cultural research, particularly within the realm of political and international relations theory. Drawing on this knowledge and insight, I now want to apply these findings to the process of learning in educational settings, examining how various identity factors can impact learning outcomes and experiences, and how educators can create inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students.

The module titled "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" is designed to provide a more in-depth understanding of the concept of cross-cultural research in a collaborative learning environment. The module offers a unique and dynamic learning environment where students can engage with diverse cultures and landscapes to gain valuable insights into the complex interplay between culture and society. During the course, we had the opportunity to explore the cultural elements that make up Thailand's rich tapestry, including its history, economy, politics, religion, and traditions. We have learnt about the various ways in which Thai culture has been influenced by other cultures and how it has influenced them in turn.

The module's innovative approach encourages us to move beyond theoretical frameworks and engage with Thailand's culture in practical ways, bridging academic knowledge with real-world experiences. In addition to traditional classroom lectures, the module also integrates online lectures, such as Professor Nadhawee Bunnag's insightful session from Kasetsart University, to equip students with the knowledge necessary to navigate the cultural nuances they will encounter.

The field trip to Thailand is a cornerstone of the module, transforming theoretical concepts into tangible experiences. Engaging with the vibrant culture

of Bangkok becomes a classroom of its own, where students witness real-world manifestation of the theories they have studied. Cross-cultural research goes beyond the confines of traditional academic exercises; it becomes a transformative journey that nurtures a deeper understanding of identity. The diversity of students within the module further enriches the cross-cultural research experience. The multifaceted perspectives brought by peers from different courses create a dynamic learning environment that broadens the scope of academic discussions. This diversity also provides a holistic understanding of how cultural nuances shape identity in international relations.

In addition to exploring traditional academic routines, the module also integrates intriguing concepts, such as the exploration of "Unravelling the Notions of Culture" by Dibyesh Anand, to provide a stimulating intellectual environment. This departure from traditional academic routines fosters an immersive and transformative learning experience in an environment where creativity thrives, allowing students to explore and question the intricate relationship between culture, identity, and representation.

Findings and Analysis

The field trip afforded me a profound exploration into the intricate interplay between culture and identity within the Thai political and international relations framework.

Within the urban expanse of Bangkok, where traditional Thai architectural motifs coalesce with contemporary structures, a nuanced narrative unfolds. This amalgamation serves as a visual testament to Thailand's adept negotiation between the preservation of its cultural heritage and the imperatives of globalisation. The placement of ancient Buddhist temples against the backdrop of modern urban life functions metaphorically, encapsulating the ongoing dynamics that shape the nation's cultural and identity landscape. These visual stimuli, far from mere aesthetic juxtapositions, proffer essential insights into how cultural symbols are politically wielded to shape and articulate Thailand's national identity, both domestically and in the realm of international relations.

The foray into historical landmarks, notably the Grand Palace and Wat Arun, augments cultural understanding while concurrently unravelling the latent political dimensions within the emblematic sites. Architectural intricacies, the prevailing atmosphere of reverence, and the narratives embedded in the murals collectively constitute tangible evidence of a nation profoundly interwoven with its historical and traditional tapestry. These visual experiences assume a critical role in comprehending the political deployment of cultural symbols, reinforcing a shared national narrative within the socio-political spectrum of Thailand.

Interactions with local communities have yielded an intimate gaze into the diverse social fabric of Thai society. Dialogues with individuals hailing from varied socio-economic strata and regional backgrounds not only precipitated a reassessment of assumptions but also underscored the multifaceted nature of Thai identity within the political landscape. These encounters served to underscore the profound impact of political decisions on the construction of identity, elucidating the role of policies and governance structures in shaping the collective consciousness of the Thai populace. Such insights contribute to a more nuanced political analysis of identity formation within the Thai socio-political milieu.

The exploration of culinary experiences emerges as an imperative lens through which to scrutinise the political dimensions of Thai identity. The diverse flavours, aromas, and culinary traditions not only echo cultural richness but also reflect political considerations entwined with economic development, globalisation imperatives, and the nation's image on international stage. Concurrently, traditional dances and celebratory events observed during the field trip function as political expressions of cultural practices, actively contributing to the ongoing construction of a distinct Thai identity. These participatory experiences underscore the dynamic nature of culture and identity, challenging any inclination towards monolithic conceptualisations and emphasising the integral role of political decisions in steering the trajectory of identity formation.

Furthermore, the impact of the field trip on the analysis of culture and identity extends sensory and visual experiences. Reflective dialogues and discussions among the participating students, particularly those representing diverse cultural backgrounds, serve as a unique lens through which to examine the political intersections of personal identities within the broader context of international relations. These intercultural exchanges act as catalysts for a more nuanced and

reflective political analysis, providing critical insights into how political decisions and international engagements actively shape, challenge, and adapt identity constructs within the complex and dynamic landscape of global politics.

The pervasive presence of portraits and images depicting the Thai monarchs, prominently displayed in public spaces, emerges as a salient facet in the political landscape of Thai identity construction. This phenomenon not only signifies the profound integration of the monarchy within the national narrative but also underscores the symbiotic relationship between monarchical symbolism and political authority. Analysing this, reveals the concept of of cultural legitimacy, where the calculated placement of royal imagery contributes to the legitimacy of the monarchy in shaping and defining Thai identity. In a nuanced academic analysis, the strategic dissemination of royal imagery can be viewed as a deliberate political communication strategy, contributing to the meticulous crafting of a unified national identity intricately interwoven with the monarchy. The calculated placement of these visual symbols serves as a means of conveying a particular political narrative, where the monarchy plays a central role in shaping and defining the contours of Thai identity. This intentional visual discourse aligns with broader political objectives and aspirations, consolidating the monarchy's position as a pivotal element in the national socio-political framework.

Furthermore, the observed reticence or limitation on openly expressing dissent or criticism against the monarchy underscores the political sensitivity surrounding these visual symbols. This controlled discourse, manifested through the prevalence of royal imagery, potentially alludes to a form of controlled political narrative, or in certain contexts, could be perceived as a subtle manifestation of political propaganda. Such limitations on public discourse contribute to the cultivation of a specific national narrative, intricately entwined with the monarchy, reflecting the nuanced and intricately managed political dynamic within Thai society.

In the broader context of Thai politics and international relations, the role of the monarchy becomes pivotal. The deliberate projection of royal symbols, both domestically and on the global stage, actively contributes to the formulation and projection of Thailand's national identity. The monarchy's influence permeates the political decision-making processes, shaping policies, and contributing to the

notion's image in the international arena. Understanding the political intersections of royal symbolism within the multifaceted landscape of Thai identity construction thus becomes imperative for a comprehensive analysis of the political dimensions inherent in the nation's identity formation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article provides a comprehensive exploration of Thailand's national identity, elucidating the multifaceted influences that shape its construction. Political and international relations theories, namely realism, constructivism, and post-colonialism, offer theoretical lenses through which the nation's identity can be analysed. The transition from an absolute to constitutional monarchy emerges as a pivotal point, showcasing the intricate relationship between political decisions and the evolution of Thai identity. Moreover, the article delves into the impact of cultural richness, political shifts, and external influences on Thailand's historical narrative, emphasising the dynamic fusion of constructivism and postcolonialism.

The findings and analysis section further unpacks the profound experiences from the field trip to Thailand, where visual, sensory, and interactive encounters provided invaluable insights into the construction of Thai national identity. Culinary experiences, traditional dances, and local interactions served as living expressions of cultural practices contributing significantly to the ongoing process of identity formation. The impact extended beyond the individual, fostering intercultural exchanges that challenged prevailing assumptions. The concept of Orientalism, with its historical influence in shaping perceptions of Eastern cultures, became particularly relevant during these interactions. These encounters prompted a critical re-evaluation of preconceived notions, shedding light on how Orientalist perspectives have influenced perceptions and enriched the academic analysis of identity within the broader context of international relations.

Innovation, creativity, and cross-cultural research emerge as vital components, enhancing the academic exploration of Thai identity. The module's unique structure encourages students to actively engage with diverse landscapes and cultures, bridging theory with real-world experiences. The delicate interplay between tradition and modernity, mediated through political decisions and international engagements, defines the contemporary landscape of Thailand's

national identity. As the nation navigates the challenges and opportunities presented by the global stage, the synergy between tradition, modernity, and innovation becomes the key to a resilient and authentic identity, continuously shaped by the forces of politics and international relations in a rapidly changing world.

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4 |

CULTURAL HERITAGE AS AN 'ENGINE' OF LEGAL DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND AND THE UK

Alina Maksakova

Abstract

The acceleration of globalisation has increasingly intervened in the field of law and stimulated the deepening of the content and development of the mutual influence of different legal families. In this article, I will analyse the main features of the development of the legal systems of the UK and Thailand, revealing their dependence on cultural characteristics and historical development.

Introduction

The "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" Module was a comprehensive course that covered a vast amount of information related to different spheres, including Law, Criminology, International Studies, Biomedical Sciences, and more. Throughout the course, I gained a deep understanding of various topics and theories concerning culture, innovation, and

international relations, which significantly expanded my knowledge and analytical skills. Moreover, I was able to connect the information I learned in this module with other modules, which helped me to see the bigger picture and how different topics and subjects relate to each other. Overall, this module was an enriching experience that broadened my horizons and prepared me to become a well-informed and engaged citizen in a global community.

Law plays a vital role in organising society, as it regulates relations between individuals. Laws are not created overnight, but rather, they are formed over a long period of time under the influence of multiple rules. Therefore, they reflect the values, ideas, and aspirations of a particular society at a specific time. Different societies have chosen to categorise their laws in various ways, aiming to balance societal ideas and expectations of justice. This has given rise to different legal families or systems.

A legal system is a set of methods, norms, and rules united in a particular manner and expressed in a particular form. There are several legal families worldwide, including the Anglo-American, Romano-Germanic (or Civil), and traditional-religious systems. In this work, I will examine the Civil and Anglo-American systems in detail, using the laws of Thailand and the United Kingdom as case studies in order to explore the similarities and differences between these legal systems and understand how culture has shaped them. The influence of culture on law is significant: in Thailand, for instance, traditional beliefs and customs play an essential role in shaping the legal system. Similarly, in the UK, the common law system has been shaped by historical, social, and cultural factors and by examining the impact of culture on these legal systems, one can gain valuable insights into how society, culture, and law interact and influence each other.

To begin with, it is important to understand the difference between the Anglo-American (or Common law) and Civil law systems. The Civil system, which originated in ancient Rome, is commonly known as a codified system of written laws with a clear hierarchy. For example, the Constitution is at the top of such a hierarchy, as we can illustrate by the example of the Thai Constitution of 1997.[1]

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[1] Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand of 6 April 1997

In contrast, the Common law system emphasises principles of law and jurisprudence and the phenomenon of judicial precedent; this relies on the decisions of courts and works of infamous jurists such as, for instance, Lord Venn Dicey[2], who has developed a doctrine of separation of powers used in the UK. The existence of a constitution is optional in such a system.

Many conditions determine the adoption of a particular legal family - for example, the economic and political situation of a country, as well as the cultural and moral foundations of a particular society. That is why a legal system is usually formed within a particular state (in this case, the name "national legal system" is used). But in some cases, a legal system can go beyond the borders of a state and encompass the social systems of different countries.

During my "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" Module, I had an opportunity to closely explore that subject while also working closely with a fellow law student from Thailand to consolidate the relevant information. Comparison is an integral part of human thinking. It is practically used in most social and natural sciences. For example, the philosophical literature rightly points out that comparison is one of the basic logical techniques for cognising the external world. Thus, comparing the cultural influences on the legal families of the UK and Thailand is extremely important and interesting in the context of learning about the world and human development.

Culture and Law

Culture is a complex and multifaceted term encompassing a wide range of human activities and achievements, including language, religion, philosophy, science, art, and education. The spiritual, intellectual, and artistic development of a society or nation reflects a particular group of people's shared values, beliefs, and customs. Culture is not limited to a specific geographic area or ethnicity but is a universal phenomenon in every society.

Culture can extend to include elements such as the state system, social order, etiquette, social customs, forms of communication, and law. These elements

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[2] Venn Dicey, A., 'A digest of the law of England with reference to the conflict of laws' (1896, Sweet & Maxwell)

profoundly impact various spheres of human life, including legal policies. For example, cultural values can shape how laws are created and enforced, affecting how people interact with each other and with society at large. As an essential aspect of human activity, culture determines the fundamental features of society and influences policy in many areas of human life. Exposure to cultural values is necessary to establish harmony in society. Cultural diversity enriches human experience and promotes social cohesion, tolerance, and understanding.

Moreover, culture provides ideas about justice and equality and strengthens the concept of a fair trial in the public consciousness. A deep understanding of cultural values is necessary to create a just and equitable society that includes all individuals regardless of their backgrounds. Cultural awareness is crucial for building social capital, enhancing intercultural communication, and fostering a sense of belonging.

As stated by Stasi (2015) '… a large variety of factors play a continuous role in influencing and shaping the evolution of laws and ways in which laws are implemented. Among these, four are of particular importance: morality, religion, justice and social convention'.

Social occurrences are closely related to the formation of law and help to analyse the entire legal sphere of life in a country or region, as well as the patterns of further development. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the change in cultural values in Europe (caused by a series of bourgeois revolutions) changed the attitude of society to the law. Written law took a dominant position, which led to its active development and codification. Thailand, whose culture has been heavily influenced by Europe, has adopted a similar attitude to the law.

In the UK, on the other hand, cultural development has become the basis for the formation of the common law. The law is seen as a reflection of age-old customs. Thus, thanks to tradition and popular values, many extremely important principles have emerged. For example, the principle of "reasonableness", which allows judges not to apply written law if its implementation would violate the 'common sense'.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that culture and history play a role as an 'engine' of the development of any legal system.

Civil Law in Thailand

Thailand's legal system has been significantly influenced by the country's rich history and diverse cultural traditions. The country's legal system has evolved over time, drawing on various sources such as indigenous customs, religious beliefs, and Western legal principles. Thailand's legal system is based on civil law, with the Constitution as the supreme law of the land. Historical events such as the adoption of the constitutional monarchy in 1932 and the promulgation of the first constitution in 1933 have shaped the country's legal system. It reflects the country's rich cultural heritage and history and continues to evolve to address the changing needs and challenges of the modern world.

The Thai legal system also reflects the country's religious identity, with many laws and customs derived from Buddhist teachings and practices. For instance, the concept of "sanuk", which emphasises enjoyment and happiness, has influenced the development of laws related to business, tourism, and entertainment.

It was a unique experience for me to work closely with colleagues from Kasetsart University in Bangkok, and it proved to be an extraordinary chance to delve into research about the specifics of Thai law and how it was developed from a perspective of cultural influence. It was a challenging and equally exciting task since the legal system in Thailand dramatically differs from the common law in the UK.

The very first distinction I was able to spot is the particularly poetic language used in legal writing in Thailand. It is a result of the existence of a very particular system of law, namely a civil law system, but one that originated in ancient Buddhist beliefs. As David Wyatt (1977) puts it: 'It is still unknown as to how much of the current law of Thailand is originally purely Thai, or the extent of influence it had received from trade usages with its neighbours from across the seas or maritime commercial customs'.

Traditions and moral aspirations still have a great influence on Thai law. For instance, the courts adopt principles based upon the 'exotic' (as compared to the principles of most European legal systems) doctrine of karma. It plays an important role in forming the vision of criminal proceedings and how the parties of the legal conflict are perceived. The Civil law family was adopted in Thailand by King Rama V, who believed it would strengthen the centralised government under the threat of French and British colonisation. However, although the Thai legal system greatly resembles classical Roman law systems (such as the French one), it still deviates from any foreign system as it has created a balance between the law, old Siamese traditions and the teachings of Veda.

Thus, the views on culture and tradition within Thai society have impacted greatly on the very operation of the law. It is easily illustrated by the organisation of the legal practice as well as the powers held by the Monarch. The King of Thailand is seen as a pillar of society and has the right to directly influence political and legal changes – which dramatically differs from the rights of the monarch in the UK. When it comes to the structure of Thai law, it is important to highlight its hierarchical order. For instance, the most fundamental rules and rights are written into the Constitution.

The first basic law was the Provisional Statute of Administration in the Kingdom of Siam of 1932. Chapter III of the Constitution, which is named 'Rights and Freedoms of the Thai People', enshrines the basic principles of judicial procedure under the rule of law. For instance, equality of citizens before the law and the right of every person to access justice. There is also Chapter X of the Constitution - 'The Courts' – which defines the basis for the organisation of the judicial system and the highest courts of the State. As we have mentioned previously, Thailand is not a common law country. However, some Supreme Court decisions are published in the 'Supreme Court Law Reports'.

The UK's Common Law

Its rich history and culture greatly influence the UK legal system which can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when the common law system was established. The common law is a system of law based on judicial decisions rather than statutory laws. This legal system has evolved over time and so has been shaped by social, political, and economic changes. Furthermore, the UK has a long history

of parliamentary democracy, which has also played a significant role in shaping its legal system. The UK Parliament is responsible for passing laws, whilst the independent judiciary interprets and enforces them. The European Union also influences the UK legal system, as the UK was a member state for over 40 years until its recent departure.

In addition to the above, the UK legal system has been influenced by its culture, including the English language and its traditions. The use of Latin in legal documents and terminology is still prevalent in the UK legal system, reflecting the country's historical ties to the Roman Empire.

The common law family is a completely unique and complex system which does not explicitly focus on written laws but also considers judicial practice, customs, and scientific works of qualified jurists. The law in the UK results from centuries of constant amendment, influenced by political and cultural circumstances. As opposed to the Romano-Germanic family, common law operates on the basis of non-written principles, such as, for example, the principle of proportionality. Its origins date back to the reign of King Ethelbert, who established the first courts in England in the VII century, and the principle implies that the punishment should not be overly harsh but rather proportionate to the extend of the unlawful harm. Subsequently the system of law produced by the royal judges replaced the forms of justice that were used previously. These included local (or tribal) and canonical courts. This system of law became known as common law after the Norman conquest in 1066 and was binding on both royal and inferior courts. In England, the common law emerged on the basis of royal authority and earlier than in the countries of continental Europe. This is explained by the fact that a powerful centralised monarchy was established here earlier than in other European countries.

While in most European countries, the dominant legal system was civil law, the common law in England was formed without its overriding influence. To illustrate this point, for almost a hundred years, the common law was ahead of the European Civil law in developing remedies for abuse of power (such as subjecting one's enemies to imprisonment without any trial). This is evidenced by the writ of Habeas Corpus, which meant that a person brought before the court may be dismissed by the judge if there was no true legal justification for their arrest.

It is also vital to mention the phenomenon of the existence of the law of equity, which gave the monarch, acting through the Lord Chancellor, the power to moderate strict judgments by reference to general principles of law, including the notion of goodness and humanity, rather than to specific precedents. The Lord Chancellor's court filled gaps in the common law. For example, the Chancellor gave effect to a person's obligation to administer property in favour of a third person and to transfer the proceeds to them. In doing so, the rule of (written) law was not violated. The Lord Chancellor had the right to intervene in specific cases only, and it was done 'in the name of justice'.

The judicial reform of the late nineteenth century (also known as the New Judiciary Act) effectively merged common law and equity law. Chancery courts were united with common law courts. After 1875, common law and equity law were applied by the same judges, with equity precedents forming an organic part of the one case law of England. Recognising judicial precedent as a source of law means that the judiciary exercises not only a jurisdictional function (resolving conflicts based on law) but also a law-making function. In constitutional law, custom plays an even more significant role than judicial precedents.

Constitutional agreements constitute unwritten rules of constitutional practice and should be distinguished from customs, which are part of the common law. These constitutional agreements act to regulate important issues of state life. For example, according to custom, the monarch must sign an act adopted by both Houses of Parliament. This is because historically, a monarch held a superior position in the field of politics and was effectively the head of all three branches of power – the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Another example is that traditionally, a government is formed by the winning party's leader in a parliamentary election.

Conclusion

After researching with my Thai colleague on both civil and common law, I was able to identify what impact cultural heritage has on the legal systems of two different countries, Thailand and the UK. After conducting a comparative analysis, I have reached several conclusions.

First it is crucial to mention that culture is closely linked to the law of any country since it must adhere to ideas and values of the people in order to achieve harmony in society. The balance between the nature of law and consciousness of the society creates a stable environment and ensures future prosperity.

Thailand and the UK share years of mutual historical experience, although the legal systems of two these countries differ greatly. The common law in the United Kingdom is focused primarily on the values of the British people - such as, for instance, fairness, equality and proportionality. Thai civil law system perceives laws as a means to reach the safety and stability of their people while ensuring strict standards and regulations.

While comparing legal systems of Thailand and the UK I had an opportunity to discuss and share opinions with a fellow student from Bangkok. While it was a challenging process due to the difference in languages and educational systems, our tutors within the "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" module have provided us with unmatched support.

I have explored various aspects of methodology for my future research. I used the methodology for cross-cultural research, which is usually divided into quantitative and qualitative research.

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PART **II**

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, MENTAL HEALTH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

5 |

THE PARADOX OF GOODNESS: NAVIGATING PITFALLS OF EXCESSIVE POSITIVITY AND DISCOVERING THE BRIGHT SIDE OF HARDSHIP

Pinyapatch Meksakunwong

Abstract

Exploring human behaviour and emotions is a highly intricate and multifaceted discipline. It is crucial to delve into both positive and negative experiences to gain a comprehensive understanding of individuals. Maintaining a balance between positive and negative thinking is important, and negative emotions should be acknowledged and processed when they arise. This article examines how people respond and adapt to various situations by exploring the entire spectrum of human experiences. Such an approach can assist us in developing a more genuine and comprehensive comprehension of ourselves and others.

Introduction

In our daily lives, we are often encouraged to focus on our strengths, mitigate our weaknesses, and strive for constant happiness and success. Although positive thinking plays a vital role in our mental well-being and overall

happiness, an excessive focus on 'staying positive' can lead to toxic positivity. This phenomenon occurs when individuals or communities enforce a positive outlook, even when faced with difficult situations and emotions. The pressure to remain positive can lead to the suppression of negative emotions, which can be detrimental to one's mental health in the long run.

However, it is essential to note that negative experiences such as disappointment, failure, and setbacks can provide valuable insights and opportunities for personal growth. These experiences can teach us valuable life lessons, inspire us to make changes, and help us develop resilience. By analyzing these concepts, this article aims to provide a new perspective on the balance between positivity and negativity.

Furthermore, the transformation process from bad to good or good to bad is an integral part of our personal development and understanding of life. Through these transformations, we can learn to appreciate the ups and downs of life, develop greater empathy, and become more compassionate towards ourselves and others.

This article explores both the benefits and drawbacks of remaining consistently positive. While positive thinking is crucial for our overall well-being, embracing life's negative experiences is equally important. By doing so, we can learn to grow and evolve as individuals and develop a more nuanced perspective of the world around us.

When Good Becomes Bad

As humans, it is natural to feel and have strong emotions. Emotional experiences play a significant role in driving our actions and shaping our identities. Therefore, it is essential as a human to effectively navigate and understand our feelings, whether they are positive or negative. This self-awareness gives us a deeper insight into the driving forces that make us. But because we are complex beings, often we don't directly express our genuine emotions due to societal expectations and norms. We have learned to fake our feelings, create the public persona, often presenting them differently than they genuinely are. This is essential to live with others in society, have a favorable social image, and ultimately survive.

Embracing hope during difficult situations and projecting a sense of strength can be empowering. However, when fixating on hope and a distant goal can unintentionally lead us astray, we neglect to assess our current state of mind and of being. And just like that, it is crucial to recognise that even good things can become harmful when pushed to an extreme.

The Dark Side of Positivity

The tendency to always look on the bright side, dismiss negative emotions, and enforce a constant state of happiness is called toxic positivity. It is when positivity doesn't align with the situation and carries the message that the person's feelings are invalid. It involves denying, diminishing, and invalidating our genuine emotional experiences as a human. Healthy positivity is rooted in acceptance, acknowledging that while things may be challenging at the moment, not everything is negative, and there's potential for improvement. However, toxic positivity is built on denial, refusing to recognize the true extent of difficulties and insisting solely on maintaining a positive perspective. This approach can be harmful as it ignores the importance of acknowledging, processing, and understanding true feelings. Moreover, toxic positivity creates an unrealistic expectation that we should always be happy and optimistic. This can result in feelings of guilt and shame when we inevitably experience negative emotions, making it even more challenging to cope with such emotions in the future.

Unfortunately, toxic positivity is quite common. It can manifest in various subtle forms in our daily lives, often without us recognizing it. Whether it is in our own perspectives in life or in the responses we receive from others when we're going through a tough time. On the surface, these responses may seem kind or helpful, especially for minor inconveniences. Some commonly heard phrases that can be associated with toxic positivity include: 'Look on the bright side,' 'It will all work out,' 'The grass is greener on the other side,' 'You will get over it,' and 'At least…'

To distinguish between helpful and toxic positivity, you can use these warning signs as guidelines, both in your internal dialogue and in your interactions with others (Kreitzer, 2023, as cited in Erickson et al, 2023):

1) Feeling pressured to feel a certain way: Toxic positivity often carries an implicit message that your current emotions are wrong, and you should feel differently.

2) Feeling dismissed: It can shut down genuine emotions, denying and minimizing your true feelings.

3) Feeling belittled: Toxic positivity tends to oversimplify complex situations, glossing over the challenges you're going through.

4) Inappropriateness or a sense that being overly upbeat is out of place: Every situation is unique, and not all circumstances call for a positive spin.

When we dismiss our negative emotions, they don't just simply disappear. We may believe that we 'forget' about these emotions to maintain happiness and avoid sadness. But when these feelings aren't properly expressed, they actually get suppressed. In general, suppressing emotions tends to amplify their intensity. Several studies have highlighted the complexities and unexpected physiological and cognitive effects of thought suppression. For example, psychiatry research by Liang et al (2022) supports the idea that suppressing emotions can lead to heightened emotional intensity and greater difficulty in managing these feelings. An examination of coping mechanisms among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a link between emotional suppression and increased emotional distress, including heightened suicidal ideation.

Several clinicians working with cancer patients in research studies also suggest that a personal coping style that suppresses negative emotions may increase the risk of cancer (Petrie, 1998).

Wegner et al (1987) suggest that attempted thought suppression has paradoxical effects as a self-control strategy, perhaps even producing the very obsession or preoccupation that it is directed against. Building on this, Wegner & Zanakos (1994) conducted a research investigate the relationship between thought suppression, obsessive thinking, and emotional reactions. They developed a self-report measure of thought suppression, known as the White Bear Suppression Inventory (WBSI), finding that high WBSI scores correlated with increased

obsessive thoughts, depression, and anxiety. The WBSI predicted clinical obsession signs, depression in those disliking negative thoughts, and a lack of habituation in skin responses to emotional thoughts. Notably, the WBSI inversely correlated with repression on the Repression-Sensitization Scale. The research deepens our understanding of how suppressing thoughts connects with obsessive thinking and emotional reactions, highlighting that attempts to suppress emotions may intensify their impact and physiological responses, contributing to our knowledge of these intricate dynamics.

In summary, concealing or denying our authentic emotions carries significant reactions, not only for our psychological well-being but also for our physical health. The suppression of emotions can lead to a buildup of psychological pressure, manifesting in heightened stress levels that have adverse effects on our overall health, making it more difficult to navigate distressing thoughts and emotions effectively.

Transforming Bad into Good

Countering toxic positivity hinges on the willingness to make space for difficult emotions, regardless of the circumstances, rather than suppressing or denying them. There are steps you can take to cultivate a healthier and more supportive approach.

First, embrace the idea that "it's okay to not be okay." Shift your perspective to acknowledge that it's normal to experience negative emotions. Focus on validation over immediate solutions. Recognize that striving to always be okay is unrealistic and that it is okay to feel down or upset sometimes. If you catch yourself downplaying your own emotions or situation, make a conscious effort to acknowledge and accept those feelings. When engaging with someone else, lead with empathy and validation for their circumstances, rather than jumping straight into problem-solving mode. Recognizing and validating emotions can often be more meaningful and supportive than rushing to find solutions.

Learn to accept and manage your negative emotions without denying them. Negative emotions can be powerful, and when left unattended, they can lead to increased stress. However, they also offer valuable insights into your inner world.

Instead of suppressing these emotions, work on managing and understanding them. This self-awareness can guide you toward positive changes in your life.

Express your emotions through words. When facing tough situations, explore constructive ways to articulate your feelings. Consider maintaining a journal or talking to a friend or your pet. Lieberman et al (2007) suggest that simply verbalizing your emotions can contribute to reducing the intensity of negative feelings. Practice active listening and provide support. When someone shares their difficult emotions with you, avoid responding with toxic positivity. Instead, be an empathetic listener. Let them know that what they are feeling is entirely normal and that you're there to support them. Offering a compassionate ear can make a significant difference to someone's emotional well-being. If needed, pause, maintain silence, and invest time in truly comprehending what someone is saying. It demonstrates your genuine care and helps you perceive their needs at that moment.

Here are examples illustrating how you can transition from a potentially toxic positivity statement to more accepting and emotionally balanced alternatives:

From "Failure is not an option." to "Failure is a part of growth and success."

From "It could be worse." to "That sucks. I'm sorry you're going through this."

From "You should always look on the bright side." to "It's okay to acknowledge the challenges and difficulties in life. They are part of the journey."

From "Don't let anything bring you down." to "It's natural to have ups and downs in life. It's okay to acknowledge and work through your low moments."

Ultimately, grant yourself the permission to experience your emotions fully. Recognize that these feelings are genuine, valid, and significant. They serve as a source of information, offering insights into a situation and highlighting areas that may require change. However, it's important to note that acknowledging your emotions doesn't always need immediate action. At times, it is crucial to allow yourself the space and time to sit with these feelings, to process the situation, and to fully accept your emotions before deciding on a course of action. Keep in mind that the entire spectrum of emotions, positive and negative and

everything in between, constitutes a normal and integral aspect of the human experience. Embracing this diversity of emotions contributes to a well-rounded and healthy human experience.

Redefining Failure: A Catalyst for Personal Development

In the context of personal growth and learning, it is crucial to recognise that failure and negative emotions can be valuable assets. Failure often carries a negative connotation, commonly associated with disappointment and frustration. Still, we can shift our perspective and understand that failing, in particular, has the potential to catalyse learning and foster personal growth. Instead of interpreting failure or experiencing sadness as setbacks, we can reframe them as windows to learning, adaptation, and self-improvement.

When examined from scientific and educational standpoints, the concept of failure is a recurring theme in numerous journals and research studies. For instance, Laksov and McGrath (2020) discuss the importance of learning from failure in academic development work and suggest that deliberate reflection on failure is necessary for learning and improvement in academic development work. They emphasize the need for individual and collaborative reflection, as well as exploration and analysis of failure in practice. They aim to encourage academic developers to embrace failure as a catalyst for learning and to engage in deliberate reflection to enhance their practice.

Loscalzo (2014) suggests that failure is essential for personal growth, education, scientific advancement, and professional development. Learning from failure allows individuals to become more resilient, adaptable, and skilled in various aspects of life.

Vernon and Myers (2021) discuss the challenges and importance of learning from failures in sanitation and hygiene (S&H) programs. They propose a typology of failures and criteria for research and learning processes that prioritize timeliness, relevance, and actionability. They argue that by embracing both successes and failures, being transparent and open, and adapting constantly, S&H programs can become more adaptive and effective. The typology of failures includes:

- Avoidable Failure: Failures that can be anticipated and directly controlled but often go unacknowledged due to difficulties in admitting fault.

- Calculated (Risk) Failure: Failures due to factors that can be anticipated and mitigated against but cannot be directly controlled. These are slightly easier to acknowledge.

- Manageable Failure: Failures that come as a surprise but could have been better controlled. These are easier to share than avoidable failures but harder than unpreventable failures.

Unpreventable Failures: Failures due to unpredictable events and shocks that are out of one's control. These are the easiest to acknowledge and share.

But what exactly is failure? By definition, failure represents a 'lack of success.' It can manifest in two primary ways:

1) Outcome that didn't meet the desired objectives: In this case, failure is characterized by the end result falling short of the intended goals or expectations. This type of failure is often assessed based on predefined criteria or standards, and it reflects a difference between the actual outcome and the targeted success.

2) Merely as an unsuccessful attempt: On the other hand, failure can also be viewed as an unsuccessful attempt, where the initial effort does not lead to the desired outcome. Unlike the first type, this form of failure underscores the process rather than the result. The attempt itself provides valuable lessons for future plans.

Intriguingly, in many cases, failure serves as a crucial steppingstone toward success. Failures and success are closely intertwined, often occurring in conjunction. For many individuals, these two facets of life are inseparable because when you experience failure, it signifies that you are actively trying and striving towards your goals.

What to keep in mind is that failure can sometimes lead to self-deception, causing you to believe false narratives. Unless you develop psychologically adaptive responses to failures, they have the potential to immobilize you, sap your motivation, and hinder your prospects for future success. One of the most prevalent phenomena is that failure has the effect of diminishing the attainability of the same goal—meaning, if you fail once, that very goal may suddenly appear more challenging. It sometimes has a way of automatically altering your perspective on your objectives, causing them to seem more distant and challenging. Your goals themselves haven't fundamentally changed in terms of attainability; rather, it's your perceptions that have shifted. The key lies in recognizing these altered perceptions and consciously choosing to disregard them.

Furthermore, failure also distorts your perceptions of your own abilities. It can lead you to doubt your skills, intelligence, and capabilities, falsely believing them to be considerably weaker than they truly are. When failure occurs, it often results in a distorted self-assessment that underestimates your actual competencies. Recognizing and addressing this cognitive distortion is crucial because, by causing you to underestimate your abilities, it can also lead to believing that you are powerless or unable to overcome challenges. Failure can leave an emotional wound, and your mind's natural response is to protect you from further pain by encouraging you to give up. It might make you believe that success is unattainable and that you should avoid future failures at all costs. However, surrendering to this mindset can also deprive you of potential success. It is important to recognize that experiencing these emotions is a normal part of being human. Allow yourself to acknowledge and feel the negative emotions that failure brings, but don't be deceived by your mind into giving up on your goals and aspirations.

The best step following a failure is to grasp its repercussions and how it influences your thoughts, emotions, and actions. After all, it is possible to transform a challenging and distressing experience into one that holds the potential for constructive learning and practical growth. When confronted with a task or goal, it is helpful to break it down into two categories: aspects within your control and those beyond your control. Begin by examining the elements that fall into the 'not in your control' category, and then devise strategies to take charge of them. This can involve improving your skills, strategic planning, building relationships, acquiring knowledge, or enhancing your preparation. Once you've addressed

these elements, redirect your focus exclusively toward the aspects that are within your control. The feeling of being in control acts as a practical remedy for combating feelings of helplessness and demoralisation. It can be a powerful motivator, inspiring you to make another attempt, reducing the likelihood of future failures, and ultimately increasing your chances of success.

In summary, navigating the journey of self-improvement and personal growth effectively involves recognising that learning from failure can offer valuable lessons. This process often requires time and a shift in perspective, so it's essential to maintain an open mind regarding our mistakes. Key practices are actively seeking feedback for improvement and measuring our progress and performance whenever possible. This mindset of humility and a commitment to growth can lead to substantial personal and professional development.

Balancing Positivity and Negativity for a Healthy Mindset: Emotional Regulation

While it is crucial to embrace positive emotions and cultivate a positive outlook on life, it is equally important to acknowledge and learn from the negative aspects of our life experiences. One way to achieve this balance is by practicing emotional regulation strategies. This involves recognizing and acknowledging negative emotions without judgment and then finding constructive ways to process and express them.

Emotion regulation refers to a person's ability to effectively manage and respond to their emotions. (Rolston and Lloyd-Richardson, 2015.) We humans unconsciously use various strategies throughout the day to cope with emotional experiences. It is a skill that individuals typically develop as they grow up. Some people may naturally find it easier to regulate their emotions than others. These strategies can be either healthy or unhealthy. Healthy strategies, like managing stress through activities such as walking, do not harm us and can help us better understand our emotions. Unhealthy emotion regulation strategies can have harmful consequences, including causing lasting damage such as physical or emotional scars, unintentionally hurting oneself or others, by reacting too strongly. Or by avoiding confronting and resolving problems, often through substance abuse like drugs or alcohol, or even self-injury as a distraction. These

strategies can be dangerous to a person's well-being and should be replaced with healthier ways of managing emotions.

Emotion regulation plays an essential role in maintaining the balance between negative and positive emotions. This balance is vital for overall psychological health. By effectively regulating emotions, individuals can acknowledge and process negative feelings without being overwhelmed by them, while also cultivating and sustaining positive emotions. Because our emotions are intricately linked to our cognitive and affective processes. Our thoughts and feelings guide our responses to various situations, influencing our behavior significantly. Mastering emotional regulation skills enable us to replace impulsive reactions with deliberate, well-considered choices. Consequently, we become capable of managing relationships, problem-solving effectively, and maintaining better control over our mental well-being. Neglecting to regulate our emotions can lead to adverse consequences, including feelings of powerlessness, persistent negative thinking, resentment, and increased frustration. Over time, these issues may contribute to the development of anxiety, depression, or even physical health problems.

Healthy emotion regulation strategies include talking to friends, writing in a journal, seeking therapy, having good sleep hygiene, practicing meditation, and paying attention to negative thoughts that occur before or after strong emotions. Additionally, recognizing when you need a break and allowing yourself to take one is also a healthy approach.

Conversely, unhealthy strategies involve the abuse of alcohol or substances, physical or verbal aggression, emotional eating, excessive use of social media to the exclusion of other responsibilities, and avoidance or withdrawal from difficult situations.

Acquiring emotion regulation skills empowers us to effectively manage our emotional responses and adapt to different situations. Consider experimenting with a blend of diverse strategies to determine what resonates most with you effectively. Here are some suggestions for enhancing emotion regulation. First and foremost, embrace your feelings. Remember, attempting to avoid unpleasant thoughts and feelings can lead to toxic positivity. Instead of avoiding these emotions, acknowledge their presence and label them specifically. It can be

beneficial to internally acknowledge or say out loud, "I am experiencing sadness/anger/fear." Recognize that people who are unclear about their emotions may also have less awareness of their psychological needs.

When your emotions become overwhelming, refrain from asking 'why' questions. Instead of fixating on the reasons behind the emotions, start by asking 'what' questions. For instance, ask yourself about what exactly is pushing your buttons, what choices are available to you at the moment, what resources and tools you can utilize, and what people, places, or activities can provide comfort and security. This shift in perspective can aid in maintaining a sense of calmness. Reframing the situation is a valuable technique for emotional regulation.

Next, consider incorporating mindfulness into your routine. After the emotional storm has subsided, mindfulness-based activities can effectively prepare you for future emotional challenges by encouraging a slower, more deliberate approach. Engaging in activities that keep you in the present moment simplifies the choice between a reactive, automatic response and an intentional one during critical moments. For instance, deep breathing sends signals to your nervous system that you are safe. Redirecting your focus to the present moment facilitates the re-engagement of your prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for problem-solving and restoring calm. Additionally, engaging your five senses by consciously observing something you can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell can also be beneficial. Moreover, activities like journaling, meditation, and yoga can serve as mindful practices that alleviate stress and promote emotional regulation.

The final aspect to consider is adopting stress management techniques. Whenever possible, strive to lead a lifestyle conducive to relaxation and self-soothing. Attending to your physical well-being is essential in allowing your parasympathetic nervous system the opportunity to activate and provide a respite. Some beneficial practices include ensuring you obtain a consistent 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night, nourishing your body with nutrient-rich foods, maintaining regular meal intervals to prevent blood sugar fluctuations, engaging in 30 minutes of physical activity at least five times a week, seeking solace and support from your pets and loved ones, spending time outdoors in natural sunlight, and lastly, contemplating the benefits of therapy if needed.

Emotional regulation is an essential skill, empowering individuals to navigate life's challenges with resilience and maintain their psychological well-being. By embracing both positivity and negativity, we can cultivate a healthy mindset that fosters growth and resilience. Instead of suppressing or ignoring negative emotions, we can learn to embrace them as valuable sources of insight and self-awareness. This approach not only helps manage behaviour and relationships but also achieves a harmonious balance between negative and positive emotions.

Conclusion

In pursuing happiness and personal growth, embracing the paradox of goodness is essential – a concept rooted in acknowledging that life is a complex interplay of both positive and negative experiences. These experiences, whether joyous or challenging, play a crucial role in our development as individuals. While some may advocate for a constant state of happiness and the denial of negative emotions, it is important to recognise that this approach is neither sustainable nor healthy in the long run.

A key aspect of achieving this balance is mastering the art of emotional regulation. Emotional regulation empowers us to navigate the rollercoaster of life with resilience, grace, and a profound sense of self-awareness. Emotional regulation acts as a compass guiding us toward the middle path, where both the good and the bad contribute to our journey of self-discovery and personal development. By embracing this balance and learning from our setbacks, we not only enhance our emotional intelligence but also enrich our lives with a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In doing so, we break free from the confines of toxic positivity and embark on a transformative journey where every experience, whether positive or negative, becomes a steppingstone toward a more fulfilling and resilient life

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6 |

COMPARING THE CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER AND KASETSART UNIVERSITY

Laraib Akram

Abstract

This article examines the ongoing mental health challenges, comparing the approaches taken in the UK and Thailand. I will discuss relevant literature on factors such as academic stress, financial strain, and societal expectations that contribute to mental health issues. Specifically, the article will focus on students' experiences at Westminster University in London and Kasetsart University in Bangkok. Three university students were interviewed to provide a first-hand account and comparative analysis of their respective institutions to gain further insight. Ultimately, the article highlights the need for empathy towards those facing mental health challenges and emphasises the importance of collective efforts in building more compassionate communities worldwide.

Introduction

Mental health is a delicate matter that necessitates kindness and understanding, as it is frequently misunderstood. Individuals who suffer from depression are commonly instructed to "get over it," while those who suffer from anxiety are commonly told to "stop being so dramatic." This article aims to diminish the stigma and lack of knowledge surrounding mental health by examining the intricate obstacles faced by university students in London and Bangkok. The article will use first-hand accounts and experiences of university students and theoretical frameworks to provide a nuanced comprehension of mental health challenges and possibilities for intervention in varied cultural settings.

Mental health is defined as the overall state of one's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It encompasses an individual's ability to cope with daily stressors and enjoy a fulfilling life, as well as their capacity to interact with others and contribute to society. Good mental health is characterized by a positive outlook on life, the ability to form and maintain healthy relationships, and the capacity to adapt to change and overcome challenges. According to the World Health Organization's 2003 report, mental health is crucial for individuals to work productively, achieve their goals, and contribute positively to their communities.

Regrettably, mental health is frequently overlooked and undervalued in many regions of the world, where it is not given the same importance as physical health. It is a complex and deeply ingrained issue that is not immediately visible to the naked eye, and as a result, it is often disregarded, even though approximately 450 million people in both developed and developing countries suffer from mental disorders (Bracken & Thomas, 2005). Due to the stigma and negative perceptions surrounding mental health disorders, those who suffer often feel trapped by their afflictions, experiencing feelings of isolation and misunderstanding that may lead to suicidal ideation.

Mental health is an important aspect of living a happy life. In order to promote a more empathetic and compassionate society and prevent untimely deaths, it is essential to address mental health issues.

In this article, I reflect on my participation in a study for my "Democratic Engagement in an International Context" course. As a student of Psychology with a passion for mental health, I was intrigued by the opportunity for cross-cultural research that the module presented. During the program, we travelled to Thailand and worked alongside students from Kasetsart University in Bangkok. Through 10 days of collaboration, we established a rapport that proved invaluable to our joint academic pursuits. This experience expanded my research interests to encompass Thailand. The article provides a detailed account of my experiences, including interviews with university students from both countries and an extensive literature review that sheds light on the unique challenges faced by students in diverse cultural contexts.

By combining first-hand accounts and experiences of university students through interviews and theoretical frameworks, this article offers a nuanced understanding of mental health challenges and potential intervention opportunities in diverse cultural contexts. The article highlights the complex panorama of mental health in both London and Bangkok, and the unique challenges confronted by the interviewed university students from both countries.

This article is especially interested in investigating the societal issues that mental health poses in the UK and Thailand predominantly because these are two countries that have such varying perspectives on mental health: with the mentally ill in the UK facing tenacious stigma despite progressions in awareness whereas many deep-rooted cultural factors in Thailand hinder more open discussions about mental health (Charoensakulchai et al., 2019). The impact of these issues on UK and Thai University students, in particular, will be addressed as, sadly, these demographic faces elevated stress levels associated with academic demands and financial restraints that make them more vulnerable to mental health issues. For example, in a cross-sectional survey of 729 undergraduate Thai students, 82% reported a mental health problem (Auttama et al., 2021). In the UK, 1 in 5 University students have a mental health diagnosis, with depression and anxiety being most prevalent and with the tendency of self-harm and suicide rising dangerously (Campbell et al., 2022). Clearly, University students in both Thailand and the UK are struggling, and this not only threatens their individual health and well-being but also has educational, social, and economic consequences arising from academic underperformance and increased risk of dropping out of university. Three Thai students from Kasetsart University in

Bangkok and three UK students from the University of Westminster in the UK were interviewed to provide further information on mental health issues in each country.

Ultimately, the article aims to raise awareness of mental health issues and cultivate a more empathetic and compassionate society that supports those who suffer from mental health disorders.

Why Mental Health?

It is important to recognize the significance of mental health today. Mental health and physical health are interdependent, and mental disorders can increase the risk of communicable and non-communicable diseases as well as contribute to unintentional and intentional injury (Prince et al., 2007). Individuals suffering from depression or anxiety are more likely to be susceptible to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and a compromised immune system, as per Firth et al. (2019). Mental health issues can also cause impaired cognitive function, which can result in intentional harm like suicide, as reported by the World Health Organization (2003). To avoid destructive stigmas, it is essential to encourage transparent conversations about mental health. This will help individuals seek the help they need and commence early interventions rather than suffer in despair in isolation. Pescosolido, Martin, and Long (2010) suggest that such conversations are critical for individuals to seek help without fear of judgment. On a societal level, active discussions surrounding mental health can foster a nurturing environment for individuals to pursue necessary help and diminish the burden on healthcare systems, which, in turn, will also increase employment and productivity levels for suffering individuals (World Health Organisation, 2003). Essentially, heightened awareness of this misunderstood and complicated topic could prevent the worsening of mental health conditions to the point of suicide or harm. Moreover, inaugurating preventive measures and enduring transparent conversations surrounding mental health can allow societies to potentially foster environments where individuals can prosper mentally and physically.

UK and Thailand's Approaches Towards Mental Health

It is now worth considering the approaches that the two countries employ in an attempt to alleviate the mental health problems that presently exist. Since the

COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand has made active efforts to ensure that they help the public as much as they possibly can with their mental health issues. Thailand has 20 psychiatric hospitals distributed throughout the country's regions, including Bangkok; what I found interesting, however, was their introduction of community mental healthcare. Due to the shortage of mental health personnel in Thailand, they train village health volunteers and local health personnel to provide sustainable care to the community (Kamonnet et al., 2022). I think that this is an incredible initiative that allows *anyone* to seek out help without needing to go to a hospital.

The approach to mental health in rural areas is quite different in that several people tend to view mental illness as being a consequence of spirit possession; they visit monks to spray holy water on them in hopes that the spirits would go away (Burnard, Naiyapatana & Lloyd, 2006). The Thai students I interviewed confirmed this belief and stated that since Buddhism is such a dominant religion in Thailand, the belief in spirituality is quite prominent. An important feature of Buddhism is also the notion of '*karma'* (Burnard, Naiyapatana & Lloyd, 2006). The Thai students elaborated on this concept claiming that the older generation believe that bad karma can result in mental health problems however, this belief is not as common with the younger generation who now turn to science to understand mental health better. Research has indicated that traditional beliefs towards mental health are more common in rural Thailand compared to the metropolis, Bangkok (Burnard, Naiyapatana & Lloyd, 2006). The most common and rather inexpensive approach to bettering one's mental health is that of a traditional Thai massage which is believed to offer many mental health benefits by stimulating certain areas of the body and providing instant relief (Ryan, Keiwkarnka & Khan, 2003). I can vouch for this as when I visited Bangkok, there was a low-priced massage place in every corner of every street in Bangkok and they were constantly bustling with people just aching for some solace from their hectic lives!

In the UK, young people expressed that mental health services should be available in locations they could easily access, such as community-based services close to home (Plaistow et al., 2014). The introduction of community care in Thailand has been an excellent creation with exceptional outcomes Kamonnet et al., 2022); perhaps this is something that we could incorporate in the UK, too. Nonetheless, the UK does have some excellent approaches towards diminishing mental health

concerns, such as the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme, which allows individuals to receive immediate online support for disorders such as anxiety and depression; this programme has helped many sufferers reduce their psychological symptoms immensely (Wakefield et al., 2021). However, individuals experience extensive waiting times if their problems are not deemed severe enough, which predictably causes further distress (Edbrooke-Childs & Deighton, 2020). The UK students that were interviewed validated this research, expressing that they felt disheartened due to long waiting times and that this often exacerbated their mental state, but they felt rather grateful for having alternative access to university well-being officers as this meant that they were seen quicker and had somebody to reassure them. The main consensus from the UK students was that university mental health resources were extremely useful for them; research has also established that university counselling in the UK has been beneficial for internal and external problems (Batchelor et al., 2020). Perhaps, this type of support could also be implemented in Thailand's universities to allow students easier access to mental health services.

A Comparison of Mental Health of Students in UK & Thailand

In the UK, students who suffer from mental health issues are concerned about coping with academic pressure, completing their courses, and whether attending university is worth the economic cost (Brown, 2018). The British government has recently encouraged students from diverse backgrounds to attend university, which has its benefits but also increases the financial burden on students. This is especially true given the government's significant funding cuts, which not only intensify academic pressure on students but also leave them with a large amount of debt upon graduation (Macaskill, 2013). Conversations with students from the University of Westminster have highlighted that they are worried about paying off their student debt after completing their degree. Financial pressures are leading to severe mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Cage et al., 2020). Counselling services are consistently available in universities in the UK, unlike in Thailand (Brown, 2018), and students are encouraged to seek help, particularly when their academic performance is affected (Cage et al., 2020). However, with the recent rise in mental health issues, the capacity of one-on-one counselling services is limited, leading many students to feel neglected and isolated (Brown, 2018). Although some people believe that the UK is advanced in its approach to tackling mental health issues, there is still room for

improvement, especially given the current changes to university funding and the large number of students seeking help from overburdened university counsellors.

In Thailand, the transition to adulthood is accompanied by academic stress, whilst possible part-time work, and experience of financial burden are all significant challenges for university students (Dessauvagie et al., 2022). Educational stress is arguably the most prevalent emotional state amongst adolescents with Thai students spending an excess amount of time in classrooms in an effort to achieve excellent academic outcomes (Assana, Laohasiriwong & Rangseekajee, 2017). This is due to Thai parents typically viewing education as a marker for high status and thus encouraging their children to perform exceptionally well (Ratanasiripong & Rodriquez, 2011). This parental pressure alongside existing societal pressure undeniably has a negative mental impact on Thai students which often leads to substance abuse and suicide (Ratanasiripong & Rodriquez, 2011). This research is supported by conversations with Thai students from Kasetsart University who claimed that their mental health was frequently jeopardised with the aggregate academic pressures that they are subjected to. They also expressed issues with being severely underpaid in their part-time jobs meaning that they had to be extremely financially astute to ensure that they did not end up in any debt. Unfortunately, resources for mental health are limited and counselling services are not regularly established at universities (Dessauvagie et al., 2022), which prevents students from seeking support and causes them to internalise their problems. Nonetheless, there has been an active effort in Thailand to educate the public about mental health and reduce stigmas (Mongkol, 2017) but perhaps more importance needs to be placed on the policies regarding mental health in universities specifically.

Conclusion

To conclude, my eventful visit to Bangkok with the University of Westminster was extremely insightful. I soaked up every minute I spent in Thailand, asking questions whenever I could and getting to know the Thai students on a more profound level, and really unravelling the mental health complexities that they deal with. Not only did I learn so much about Thai mental health, but I also revelled in the mental health stories that my peers from the University of Westminster shared with me. It sincerely was a cherished trip that taught me so much, bringing me closer to people that I might have never otherwise spoken to.

When I picked the optional module, "Democratic Engagement in an International Context", I had no idea what it would entail or what I would learn or discover. However, researching and writing this article and evaluating case studies in both Thailand and the UK has been so incredibly valuable to me. It has inspired me and made me feel euphoric for whatever endeavours await me in the coming future.

This trip has inspired me to conduct future research surrounding mental health in other foreign countries too, to implement measures in other nations that work well for us in the UK and also to learn from creative approaches to mental health issues in other countries and see if they can be implemented here in the UK. However, the main concept that I have taken away from this entire experience, is that everyone is going through something; it is always important to be there for people, to listen to them and to let them know that they are not alone.

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7 |

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: LONDON VS THAILAND

Layecha Fidahoussen

Abstract

Effective communication relies on language, which follows specific rules, including grammar, to convey meaning. As individuals mature, developing language skills becomes increasingly essential. Proficient use of language enables individuals to express their thoughts and ideas clearly, fostering positive relationships with others. This article is a comparative analysis of the impact of language acquisition, including culture, education, bilingualism, brain structure, and language disorders in two different cities, London in the United Kingdom and Bangkok in Thailand.

Introduction

The article's inception dates back to my enrolment in the elective course, "Democratic Engagement in an International Context." As a cognitive and clinical neuroscience student, my peers and I opted to present our research on the subject of language in Thailand. While we had some preliminary knowledge from our first year, we aimed to delve deeper into the acquisition of languages

across various cultures and communities worldwide. This course allowed us to undertake a comparative research project, analysing the factors shaping language in two distinct continents, countries, and cities. These two cities possess unique historical characteristics and multicultural communities with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

London is an incredibly diverse and vibrant city, with a population of around 9 million people. It is the largest metropolis in the UK and is considered the country's economic, transportation, and cultural hub. In addition to its rich history, art, and politics, London is also known for its ethnically diverse population. According to the census (Brazzill, 2023), London is home to a total of 287 ethnic groups and nationalities, making it the most diverse region in the UK. Of the residents surveyed, 46.2% identified as Asian, black, mixed, or 'other' ethnic groups, while a further 17.0% identified as white ethnic minorities (Brazzill, 2023). This diversity is reflected in the city's cuisine, music, and fashion, among other things. London is also a linguistically diverse city, with over 300 languages spoken, more than any other city in the world. This is a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage and the many different communities that call it home.

In comparison, Bangkok's current population is estimated at 11.2 million (world Population Review, 2021). Most of the city's population are ethnic Thais which constitute 91.4%, Burmese at 2.6%, and the remaining 6% are Chinese, Cambodian, and Japanese. Although there are sizeable populations of other Asians, North Americans, and Europeans, Chinese make up the majority of the minority 6%. Even if it's a small population, specific ethnic groups often reside in particular regions; for example, Chinese people live in the commercial district of Sam Peng, Indians congregate around mosques in the Wang Bu Rapha neighbourhood, while Western and Japanese people live in the wealthy, modern eastern neighbourhood of the city. The Chinese are the immigrant group that integrates into city life the most easily, and intermarrying is common (Sternstein , n.d.). Their children are citizens of Thailand, and many Chinese families become citizens by adopting Thai surnames.

The national language of Thailand is Thai, spoken by about 53% of the population. Many more speak it as a second language. Lao is spoken by about 27%, and Chinese 12%. Malay is spoken by 4% and Khmer by 3% (Sternstein ,

n.d.). English is widely used in business, as are many of the Chinese dialects. Records were kept in Thai, Lao, Malay, Chinese, and English (Sternstein , n.d.). Furthermore, regarding the ability to read and write in both Thai and other languages, it was found that more than 90 percent of the population aged 15 years and over, in Bangkok can read and write Thai (Sternstein , n.d.).

Our presentation on an exciting topic at the University of Kasetsart and subsequent report writing had a great impact on our understanding. It allowed us to explore ideas and perspectives beyond our chosen fields of study. In this article, I will analyse the impact of language acquisition on culture, education, bilingualism, brain structure, and language disorders in two different cities. I will also discuss our cross-cultural research methodology, the theories underlying language acquisition, and how our field trip to Thailand has furthered our research through learning and collaboration with Thai students and staff.

Assessing Language

Language is a vital part of our lives, as it is the primary means of expression and communication. We use language in our daily interactions, whether speaking, writing, or reading. These essential skills enable us to communicate with one another effectively. By examining how individuals use language, including the words and phrases they select, we can better understand ourselves and the reasons behind our actions. Social beings interact with friends, family, co-workers, and strangers in person or through digital channels. Language is fundamental to human existence. It enables us to express ourselves in the most impactful ways imaginable. While all animals have different means of communication, only humans have developed cognitive language communication.

The importance of language lies in its ability to communicate our ideas, emotions, and feelings. It is a fundamental aspect of human existence and plays a crucial role in our daily lives. Without language, we could not effectively express our thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others. We would not be able to communicate with one another, and our ability to interact and form relationships would be severely limited. So, given that language is fundamental to how humans interact and convey meaning to their actions, our trip to Thailand helped us understand the cultural and social differences within different societies. We discovered that various factors, including culture, environment, and personal experiences, shape

language acquisition. For instance, we learned that Thai has a unique tonal system that differs from other languages, making it challenging for non-native speakers to learn.

The importance of language is rooted in what makes humans so interesting, which is our ability to communicate through speech and articulate sounds by making rules and abiding by them. Putting into perspective that there are 7,100 branches of traditional language, ranging from spoken to signed languages (Anderson, 2009), it's important to consider how different groups of people and communities acquire language. From a broader point of view, humans acquire language mainly through social interactions from an early age making it an important point of development for all human beings (Birner, 2023).

Furthermore, there are biological and environmental influences on the development of speech and language which is why we chose to analyse how different factors influence the acquisition of language in England versus Thailand. Both countries differ greatly in all aspects such as their architecture, religion, political, economic system, education, and much more. What was the most intriguing was the language difference: we know in England, English is mainly spoken and in Thailand, they speak Thai but what is interesting to analyse is how these languages are acquired in both countries considering all the different biological and environmental factors and systems they are influenced by.

Theories Underlying Language Acquisition

Language in psychology refers to a system of communication that uses grammatical structure to give context to an idea (American Psychological Association, 2020). In contrast, language acquisition in psychology is defined as the mechanism by which humans learn to perceive, generate, and manipulate words to communicate (Lemetyinen, 2023). As mentioned previously, humans acquire language from an early age when social, cognitive, and genetic factors work hand in hand to develop their linguistic abilities. According to Rowland and Noble (2010) infants younger than 12 months old exhibit some responsiveness to the collection of words such as causative statements, for instance who did what to whom in certain circumstances.

One of the earliest scientific theories on language was developed by Skinner (1957) who proposed that language is acquired through the concept of imitation, reinforcement, and conditioning in terms of environmental influence. He argued that through mimicking words and speech, children would learn the rules of grammar and additionally by being positively rewarded for correctly manipulating and abiding by the rules. For instance, when a child asks for milk and the mother offers it with a positive response, the child will be satisfied and therefore it will enhance his linguistic abilities (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011).

In response, Noam Chomsky (1965) heavily criticised Skinner's theory since it does not fully explain why humans can learn languages so quickly. Chomsky introduced the nativist theory, arguing that there's a biological basis to learning languages. There are four key points to his theory, the first one being the language acquisition device (LAD) where he postulated that humans are inclined to learn languages because of an innate biological ability. His second point proposed that all humans have a profound structure in the brain that encodes grammatical rules, meaning all humans intuitively comprehend 'universal grammar' (Chomsky, 1965). Thirdly, he argued that children can acquire their native language quickly and reliably indicating underlying innate cognitive structures. Lastly, Chomsky and other linguists suggested that there exists a critical period during development in which language acquisition is more effective because the brain shows more responsiveness to linguistic information. Despite making interesting observations, critics claim that Chomsky's theory is overly innatist and fails to account for other factors involved in language acquisition such as the importance of social interactions (Lemetyinen, 2023).

Other recent scholarly research focus on aspects of both nature and nurture when evaluating the factors of language acquisition. For example, age: comparing the time when people acquire their first and second language allows us to understand underlying factors that impact language acquisition. When learning their first language children are still in their early stages of development therefore they are not afraid of making mistakes and experience little to no anxiety since they are still learning (Marzuki, 2018). This contrasts with the acquisition of a second language when people are often more mature and are more self-conscious when learning. Studies also show that children learn their first language more naturally and in informal settings like at home with their family. Parents don't give them set instructions to rely upon but it's more interactive while adults at a later stage

may be more conscious of the rules and have set goals. Second language acquisition also occurs mostly in an educational setting meaning the person is required to receive clear instructions and rules. Additionally, many people acquire more than one language since birth so for such bilingual speakers, they may acquire a third language at a later stage in life. This shows that situational differences also make an impact on language acquisition (Marzuki, 2018).

Language acquisition also varies when it comes to location. Cross-cultural research was conducted to assess language acquisition in London versus Thailand. Both countries differ greatly and are at a great distance from each other. When conducting my research five factors were considered when determining what influences language acquisition in both countries. The factors include cultural, educational, bilingualism, structure of the brain, and language disorders.

Both environmental and biological aspects were analysed to examine how all of them work hand in hand for humans to develop their linguistic skills in different settings. When examining the cultural factors that influence language acquisition both cultures rely greatly on social interactions whether it's in person or online. In educational settings, London uses more of a natural approach to learning English since it's its local language, whereas in Thailand learning a seocnd language in an educational setting is more structured and stricter in learning the rules. They also apply the mimicking and repetition theory when writing notes. Additionally, in recent years they have established a new approach to teaching languages by having a two-hour conversation class to enhance their communication skills to be more natural. Learning a second language is very common in England. The second language might be another language than English whereas in Thailand the second language might be English since Thai people learn their native tongue at home and other languages are brought up at school or later on in their life based on their personal goals.

Acquiring a second language in both countries is mostly due to job prospects and personal goals and is typically acquired later in life or in educational settings where exams such as GCSE test learning through instruction.

Literature research was also conducted in relation to neuroscience to support the biological part of the language acquisition when completing our presentation at Kasetsart University. It was found that specific parts of the brain such as

Wernicke's area, Broca's area, and the angular gyrus are distinctly responsible for linguistic purposes. In the research process parts of the brain were analysed as well as the variance of language disorders that exist in both Thailand and England including how they are diagnosed and the challenges they pose. This biological aspect helped us comprehend how innate structures help us acquire language and its existing limitations. Through this field trip, I learned that there is not just one true answer to acquiring language since we all come from different parts of the world, and we learn a lot more similarly than we may at first think but how we learn will be affected by our educational experience and by interacting with one another and with the outside world, for example, through use of social media. Moreover, through the study of Chomsky and Skinner's theories, I was able to differentiate how humans from different parts of the world acquire language both innately and via their environment through education, cultural, and social factors.

My Experience in the UK and Thailand

During my travels to Thailand, I was amazed by the diverse linguistic landscape of the local Thai community. As I interacted with various individuals, I became increasingly fascinated by the different languages and dialects they spoke. I realised that most of the people I met had not learnt English as their first language, which sparked my curiosity about how they learned new languages through their environment especially after examining the different theories on language acquisition. Through my conversations, I discovered that many people learn a second language, such as English, for a multitude of reasons such as education, employment, or travel. This was also the case for many Thai locals with whom I spoke. I learned that in major tourist hubs like Bangkok, many residents have become proficient in English to cater to the increasing number of tourists. However, I also discovered that learning Thai can be challenging although the Thai people always seem eager to assist visitors in learning simple Thai phrases, enabling them to communicate more effectively and enhancing their foreign linguistic abilities. Moreover, I observed that technology is widely used in Thailand, making communication across cultures easier: if some locals aren't fluent in English, they may use Google Translate or other such Apps to express their thoughts. This highlights the significance of technology in facilitating communication across cultures and languages.

In London, I noticed that individuals from various parts of the world treasure their culture and pass it down to future generations. Many of them already speak languages other than English and acquire English either through schooling or daily interactions. I was impressed by how the ability to speak diverse languages teaches us to be adaptable and receptive to new concepts and cultures. It allows us to recognise the similarities and differences between our culture and others, enabling us to engage with fresh ideas and perspectives.

My experiences in Thailand and London have taught me the value of language learning in bridging cultural differences and fostering a deeper understanding of the world around us. Learning a new language can enrich our lives, expand our horizons, and enhance our ability to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Conclusion

The acquisition of language is a complex process that requires collaboration between linguists and psychologists. During our study, we collaborated with Thai students both online and in Bangkok, which provided us with a unique opportunity to conduct fieldwork. Our interactions with these students allowed us to learn about their culture and exchange knowledge about our own. We made a conscious effort to learn simple Thai phrases that were essential to our research, which helped us to better communicate with the locals. Our research delved into investigating the various factors that influence language learning across different cultures. By conducting cross-cultural research, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of language acquisition and its intricacies. Working closely with the Thai students also allowed us to develop a deeper appreciation for our similarities and differences. We collaborated on developing presentations that highlighted the nuances of our respective languages and cultures. This collaboration taught us empathy and to consider different perspectives, which was a valuable experience.

Our travel to Thailand gave us a new perspective on language learning. We realised the significance of language and how it can be a barrier in our increasingly globalised world. The experience provided us with a unique opportunity to immerse ourselves in a different culture and learn about the various factors that

influence language acquisition. We learned that language is not only a tool of communication but also a reflection of our culture.

Our research has provided us with valuable insights into the complexity of language acquisition and how it is influenced by culture, social norms, and individual differences. By collaborating with students from different cultures, we have learned to appreciate and respect cultural diversity. This is a crucial skill in our diverse and interconnected world.

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8 |

THE NATURE VERSUS NURTURE DEBATE: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Kaneezah Begum

Abstract

In this article, I examine the crucial role of language in connecting individuals while assessing the various factors that impact language acquisition. I explore the intriguing nature vs. nurture debate, questioning whether language evolved from our ancestors, shaping our brains, or if our environment plays a more significant role in language acquisition. Through interactive workshops in London, hybrid learning with our esteemed partner university, Kasetsart in Bangkok, and a thrilling field trip to Thailand, this article delves into how cultural, educational, historical, and socioeconomic factors influence how language is acquired, processed, and learned. Its emphasis is on cultivating a global outlook and navigating cultural differences. By fostering mutual understanding, individuals can promote respect and innovation in current systems to enhance society and research.

Introduction

L anguage is the way people communicate with one another, and every country speaks languages that have their own unique cultural and historical backgrounds. It connects people within their own culture and globally, promoting mutual understanding and intercultural relations while navigating cultural differences. The neuroscience of language acquisition suggests that babies must reach a few milestones, such as cooing, babbling, and recognising voices through facial expressions, to acquire language skills (NIDCD, 2015). William O'Grady's book on language learning suggests that toddlers begin with single-word speech and eventually progress to the ability to construct words and form sentences. However, the question remains, is language acquired biologically or more through external influences? The evolutionary and biological perspective of language acquisition explains how language has been established, processed, learned, and used. However, different countries have factors that affect the learning and development of language. This raises questions about how language is acquired in London and Thailand, despite our biology, the natural aspect. Two colleagues and I delved into the debate of whether language is more natural or nurture-influenced by our environment. We presented our research and conducted a mini-activity on co-activation in Thailand, where we displayed some colours on the screen and asked Thai and London students what colour they saw on the board. We found that for the colour 'pink,' most London students stated 'hot pink' or 'Barbie pink,' whereas most international and Thai students perceived the colour as 'magenta.' We discussed language disorders and the support and diagnosis process in Thailand and London regarding Aphasia, a form of brain damage that disrupts language acquisition. We also discussed grey matter density in bilingualism and found more blood flow in areas related to processing language.

My key areas of interest were the research on how nurture factors, such as education, socioeconomic status, and community, account for how language is acquired in London and internationally in Thailand. Therefore, this article aims to introduce the anatomy of the brain in terms of language and the nurture debate, including cultural, historical, and socioeconomic factors that may influence language acquisition. I will also look at the evolutionary perspective of language with evidence from archaeology and look at scholars' views and theories explaining whether language is acquired innately or socially. It was intriguing to merge the science of language in a multicultural setting and learn about one

another's ways of life through a field trip to Thailand and a combination of hybrid learning with our partner Thai University, Kasetsart. Both field trips and modules highlighted how society needs to innovate to benefit everyone. It needs to undergo "deschooling" to avoid dependency on standardised schooling to essentially 'prepare us' for the real world; hence, the field trip emphasised the importance of working co-creatively, exchanging knowledge and learning from different perspectives, and putting concepts into practice.

Language Acquisition

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) studies have revealed that our brains are wired with three regions that are responsible for language acquisition (Binder et al., 1997). Language acquisition is the process of how we learn to understand and speak a language. It is a mental process through which we acquire the ability to communicate in a man-made language. Cerebral lateralisation refers to the different functions of the right and left hemispheres of our brain. The two halves control opposite sides of our body, and each hemisphere plays a critical role in guiding us as we develop to speak and understand grammar and pronunciation (Groen et al., 2012).

The evolutionary perspective of language is fascinating. The "tool use" theory suggests that humans evolved to favour using their right hand, resulting in more humans having right-hand dominance over actions (Greenfield 1991). Archaeological evidence from the Helen Beare Museum in Australia confirms that humans started making tools millions of years ago out of stones, and from the technique used to make the tools, we can determine which dominant hand they were made for (Uomini, 2009). The left hemisphere controls the preference for right-hand use.

Language originated from the left hemisphere specialisation centuries ago for routine communication in both vocal and non-vocal language acquisition. Initially, tool-making started as non-vocal gestures for survival, such as opening nuts, and our left hemisphere evolved to communicate vocally. The gestural language theory explains how humans evolved from gesture (non-vocal) to speech (Armstrong et al., 1995). As our ancestors began making tools, they preferred using their right hand (controlled by the left hemisphere), and eventually, non-

vocal gestures transitioned into vocal communication through sounds, squeals, and, ultimately, language.

The evolutionary perspective explains how our brains have evolved to process language, in which three main areas of the brain control and help us mentally process input and output language. There are three main areas of the brain that control and help us mentally process input and output language. The Broca's area is responsible for speech, and impairments in this can result in a lack of articulated speech or language disorders. The Wernicke area helps us to comprehend and disintegrate the language so that we can understand it. Lastly, the angular area connects our senses to know what we speak/hear. But constructivists argue the nurture approach (interactions) influences our language acquisition more, and there is limited evidence from tool making and nature in which the next section will look at theories relating to language acquisition.

Social constructivists argue that language is learned through environmental factors such as culture and history. Vygotsky's 1962 theory of the Zone of Proximal Development suggests that "shared language" and cooperation are crucial for the language learning process. However, there are different "zones" that explain how likely a person is to develop in their language depending on the circumstances. For example, children are more prone to developing language if they play games with others (egocentric speech), but they would speak less if they weren't playing. Therefore, similarities shape language, but this heavily relies on social interactions for reassurance and guidance.

This relates to our field trip and standardised schooling where both Thai and English students learned so much more through shared learning and bonding through similarities to enhance their language. For example, both types of students visited Ayutthaya in Thailand and I found that through both being interested in the temples, culture, and history, people were more mindful of each other. The Thai students encouraged English students to get more involved, which enhanced learning. The English students engaged in wanting to learn about Thai manners and language, which they wouldn't have been as enthusiastic about if they were just sitting in a classroom being taught through standardised schooling methods.

However, the nativist approach by Noam Chomsky (1965) argues that language is far too complex to be shaped through interactions. Instead, language is "hard-wired" into our brains from birth, so toddlers have this innate ability to learn a language despite not receiving any institutional care yet. Chomsky suggested the brain must have evolved to support children in learning languages, and we have a tool in our brain, the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which innately gives us the ability to learn languages. The LAD carries universally applicable linguistic and grammar knowledge that helps humans understand and comprehend language.

However, Chomsky's theory has been widely criticised as he needed to consider how interactions or other factors are essential in language acquisition, which our field trip emphasised. Different cultures have factors that may influence how language is acquired, with some factors having more significant or less influence on how a language is processed or developed.

Thailand vs England

Although neuroscience suggests that specific brain regions aid in the understanding and appropriate use of language about the innate (nature) approach, experiences - the subject of the nurture debate - are crucial to language acquisition, so the context of each country was something to discuss during our presentation. Thai students in Thailand speak excellent English, highlighting the value placed on the English language. This highlighted Chomsky's nativist approach of there being a universal language learning device in our brain where different cultures can learn the same depth of a language even if you are not exposed to the language as much.

Research into Thailand's education system and history suggested language is taught more passively in Thailand, so there is a stricter education system compared to England, where there is a more communicative approach to language learning. The evidence of students from Srinakharinwirot University implied passive learning does not threaten the hierarchal position of teachers like active learning does (Young, 2021). According to the Thai students, their curriculum prioritizes passive learning over active learning. They stated that interactive learning may challenge the formal hierarchy present in their education system. Interestingly, this is not the case in England, where the hierarchy does

not seem to impact language learning. This sheds light on why Thai students often possess excellent English skills? The following section will delve deeper into this comparison.

In Thailand, English language learning was restricted to the higher court until the 1920s because of a hierarchal system derived from the Khmer ancient civilisation. Following the conclusion of World War II, there was a significant rise in the popularity of learning the English language in Thailand. This increase in demand for English language education was driven by a variety of factors, including the need for improved communication with Western nations and an increasing interest in international business and trade. As a result, many schools and institutions were established to provide English language instruction to Thai students of all ages and backgrounds. Today, the ability to speak and understand English is widely regarded as a valuable skill in Thailand, with many individuals actively seeking out opportunities to improve their language proficiency through formal education, language exchange programs, and online learning resources.

Currently, In Thailand, students participate in English learning camps where they engage in two hours of conversational learning per week (Prasongporn, n.d). I wanted to research deeper into the historical context; however, the information online was limited. However, I was encouraged to improve my research skills and foster international collaborations, as a Thai student helped me develop my research. I found that regular Thai citizens will use the word "thi yu" for the word 'cubicle', but monks will use the word "kuti." There are specific words tailored to the royalty, such as "sa-woei", meaning 'to eat', whereas regular Thai citizens will use the word "kinn." This shows how different words used by different classes influence a Thai person's language acquisition.

My research revealed that culture significantly influences language acquisition in East Asian countries like Thailand, where people are more collectivist and use social media platforms like WeChat and Facebook. Higher networking opportunities like Facetime calling are preferred over audio calls (Kitkhachonkunlaphat & Vorvoreanu, 2015). Many Thais prefer sitting down together on the floor, sharing dishes and acts of service as I experience during the field trip when I visited a Thai student's house, and everyone sat on the floor and ate together. They were also very friendly and welcoming. In contrast, in London, society is more individualistic, as individuals focus on personal goals and prefer

using online language learning apps and personal interactions, where Twitter and blog posting are preferred (Leonard et al, 2009). Londoners are more reserved towards tourists, whereas, in Thailand, everyone is amiable. However, in London, exposure to different cultures increases awareness of perspectives.

The vast array of cultures existing in our society brings with it numerous benefits, one of which is the increased exposure to language learning opportunities. According to Vygotsky's, shared learning experiences are essential in the development of language competence. As such, exposure to different cultures and languages can help enhance an individual's language skills. This is because when individuals interact with people who speak other languages, they are exposed to a diverse range of communication styles, which can improve their understanding of language structures and nuances. Additionally, being exposed to different cultures can help individuals acquire new perspectives and insights into different languages, which can ultimately improve their overall language proficiency.

As a Londoner, I support this research because Londoners tend to be more reserved, even towards tourists; however, because of the vast exposure to different cultures, people are more aware of different perspectives. Thus, cultural and societal factors can influence language acquisition because, in collectivist cultures like Thailand, there is a greater emphasis on communication, leading to language fluency due to social interaction. In cultures like London, which are more individualistic, people focus on acquiring a language independently, but perhaps because of the broad access to resources and cultural diversity, it is easier.

Socioeconomic factors play a role in language acquisition, too. While speaking to the Thai students about income, they implied it was easier to not work as a student because you would only make an equivalence of £5 a day. This was shocking, as we earn their day's salary in London in just half an hour. This was demonstrated by a fully funded field trip to Thailand, which included 17 London students instead of the 5 Thai students visiting us in May.

Access to resources and educational opportunities is vital for people from diverse cultures to share their languages, which in turn fosters cultural cooperation. During a recent field trip, it became evident that promoting international cooperation is crucial because social interactions aid in developing language skills, as suggested by Vygotsky (1962). By actively participating in activities, both

English and Thai students were able to communicate better and enhance their language learning. This is particularly important as Thailand has previously received a "very low" rating for language learning (Young, 2021).

The education systems in London and Thailand differ in terms of how language is acquired. In London, language learning is not emphasized, and there needs to be a set curriculum to acquire it. Instead, language is learned through active learning, which involves group work and speaking. Phonics, which is how letters sound and are pronounced, is emphasized. However, with an increasing emphasis on learning a language at GCSE level, a more immersive approach is now being adopted, with school trips abroad promoted to immerse students in the culture and actively learn the language.

In Thailand, there is a greater focus on grammar, and passive learning is emphasized. An article by Kasetsart University emphasizes structured learning to learn the rules of the Thai language, with the use of 'cognitive strategies' and much repetition. However, there has been a move towards a more conversational approach to language acquisition in recent years. For instance, in most schools, students engage in 2-hour casual weekly discussions to enhance their language acquisition.

Conclusion

During my cross-cultural research with Thai students, I was able to expand my language acquisition project beyond the limited scope of my usual education system. This involved spending countless hours researching articles and relying solely on strict guidelines and manuals that my degree required for accreditation within Britain. The research project encouraged me to undertake cross-cultural research, where I found depths of information that even Google, a multi-disciplinary network, needed help finding. I discovered that, in contrast to England, culture has a more significant influence on language acquisition in Thailand. While in England, greater access to resources allows for more language learning opportunities. Overall, the nurture debate outweighed the nature debate, which implies that environmental factors influence language acquisition more in both countries. Working with students from neuroscience and different educational backgrounds exposed me to different ideas and highlighted the significance of cross-collaborating and broadening our global understanding of

language learning and human communication. Further research can be conducted on how socio-economic factors such as the cost and wait times of healthcare have affected language learning and acquisition, as well as how new technology has affected language acquisition in different countries. Additionally, future research could look into how accents make language learning more or less difficult by studying how the pronunciation of letters and accents can affect language acquisition.

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PART **III**

AREA STUDIES

9 |

"ASIA IS ONE": UNDERSTANDING THE RISE AND FALL OF PAN-ASIANISM

Devika Nambiar

Abstract

As Asian societies succumbed to Western dominance during the early twentieth century, a group of Japanese thinkers and nationalists were prompted to reinstall Asian control and values in the region through a socio-political ideology known as Pan-Asianism. Pan-Asianism emerged as a promising macro-nationalist ideology calling for Asian solidarity to confront and end Western imperialism. Throughout its fifty-year run, the ideology went from being a cause for Asian unity and harmony to being a political tool for legitimising Japan's territorial expansion and military aggression in East Asia. This article will explore and examine the development and execution of Japanese Pan-Asian ideology. Through a review of its historical context and an analysis of its structural limitations, the article will offer a broader understanding of the rise and fall of this influential yet relatively overlooked ideology in Asian history.

Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a tide of national and anti-imperial movements emerging across Asia[1]. Amid this transformational climate, Japanese art historian Okakura Tenshin famously penned the phrase "Asia is one." The following decades saw the rise of a macro-nationalist ideology known as Pan-Asianism. Almost an extension of Okakura's words, the ideology highlighted the shared history and cultural similarities of Asian peoples, and called for Asian solidarity to resist and end Western imperialism. Over the course of its fifty-year run, Pan-Asianism went from being a cause for cultural exchange and unity to a political ideology cushioning Japan's military aggression in East Asia. This article will examine the development of this powerful yet short-lived ideology and attempt to understand the reasons for its failure. It will begin with an overview of European imperialism in Asia to explain the political conditions that fostered Pan-Asianism. A detailed account of Pan-Asian will follow this thought and its development in the cultural and political realms. The final section of the article will summarise the hostile reception of Pan-Asianism and outline the structural limitations of the ideology that prevented its triumph. Overall, the article will demonstrate that while Pan-Asianism came to a decisive end because of its synonymity with Japanese imperialism, the innate structural flaws of the ideology also contributed to its fall.

European Expansion in Asia

Asia's experience of European expansion began in the guise of trade relations. In 1498, Portuguese explorers discovered an all-sea route linking Europe to Asia when they sailed along the Cape of Good Hope to arrive at the southwest coast of India. From there on, the explorers encountered the long-standing and intricate network of Indian Ocean trade, through which they gained access to the ports of Southeast and East Asia (Prakash, 1997). While the Portuguese were able to maintain a monopoly initially, the majority of Euro-Asian commerce and trading routes were taken over by Dutch, English and other European trading companies over the course of the seventeenth century.

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[1] Abiding by the limits and focus of this article, Asia will comprise of East, South and Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Pan-Asianism was relevant to the history and politics of both Central and West Asia as well.

The European maritime contact with Asia saw a dramatic shift in the trade relations between both continents. However, the political and power relations between both underwent a transformation only after Europe's Industrial Revolution. The development of the telegraph, along with the technological advancements in the production of firearms, steamships, and steam engines, granted Europe a technical and military advantage over Asia. This led to Europe's merciless expansion into Asia and the colonisation of the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. As explained by Wesseling (2015), "(t)he Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century provided the basis for a new power structure in Asia… the European governments themselves became interested in exercising colonial authority. The days of mercantilism and monopolies were over" (unpaginated).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, most of Asia succumbed to European expansionism at varied intensities. After the Rebellion of 1857, the Indian subcontinent came under direct rule of the British Empire. A similar fate was inescapable for the majority of Southeast Asia, where the Indonesian archipelago fell under Dutch rule, Burma was consolidated into British India, and the current states of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were colonised by France, creating the French Indochina Union.

The threat of European conquests and socio-economic disruption encouraged China and Japan to close their mainland to European trade as early as the sixteenth century (McNeill, 2009: 566). The minimal and regulated trade that happened directly between Europe and East Asia occurred through isolated enclaves outside of China and Japan – namely, Macau in China and the Nagasaki harbour in Japan (Porter, 1993; Totman, 2007). However, this relative isolation from European trade could not outlive Europe's expansionist missions in the post-Industrial Revolution era. After the Anglo-Chinese conflicts between 1839 and 1860, known as the Opium Wars, China was forced "to engage in commercial and diplomatic intercourse according to western rules" (Bard, 2000: 1). Similarly, Japan was provoked to "open" its borders as a result of the looming threat of an attack after the first Opium War (Jansen, 1991: 191). When American Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan in 1853, he presented the choice of "a treaty of 'peace and amity' – or naval bombardment of the Tokugawa capital city of Edo" (Totman, 2007: 39). This was followed by Japan's official entry into commercial and diplomatic exchanges with the West on

Western terms, leading to the Meiji Restoration and vigorous modernisation of the nation.

The Essence and Evolution of Pan-Asianism: Reclaiming Asia

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the aggressive and unchallenged rise of the West[2] in Asia. As summarised by Mitter "India was colonised, China's resistance crushed and, finally, Japan's isolation shattered" (2020: 149). Although Asian societies escaped total colonisation and a fate similar to that of the Americas, by the turn of the century, almost the entirety of the continent operated according to the terms and needs of the West. Moreover, Europe's self-bestowed "civilizing mission" made sure that modern Western values and systems replaced traditional Asian ones (Osterhammel, 2006: 8).

This unyielding dominance of so-called Western civilisation led to the emergence of a regional ideology known as 'Pan-Asianism.' Developed in late-nineteenth century Japan, Pan-Asianism was a macro-nationalist ideology that rallied for Asian solidarity in the face of Western imperialism. The ideology highlighted the inherent spiritual quality of Asian cultures and the shared histories of the continent's inhabitants to inspire the creation of an 'Asian' identity (Saaler & Szpilman, 2011). One of the foremost thinkers of Pan-Asian thought, Japanese art historian Okakura Tenshin writes in his influential book *The Ideals of the East*,

> *"Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life." (1903: 1)*

Pan-Asianism relied on the assumed similarity of communities within Asia. However, it is important to note that the idea of "Asia" came into use in the region only as late as the nineteenth century. Saaler and Szpilman explain that

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[2] Europe and the United States

the term "Asia" was introduced to East Asian mapmakers by Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century (2011: 1). However, "it was only with the resumption of European colonialist expansion in the nineteenth century that "Asia" ceased to be a technical term used by East Asian cartographers and … came to represent a specific geopolitical space bound together by such commonalities as a shared history, close cultural links, a long record of diplomatic relations, trade exchanges, and the notion of a "common destiny"" (ibid., pp. 1-2). This notion of "Asia" presented Japanese Pan-Asian thinkers with the possibility of an alternate civilisation to that of Europe (Duara, 2001: 109). And, despite its novelty, this "Asian" civilisation, if strengthened and unified, would be the solution to the "Western threat" (Saaler & Szpilman, 2011: 1).

Initially, Pan-Asian ideology did not arrive as a concrete policy or agenda. Rather, vague Pan-Asian sentiments were dispersed through versatile mediums such as "in the writings of intellectuals, political statements, popular slogans, and even in songs and poems" (Saaler & Szpilman, 2011: 2). It was only in 1903, when Okakura Tenshin published his book mentioned earlier, that the idea of Pan-Asianism formally entered global political discourse. Okakura endorsed the idea of a Pan-Asiatic alliance to challenge Western imperialism. He called for the revival of the "immanent" spiritual and cultural qualities of Asia established in the Vedas, Confucianism, and Buddhism. As noted by Duara, "(Okakura) was aware of differences between Asian "civilizations," but he believed that they all differed from Western Civilization in principle – in their promotion of peace and beauty" He encouraged Asian societies to connect over this similarity and to "produce an alternative to the aggressive and dominating Civilization of the West." (2001: 110).

Okakura's contribution to Pan-Asianism also materialised through this involvement in artistic revivalism in both India and Japan. By the early twentieth century, European imperialism dominated the realm of arts and culture in Asia, where traditional Asian artistic practices were replaced by European-style academic painting and aesthetics. This impelled a group of Pan-Asian artists and intellectuals – led by Okakura and Indian painter Abanindranath Tagore – to embark on a mission to protect and continue the native artistic traditions of Asia. As Mitter explains, "the aim of the Pan-Asian movement was to create an alternative mode of artistic expression that would pose a challenge to the western colonial aesthetics" (2020: 151).

The artistic creations of the Pan-Asian movement not only aimed to restore centuries-old practices, but they also fostered a unique merging of Indian and Japanese art. While Okakura was inspired by the 5th century Buddhist art of India's Ajanta caves, Tagore employed Japanese wash painting techniques to depict scenes of Indian mythology. This fascinating cultural exchange not only led to the creation of an Indo-Japanese artistic tradition named 'oriental art,' but it also nurtured two uniquely revivalist art movements: Nihon-ga in Japan, and the Bengal School in India (Mitter, 2020: 153).

Although the scope of cultural amalgamation through Pan-Asianism was powerful and endless, it would not be the sole or primary application of the ideology. Duara notes that Japanese Pan-Asianism contained two narratives: "the solidarity-oriented, non-dominating conception of Japan's role in reviving Asia," and "the conception of Japan as … the harmonizing or synthesizing leader" (2001: 110). The latter gained prominence after Japan's expansionist missions in the early twentieth century. After the Sino-Japanese war over Korea in 1895, Japan had established itself as the regional leader. However, its victory over Russian forces during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 presented Japan as the Asian leader who was also capable of combatting Western imperialism. As articulated by Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, "the triumph of the Japanese over a European opponent crushed not only the widely held belief of the natural superiority of the white "race"; it also demonstrated to Asia the formidable achievements in the modernization by Meiji Japan" (2012: 69-70).

The victory gave rise to the notion that only Japan was capable of "rescuing Asia and harmonizing East and West civilizations" (Duara, 2001: 110). In fact, as explained by Duara, the idea was that

> "(b)ecause it "belonged" to Asia, the Japanese nation could bring modernity the timeless sacrality of Asia, and because it had mastered Western Civilization, it could bring material modernity to Asia" (ibid.). Hereafter, Japan assumed the title of Asia's guardian who would liberate the remainder of Asia – particularly East and Southeast Asia – from the rule of the West and "bring them into the modern era without destroying their traditions" (2001: 110).

Keeping with this narrative, the following decades saw Japan's relentless expansion into East Asia, paving the way for Japanese imperialism. By 1942, the Japanese empire established control over the majority of the region – ranging from Manchuria and the Korean peninsula to Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Although Pan-Asian thought was not directly credited to instigating Japan's imperialist missions, the ideology was used to validate the colonial practices and exploits of the period. As Saaler and Szpilman elaborate, "(a)s early as 1910, pan-Asian rhetoric was used by the Japanese government to legitimize the annexation of Korea. The Annexation Treaty referred specifically to commonalities between Japanese and Koreans, such as racial origins, a common history and culture, and a shared destiny … The same pan-Asian rhetoric was continuously reaffirmed and applied to other colonial territories" (2011:7).

Japan's transition into an Asian colonial power soon led to the waning of Pan-Asian sentiments and solidarity in the rest of Asia, particularly in India, Korea, and China (Stolte & Fischer-Tiné, 2012: 71; Saaler & Szpilman, 2011: 16). However, at home in Japan, Pan-Asianism gathered even more attention among officials and leaders over the course of the Pacific War – i.e., the final years of Japanese colonialism. As Japan's military losses became worse by the day, the idea of Asian solidarity and brotherhood was amplified to foster support from East Asian societies (Saaler & Szpilman, 2011: 20). To quote one of Japan's leading philosophers of the time, Nishida Kitarō: "The Great East Asian War is a sacred war, because it is the culmination of the historical progress of Asia … The task of the liberated peoples is now to win the war and establish the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere … Japan's victory will save Asia and will offer a new hope for mankind." (Saaler & Szpilman, 2011: 21)

After almost half a century of relevance and promise, Japanese Pan-Asian thought came to an abrupt decline, if not disappearance, after the end of the Pacific War in 1945. Japan's surrender and humiliating defeat to Western forces, as well as the creation of a bipolar world order during the Cold War era, ensured there was no scope for a Pan-Asian direction.

The Fall of Pan-Asianism: What Went Wrong?

During its almost fifty-year run, Pan-Asianism remained relevant and important to Japanese society in both subtle and strong ways. From offering the romantic

idea of an 'Asian' civilisation to encouraging cultural exchanges with India, to legitimising Japan's colonial ambitions, the narrative of 'Asian unity' worked alongside the operations of the Japanese empire. However, the ideology did not flourish as much in other parts of Asia from its very beginning.

To elaborate, Korea had developed suspicions of Pan-Asianism and a Japanese annexation since the nineteenth century. After it became a Japanese colony in the early-twentieth century, Korean leaders "advocated resistance and "self-strengthening"" instead of the unified approach endorsed by Pan-Asianism (Saaler & Szpilman, 2011:16). Similarly, China rejected Pan-Asianism early on in the twentieth century. Understandably, its defeat during the Sino-Japanese did not create the ideal sentiments for agreeing to a Japan-led model of Asia. The resistance from Southeast Asia came much later than Korea and China. Saaler and Szpilman explains, "unlike in Korea and China, the Japanese were not perceived as a threat to a region dominated by Western powers" (2011: 18). Thus, it was only after Japan's occupation and exploitation of the region during the late 1930s and early 40s, that the Southeast Asian population "called into question the sincerity of pan-Asian rhetoric" (2011:18).

As mentioned earlier, India was largely accepting of the idea of Asian unity. However, it is important to note that the influence of the specific brand of Japanese Pan-Asianism in India, although positive and beneficial to both cultures, was minimal in comparison to the other ideologies and movements that circulated in India. In fact, its influence was almost entirely limited to the cultural realm. Also, much like the rest of Asia, "Japan's ascent to intra-Asian colonial power soon dampened pan-Asianist aspirations in India" (Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, 2012: 71).

These largely negative responses towards Pan-Asianism demonstrate that, although it was forced to end in 1945, Japan's idea of Asian unity was deficient and problematic from its very launch. In other words, Korea and China's rejection, Southeast Asia's suspicion, and India's insubstantial adoption of Pan-Asianism show that the idea survived its course solely because of East Asia's reluctant adherence to Japan's aggressive efforts. This inspires an analysis of the strength of Pan-Asian ideology on the structural front – i.e., its foundations and beliefs. The following section will outline and explain three main structural faults or limitations of Pan-Asianism that contributed to its ultimate decline.

The first limitation of Pan-Asianism is the ambiguity of its definition. Pan-Asianism did not emerge with a fully-fledged ideological framework. Rather, it arrived as a vague sentiment calling for Asian solidarity in the face of Western imperialism. The lack of definite structure and virtues during its early stage made sure that the ideology was at risk of being misused or appropriated in the future. Predictably, the majority of Pan-Asianism's short life saw exactly that. Pan-Asianism was used to justify the violence, exploitation, and ruins of Japan's ruthless expansion in East Asia and operations during the Pacific War. Saaler and Szpilman explain that although there was no official conversion of Pan-Asianism into foreign policy during Japanese colonialism, "it is undeniable that the Japanese government frequently utilized pan-Asian rhetoric in the 1930s and 1940s in order to bolster claims to Japanese leadership in East Asia and legitimize its colonial rule over parts of Asia" (2011: 7). For instance, although Okakura was not supportive of Japan's imperialism, his Pan-Asian writings – especially the quote "Asia is one" – was notoriously repurposed by the Japanese military as political propaganda during the 1930s and 40s (Duara, 2001: 110; Shigemi & Singleton, 2012, 39-40).

The second limitation of Pan-Asianism is its reliance on an Orientalist worldview. Asia has been the seat to a great many diverse yet thoroughly connected human societies and empires for centuries. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the notion of 'Asia' as a unit came about in the region only when faced with Western imperialism in the nineteenth century. Hence, the construction of a Pan-Asian identity involved defining 'Asia' in relation to the West (Aydın, 2006: 212). This led to the ideology's reliance on Orientalism to differentiate Asia and the West – with Asia serving as the spiritual counterpart of the material West. As Mitter explains, "the myth of 'One Asia,' propounded by Pan-Asianism was based in part on western stereotypes of the Orient … The Pan-Asian doctrine rested on the binary relationship between masculine/materialist Europe and feminine/spiritual Asia" (2020: 150). This phenomenon, dubbed as "self-orientalization" by Stolte and Fischer-Tiné (2012: 69), does not do justice to the actual potential for unity within Asia. It reduces Asia's identity, history and worth to merely an antithesis to 'The West.'

The third limitation of Pan-Asianism is its imitation of Europe's 'civilising mission.' The driving force behind Pan-Asianism was the need to liberate Asia from the clutches of Western powers. However, that did not imply that Pan-

Asianists were against European-style modernism or progress. In fact, having originated in the thoroughly modernised Meiji Japan, most Pan-Asian thinkers endorsed the European-style development of Asia – but without the pain of Western imperialism. As put by Aydın, "they believed in the necessity of westernizing reforms, almost in terms of a self-civilizing discourse, to uplift Asia… from their backward condition" (2006: 205). Thus, Pan-Asianism called for a transfer of "civilising" duties from the West to the Asian leader, Japan. Saaler and Szpilman elaborate, "as early as the late 1910s, some writers, such as Kanokogi Kazunobu, Kita Ikki, and Ōkawa Shūmei, spoke of a divine Japanese "mission" to liberate Asia. This high-sounding objective was often difficult to distinguish from the substitution of one form of colonial oppression (by Europeans) for another (by fellow Asian Japanese)" (2011: 8). Moreover, the destructive and forceful colonial practices and agenda of Imperial Japan were not far off from those of the West. Aydın makes the interesting observation that "(w)hile claiming to overturn modernity and to end European colonialism in Asia, the Japanese Empire in fact embodied a most radical experiment in modernization" (2006: 221).

Conclusion

Pan-Asianism arrived when Asian societies were left powerless and fragmented by European imperialism. While a united effort to liberate Asia from European domination could have been ideal in these circumstances, the reality of Pan-Asian operations was far from it. This article has attempted to provide a broader understanding of Pan-Asianism and its failure by summarising its historical context, explaining its rationale and application in the real world, and, finally, analysing its limitations on the structural front. It has demonstrated that the obvious downfall of Pan-Asianism, which ultimately led to its decline, was its use as a legitimising tool for Japanese imperialism and military operations. However, the article has also shown that the mounting negative or insubstantial responses against Pan-Asian thought from the outset show that the ideology contained several structural faults – specifically, the ambiguity of its definition, its reliance on an Orientalist worldview, and its imitation of Europe's 'civilising mission.' The article has proved that even though Pan-Asianism ultimately ended due to Japan's defeat during the Pacific Wars, its ideology was built on faulty foundations that would have prevented its success or continuity either way.

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10 |

EGYPT:
NEOLIBERALISM, POVERTY, AND THE
INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

Momina Nehmat

Abstract

Since 2016, Egypt has followed the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) policy by receiving financial assistance to manage a driven economy. They signed a $12 billion loan agreement to address macroeconomic stability and promote inclusive growth. The Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program sought to address external imbalances, reduce the budget deficit and public debt, spur economic growth, and protect vulnerable populations. While some positive economic developments have been observed, the IMF's policies have not entirely alleviated poverty and youth unemployment in Egypt. This article attempts to answer these questions by examining a brief history of the IMF and its relations with Egypt. The article will answer these questions by examining the role of neoliberal policy implemented by the state and guided by the IMF.

Introduction

Egypt has been facing economic, social, and political challenges since 2000 including high youth unemployment rates, poverty, and corruption. In 2016 Egypt signed a $12bn loan agreement with the IMF under its EFF mechanism to implement economic and structural reforms. This helps restore macroeconomic stability and promote inclusive growth. IMF policies aim to correct external imbalances, restore competitiveness, reduce the budget deficit and public debt, boost growth and job creation, and protect vulnerable groups (IMF, 2023). The IMF was created to promote global economic growth and stability by providing financial assistance, policy advice, and technical assistance to its member countries. The EFF is one of the most comprehensive loan arrangements offered by the IMF, with a strong focus on structural reforms and policies to maintain macroeconomic stability. This article examines how the EFF loan between 2016 and 2019 influenced employment and poverty reduction in Egypt.

A Brief History of Egyptian Development

Egypt has a very long and complex history going back thousands of years and has been ruled by numerous dynasties including the Ottoman Empire and the British occupation. Egypt has gone through many changes, experiencing empires, colonisation, monarchy, and military rule. During the 19th century, Egypt was ruled by the Ottoman Empire undergoing political, economic, and social reforms to modernise society and centralise its political system. A prominent name during this century was Muhammad Ali Pasha, who "managed to build Egypt as an independent state from the Ottoman Empire, standing on its own power" (Islami, 2016: 192). Often referred to as the "founder of Modern Egypt" he is known for introducing European influences into the country. During the early 20th century, the British colonised Egypt to protect their own interests and ultimately have control of the country and the crucial Suez Canal. After independence in 1922, the British still had control over Egypt's defence.

Throughout this period, Egypt became a monarchy under King Farouk I. Many despised his monarchy due to "corruption and incompetence" which subsequently led to his being overthrown in a coup 'd'état' by the next leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser (Ikram, 2018:143). By this time, the British had left

the country, and Egypt became a republic with Nasser becoming the first president in 1953. Under Nasser, all private-owned entities such as banks, local enterprises and the Suez Canal were nationalised as the government ought to control its own economy. However, this nationalising of entities "may have improved education and healthcare, but it was a socialist and repressive regime and the economy stagnated" (Islami, 2016: 204).

Shortly after the death of Nasser in 1970, Anwar Sadat became the next president, introducing neoliberalism into the country. Sadat implemented the "infitah (open door policy)." This major change transformed the Egyptian economy into a more liberal one whereby it became incorporated into the "global economy opening up the country for private and foreign investments and several economic, industrial, financial and investment policies" (Bush, 2019: 16). However, Sadat's neoliberal policies caused multiple problems such as a rising external debt, income inequality, class division and corruption and poverty. This was because the private and foreign investments were mainly in the finance, construction and tourism sectors, ignoring the industrial sector which is a key area for economic prosperity within the country. It was the "wealthy who benefited from infitah and they soon became loathed by those who were suffering from accelerated inequalities in wealth" (Bush, 2019: 17). After the assassination of Sadat in 1981, Hosni Mubarak became the third president of Egypt and remained in power for three decades until he was overthrown during the Arab Spring protests in 2011. A recurring theme under both the Nasser and Sadat regimes was the importance of foreign relations between Egypt and the United States. From the start of his presidency, Mubarak affirmed his relationship with the United States, as the Egypt government began to ask for loans from the IMF beginning the IMF Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programmes. In addition to this, Mubarak's policies were characterised by "economic deterioration, corruption, authoritarianism and widespread human rights violations" (Islami, 2016: 203). He was also condemned for his failure to address unemployment and poverty and the corruption which was entrenched in his government.

In 2011, the Middle East and North Africa experienced a new chapter in its history with a wave of uprisings across the region calling for social justice, political change. The Arab Spring saw the collapse of Mubarak's thirty-year regime in which he was overthrown and ousted. "The government's deteriorating ability to provide basic services and seeming indifference to widespread unemployment

and poverty alienated tens of millions of Egyptians" (Anderson, 2011:4). The current president of Egypt is Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who was elected in 2013. He has maintained the power of the military within the country which dominates governance as never before and has become incredibly power-hungry. His regime is helping "military companies to crowd out the private sector in the economy as well as diverting scarce government resources away from critical needs of the Egyptian people and towards arms purchases and vanity megaprojects" (Dunne, 2020: 1). Unfortunately, the downside of Sisi's power caused an "increase in human rights violations, political repression and socio-economic inequalities" (Rutherford, 2018: 195). Subsequently, much of Egypt's economic downfall is both deeply rooted and multifaceted and goes back to the economic and development policies and programs adopted by various Egyptian governments over the past seven decades. However, the key socio-economic crises occurred during the regimes of former President Hosni Mubarak and current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Egypt has experienced a series of major social, economic and political developments since the Arab Spring in 2011 and is striving for a more "sustainable economic and social development, strengthening political stability and security, combating terrorism, protecting borders, improving public services, consolidating principles of governance and tackling corruption" (UNDP, 2021: 21). The Egyptian population face "intense challenges due to rapid population growth, deep and increasing poverty, widespread youth unemployment, a looming Nile water shortage, and threats to food security due to climate change" (Dunne, 2020: 1). Egypt's gross development product (GDP) growth rate has been fluctuating from 2019 to 2023. In 2019, GDP was approximately 5.5% decreasing by 2% in 2020 and 2021 and then increasing significantly to 6.61% in 2022 (Statistica, 2022). The reasons for the decrease may have been due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which halted the world's economies. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2021), Egypt's human development index (HDI) from 2010 to 2020 increased by approximately 0.03% each year, rising from 0.668 in 2010 to 0.707 in 2020. The HDI of a country measures the progress and development of life expectancy, education and standard of living. Egypt's HDI increased each year from 2010 until 2020 which clearly shows there has been improvements in development with quality of life, education and income. However, unemployment and poverty rates within Egypt have not been so positive for the country. Poverty rates are

approximately 29.7% in 2022 which hasn't increased or decreased dramatically over the last five years but is still a key issue within the country. It is evident that the government has not been proactive in tackling poverty reduction and there is a further risk for it to increase in the future if nothing is done. In addition to this, unemployment rates within Egypt have been slowly decreasing since 2015 to 2021 falling from approximately 13.05% in 2015 with a significant decrease to 7.4% in 2021 (Statistica, 2023). There are many key factors behind this significant decrease: economic instability, age and gender disparities, with youth and women being the primary victims of unemployment.

IMF and Egypt

Egypt has had a long-standing relationship with the IMF since the 1970s. The IMF is an international organisation of 190 countries that aims to promote global economic growth and stability by providing financial assistance, policy advice, and technical assistance to its member countries. Its primary objective is to provide short-term loans to member countries with temporary balance-of-payment deficits. These loans allow governments time to reduce inflation and relieve pressures to devalue their currencies. The IMF also monitors global economic developments, provides policy advice to member countries, and offers financial assistance in loans and credits to countries facing difficulties with balance of payments.

However, the IMF has received criticism for aligning its policies with a neoliberal perspective that prioritises free markets and privatisation over social welfare and government intervention. Critics argue that the IMF's policies harm member countries more than good.

The IMF provides loans to its member countries through various arrangements, mainly the Extended Fund Facility (EFF). This arrangement ensures that member countries can withdraw up to a specified amount, usually over three to four years, to make structural economic changes that the IMF thinks will improve the balance of payments. Overall, the IMF plays a significant role in promoting international economic stability and growth. While there may be criticisms of the IMF's policies, its primary goal is to promote and strengthen the socioeconomics of its member countries (Peet, 2003: 75).

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a crucial theory within the international community, especially within international organisations' roles and the distribution of wealth and power. Harvey (2005: 2) defines neoliberalism as a theory emphasising "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills can best advance human well-being within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade." It is a theory devised by the Western countries which has unfortunately generated instability, poverty and inequality in many developing countries. Moreover, neoliberalism highlights the importance of privatising the economic market and prioritising the private sector, which the Sadat and Sisi governments chose to do. Although it has allowed Egypt to be more open with the international community and have more foreign investments, it has unfortunately created increasing debt, class separation, poverty, corruption, and more inequalities.

The IMF has a significant relationship with neoliberalism because they have promoted the neo-liberal values of free markets and free trade within their "arrangements", "facilities", and "programmes". Saleh et al. (2019: 115) emphasise that these international organisations "use their power and influence in the world to convince most of the nations to comply to this structure to promote the rule of the market, cut public costs, and adopt the principle of individuality even if this means throwing people aside and regarding them as "losers", in a win-or-lose situation." International organisations indeed have significant power and influence within the world. Whilst neoliberalism has been successful in some cases in promoting growth and development, it has not eliminated economic inequalities, class separation and poverty. It is also important to note that success is primarily common amongst developed countries rather than developing countries.

Before Egypt entered the IMF loan agreements, its economy grew from the 1950s to the 1970s. It increasingly took on the characteristics of "a state-led industrialisation model with the public sector being developed to be the main engine of growth and major new investments and employment" (Alissa, 2007: 2). Egypt had adopted liberal strategies by the late 1970s where there was political liberalisation, foreign investments from both Western and Arab capital and "the encouragement of the private sector alongside state domination and regulation of the economy" (Harrigan and El-Said, 2010: 1).

Egypt joined the IMF in December 1945, when the IMF was first created, and is one of the founding members. Egypt and the IMF have a long history of multiple loans and arrangements dating back to the 1970s. Sadat was transforming Egypt's policies to adopt a more neoliberal stance, which included a more market-focused economy to promote privatisation. Although these policies may have intended to encourage economic prosperity within the country, they created more problems for Egypt such as increasing debt levels, high inflation and corruption. Egypt turned to the IMF for financial help because they aimed to help developing countries in need to stabilise the economy and implement economic reforms. Therefore, in 1977, the IMF provided Egypt with a "Stand-by Agreement" of SDR 125,000 (but only SDR 105,000 was used) for one year, which aimed to support the "fiscal and monetary areas" of the economic reforms (Harrigan and et al.,2005: 255). The fiscal and monetary policies included "raising food prices to reduce the government deficit, as well as achieving the "correct prices" for these products" (Zaki, 2001: 1880). As well as this, the loan was to help Egypt's growing external debt and improve the efficiency of the state-owned companies.

Egypt repaid the IMF loan over twelve years, with the final payment in 1990. This repayment of the IMF loan improved Egypt's severe external debt. This IMF stand-by agreement in 1977 had both successes and failures. The deal's success was that Egypt could stabilise its economy and decrease its external debt. However, its failures led to social uprisings amongst people with low incomes in Cairo and income inequality. In 1977 there were two days of "bread riots" and street riots resulting in hundreds of casualties and significant property damage. This shocked the government to gradually remove subsidies "while avoiding publicly announced reductions and the phasing out of offerings." (Alissa, 2007: 3).

Extended Fund Facility (2016 – 2019)

After the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Egypt continued to experience social and economic instabilities as "the government failed to tackle head-on the issues of poverty, high unemployment (especially among women and youth), inequality, increasing debt, and corruption" (Momani, 2018: 1). These were the key issues under the thirty-year reign of Mubarak's leadership, and which later led to him being overthrown.

The Arab Spring caused the "GDP growth to fall from 5.1% in 2010 to 1.8% in 2011," the lowest that the GDP had fallen to (Zaki, 2017: 100). Poverty and unemployment rates in Egypt in 2011 were also very high and spiked due to the uprisings: the poverty rates during 1995/1996 were approximately 16.7% but increased dramatically to 25.2% in 2011 (Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), 2013: 2). The obvious factor were the uprisings but also the significant increase in food prices, lack of job opportunities and just a severe economic crisis. Furthermore, in the years after 2011, the GDP continued to slowly grow due to public investments, but this was not enough as the major contributors to the economy, tourism and manufacturing sectors, were facing challenges.

Sisi's government tried to implement its own structural reforms to overcome these social and economic challenges such as "heavily subsidised food products, slashing fuel subsidies and raising taxes in an effort to ease unemployment and generate long-term revenues" (Al Tahhan, 2018). This created an improvement in the GDP which rose to approximately 4.4% in 2015, compared to a figure of 1.8% in 2011 (World Bank, 2023). This increase in GDP produced an increase in tourism revenues, foreign direct investments and a great "economic improvement in the country which was also due to the performance of agriculture, construction and retail trade sectors" (Mounir, 2015). This clearly illustrates that the structural and economic reforms implemented by the Egyptian government created some economic prosperity within the country. However, these reforms were not enough to solve all of the economic challenges for good in the country and this is why Sisi sought financial assistance in the form of a loan agreement from the IMF in 2016. Sisi intended to attract foreign investments from the loan and to allow the Egyptian Pound to trade freely (Hadid, 2016). But as a precondition for the loan to be approved, Egypt had to raise "$6 billion in external financing and agree to significant neoliberal economic changes" (ibid, 2016). They managed to raise the money from financial support from the "UAE, China, and the G7" (Momani, 2018: 2).

The three-year $12 billion IMF loan to Egypt was structured with a reform programme that focused on fiscal, monetary, and structural reforms which would all promote inclusive growth. Fiscally, the country was to reduce "public debt by cutting fuel subsidies while expanding spending on vulnerable groups, such as women and children" (Momani, 2018: 2). Monetarily, Egypt was to transition

to a "floating exchange rate and worked to contain inflation" (ibid, 2018: 2). Structurally, Egypt was to "streamline industrial licencing provide financing to small and medium sized enterprises and simplify bankruptcy laws" (ibid, 2018: 2). It aimed to facilitate "inclusive private sector led growth, increased labour force, especially among women, attract foreign direct investment, and strengthen Egypt's macroeconomic stability" (IMF, 2016). The EFF is one of the most "comprehensive loan arrangements" the IMF offers, and its conditions "have a strong focus on structural reforms" and on "policies to maintain macroeconomic stability" (Diab and Hindy, 2021: 397). It is important to note that these policies from the IMF have a neoliberal aspect to them because it requires Egypt to create more private sector development which ultimately reduces public sector development. Neoliberalism is all about "shifting away from state-dominated to private investment, and from protected and rent-seeking enterprises to export-led growth and value creation" which is what shifts the Egyptian state from its role in economy (Joya, 2017: 345). Additionally, there was no mention of reducing poverty or any policies towards poverty from the IMF, but Egypt did briefly mention "poverty alleviation" as part of its fiscal policies.

Implications of IMF Policies since 2016

Employment

Employment is a significant issue that the Egyptian government have to deal with, especially among vulnerable groups like the youth and women. IMF agreements and policies seek to increase employment opportunities and assess whether they successfully achieve these goals.

Egypt's economy is diverse and comprises many sectors: agriculture, construction, wholesale and retail, manufacturing, transportation, education and health and social work being the largest contributors to employment. Agriculture and construction are important sectors within Egypt and are mainly male-dominated whereas the education, health and social work sectors are mostly female-dominated. Within the agricultural sector, female workers represent approximately 26.4% of the total workers and within the construction sector, female workers represent approximately 0.81%. On the other hand, within the education sector, female workers represent approximately 53.7% of the total

workers and within the health and social work, female workers represent approximately 59.8% of the total workers which is double the amount within the agricultural and construction sectors (Diab and Hindy, 2022: 71). The significant differences in job sectors between genders is because of the "reduced role of the public sector in the economy without building a viable and protective private sector that would ensure new generations of women can find suitable employment" (ibid, 2022: 72).

This neoliberal outlook of shifting away from the public sector has created a lack of investments into the public sector and made it extremely difficult for women to even get employment. Although the policies implemented during the EFF loan in 2016 were to prioritise reducing unemployment among women and youth, this hasn't succeeded. In the IMF's report after the three years of the EFF agreement, they detailed their budget on improving women's unemployment: "EGP250 million was spent in 2016/2017 to improve the availability of public nurseries and other facilities to enhance the ability of women to actively seek jobs", "EGP500 million was spent in 2017/2018 on nurseries for 0- to 4-year-old children and EGP600 million in 2018/19" (IMF, 2019: 46). This budget over the three years was aimed to increase the resources for women with children available in Egypt and to develop job opportunities for women and working mothers. However, this policy didn't succeed as much as it could have because unemployment was still relatively high for women after 2019, at approximately 16% (World Bank, 2023). This raises the question whether the problem is the IMF's policies or is the Egyptian government the problem for not prioritising female participation within society and the economy?

Unemployment has been a key issue for many decades in Egypt and is "largely a phenomenon of youth" (Hanieh, 2013: 146). The IMF policies that they wanted to implement were to promote and encourage "job intermediation schemes and specialised training programs for youth" (IMF, 2016: 4). This proposal was to help youth unemployment and to provide them with better opportunities which in some cases it did. Youth unemployment seemed to have significantly decreased after the implementation of IMF policies from approximately 33.69% in 2016 and, falling to 20.71% after the EFF programme had finished. The IMF policies implemented did have a positive development for the Egyptian youth because it allowed them to have job opportunities as well as valuable training which can be instrumental for their future. However, although short-term it may have created

some positive development for the youth, it is essential to ensure that such policies are made to be long-term and to also address the structural inequalities which have contributed to youth unemployment. These neoliberal approaches are limited in the economic reforms that they present and should not be wholly relied on.

Additionally, a large struggle of the youth unemployment problem in Egypt is driven by the increasing population growth. The size of the youth population (ages 15–24) has increased from 22.2 million in 2006 to 31.5 million in 2020; such "demographic pressure increases the demand for jobs, and the private sector has not been able to keep up" (Ghafar, 2016: 5). This is a structural issue which has been exacerbated by prevailing inequalities that the Egyptian government need to address and take action on before there are further social disagreements and unrests.

Poverty

Poverty is another major challenge which many Egyptians have faced throughout the decades. "Poverty is at its worst in rural areas, the southern Upper Egypt region, remote and further disadvantaged by its narrow configuration, has poverty rates above 50 per cent" (Bremer, 2018: 306). Unfortunately, poverty runs deep through all corners of Egypt at significant rates. Before the IMF agreement, the Sisi leadership implemented "harsh austerity measures such as cutting fuel and energy subsidies for the country's middle and lower classes" which caused "increases in the electricity bills paid by the poor and middle-income segments that reached 21.8 % and 27.1% from 2011 to 2017–2018" (Al-Anani, 2022). As a result, austerity measures hit the "lower classes extremely hard and increased the total percentage of Egyptians living in poverty to more than one third of the total population" (ibid, 2022).

The IMF policies sought to reduce poverty through implementing "priority spending on poverty alleviation" but this was the only direct mention of poverty in the IMF EFF report in 2016. But the impact of the policies implemented on different social classes within the Egyptian population have a significant effect on poverty. Before the implementation of the IMF loan, poverty rates were at approximately "27.8% in 2015/2016" and during the loan in "2018/2019, the poverty rates were approximately 32.5%" (ECESR, 2019:1). This clearly

illustrates that the policies created by the IMF and implemented by Egypt did not generate any changes for poverty alleviation which goes against what Egypt had proposed to do in their report. Therefore, the IMF programme pushes "misplaced revenue-raising approaches and spending priorities, fails to tackle the inefficiency and corruption of public institutions, and further reduces the availability of resources for rights realisation" (ibid). It is important to note that austerity measures and reduced energy subsidies were conditions for Egypt to meet in order for the loan to given, which created "dramatic increases in prices of basic goods and services" (Elkhashen, et al, 2020: 79). The IMF's neoliberal policies fail to understand that these policies cannot be implemented in a country like Egypt, where they rely on private sector led growth rather than the public sector. This is why a third of the Egyptian population is living in poverty because the cost of living is just too high for them to even afford basic goods and services. In this case, "neoliberalism has effectively acted to redistribute wealth from the region's poor to the wealthiest layers of society by subsuming every aspect of social life under the logic of capital" (Hanieh, 2013: 73). Though the IMF EFF agreement may have stabilised the economy in some respects, promoting stable economic growth, in other aspects it had negative effects for people living in poverty and those unemployed.

How Effective was the EFF on Egyptian Development: Employment and Poverty?

The main objectives within the EFF were to address the economic instabilities within Egypt and help reform their policies by adopting neoliberal policies. The impact of the neoliberal policies on employment have been successful in some respects, but unsuccessful in other areas. Economic growth is evident from the GDP annual growth increasing after the Arab Spring and during the implementation of the IMF loan. In 2015, Egypt's GDP was 4.4% which then increased to 5.5% in 2019 when the loan had just finished (World Bank, 2023). This clearly shows that Egypt had somewhat a stable economy during the period from 2016 to 2019 which resulted in a growth in their GDP. This may be a result of the neoliberal policies that the IMF implemented such as, having more private sector led growth which has created job opportunities, but it's not so positive on the vulnerable groups in the country.

Within education, women are trying to assert themselves within the more male-dominated industries, such as agriculture, but they fear for their safety as social protection is a big issue within the Egyptian population. Ghafar illustrates that more women are trying to enter the private sector but "there are significant cultural and practical barriers to entry for females in the private sector and there are limited job opportunities for women here, with most opportunities limited to the areas of education and healthcare" (Ghafar, 2016: 5). It appears that it is the Egyptian government which is the issue here because they don't seem to consider the needs of the female workforce which is integral to the Egyptian economy.

The lack of female participation within the economy is directly linked to the government's declining rate of public sector jobs and the slow growth in its economy. "The government should implement regulatory reforms, such as flexible working arrangements, that support increased participation of females, more part-time work opportunities, and options to work remotely can go a long way in bringing more women into Egypt's workforce" (Ghafar, 2016: 11). This demonstrates that the neoliberal policies of the IMF are not very effective in the aspect of female prosperity within the workforce and instead disproportionally affect women. Joya agrees that Egypt needs to reconsider the credibility of neoliberal policies for development for its socioeconomic challenges because it has been admitted by an IMF research team in 2016 that "neoliberalism has not produced policy outcomes that can resolve lingering structural unemployment; nor can it spur economic growth in sectors of the economy that would lead to sustainable long-term growth" (2017: 354). This clearly illustrates the ineffectiveness that the IMF's neoliberal policies have had on employment in Egypt.

Furthermore, the impact of the IMF policies on youth employment has a mixed result because as discussed previously, there were available job and training opportunities for the youth, and it did create a reduction in youth unemployment. This is a surprisingly significant amount of decrease which is important for the Egyptian government to uphold. The Egyptian government should fully "recognise and acknowledge the urgency of challenges it faces as it attempts to deal with the problem of the unemployment of the youth who rose up in 2011 to demand basic political, economic, and social rights" (Ghafar, 2016: 11). Youth unemployment should not be unheard and should be at the forefront

of Egypt's key issues to tackle because otherwise it could be possible fuel for another uprising in the future.

The impact of the EFF loan on poverty tells another story as poverty has been on the rise for decades within Egypt and has only worsened with the implementation of neoliberal policies. The continuing rise of poverty rates is clear as from 16.7% in 1995/1996, they doubled to 32.5% in 2018/2019, during the IMF agreement. An objective of the loan was to "alleviate poverty" but it was not a key issue that the IMF wanted to solve and rather it focused on the fiscal aspects of Egypt which exacerbated poverty. Although the IMF policies did create some GDP growth during the 2016-2019 period, the way it got to this growth was extremely hard on the poorest of the population. Implementing austerity measures and raising the cost of living has driven "millions of ordinary Egyptians unable to cover their basic needs, including food, healthcare, and education" and the IMF's neoliberal policies have not "solved the country's economic crisis but have instead deepened it" (Al-Anani, 2022). It is likely that Sisi will not abandon this policy in the future, and it is all but certain that the "Egyptian people will continue to suffer while their government persists in ignoring their basic needs" (ibid, 2022). Saleh, et al address neoliberalism as "the main cause of the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in society and that the well to do are becoming more wealthier, based on their original assets while poor people are "sinking down" and suffering great economic difficulties in their lives" (2019: 116). It is clear that the rates of poverty are continuously increasing, and it seems that neither the government nor the IMF want to address this innate structural issue.

In order to effectively reduce poverty and unemployment amongst youth and women, the Egyptian government needs to address these structural social and economic challenges before they ask for help from a third party. It is better for the government to recognise the struggles that the population is experiencing, mitigate these issues immediately, and make them a priority.

Conclusion

The IMF policies aimed to tackle the challenges at the time to decrease unemployment rates amongst youth and women and to massively reduce poverty rates. The $12 billion loan was to be spread over the course of the three years and

was hoped to create new job opportunities and boost growth while protecting the vulnerable groups of Egypt.

Within employment, youth and women were not factored into the IMF policies and there was a lack of job opportunities for them. But it is also the actions of the Egyptian government which halted the progression of the female workforce because of the lack of inclusion for females to work in the economy. There is a prioritisation of the male dominated sectors, such as agriculture and construction, and there is no room to allow for women to join these sectors largely because it is not safe for them. The Egyptian government would benefit massively from female participation in these industries but lack the resources to make this happen. The IMF policies also do not allow for job opportunities for women because these "conventional macroeconomic policies and loan programmes are not gender-neutral and should consider their impact on women in the productive and reproductive spheres" (Abdo, 2019: 5).

Poverty is a prevalent issue within Egypt with still no solution to it from the numerous agreements and loans that Egypt has entered over the last few decades. The impact of the neoliberal policies implemented by the IMF's EFF worsened the situation and created more poverty for the population and made it even harder for those struggling by further raising prices on basic goods and services. It has become a recurring theme amongst critics of both the IMF and Egyptian government that their policies are not made to alleviate struggles amongst the less fortunate but actually are exacerbating the situation further.

The narrative in the IMF agreement implied that "vulnerable groups need support and that once 'distortions' caused by excessive government interference are removed, growth will occur, and poverty consequently will decrease" (Diab and Hindy, 2021: 405). There is a neoliberal belief that the shift away from the public sector is vital for the private sector to flourish but this is not the case for Egypt because it disregards vulnerable groups like women being unable to join this sector. Furthermore, youth unemployment was found to have some positive reductions allowing more opportunities for the youth to have schemes and training programme, but it is important that this policy remains in place long-term so that the youth unemployment rates can continue to decrease. The youth within Egypt are one of the main sufferers of the economic challenges that Egypt faces. They have been "condemned to a future of unemployment, low-wage

work, and social exclusion" (Hanieh, 2013: 71). This concerning aspect is the "logical and predictable endpoint of neoliberal reforms, one that has been socially engineered in a highly conscious manner by local elites and international institutions—not an accidental outcome of policy mishaps or the arbitrariness of authoritarian rulers" (ibid, 71). It is essential in this globalised world, for young people to have viable opportunities in their countries because this is the youth's future, and the Egyptian government must be cautious to not continue the economic challenges that they face otherwise there will be an outcry and retaliation from them.

Additionally, there was a lack of recognising the structural issues of Egypt from Sisi's government, which is vital for the country, instead of asking an international organisation to help. It is important to note that "Egypt's economic and developmental ills did not begin after the uprisings; they have been accumulating over several decades and in fact contributed to the circumstances that brought about the uprising and its demands and the future" (Momani, 2018: 3). Going forward, Egypt must be comprehensive and resolve the structural issues and the foundational causes of these social and economic challenges of unemployment and poverty, without international organisations and neoliberal policies, so that the country can prosper in all aspects, socially, economically, and politically for the whole Egyptian population including the poor, youth and women.

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11 |

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ANTI-APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA

Maliha Hussain

Abstract

This article explores the crucial role that civil society plays in addressing societal concerns, promoting social justice, and catalysing positive change. It delves into the importance of social movements in raising awareness about critical issues, mobilising people to act, and challenging established power systems. Social movements have the potential to bring about significant change by giving voice to the marginalised and oppressed and by creating a network of active citizens who demand accountability and change. The article cites examples of successful social movements, such as the anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa, to demonstrate the transformative power of collective action.

Introduction

Social movements can profoundly impact society, politics, and culture. They are collective efforts to bring about social, political, or economic change, often driven by a shared vision of a better future. Social movements can take many forms, from peaceful protests and demonstrations to more radical

actions. They can address various issues, such as civil rights, gender equality, environmental protection, and workers' rights. The impact of social movements can be seen in the changes they have brought about in laws, policies, and public attitudes. They can also inspire and empower people to take action and work towards a more just and equitable society.

One of the most significant social movements in the contemporary world was the anti-apartheid movement which successfully fought against racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa. This was a social and political movement that emerged in South Africa in the 1940s and aimed to end the apartheid system of racial segregation and discrimination. The movement was led by various organisations, including the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and other civil rights groups. The movement used various strategies, such as protests, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience, to put pressure on the apartheid government to end its discriminatory policies. The movement gained international attention and support, and eventually, the apartheid system was dismantled in the early 1990s, leading to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994.

In this article, I explore the role of social movements in modern societies and the problems associated with civil society. One of the biggest challenges is the need for more inclusivity, ending the process whereby certain groups are excluded from participating in civil society activities. I will use examples from different social movements, focusing on anti-apartheid, to illustrate their cause, process, and impact on the broader society.

Social Movements

Social movements are a form of collective action where groups of people organise to bring about social, political, or cultural change in society. These movements are typically characterised by their decentralised and non-institutionalised structure and their grassroots nature. Social movements may arise in response to perceived injustices or grievances, and their goal is to challenge existing power structures and promote social fairness. Social movements play a vital role in global governance. By raising awareness of issues and advocating for change, they can significantly contribute to shaping policies and decision-making at the local, national, and international levels. Throughout history, social movements have

brought about significant changes in the world, including the end of segregation in the United States, the abolition of apartheid in South Africa, and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in many countries. (van Zyl, 2011)

Social movements seek to overthrow established power structures and advance social justice in reaction to perceived injustices or grievances. They use a variety of strategies, including marches, protests, petitions, and direct action in order to raise awareness of concerns and pressure individuals in positions of power to make changes. One of the defining characteristics of social movements is their ability to mobilise large groups of people and create a collective voice for change. Through protests, marches, petitions, and other direct action, social movements can draw attention to issues and demand action from those in power. In recent years, social media has also played a crucial role in the success of many social movements, allowing activists to connect and organise on a global scale. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have given activists a tremendous tool for raising awareness, sharing experiences, and rallying supporters for their causes. Hashtags, viral videos, and online campaigns have all helped to raise the voices of marginalised populations and draw attention to social injustices. With a few clicks, people can donate to movements and make a difference from the comfort of their own homes. However, it is crucial to understand that social media activism alone is insufficient. While it can be an effective instrument for raising awareness and mobilising support, true change frequently necessitates ongoing efforts both online and offline. It is important for activists to complement their digital activism with offline actions such as community organising, lobbying, and engaging in direct dialogue with decision-makers.

However, social movements face many obstacles that could prevent them from taking part in global governance. Fragmentation is a significant issue as it can make it challenging for social movements to organise and mobilise effectively. Fragmentation can stem from differences in ideology, tactics, or goals among groups within the movement. Social movements can overcome this difficulty by trying to forge greater alliances and collaborations with other organisations that share their objectives. Another problem is the appropriation of social movements by governments or other entities, which may result in compromises inconsistent with their objectives, undermining their efficacy and legitimacy. This can happen when governments or other entities try to co-opt social movements by offering

them resources or incorporating them into existing institutions. Social movements can combat this problem by seeking to maintain their independence and avoiding getting overly allied with any one government or organisation.

The broader society is greatly impacted by social movements. They can question established power hierarchies, bring significant issues to light, and push for reform. Social movements have the power to change society on a political, social, and economic level by working together. One of the key impacts of social movements is the changes they bring about in laws, policies, and public attitudes. For instance, racial discrimination and segregation have been fiercely opposed by social movements promoting civil rights, which has resulted in the passing of legislation that uphold the rights of marginalised groups and advance equality. In a similar vein, environmental, social movements have shaped laws and procedures meant to combat climate change and safeguard natural resources. People are also motivated and empowered to act by social movements. Social movements can inspire people to actively reshape their communities by organising people and establishing a unified voice for change. They allow individuals to express their concerns and call on those in positions of authority to act by organising nonviolent protests, demonstrations, and other types of activism.

Social movements may also face repression from those in power who are threatened by their message or actions. Repression can take many forms, including arrests, violence, or censorship. Social movements may need to develop strategies for dealing with repression, such as legal challenges or building alliances with sympathetic individuals or organisations.

Social movements are an important force for change in the world today. They have the potential to significantly impact global governance by raising awareness of issues and advocating for change. However, social movements face many obstacles that can prevent them from achieving their objectives, and they must be strategic in their approach to overcome these challenges.

The apartheid system in South Africa is an example of a social movement that occurred in the 20th century. A more up to date example of what is happening in the world right now is the social movement which advocates for Palestinian rights and self-determination. This movement has increased global awareness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the misery of Palestinians under occupation.

The Palestinian social movement seeks to challenge the current quo and achieve a just and long-term resolution to the conflict through protests, social media, grassroots organising, and international solidarity. This is organised by various Friends-of-Palestine societies from universities and others worldwide. They work together as a civil society to lobby governments to call a ceasefire in Palestine. (Anabtawi and Brown, 2021)

Social movements can strengthen their impact and bring about substantial change by developing coalitions, alliances, and strategic partnerships. (Tabar, 2016) Social movements must be inclusive, diverse, and representative of the communities they aim to serve. They must listen to the voices of those directly affected by the issues they advocate for and prioritise their needs and perspectives because it ensures that a wide range of experiences and perspectives are considered in decision-making processes and avoid excluding or marginalising certain groups or individuals. By fostering solidarity and collective action, social movements can create a powerful force for social, political, and economic transformation.

Anti-apartheid Movement in South Africa

Apartheid was a system of institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination implemented by the National Party government from 1948 to 1994. This oppressive regime denied the majority Black population's fundamental human rights and freedoms, isolating them from the White minority and subjecting them to discriminating laws and regulations.

The anti-apartheid movement, led by organisations and activists such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Nelson Mandela, struggled against this unjust rule. Through nonviolent protests, international campaigning, and grassroots organising, the movement galvanised people in South Africa and around the world to resist apartheid and demand equality and justice. The apartheid movement exemplifies how civil society can be important in confronting social injustices and fighting for change. It exemplified the strength of collective action, solidarity, and tenacity in facing injustice. By emphasising the problems and ambitions of the oppressed majority population, the movement drew global attention to apartheid's atrocities and put pressure on the South African government to abolish the discriminatory system.

The apartheid movement demonstrates that civil society has the power to fight and reform deeply entrenched systems of injustice and oppression. It demonstrates the value of grassroots activism, international cooperation, and ongoing lobbying in achieving social justice and human rights. As we continue to examine social movements, let's look more closely at some instances of how these movements have impacted our society and brought about revolutionary change. All these movements have been crucial in questioning social conventions, promoting equality of rights, and advancing progressive legislation. We can learn about the possibility for social change and the strength of group action by comprehending the tactics and successes of these movements.

The anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa is an example of a successful social movement and is considered one of the most significant movements of the 20th century. The primary objective of the movement was to put an end to the institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination established by the South African government under its apartheid policies. (Mhlauli, Salani and Mokotedi, 2015) It began in the 1940s but gained momentum in the 1980s when the South African government's human rights violations were exposed globally. The movement used various tactics, including rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience, to put pressure on the government to abolish apartheid. However, the peaceful protests were often met with violence and repression, and many protestors were arrested, imprisoned, or killed.

The anti-apartheid movement received widespread support from international countries, human rights organisations, and civil society groups worldwide.. One of the most notable achievements of the anti-apartheid movement was its success in persuading international countries to impose economic sanctions on South Africa. These sanctions had a significant impact on the country's economy, resulting in an increase in poverty and unemployment rates. Ultimately, the economic sanctions proved to be a powerful tool in ending apartheid, as they put pressure on the South African government to negotiate a peaceful transition to a non-racial democracy.

Moreover, the anti-apartheid movement played a crucial role in the development of international standards for human rights and racial equality. The movement's efforts helped to establish apartheid as a crime against humanity, leading to the delegitimization of the South African government's policy. The United Nations

General Assembly declared apartheid a crime against humanity in 1973, and this decision helped to galvanise the global movement against apartheid. The movement against apartheid in South Africa was a global effort that united people from all backgrounds in the fight against institutionalised racism and discrimination. The success of this movement in ending apartheid and its contribution to the development of international standards for human rights and racial equality is a shining example of the power of collective action and social movements. The anti-apartheid struggle stands as a testament to the courage, resilience, and determination of those who fought for justice, equality, and freedom in South Africa and throughout the world.

The anti-apartheid campaign encountered various problems and obstacles along the road. The South African government responded to the movement with violent repression, using violence and intimidation to silence opposition. Activists and leaders in the movement were frequently targeted, jailed, and tortured. Despite these obstacles, the movement persisted, motivated by a strong dedication to justice and equality. The international community also had an important role in helping the anti-apartheid campaign. International solidarity movements, boycotts, and divestment campaigns pushed governments and corporations to abandon their support for the apartheid state. Artists, musicians, and athletes from all over the world joined the cultural boycott of South Africa, refusing to perform or take part in activities that supported the apartheid regime.

It reached a turning point in the late 1980s. Internal resistance in South Africa grew stronger, and international pressure on the apartheid administration increased. In 1990, South African President F.W. de Klerk announced the unbanning of anti-apartheid organisations as well as the release of Nelson Mandela, who had been imprisoned for 27 years. This signified a fundamental shift in the political environment, paving the way for discussions towards a democratic South Africa. South Africa had its first democratic elections in 1994, electing Nelson Mandela as its first black president. The fall of apartheid was a watershed moment not only for South Africa but for the entire world. It demonstrated that collective action and unity can overcome injustice and oppression.

The anti-apartheid movement's legacy inspires and enlightens modern-day movements for justice and equality. It reminds us of people's ability to effect

genuine change, as well as the need to stand up to oppressive regimes. The achievements of the anti-apartheid movement serve as a compelling reminder that social justice is both feasible and worth fighting for.

Conclusion

Civil society, and social movements play an important role in addressing societal issues, promoting social justice, and catalysing good change. Civil society organisations, such as social movements, labour unions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), promote social justice, human rights, and democratic values. They provide a voice to underprivileged and oppressed communities, motivate people to act, and challenge established power structures. Social movements have the power to effect major change by raising awareness about crucial issues, mobilising people, and demanding accountability and change. They demonstrate the strength of collective action, solidarity, and tenacity in the face of injustice. The anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa exemplifies the transformative power of social movements in challenging and removing oppressive structures.

Social movements and civil society organisations have played an important role in creating a global government. Their initiatives have challenged power systems, pushed for marginalised populations' rights, and influenced policymaking and international norms. Despite problems, their contributions to human rights, environmental protection, and social welfare are invaluable. Governments and policymakers must recognise and support the role of civil society in achieving a more equal and just global society. This allows us to work towards a future where all persons and groups' voices are heard, and global government is based on inclusivity, justice, and equality.

Civil society and social movements confront their own set of obstacles. Inclusivity is an important issue, as certain groups are barred from engaging in civil society activities, resulting in marginalisation and exclusion. Furthermore, accountability and monitoring are critical to ensuring that civil society organisations maintain their credibility and effectively solve societal challenges. Despite these problems, civil society and social movements continue to play an important role in global governance. They give a forum for citizens to voice their issues, organise collective action, and hold governments accountable. Civil society and social movements

can help to create a more just and equitable world by fostering diversity, addressing issues, and advocating positive change.

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12 |

NGOS IN VIETNAM: NURTURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

To Thanh Thai

Abstract

This article delves into the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Vietnam and their crucial contributions to fostering sustainable development. With Vietnam experiencing rapid economic growth and social change, NGOs have emerged as pivotal actors in addressing multifaceted challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and social inequality. This article sheds light on their impact on local communities by examining NGOs' diverse strategies, including community engagement and education, as well as by mentioning a significant project that Hanoi University has collaborated with NGOs in order to mobilise students to address gender stereotypes in Ha Giang and to build up more sustainable communities.

Introduction

There is no doubt that Vietnam has been going through a significant transformation in recent times, with a focus on achieving economic growth along with comprehensive development. In the article "Some Theoretical and Practical Issues about Socialism and the Path to Socialism in

Vietnam", General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong clearly stated: "We need economic development goes hand in hand with progress and social justice, not expanding the gap between rich and poor and social inequality" and believes that those good wishes are one of the "true values of socialism and are also the goal and path that President Ho Chi Minh, our Party, and our people have chosen and are steadfastly and persistently pursuing." (Trong, 2021). Therefore, the country has implemented various policies and reforms to promote private sector participation, encourage foreign investment, and improve infrastructure. This transition towards growth and development has resulted in increased productivity, higher employment rates, and improved living standards for many Vietnamese citizens.

After implementing the Doi Moi policy in 1986, Vietnam has undergone a significant economic and social transition. The policy was introduced with the aim of transforming Vietnam from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy. This policy has had a far-reaching impact on the country, resulting in rapid economic growth, with a focus on export-oriented production and foreign investment. The policy has led to the establishment of new industries, the expansion of existing ones, and the creation of jobs and opportunities for the Vietnamese people.

In addition to the economic benefits, the Doi Moi policy has also led to improvements in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Infrastructure development has also been a key focus of the policy, resulting in the construction of new airports, roads, bridges, and other facilities, which have made transport and communication easier and more efficient.

Furthermore, the Doi Moi policy has contributed to increased political stability and international integration in Vietnam. Additionally, the policy has led to Vietnam's increased integration into the global economy, with greater trade and investment ties with other countries. This has helped to boost the country's economic growth and prosperity.

Despite its rapid economic growth, the implementation of social progress still has limitations, such as unsustainable poverty reduction, income inequality, the growing gap in living standards, environmental pollution, biodiversity degradation, increasing deviant behaviours, and so on (Hanh, 2021).

Additionally, Vietnam also faces numerous challenges and difficulties in carrying out the process of innovation, construction, and development from a low-level, backward economy, and also has to deal with the major consequences of a long and fierce period of war. Therefore, the contributions of non-governmental organisations in terms of approach, experience, methods, and resources play an important role, contributing to supporting Vietnam in the process of ensuring social security, hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and building and implementing a socio-economic development strategy.

Funding from non-governmental organisations are very important contribution to the implementation of poverty reduction and socio-economic development. To ensure the success of these projects/programs, the role of NGOs and their contribution must be thoroughly understood. Therefore, the article will focus on identifying the concept of NGOs, and the current situation of NGOs in Vietnam. Subsequently, the article will analyse a case study of the "Vi Em" project to highlight that the contribution of NGOs in the education sector is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society, where every individual can have access to quality education and reach their full potential. Ultimately, by analysing NGOs in Vietnam, this article hopes to highlight the importance of their work, not only throughout the world but also in Vietnam.

Analysis of the Concept of NGOs

Non-governmental organisations have a history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. However, the phrase "non-governmental organization" only came into popular use with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 with provisions in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the United Nations Charter for a consultative role for organisations that are neither governments nor member states.

It could be seen that the concept of NGO may vary through the different perspectives of scholars. Scholars like Edwards and Hulme (1996) have extensively discussed the importance of NGOs in promoting inclusive development, and they consider NGOs as crucial intermediaries that facilitate forward movement in several ways.

According to Fowlers (2010), NGOs are multifaceted organisations that are involved in several roles. They act as advocates for social issues, facilitate international collaboration, and build capacity, among other things. NGOs are instrumental in fostering development, as they are considered "agents of development" due to their diverse approach. They are better equipped than any other institutions to tackle the complex global challenges of our time, such as climate change, poverty, and social injustice (Fowler, 2010).

Enloe's perspective on NGOs is that they can act as agents for promoting gender equality and social justice. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing gender dynamics within NGOs and how it affects their work. Enloe argues that Vietnamese NGOs address gender issues and contribute to women's empowerment, which is essential for the overall growth of society (Enloe, 2004).

Willetts (2011) argues that NGOs are non-state actors that operate independently from governments. They aim to influence public policy and play a significant role in global governance. Willetts examines how Vietnamese NGOs navigate their relationship with the government and the dynamics of collaboration and tension as they strive to influence policies for the betterment of society. Willetts also sheds light on the challenges that NGOs face, such as limited resources and the changing political landscape.

Murray Li (2007) acknowledges that NGOs can both empower and disempower communities, and it is vital to have a critical perspective on their interventions. She suggests that their initiatives shape local communities but also raise potential tensions. Murray Li examines NGOs in Vietnam and provides insights into how their work affects communities in the long run.

In short, although the term "non-governmental organisation" may contain different meanings in different contexts, NGOs still share some common characteristics: independent, voluntary, and non-profit. In other words, NGOs must be private, non-profit, non-violent, volunteer-based, independent organisations that are not under the direct control of any government (Britannica, 2024). Besides, most NGOs are small, grassroots organisations not formally affiliated with any international body, though they may receive some international funding for local programs.

Current Situation of NGOs in Vietnam

One can believe that a number of NGOs existed in Vietnam before the Doi Moi period (1986). However, NGOs in Vietnam have only grown strongly since Doi Moi's introduction in Vietnam. The reasons of NGOs have thrived since Vietnam's Doi Moi are numerous: (i) the market economy has created an important socio-economic basis for the operation of NGOs; (ii) a rational settlement of the (reformed) relationship between government, market, and society has created an important political basis for the emergence and development of non-profit organisations; (iii) the government's responsibility to ensure and deliver public services is increasing while the government's financial resources are limited. This requires the promotion of the NGOs' role in social governance; (iv) people's needs for various types of public services increase, requiring the promotion of NGOs role in providing diverse public services to the people; (v) the development of NGOs in Vietnam is also due to the necessity to improve the effectiveness of people's participation in social governance (Binh, 2022).

Therefore, during the Doi Moi period, NGOs in Vietnam have developed very quickly. Excluding international NGOs (now more than 900 international NGOs are operating in Vietnam), Vietnam currently has approximately 500 NGOs operating at the national level, 4,000 at the provincial level, and 10,000 at the district and commune levels. Additionally, there are 1,800 NGOs working in the fields of science, environment, healthcare, and education. Vietnam also has 150 professional associations and more than 140,000 active community-based organisations (CBOs) (Binh, 2022). However, in recent years, due to the global financial crisis in 2008 and Vietnam's transition into a middle-income country, several foreign NGOs have shifted their priorities and reduced their activities in Vietnam. This change resulted in the withdrawal of some donors who focus on poverty reduction. Nevertheless, dozens of new organisations register in Vietnam every year (Phuong, 2018).

NGOs in Vietnam play a multifaceted role, performing various functions crucial to societal development. Firstly, they engage in service delivery, often filling gaps in areas where government provision may be lacking or insufficient. This includes vital sectors such as healthcare, education, poverty alleviation, and disaster relief (Binh, 2022). Secondly, NGOs serve as advocates for diverse social issues, actively raising awareness, lobbying for policy changes, and engaging with the

government on matters such as human rights, gender equality, and environmental protection (Tuan & Anh, 2019). Thirdly, NGOs contribute to capacity building by undertaking activities that enhance the skills and capabilities of individuals and communities. This involves implementing training programs, skill development initiatives, and educational campaigns to empower and uplift the target populations (Linh, 2009). Additionally, NGOs take on the responsibility of conducting research, collecting data, and providing valuable insights into various social, economic, and environmental issues, contributing to evidence-based policymaking (Tuan & Anh, 2019). Lastly, international collaboration stands as a significant aspect of NGOs' operations in Vietnam (Linh, 2009). Many organisations forge partnerships with international counterparts, leveraging expertise, resources, and best practices from a global perspective. This collaborative approach allows NGOs to address local challenges within a broader context, enriching their initiatives with a diverse range of perspectives and solutions. In essence, NGOs in Vietnam emerge as dynamic entities that navigate diverse roles to contribute significantly to the holistic development and well-being of society.

The areas of NGO activities are often determined based on their purposes, for instance, Oxfam is involved with poverty reduction, social inequality, people's participation, and State responsibilities. The World Population Foundation identifies its area of activity as sexual and reproductive health issues (SRH). The WWF is concerned with the protection of the environment and natural resources. Save the Children is concerned with children's rights and the   FHI Foundation's health and quality of life. Based on the local socio-economic conditions and the needs of the people, NGOs specify their intervention projects. In general, NGO activities are very rich and diverse in terms of local aid needs. Meeting various needs of Vietnam, NGOs operate in many different fields. About half of the NGOs operate in two to four areas and a quarter of them only focus on one area of their expertise. Most NGOs are operating in the fields of economic development, poverty reduction, and provision of social services such as health and education (Tuan & Anh, 2019).

The primary funding sources for NGOs in Vietnam are as diverse as the issues they strive to address. Government grants represent a significant avenue, with some NGOs receiving direct funding from government agencies to execute specific projects or initiatives aligned with national development goals. However,

such funding often comes with guidelines and regulations, necessitating compliance and adherence to prescribed procedures (Linh, 2009). In addition, individual donations and grassroots fundraising initiatives play a vital role in bolstering the financial health of NGOs in Vietnam. Leveraging the power of collective contributions, NGOs engage in fundraising campaigns that resonate with individuals, encouraging them to contribute to the causes they believe in. According to Linh (2009), in an age of digital connectivity, online platforms and social media play a crucial role in amplifying the reach of these campaigns, connecting NGOs with a broader audience of potential supporters.

Despite this diversity of funding sources, NGOs in Vietnam often grapple with the challenge of balancing financial stability with their mission-driven objectives. The reliance on external funding, while essential for executing projects and sustaining operations, can render these organisations vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities, economic downturns, or geopolitical changes. In addition, it could be seen that as long as NGOs are continuously receiving funding from international donors, foreign NGOs, and governmental agencies, then their goals and objectives, to some extent, are still dependable on the will of their donors (Linh, 2009). And because of that, they are still on their long way to be a truly independent and effective actor for the development of the country. Striking a delicate balance between financial viability and maintaining the integrity of their mission remains an ongoing challenge for many NGOs in Vietnam.

While the strengths of NGOs in Vietnam lie in their flexibility, innovation, and ability to fill gaps in services, the weaknesses often revolve around dependency on external funding, coordination challenges, limited accountability, and navigating political sensitivities. The journey to sustainable development requires a delicate dance between securing necessary financial resources and preserving the independence and integrity of NGOs in their pursuit of positive societal impact. In essence, the funding landscape for NGOs in Vietnam is a dynamic and multifaceted terrain where organisations must navigate a plethora of avenues to secure the resources needed to drive sustainable development initiatives. By diversifying funding sources, fostering transparency, and addressing inherent challenges, NGOs can strengthen their financial resilience and continue to play a pivotal role in shaping a more equitable and sustainable future for Vietnam.

The Case Study of the "Vi Em" Project - A Hanoi University Students' Project under the Auspice of CISDOMA and Oxfam in Vietnam

Hanoi University (HANU) is known as one of the largest language teaching and research universities in Vietnam with the strength of training in a variety of foreign languages such as English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, German, French, Portuguese, and so on. As a multi-disciplinary university, specializing in foreign languages and foreign language teaching-learning majors, as well as a dynamic environment for students to develop, Hanoi University has organised various extracurricular activities and worked closely with several NGOs in order to help encourage and mobilise students to participate in community development and contribute to the sustainable development process of Vietnam. Particularly, their efforts have been focused on providing educational opportunities in remote areas that lack access to formal education and infrastructure.

Prominent among them is the project namely "Youth participate in changing gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in Vietnam". This is the name of the project funded by the European Union and implemented by Oxfam in Vietnam and the Consultative Institute for Socio-Economic Development of Rural and Mountainous Areas (CISDOMA) launched in 3 cities: Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City in the period 2020 - 2024. The Project's goal is to achieve the following three specific results: Youth become the nucleus for change in gender equality in the community; Media and businesses transform communication and advertising activities in a gender-sensitive direction; Men and women in Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City have awareness and actions that demonstrate substantive gender equality (Hanoi University, 2020).

Hanoi University is one of the schools within the Hanoi area collaborating with Oxfam and CISDOMA to implement this project, with the hope that HANU students participating in the project will be the pioneers in promoting and leading changes in the community to change gender stereotypes. Additionally, students' initiatives are believed to contribute to solving the root causes of gender bias through their impact on raising awareness and changing behaviour about gender stereotypes that are widespread and deeply ingrained in the daily life of the community. Among several student initiatives, the "Vi Em" project is worth mentioning, an educational sub-project within the framework of the project

"Youth participate in changing gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in Vietnam".

This project was implemented in Hanoi city and mainly in Ha Giang province by a group of students majoring in Development Studies at the Faculty of International Studies - Hanoi University. The need for quality education is palpable in the heart of this remote mountain area - Ha Giang. The terrain, while picturesque, poses a daunting challenge for the children who call it home. The project's central mission is clear: to promote understanding and raise awareness of the value of education to families with girls in particular and ethnic minority communities in general about the right of female children to go to school in the area of San Sa Ho commune in Hoang Su Phi district, Ha Giang. With the slogan "Because girls have rights", the project team targets female children in highland areas, where there are few opportunities and privileges compared to other developed areas, with the hope that they can enjoy equal rights, particularly the right to go to school and to be exposed to education effectively.

The project team successfully organised two main activities: the Talkshow "Raising awareness of gender equality and learning opportunities for girls" and the Painting Contest - Exhibition "Her Dream" (FIS HANU, 2023). In terms of the talkshow, it plays an important role in the "Vi Em" project and is also the opening event for a series of events within the framework of the project with the aim of spreading the positive values of education to girls in particular and the ethnic minority community in general with the desire to light up the future for the female children in the commune. Meanwhile, the project team organised the contest & painting exhibition "Her Dream" with the purpose of reaching and directly/indirectly promoting awareness of the right to go to school; motivating girls about their dream of going to school, thereby creating a space for exchanges, meetings, and entertainment activities for them. The Organising Committee wishes to create an activity with a meaningful message that children in San Sa Ho, who do not receive special privileges like others in urban areas, can hold a pen in their hands to draw their dreams.

It could be seen that a vital aspect of the project's success lies in its collaborative approach. The project team actively collaborates with local organisations, schools, and community leaders in this area. They had created favourable conditions and enthusiastically supported the group throughout the process of

organising activities in the commune. The locals aren't just beneficiaries; they are integral parts of the action, ensuring that the project aligns with its aspirations and requirements. Besides, turning dreams into reality requires financial support and consultancies. Therefore, the aid, management, and coordination of CISDOMA and Oxfam in Vietnam have also created favourable conditions for the "Vi Em" project team to successfully implement activities in the Ha Giang area.

One of the pictures taken by the students of FIS - Hanu during the Painting Contest - Exhibition "Her Dream" in 2023

Nestled within the bustling halls of Hanoi University, a beacon of hope emanates from a unique project that transcends geographical barriers. This endeavor epitomizes the essence of sustainable development, where a university environment is not just nurturing young minds but also fostering a transformative change in the faraway and rugged mountains of Vietnam. This case study unfolds the narrative of an initiative driven by the ethos of global

citizenship, social responsibility, and a profound commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty through education. In conclusion, the project's vision is to empower female children with the necessary tools to break free from the cycle of poverty and transform their lives. Through strong partnerships, comprehensive strategies, and financial resources, the project is making significant strides towards realising this vision. The project has created conditions for the students to actively participate in promoting gender equality in Vietnam, further fostering sustainable development.

Conclusion

It can be affirmed that NGOs have played an important role in poverty reduction and sustainable development, in accordance with the priorities and socioeconomic development orientation of Vietnam. In the context of still facing many difficulties and challenges, Vietnam always respects and appreciates the valuable help of NGOs. The level of participation of these organisations in the work of hunger eradication and poverty reduction and socio-economic development of Vietnam is becoming more and more extensive, reflected in the increasing number of NGOs operating in Vietnam, the fields and areas of operation are increasingly expanding and the level of aid is increasing. NGOs' activities bring a lot of benefits and positive changes in the lives of Vietnamese people. NGOs' participation in Vietnam's development has created a more multidimensional and comprehensive view of socioeconomic issues as well as development models. In that context, therefore, it is necessary to continue to improve the policy system and create favourable conditions for NGOs to improve their establishment and operational efficiency, contributing to sustainable national development. Besides, through the "Vi Em" project, it can be concluded that it is encouraged to collaborate with NGOs working in the sustainable development sector. This synergy allows us to amplify the positive effects of our charity project, ensuring that underprivileged children in Vietnam's remote mountainous regions receive the support and opportunities they deserve. Therefore, by making a profound and lasting collaboration with NGOs, Vietnam could reaffirm our commitment to global citizenship and social responsibility.

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13 |

DISCOURSE OF THE GOLDEN LAND: THAILAND'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Sirawhich Sanohjamnong
Thanakrit Thongchantr

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between Thailand and Suvarnabhumi, exploring how the perception of this mythical realm has evolved over time to become a powerful rhetorical tool that has impacted both domestic and international affairs. What does Suvarnabhumi mean in the context of Thailand, and how has its rhetoric influenced the country's international relations? To answer these questions, we'll delve into the historical development that led to adopting Suvarnabhumi's name, as well as examine the broader historical context of Thailand, including factors such as geopolitics, domestic governance, and foreign diplomacy. This comprehensive overview aims to provide readers with a deeper understanding of Thailand and the Southeast Asia region.

Introduction

The geographical positioning of Thailand holds profound historical and cultural significance, notably in the context of the expanse recognized as "Suvarnabhumi." Etymologically derived from the Sanskrit amalgamation of "Suvarna," signifying golden, and "Bhumi," connoting land or territory, "Suvarnabhumi" intricately translates into "Land of Golden Splendor" or "City of Gold." In the geopolitical tapestry, Thailand assumes a pivotal role as the epicenter of Southeast Asia, strategically facilitating the terrestrial conduit linking China to the Malacca Strait, thereby extending access to the South China Sea. The prominence of Suvarnabhumi Airport, extolled for its uninterrupted operational density since its inauguration (Airport Technology, 2023), serves as an empirical testament to Thailand's indispensable regional centrality.

The genesis of Suvarnabhumi's nomenclatural underpinnings traces back to venerable Indian narratives. One hermeneutic strand posits that Suvarnabhumi stood as an opulent citadel where the treasuries brimmed with gold, hence the christening. Conversely, an alternate interpretation proffers that Suvarnabhumi, perched in proximity to the sea, presented shores adorned with sands glistening akin to gold, prompting a metaphorical moniker. The resonating significance of Suvarnabhumi is further underscored through its historical connection with the propagation of Buddhism. It emerges as a critical nexus in the narrative of Buddhist dissemination, notably during the reign of Ashoka the Great within the Mauryan Empire (Silpa-mag, 2020).

However, the precise cartographic coordinates of Suvarnabhumi continue to elude stringent demarcation. Myriad historical sources, spanning Indian Buddhist hagiographies, Chinese annals, and Ptolemy's Geographia, proffer vague indications concerning its locale, coarsely pointing toward the western littoral of the Indian subcontinent. Contemporary interpretation inclines toward situating it within the confines of the Malay Peninsula (Bennett, 2009). Evidently, irrespective of provenance, the geographic whereabouts of Suvarnabhumi remain ensconced within the realm of conjecture. Notwithstanding, one may conjecture that the territorial ambit encapsulated by Suvarnabhumi presumably encompassed tracts of the Southeast Asian mainland and the Malay Peninsula, underscoring its generic characterization toward diverse domains within this geographical precinct.

The matter of Suvarnabhumi's geographical location remains a subject of contention among historians, with countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand all laying claim to this revered territory. This contention arises from the profound historical and cultural associations that these nations share with the fabled land of Suvarnabhumi, a domain that extends across the southeastern Asian continent. Furthermore, the affinity between these countries, rooted in their shared adherence to Buddhism, has endowed Suvarnabhumi with a revered status and deep cultural resonance.

The decision to entitle the national airport with the name "Suvarnabhumi" did not mark Thailand's initial proclamation of ownership over this legendary land. The earliest reference to Suvarnabhumi within Thailand's academic sphere can be traced back to the era of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), with significant contributions from Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, a preeminent figure in Thai historiography. Prince Damrong, recognized as the father of Thai history, conducted pioneering research on Thai historical narratives and firmly advocated the notion that Suvarnabhumi might have been situated within the boundaries of Siam. Nevertheless, from the perspective of historical scholarship, Prince Damrong's hypothesis possesses limited empirical substantiation, particularly when contrasted with the more comprehensive evidence presented by neighboring countries (Sriwattanakul, Phon 1971: 8-11).

However, Suvarnabhumi's significance transcended academic discourse, finding its place in the national anthem of Thailand during the People's Party era. This incorporation of Suvarnabhumi into the national anthem underscores the fact that Thailand viewed Suvarnabhumi not merely as a mythical realm but as an emblematic representation of the nation's identity.

Genesis: When the World Order Shifted

Initially, the issue of Suvarnabhumi is just a part of the study of Siam's history during the Rattanakosin period (1782 - Present). Throughout Thai history until the early Rattanakosin period, Siam (or Thailand) , had interactions with neighboring states in the Galactic Polity or Mandala system. This perspective is influenced by Brahmanism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, reflecting the influence of both religions on not only individual lifestyles but also on the governance of various states in Southeast Asia. This perspective resembles a cosmological system

where there must be celestial bodies and satellites orbiting around. Therefore, governance took on various hierarchical levels, with those farther from the capital city having less influence than those closer. This resulted in the uncertain nature of territories, unlike modern nation-states (Tambiah, 2013: 503-508). In this context, Myanmar's culture was considered a significant threat to Siam throughout its history. However, during the middle of Rattanakosin period (1851 – 1925), Siam faced a new kind of threat as Myanmar was incorporated into the British Empire. In this era, Siamese leaders viewed the Chinese empire not just as a mere extension of the Mandalas but as a great power in its own right. Siam suffered defeats at the hands of the British Empire during the Bowring Treaty negotiations.

This threat did not only come from European countries embarking on imperialism but also from the changing world order and practices from the Western perspective. European countries claimed that the lack of civilization or nomadic forest-dwellers in various nations was their responsibility to address. This duty fell upon European countries, who possessed civilization, to organize these nations. This notion extended beyond royal offices and included the educated bourgeoisie and other high-ranking social groups in Siam.

King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851 - 1868) was well aware of the level of threats and challenges facing Siam during his reign. He perceived Siam as a state that was 'half-civilized and half-barbaric.' Consequently, it became imperative to modernize Siam to a greater degree in order to ensure its survival in the face of various threats. The concept of modernization, or 'ศิวิไล' (Siwilai), in the context of King Mongkut's vision was not solely based on either Western standards or on scientific and technological progress. It was a blend of modernization with the existing identity and traditions of Siam. This included preserving Buddhism and maintaining the status of the monarchy. This idea of Siwilai was not limited to the royal court; it extended to intellectuals and the upper classes of Siam as well. This concept emerged as a result of the reforms implemented during middle of Rattanakosin period, which aimed to bring Siam up to date with the contemporary world (Winichakul,Thongchai, 2000: 529-533).

As previously discussed, Siam's primary goal was to place itself in a state of autonomy, following the model of European nation-states that had adhered to the principles established since the Westphalian Peace Treaty (October 1648).

This was to ensure that Siam could continue its traditional way of life without interference from Western powers. Efforts to emulate the Meiji Restoration in Japan became a significant endeavor during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868 - 1910). This period was crucial for Siam's survival, as it faced both the encroachment of the British Empire from the west and French influence from the left bank of the Mekong River. The ongoing process of modernizing the country was evident, and one of its most notable successes was the negotiation that led to the Second Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1896. This treaty, also known as the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896, demonstrated Siam's ability to maintain a neutral position between the two European superpowers. Both the British and the French agreed not to interfere in Siamese territory beyond the borders of Europe.

At this point, it is essential to note that Siam's success was not solely due to its approach to modernization but also to its strategic geographical positioning, which facilitated its ability to navigate international relations effectively. This created a 'Siamese-style Siwilai' environment that contributed to Siam's resilience. The concept of 'Siamese-style Siwilai' It is applied mostly to the word 'Charoen' that abouts nonmaterial matters, such as cultivating merit and Buddhist awakening, making (someone) happier, growing up, increasing maturity. until it became an alternative to the alien word siwilai in this latter sense. Siwilai and the new notion of Charoen clearly indicated the sense of transformation into the new age, or modernity, as opposed to the traditional, the ancient, or the bygone era, later become the foundation of the Golden Land (Suvarnabhumi) discourse during subsequent periods. In the broader context of international relations, it's worth mentioning that Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was also a significant player during this time, albeit not directly involved in Siam's affairs.

In the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910 - 1925), the issue of safeguarding Siamese sovereignty within the framework of "Siam's Siwilai" became a prominent concern. Ensuring Siamese independence was a paramount challenge to address. Although Siam managed to avoid colonization by Western powers on both fronts, it still had to grant extraterritorial rights to the British Empire. The perception that Siam did not fully benefit from various treaties led to a foreign policy agenda focused on rectifying these agreements and enhancing Siamese sovereignty, ensuring its survival in a global order shaped by Western

nations (Waithayakorn, Wan, 2021: 67). It is evident that a crucial opportunity that allowed Siam to achieve its objectives was its participation in the Great War, also known as World War I. This participation led to Siam aligning with the Allied Powers and emerging victorious. Siam seized this opportunity to address the unfair treaties. However, during the reign of King Vajiravudh, Siam continued to face challenges to its cultural, traditional, and economic identity, much like in previous times.

During this period, the democratic form of government was gaining recognition in many countries, presenting a clear contrast to the traditional monarchical system. Meanwhile, following the end of the Great War, after 1917 revolutions in Russia a new form of governance emerged - communism, which was gradually gaining acceptance among political leaders in several countries with the worker's movement this further heightened concerns within Siam to adaptation of monarchy. King Vajiravudh era saw the introduction of persuasive propaganda, marking the beginning of widespread nationalist sentiments in Siam. This was achieved through various forms of communication, including writings and songs, where the King used a pseudonym, " Asvabahu" in political writings. His aim was to convey the royal aspirations to the masses, fostering patriotism, religion, and loyalty to the monarchy. Thus, this period marked the initiation of advertising campaigns aimed at promoting nationalist sentiments and ideals among the Siamese populace.

Nevertheless, during the reign of King Vajiravudh, it should be noted that although he governed within a constitutional framework, the Siamese-style concept of sovereignty was not entirely relinquished. As mentioned earlier, this mindset was not limited to the royal court but extended to intellectual circles and other groups that did not view the monarchy as the sole solution. During this period, reformist intellectual groups, referred to as "Reformists" or those advocating change from dissatisfaction with royal governance, began to play a role in Siam's political landscape. The pivotal event that demonstrated these dynamics was The Palace Revolt of 1912 (Phumkird, Sirirat, 1995: 46-55).

The Rise of Nationalism and the Nostalgic Sentiment

Following the conclusion of the reign of King Vajiravudh, a significant transformation took place in the governance structure of Siam. During this

period, it becomes evident that Siam transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. This transformation was instigated by a group known as the People's Party (Khana Ratsadon), which led the revolution against King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) in 1932. Among the six fundamental principles they established, one was the principle of national sovereignty. Siam's primary goal in its foreign relations remained the attainment of full sovereignty. Despite the shift in governance from the royal court to the People's Party, there was not a significant departure from the previous political landscape regarding international policies. Furthermore, Siam cooperated effectively with the League of Nations in promoting global peace. This demonstrated to many nations that Siam was committed to peaceful means to elevate its international standing (Waithayakorn, Wan, 2021: 79-81) and marked Siam's transformation into a fully sovereign and independent state.

This period was also a time when Suvarnabhumi, the Golden Land, officially emerged. The government of the People's Party aimed to create a national anthem for Siam to instill patriotism among the Siamese people. This led to the creation of the first Siamese national anthem, composed by Khun Wichitmatra, with the following lyrics:

> *"In the realm of Siam, once known as the Golden Land,*
> *Thailand took its stand, a majestic sovereign land.*
> *Through time, we Thais have strived, our heritage held with pride,*
> *Guarding our liberty, with hearts and souls as our guide.*
>
> *In days of strife and war, when foes approached our shore,*
> *Unified, we stood, defending evermore.*
> *Our sacred Thai soil, where our roots and spirits coil,*
> *Flows like the river's toil, with courage in our toil.*
>
> *Independence, our core, a reverence we implore,*
> *Together we restore, our strength for evermore.*
> *We uphold our rights and might, in freedom's radiant light,*
> *Unyielding in the fight, we stand with all our might.*
>
> *We pledge our blood to thee, to keep our land ever free,*
> *In unity, we decree, the glory of Thailand, we agree."*

From the lyrics of Khun Wichitmatra's version of the national anthem, we can consider that Siam has been referred to as the "Golden Land" or "Land of Prosperity" since ancient times by the Thai people. Simultaneously, it emphasizes the preservation of independence and unity among the population while daring to defend against invaders. This has allowed Siam, the homeland of the Thai people since ancient times, to gracefully withstand various threats.

Comparing this to the royal compositions of the reign of King Vajiravudh, we find a shared sense of purpose: the necessity of preserving Siam. At that time, Siam had to adapt to modern nation-state principles. The characteristics of the prosperous Golden Land and the spirit of Siwilai have clear similarities. During the earlier period, Thailand was considered a vast land but faced the challenges of preserving it, reflecting the government's perspective that Thailand had struggled to survive against various difficulties while losing parts of its territory.

In the post-World War I era, the rise of nationalist ideologies had a significant influence on governance and international politics, leading to the development of frameworks promoting national superiority. This phenomenon was global in nature and saw the creation of various definitions and concepts to fuel nationalist sentiments. For example, the concept of Aryanism was used by the Nazi Party. However, it's crucial to note that this term did not refer to the ethnic groups residing in Iran and the Indian subcontinent but rather symbolized those conforming to the Nazi ideology. Historians employed various historical narratives to justify and support the notion of Aryanism. This mirrors the emergence of Siwilai, or the Golden Land, which did not exclusively represent Thailand's ancient origins but rather embodied the idea of a prosperous nation. Both ideologies share similarities in their construction, emphasizing the idealized attributes of a particular nationality within their respective contexts.

In practice, it appears that the Golden Land ideology, as a concept that ignited nationalist sentiments among the Thai population, did not create intense domestic or international actions akin to the Aryanism framework of the Nazis. However, there were some notable initiatives. During the first era of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1938 – 1944), who changed the country's name from Siam to Thailand, the national anthem was modified to align with the new national identity. This change persists to this day to suit the context of

the altered country name. Additionally, technical deficiencies in the original anthem were rectified. (Suphasopon, Satheun,1989: 26-27)

During this period (1938 – 1957), the Thai government pursued the policy of "Greater Thai" or "Pan-Thai-ism," aiming to unite ethnic Thai groups under Thai rule. They also sought to reclaim lost territories from colonial powers, a triumph that went beyond diplomatic negotiations and even involved military actions. In November 1940, diplomatic tensions escalated between the Thai government and the Vichy French government, with neither side willing to compromise. The French government, both in Indochina and Vichy France, stood firm on not returning the disputed territory to Thailand. On November 24, 1940, clashes erupted along the Indochina-Cambodia border and escalated further on November 28 when French fighter planes bombed Nakhon Phanom. Thai forces retaliated, leading to a military confrontation.

A significant battle occurred on January 16, 1941, in the border area of Cambodia, resulting in casualties for the 5th French Army Corps. On January 17, 1941, the Thai warship "Thonburi" engaged in a battle with the French cruiser "Lamotte-Picquet" near Koh Chang, resulting in significant damage to the Thai warship.

As the conflict unfolded, Japan seized the opportunity to intervene, perceiving the military weakness of both Thailand and France. Despite signals from the British government discouraging Japanese intervention, Japan entered the fray directly, aiming to expand its influence in Asia. The conflict concluded with a ceasefire on January 28, 1941, and a peace agreement was signed aboard the Japanese destroyer Natori on January 31, 1941. This intervention marked Japan's increasing involvement in Asian affairs, taking advantage of the weakened positions of Thailand and France. (Daorai, Limsaihua, and Surachart Bamrungsuk, 2016: 469)

At the same time, Thailand decided to align itself with the Axis Powers in 1943. However, the Greater Thai policy faced its end as Japan, an Axis Power, surrendered on August 15, 1945, marking the conclusion of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Shortly after World War II, Thailand experienced a coup

led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1947, which marked the end of the government led by the People's Party.

The World Order Shifted Again (and Again)

During the Cold War era, Thailand had to confront threats that impacted its stability both domestically and internationally. The rise of Communist China as a major power in Asia added complexity to the situation, necessitating a reevaluation of relations with China, which had been severed during the reign of King Rama IV. Thailand hoped for support from the United States to counter the influence of the Communist bloc. This marked a significant shift in Thai foreign policy. Amid global resistance to communism and the demands for self-determination by countries under colonial rule, Thailand emerged as a prominent figure in the fight against communism. Additionally, Thailand became a front line for the United States in its struggle against the spread of communism in Asia. (Suphamongkhon, Konthi, 2023: 270-271) However, it is essential to note that the communist threat was not the only challenge Thailand faced during this period. The Thai government also grappled with domestic opposition, primarily from leftist intellectuals who supported communism. Their perspective on Thailand's sovereignty did not differ significantly from that of the Thai government. Nonetheless, their concern lay in the perceived infringement on Thailand's sovereignty and autonomy caused by the United States' efforts to counter communism.

Despite these challenges, Thailand managed to survive with its full sovereignty intact. The complete support from the United States greatly contributed to this outcome. Notably, the Thai government maintained its strong belief in sovereignty and democracy throughout the Cold War, even though the world order was ever-changing. Thailand's resilience and its ability to gain the full support of the number one superpower proved to be a significant achievement. It demonstrated Thailand's determination to protect its sovereignty and remain independent in a world order that constantly shifted.

During this period, the term "Suvarnabhumi" remained largely dormant until 1959 when Thailand assumed a significant role in regional competition management, particularly well-known under the name of "Laem Thong Sports (Southeast Asian Peninsular Games)" which would later develop into the South

East Asian (SEA) Games. Although the term "Suvarnabhumi" or "Golden Land" had disappeared from the national anthem during this time, it had not vanished from Thailand. It was reintroduced, notably in the context of regional sports events, signifying one of Thailand's successful endeavors.

Considering the political context of that era, Southeast Asia was a region marked by significant conflicts, both internally within individual countries and externally, often arising from the newly gained sovereignty and political struggles among nations. Establishing relations between countries that were not superpowers was a challenging task. During the later years of the Cold War, Thailand had to navigate diplomatic relationships with neighboring countries. The "Vietnamization" policy of the United States, which involved gradual withdrawal from Vietnam, and the Sino-Soviet Split (a conflict between the Soviet Union and China) led the United States to normalize relations with China. Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's policy of shifting from "a battlefield into a trading ground" played a crucial role in Thailand's ability to overcome these challenges. Thailand, functioning as a focal point for the United States in the region, gave it a vital opportunity, especially as the opposing superpowers' influence waned, and Japan rose to great power status once again. Thailand was not merely a center of U.S. influence but was not weighed down with the historical baggage that other neighboring countries had with Japan during World War II. (Yoneo, 1987: 216-220) This presented a significant opportunity for Thailand to declare its intention to fulfill the status of "the Fifth Tiger" of Asia, signifying a clearly defined future goal. This aspect of "the Fifth Tiger" reflects a distinct characteristic of Suvarnabhumi during this time, where it was forward-looking rather than protective or nostalgic as it had been in the past.

Suvarnnabhumi: Embracing the Uncharted Horizons of a New World Order

In the wake of the Cold War's conclusion, the world witnessed a transformative shift in the global order, inaugurating a new era. However, for Thailand, which had aspired to claim its place as the "fifth tiger" of Asia, this period brought economic upheaval in the form of the 1997 Tom Yum Kung crisis , abruptly halting its ambitions. Thailand found itself on a path to economic recovery, a journey that would continue until 2006 when Suvarnabhumi Airport first opened its doors. This milestone marked Thailand's return to the international

stage. The process of Thailand's economic rehabilitation necessitated the repayment of debts acquired from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stabilize its economy post-crisis. Symbolically, this resurgence was encapsulated in the name "Suvarnabhumi," signifying Thailand's reemergence as the "Land of Gold." It was Field King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) who bestowed this name upon the nation, drawing inspiration from the literary work "Phra Mahachanok."In this narrative, "Suvarnabhumi" carries profound Buddhist connotations and stands as a testament to Thailand's enduring Buddhist identity. It is worth emphasizing that "Suvarnabhumi" in this context does not allude to the mythical land but rather symbolizes the nation's vision for a modern-day utopia, deeply intertwined with its Buddhist heritage (Naknuan, Natthakarn, 2017: 77).

In the midst of the new world order, the year 2010 witnessed the emergence of the 2010 Senkaku crisis between China and Japan. This signified a shift towards great power status for China and its increasing role in the Southeast Asian region. Thailand, within this evolving global landscape, sought to position itself as a balancing power between China and Japan, utilizing a flexible diplomatic approach that had proven beneficial in harnessing gains from their competition (Shigenoi, 2022: 5). Thailand's ability to assert itself as a relevant player in this conflict can be attributed to its historical amicability with major powers and its geographical centrality, serving as a transit point for all parties involved. The strategic initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy, which has continued since President Obama's announcement of the "Pivot to Asia," placed Thailand in a precarious position amid heightened tensions and intensified competition between China and the United States. This compelled Thailand to navigate the challenges of the 21st century, where it must grapple with the complex decision of aligning itself between a preeminent great power and a proximate influential power, across various dimensions.

It is evident that the concept of "Suvarnabhumi" or the "Golden Land" has emerged from Thailand's endeavor to preserve its traditional way of life, characterized by a monarchy and Buddhism, throughout its history. This distinctive notion has evolved into the present-day "Suvarnabhumi" or "Golden Land," which is employed in various contexts, ranging from instilling a sense of

national pride to international recognition. However, it is essential to note two critical observations within this context.

Firstly, it is evident that the characteristics of this discourse have typically trickled down from the political elites of each era. Exploring Thailand's history reveals that the country's transition to fully-fledged democracy has not been a seamless journey. Nonetheless, in today's globalized landscape, where human rights and democratic principles play an increasingly significant role, the trajectory of Thailand's foreign policy and the essence of Suvarnabhumi may undergo a transformation. This transformation could potentially involve a shift in the dynamics of the relationship between the people and the state, moving from a top-down approach to one where the people have a more influential role.

Secondly, the character of Thailand as a constitutional monarchy and its diverse religious landscape may pose challenges to the definition of Suvarnabhumi that predominantly emphasizes Buddhism. The question arises as to whether Thailand will continue to lean towards an image of itself as a Buddhist-majority nation, or if this discourse will adapt to the evolving world order. As the concept of Suvarnabhumi in the Thai context has proven to be versatile and adaptive over time, it remains an open question whether it will be modified to fit current or future events or will serve as a reflection of past occurrences.

In conclusion, the discourse surrounding Suvarnabhumi in the Thai context remains a dynamic and evolving concept. Its adaptability and relevance in today's global society may continue to transform in response to changing circumstances. Whether it will persist as a narrative explaining current events or transition into an artefact of the past, only time will reveal.

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14 |

TACKLING FUEL POVERTY
IN LONDON

Navodi Kuruppu

Abstract

Fuel poverty is a major challenge that adversely affects the well-being of a significant number of people across the globe, and the United Kingdom is no exception. Millions of people in the UK need help to keep up with the rising cost of living, with essential items like food and energy bills becoming increasingly expensive. The city of London, in particular, is notorious for its high prices, which are 27% higher than the rest of the country (Ellard King, 2023), leaving Londoners in a tough spot as they try to meet their basic energy needs. This policy report aims to analyse two key research questions using the Environmental Justice (EJ) framework, namely: (a) What is the prevalence of fuel poverty in London, and how is it distributed across the city? and (b) What measures are governing bodies taking to tackle fuel poverty in London?

Introduction

London is the vibrant capital of the United Kingdom and boasts the most significant urban population in the country. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in 2022, the city has a population of 8.7 million people, with 37% of those born outside of the UK, as stated by Sturge in 2023.

It is also a thriving global financial centre with a strong economy driven by service industries. According to Clark, in 2023, the city's gross domestic product (GDP) was £496.4 billion. London provides many employment opportunities, with an overall employment rate of 74.7% for people aged 16-65 in 2021.

Additionally, it hosts 55% of the European headquarters of top companies, as per Lewis in 2021. London boasts a well-connected transportation system and ample green spaces. Moreover, the city is committed to building more sustainable and inclusive infrastructure.

However, London also faces several challenges. Fuel poverty is a significant issue for Londoners, particularly given the city's high cost of living and housing shortage. Within its diverse population, some communities may be more vulnerable to the effects of fuel poverty, struggling to afford and access adequate heating and energy services.

This policy report aims to address these challenges by (a) analysing the extent of fuel poverty and the unequal distribution throughout London and exploring the possible factors of the issue, drawing from the Environmental Justice (EJ) framework, and (b) assessing how effective local governance in London is toward fuel poverty and exploring the role of Local Authorities (LAs) in fuel poverty using the EJ framework.

Fuel Poverty in London

Fuel poverty is the situation in which a household's income fails to meet the cost of heating and powering the home adequately. In 2015, 33,5201 households were affected in London, equivalent to 10.1% of all households in England that are in fuel poverty. Between 2013 and 2014, 69% of the nationwide increase in fuel poverty took place in London and the average fuel poverty gap (the amount needed to avoid falling into fuel poverty) was estimated at £296 (Mayor of London, 2018). This is mainly caused by inadequate investment in new housing, rising housing expenses, higher energy prices, declining incomes, and reductions in benefits for the most vulnerable households. The consequences of fuel poverty encompass negative effects on both mental and physical health. These include depression and anxiety, as well as respiratory and circulatory problems. In some instances, fuel poverty leads to winter deaths. This problem disproportionately

affects the youth, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing chronic medical conditions. (Pellicer-Sifres, 2019). Addressing fuel poverty in London requires various approaches, including extending financial assistance to affected households, improving dwelling efficiency, and ensuring adequate incomes to cover fundamental needs. Organisations like the NEA (2022) and the End Fuel Poverty Coalition (n.d.) support these proposed solutions to alleviate fuel poverty.

The UK government, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Local Authorities (LAs) are all governing bodies working towards alleviating fuel poverty in London. While the UK government is responsible for creating and implementing laws and policies that apply to England, including London, the GLA is responsible for adapting those policies at a local level to address and solve the issues faced by London. The GLA works hand-in-hand with the 32 London Boroughs to promote collaboration and ensure a coordinated approach to governance. (Greater London Authority, 1999).

In 2021, the UK government proposed the "Sustainable Warmth: Protecting Vulnerable Households in England" strategy, updating how fuel poverty is measured. The new approach assesses the three main elements contributing to fuel poverty: low income, energy efficiency and energy prices. According to the new indicator Low-Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE), a household is fuel-poor if:

- After accounting for necessary fuel costs, the household's remaining income falls below the poverty line.

- The household resides in a home with an energy efficiency rating lower than Band C. (DBEIS, 2021b)

In addition to defining and measuring fuel poverty, a key policy implemented by the UK government towards fuel poverty is the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) of 1995. Under this legislation, local authorities in England are required to submit a report to the Secretary of State every two years. The LA must demonstrate which energy conservation measures they have adopted to improve energy inefficiency. This responsibility recognises the jurisdiction of local governments to improve residential properties within their jurisdictions,

including owner-occupied, privately rented, and social housing. The Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS) uses the data from these reports to shape energy efficiency policies and build knowledge of implementation of energy efficiency measures at both local and national levels (DBEIS, 2021a). The UK government attempts to create a comprehensive strategy that addresses fuel poverty at both the macro and micro levels.

Alongside the UK government, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has been actively addressing fuel poverty in London. In 2018, they published the Fuel Poverty Action Plan. This report presents data and information regarding the extent, causes, and impact of fuel poverty in the city. It provides breakdowns based on age, gender, and employment, highlighting the underlying demographics of those most affected by fuel poverty. Moreover, it presents potential solutions, such as raising income levels, enhancing energy efficiency in dwellings, and partnering with energy companies. Additionally, it identifies challenges faced by the GLA in tackling fuel poverty, including lack of funding, resources, evidence to support their case, and difficulties engaging with households. The report is indicative of the GLA's commitment to addressing this issue. The report is easily accessible to the public via the GLA website, and the research presented is readily understandable. Furthermore, it includes references to other institutions, programs, and partnerships facilitating collaboration and cross-referencing.

In addition to the action plan, the GLA introduced the Warmer Homes programme in 2022 in response to the ongoing cost of living crisis. This scheme has the aim of making homes greener and warmer, while also reducing energy use and bills for eligible low-income homeowners and private tenants. Grants ranging from £5,000 to £250,000 are offered through this scheme, based on various factors such as the existing energy efficiency rating, dwelling tenure, and fuel type. The options available for applicants include heat pumps, insulation for walls, heating system improvements, draught-proofing, and solar energy installations. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced the initiative, making it easily accessible to Londoners through an online survey to determine their eligibility for the grant. Each LA has adopted the Warmer Homes programme, by setting up sections on their websites with information about the scheme. With the Fuel Poverty Action Plan and the Warmer Homes programme, the GLA is taking important steps to address fuel poverty and promote energy efficiency and

affordability throughout the city. While the Warmer Homes programme provides a beneficial short-term solution for low-income homeowners and renters, the UK government and GLA funds should be allocated for retrofitting and for researching sustainable solutions to alleviate fuel poverty in London effectively.

Methodology

Extent and Distribution analysis

As the introduction explains, the UK Government is working towards fuel poverty through the LILEE framework. Based on the new criteria and results, O'Brien (2023) has created a map for Trust for London, showing the proportion of households in fuel poverty in Greater London.

Each borough has been split into postcode areas.

- If the postcode area has under 5% of households in fuel poverty, it is coloured in pink.

- If the postcode area has between 10-15% of households in fuel poverty, it is coloured in peach.

- If the postcode area has between 15-20% of households in fuel poverty, it is coloured in orange.

- If the postcode area has over 20% of households in fuel poverty, it is coloured in red.

The map (section 5) will be visually analysed to identify the areas in London most vulnerable to fuel poverty. For this assessment, particular attention will be given to regions where over 20% of households are classified as fuel-poor, represented by red. This selection criterion is applied as it may indicate a broader housing issue within those areas, with more than 20 houses out of every 100 facing fuel poverty challenges. Also, the map will be divided into four cardinal quadrants to

make it easier to describe the findings through the North, South, West, and East ends.

4.2 Governance analysis

The UK Government is collaborating with LAs to tackle fuel poverty through the HECA, which requires all LAs in England, including London to submit a report every two-years indicating what the authority has been doing toward energy efficiency and fuel poverty for their residents. With regard to fuel poverty, the sections include questions 21 to 24b:

> 21) Does your local authority have a fuel poverty strategy?

> 22) What steps have you taken to identify residents/properties in fuel poverty?

> 23) How does fuel poverty interlink with your local authority's overall carbon reduction strategy?

> 24a) What measures or initiatives have you taken to promote fuel cost reduction for those in fuel poverty?

> 24b) If you have taken measures or initiatives to promote fuel cost reduction for those in fuel poverty, what partnership with business or energy providers have you undertaken?

The methodology employed for the second part of the study involved a systematic search for HECA reports from each LA within Greater London. The primary objective of this search process was to identify the most recent HECA report available. The evaluation of these reports was based on specific criteria related to their submission dates and relevance and the results will be reported in Table 1 in section 6.

Reports submitted in either 2021 (the latest round) or 2019 (the second latest round) were classified as "good" and highlighted in green. This classification signified compliance with the act's deadline and the provision of updated, contemporary information. The inclusion of the 2019 round recognises the

potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have influenced some Local Authorities' ability to meet deadlines due to unforeseen challenges arising from the pandemic. In-depth analysis was carried out on the sections pertaining to fuel poverty within these reports. This examination aimed to assess how extensively these Local Authorities had taken steps to tackle fuel poverty and how well they had addressed questions 21 to 24b. This assessment acknowledged that simply submitting a report doesn't ensure it comprehensively includes all the necessary data, information, and examples. The results are reported in Table 2 in section 6.

Reports prior to 2019 were categorised as "neutral" and marked in yellow. This classification indicates adherence to the HECA but also underscores the potential value of historical information for contemporary research purposes for fuel poverty. Reports that could not be located at all were evaluated as "bad" and indicated in red. This classification could signify insufficient efforts to document actions targeting fuel poverty, a lack of available resources for such documentation, or even a scarcity of relevant online data and information on the Local Authorities' websites.

It is noteworthy that the city of London was excluded from the HECA report analysis due to its distinction as a non-borough entity.

Extent and Distribution analysis

Findings
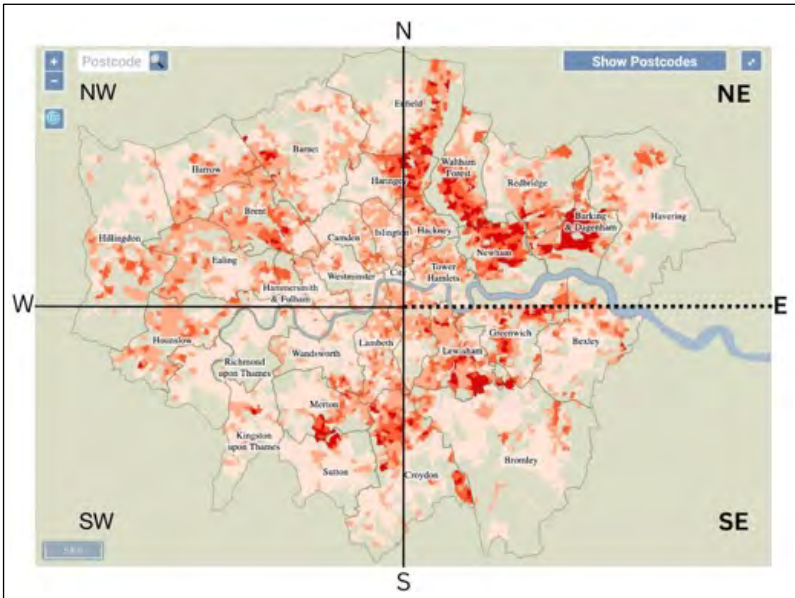
The visual analysis of the fuel poverty map revealed insights into the extent and distribution of fuel poverty in Greater London. While the phenomenon exists in all boroughs at different levels, the East of London (including Northeast and Southeast) shows a high concentration of fuel poverty rates, particularly in Barking and Dagenham, Newham, Waltham Forest, Enfield, Greenwich, and Lewisham. These areas exhibited clusters of postcodes with more than 20 houses per 100 households experiencing fuel poverty, signposted in red. The severity of these clusters is visually remarkable and highlights the pressing need for targeted interventions in this region. The presence of significant fuel poverty clusters in the East, transcending borough borders, suggests that specific local factors contribute to this phenomenon. In addition to the clusters of the East end of London, red postcodes have been detected also in Southwest (Merton, and Sutton) and Northwest (Barnet and Brent). In these cases, the red postcodes

appear in isolation or more dispersed compared to those in the East end of London. The unequal distribution of fuel poverty in London could be related to demographics, housing types, socio- economic conditions, or energy efficiency measures in these areas.

Discussion

While there are various potential factors contributing to fuel poverty in the East end of London, the EJ framework leads us to consider the disproportionate impacts of fuel poverty on some communities and their causes. One way to do this is by looking at intersectional inequalities, such as fuel poverty and ethnic background, and how these may interact with one another, exacerbating fuel poverty for some households. It attempts to answer the question: "Is there a correlation between the high fuel poverty rates in households located in the East End of London and the ethnic background of the people residing in these households?". It is reasonable to consider this line of thinking because the East End of London is renowned for being an area of high levels of ethnic diversity.

According to the ONS (2020), East London presents an average of 40.1% of its population comprising individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Black, Asian, Mixed, and other). Notably, boroughs such as Barking, Newham, Redbridge, and Tower Hamlets are boroughs of inclusivity, each with a non-white population exceeding 50%. Furthermore, Kochan et al (2014) have found that one of the major concentration areas of London includes the eastern boroughs of Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, and Greenwich. It was understood that migrants from economically disadvantaged countries were usually found in these less expensive inner boroughs such as Tower Hamlets (Bangladeshis), Southwark and Lewisham (Caribbeans) as well as throughout outer boroughs north of the river (Indians). While no literature has been found connecting fuel poverty and vulnerable communities in these areas, it is relevant to consider the housing factor as a perspective in the examination of fuel poverty and disproportionate impact. In general, inefficient energy systems and insulation can increase the energy costs of a household (Chen et al, 2022).

The contemporary settlement of these Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in East London can be traced back to housing patterns

during the post-war immigration to Britain. In this period, a significant influx of migrants to Britain took place from Commonwealth nations, coinciding with decolonisation, and reaching a post-war peak in 1961 (Webster, 2011). Sutherland (2006) has analysed the disadvantages experienced by African Caribbeans living in urban inner communities during this era. Post-war Caribbean immigrants faced significant challenges when entering the housing market in Britain, particularly at a time when the private rental sector was shrinking. Their limited financial means due to low-income jobs, coupled with overt white racism, severely restricted their housing options. Additionally, these people where marginalised to low quality accommodations, which further exacerbate energy costs. Consequently, many black households found themselves residing in overcrowded, unsafe, and under-resourced living conditions, devoid of even the most basic amenities for a decent life. The issue of housing discrimination also surfaced, revealed that one in five real estate agencies engaged in discriminatory practices against non-white individuals. Amidst these difficulties, African Caribbeans experienced chronic stressors, particularly concerning their housing conditions. Narrowing the focus to one of the boroughs in the interest of this report, Glynn (2011) examines the connection between Bangladeshi migrants in Tower Hamlets and associated ghettoisation. It is claimed that housing emerged as a crucial aspect of race relations, such as in the case of Bangladeshi migrants in Tower Hamlets. The chronic shortage of adequate housing in Tower Hamlets pushed immigrants, particularly those with large families, disproportionately into the poorest housing options. Housing allocation policies and a climate of institutional racism further hindered their access to better accommodation. This unequal allocation not only affected their living conditions but also contributed to a feeling of racial discrimination and ghettoisation.

Given the challenges faced by post-war Caribbean immigrants in accessing suitable housing, it is possible that some African Caribbean households may find themselves in energy-inefficient and poorly insulated homes, leading to higher energy consumption and increased difficulty in paying energy bills. This situation is exacerbated by their limited financial means due to low-income jobs and the additional burden of discriminatory practices in the housing market. Similarly, the case of Bangladeshi migrants in Tower Hamlets has highlighted the issue of overcrowding. When multiple families or individuals live together in confined spaces, energy usage can rise significantly. The increased demand for heating,

lighting, and other energy resources in overcrowded homes can further increase energy bills and contribute to fuel poverty. Overcrowded households are also more likely to be fuel-poor and in these circumstances, the risk of circulating respiratory viruses due to cold homes is much higher (Pellicer-Sifres, 2019).

The racial legacy from the post-war era, has become ingrained in various aspects of the UK's societal systems, such as the housing sector. In a report for Runnymede, Elahi et al, (2016) discuss how all ethnic groups are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, in comparison to their White British counterparts. More specifically, Black Africans, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have the highest levels of overcrowding and thus housing inequality in London, where around two in five Black African (40%) and Bangladeshi (36%) residents live in overcrowded housing, with around two in five Black African (40%) and Bangladeshi (36%) people living in overcrowded housing. The most substantial increases in housing inequality took place in Barking & Dagenham, Waltham Forest, and Hillingdon. Similarly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation conducted a study showcasing the deep inequalities faced by BAME communities, inhibiting their access to affordable and secure housing. More than a quarter of BAME working adults spend over a third of their income on housing, compared to just over 1 in 10 white workers. Moreover, policies such as No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and Right to Rent contribute to the severity of housing affordability issues for these minority groups. NRPF restricts access to social housing and welfare support for many individuals who have temporary leave to remain in the UK, while Right to Rent has led to direct discrimination against BAME people, as landlords tend to avoid those tenants perceived as "foreign" individuals. As a result of these policies deemed as "discriminatory", BAME communities often experience overcrowded living conditions, housing instability, and in some instances destitution. Consequently, they may find themselves residing in properties lacking proper insulation, modern heating systems, or energy-efficient infrastructure. Ultimately, these houses tend to consume higher amounts of energy due to heat loss and inefficient energy usage, resulting in increased energy bills for the residents.

Nevertheless, it is important to discuss around the remaining red postcodes areas outside of the East end of London. As mentioned in the visual analysis, there are cases of over 20% of fuel poverty in the Southwest (Merton, and Sutton) and Northwest (Barnet and Brent). These areas are also very diverse with Merton

having a non-white population of 32%, Sutton with 34%, Barnet with 35%, and the most striking example being Brent, with a non- white population of 64%. Yet, the situation in the East end of London represents a specific scenario in which ethnic minorities were disproportionately allocated to substandard housing options within that area. Consequently, this has led to the formation of significant clusters of high fuel poverty, in contrast to other regions of London where isolated cases are more common. Therefore, the issue extends beyond the territorial distribution of energy-poor households, as evidenced by the LILEE map.

Governance analysis

Findings

Table 1

	LA's name	Latest submission of HECA
1	Barking & Dagenham	Not found
2	Barnet	2019
3	Bexley	Not found
4	Brent	Not found
5	Bromley	2019
6	Camden	2021
7	Croydon	2021
8	Ealing	2017
9	Enfield	Not found
10	Greenwich	2013
11	Hackney	Not found
12	Hammersmith & Fulham	2015
13	Haringey	2019
14	Harrow	2018
15	Havering	Not found
16	Hillingdon	Not found
17	Hounslow	2019
18	Islington	Not found
19	Kensington & Chelsea	2013
20	Kingston upon Thames	2008
21	Lambeth	2021
22	Lewisham	2019
23	Merton	Not found
24	Newham	Not found
25	Redbridge	Not found
26	Richmond upon Thames	2013
27	Southwark	Not found
28	Sutton	2019
29	Tower Hamlets	Not found
30	Waltham Forest	Not found
31	Wandsworth	Not found
32	Westminster	Not found

Good:	Report from two latest rounds - 2021 and 2019.
Neutral:	Report from before two latest rounds - before 2019
Bad:	Reports not found from any round

Table 2

LA name	21. Strategy	22. Identification of residents in fuel poverty	23. Interlink with CO_2 reductions	24a. Fuel costs reductions	24b. Partnerships
Barnet		X			
Bromley	X				
Camden		X	X		X
Croydon	X	X	X	X	X
Haringey	X				
Hounslow	X	X	X	X	
Lambeth	X	X	X	X	X
Lewisham		X			
Sutton	X	X	X	X	

9 boroughs have submitted HECA report in one the latest two rounds, either in 2021 or 2019. These include:

- Camden, Croydon, Lambeth in 2021;

- Barnet, Bromley, Haringey, Hounslow, Lewisham, and Sutton in 2019.

With reference to Figure 2, these boroughs have put different focus on the fuel poverty section of the HECA report.

- Croydon and Lambeth have answered all questions substantially with examples;

- Hounslow, Sutton have not answered whether they have partnerships;

- Barnet and Lewisham only defined how they identify fuel poor households;

- Haringey and Bromley only claimed to have a strategy or to be working towards it.

6 boroughs have submitted HECA reports before the latest two rounds, before 2018. These include:

- Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames.

16 boroughs' HECA report has either not been submitted in any round or has not been detected throughout the research. With reference to the visual analysis of the fuel poverty map, these 16 boroughs include 6 of the boroughs with a number of postcode areas with over 20% of fuel poverty, which are:

- Newham, Hackney, Enfield, Waltham Forest, Redbridge and Barking and Dagenham.

Discussion

The compliance with HECA reporting by LAs has been a cause for concern, as many have not adhered to the 2-year submission deadline and have provided inadequate responses to questions 21-24b, which specifically pertain to fuel poverty. This lack of compliance is evident across boroughs with both high and low fuel poverty rates, as indicated in the fuel poverty map. As the distribution of fuel poverty is highly diverse throughout the city, it is understandable that some local authorities may not have prioritised fuel poverty given the variation in rates and the presence of other critical issues in their boroughs. Submitting the HECA report enables the UK government and the BEIS department to gain valuable insights into how to improve fuel poverty in each borough of London and how to best engage and cooperate with the local authority and their residents. The HECA report holds a key role, not only in providing data to DBEIS but also in providing important information to their residents and in promoting transparency of LA actions. This is of particular importance for boroughs with high fuel poverty rates, such as those in East London.

The HECA report's response patterns of LAs may indicate wider governance challenges around fuel poverty. These challenges could include funding

limitations, interfering with the implementation of fuel poverty action plans and a normalisation of the issue of fuel poverty, resulting in insufficient efforts. In view of the complex arena of governance with three different bodies holding jurisdiction over London's fuel poverty, it is essential to examine how the UK government and the GLA can effectively support and empower LAs in fulfilling their responsibilities regarding fuel poverty. This analysis is fundamental to ensure effective collaboration and coordination between different layers of governance. Ultimately, the analysis can help to create impactful solutions that benefit not only the most vulnerable fuel-poor communities but also all affected households in London.

England's local government system has gained widespread recognition for its capacity to make decisions at the local level, impacting the quality of life for residents in the area. Local authorities are then held accountable for these choices through regular local elections. In the last thirty years, the government has implemented a range of actions aimed at reducing the powers and diminishing the status of local authorities (Leach et al. 2017). Travers et al. (2010) discuss the various challenges that local authorities encounter within metropolitan governance of London. They highlight the complexity faced by metropolitan governments, including London, in the management of diverse populations and business activities with high potential for interaction and unintended outcomes. LAs are supported by both the UK government and the GLA in various ways. On the one hand, the UK government is one the main three sources of revenue for LAs, in addition to council tax and business rates. However, unlike central government, local authorities have no power to borrow to finance day-to-day spending, and so they must either run balanced budgets or draw down reserve (IfG, 2023). On the other hand, the GLA exists as the upper governing tier of London, which complements and supports the efforts of local authorities through energy-related initiatives and collaboration with housing association. However, LAs remain the lower tier borough authorities who carry the main responsibilities for actual service provision over the GLA, including housing and planning applications (Leach et al., 2017).

One of the main concerns in this scenario is the Mayor of London's limited authority in controlling essential investment resources, which are crucial for implementing any development strategy. A report by Grant Thornton published by LocalGovUk (2019) has shown that more than a third of councils in England

are at risk of financial failure in the next ten years. Among these, the most vulnerable councils are London boroughs with 78% (25 out of 32 boroughs) predicted to fall into bankruptcy by 2028. Additionally, London Councils (2018) have estimated that between 2010 and 2020 around £4bn were detracted from central funding for local services in London. Consequently, at least £2bn are required to be saved in the next four years for London boroughs, unless more money is made available in the spending review. Limited funding plays a significant role in constraining local authorities (LAs), impacting their available resources including time, staff, and functional IT systems for data storage and critical document preparation like HECA reports. Given the extent of this funding shortfall, it's plausible that some LAs might struggle to allocate substantial time and efforts to address fuel poverty specifically, focusing instead on broader poverty-related challenges.

The financial and capital raising limitations faced by LAs may also be the result of a downplaying of their role in the representation of their communities. As argued by Leach et al, (2017), local authorities play an essential role in view of their ability to recognise and address the diverse nature of local circumstances. They discuss how this role allows them to prioritise local services, an important aspect in the context of fuel poverty, especially during periods of financial constraints. Additionally, LAs are accountable for the welfare of local residents and the choices that affect their lives, ensuring a representative and participatory decision-making process. They can efficiently deliver essential local services, thereby fulfilling the purpose of local governance, which encompasses the concept of "community governance." This approach involves identifying and effectively responding to the entire spectrum of local issues, challenges, and opportunities that the locality encounters. In these terms, local authorities serve a significant purpose in tackling fuel poverty in London, which is in alignment with the principles of the EJ framework. As explained by Schlosberg (2014) in the literature review, the EJ lens emphasises local impact, the community's voice and experience, demand for community sovereignty, democratic accountability, and participation, all of which are evaluated as essential in addressing fuel poverty in London.

Travers et al. (2010) further show that local governments also play a vital role in the foundation of local democracy, which draws the boundaries that define communities based on where people live. These communities are significant as

they foster a sense of identity and belonging known as "affective" community, while also exhibiting identifiable patterns of activity around major population centres, known as "effective community". Being responsive to both affective and effective aspects of the community are primary responsibilities of local authorities. To achieve this, LAs must be defined in ways that align with the unique characteristics and requirements of the communities they serve, particularly for underprivileged and impoverished groups. By doing so, they can effectively meet the diverse needs and aspirations of the local residents they represent. While LAs are characterised by limited financial resources, limited revenue-raising powers, and the substantial responsibilities, implementing measures such as raising council tax would be unjust as it may disproportionately impact households already affected by the very issue being addressed in this report, making it essential to explore alternative funding strategies that mitigate the burden on vulnerable communities. Therefore, both UK government must allocate additional funding to support LAs, and the GLA to ameliorate their support and assistance to them.

The research has been conducted using official and reliable sources, ranging from policy, academic literature, which support the claims presented. The claims are also linked with a relevant analytical. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge some limitations must be considered. Firstly, the HECA report serves as a compilation of information regarding LAs' action toward tackling fuel poverty. Consequently, crucial information becomes unavailable if a local authority fails to submit the report. It is important to note that additional reports and strategies related to fuel poverty have been published. For instance, despite the absence of Islington's HECA report, they have released the "Vision 2030: Building a Net Zero Carbon Islington by 2030" (2020), outlining commitments toward climate change that encompass housing and energy efficiency improvements. Similarly, the "Brent Climate Change Strategy 2021-2030" (2021) provides an overview of the Brent Council's efforts in reducing carbon emissions, including housing and building enhancements. Also, Newham has published a "Fuel Poverty training" (n.d.) report, addressed to residents and providing an overview of the issue and information on support. Additionally, it is worth highlighting that LA's websites may have dedicated sections focused on fuel poverty and energy services. Redbridge council features a webpage on "Help with your energy bills", while Tower Hamlets offers guidance on "Fuel debt and advice". These sections provide insights into how local authorities assist residents and enhance their living

conditions. These examples demonstrate that a range of fuel poverty literature exists within LAs policy context. LAs address Discussions on fuel poverty, relevant data, and ongoing initiatives at the macro and micro levels. So, on the one hand, the HECA report is not necessarily indicative of all the endeavours of LAs. However, LAs should prioritise completing and publishing these reports, not only for the interests of the UK government and the DBEIS but also to uphold transparency for the wider public. By ensuring the timely completion and publication of HECA reports, LAs contribute to strong data sets that support policy formulation.

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PART **IV**

GLOBAL POWERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

15 |

NATO DECISION MAKING AND STATE SOVEREIGNTY

Lucas Iacuzzi

Abstract

After the Soviet Union's dissolution, expectations of NATO's obsolescence and a new era of global collaboration emerged. However, in hindsight, this optimism appears misplaced, as NATO today remains a strong and united force. Amid global divisions and Russia's actions in Ukraine, NATO has once again become a topic of debate, drawing both support and opposition from various perspectives. One of the criticisms levelled against NATO, primarily from Russian & Chinese state-regulated media, is the allegation of American imperialism. This article aims to investigate these claims by exploring NATO's history, interventions in both Kosovo and Libya and the decision-making processes that underlie these actions, better to understand the power dynamics at play within NATO. It will conclude that NATO, as a democratic institution, retains its highest number of member states due to the benefits of membership vastly outweighing the costs.

Introduction

Warfare has been a constant part of human history, causing death, destruction, and suffering. The 20th century saw large-scale conflicts that led to a desire to prevent further devastation. Western leaders, driven by concerns about Soviet activities and the need for reconstruction, created a defensive alliance to protect member nations. This alliance became known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was established in response to the Soviet Union, and was followed by the formation of the Warsaw Pact. NATO has faced criticism from political rivals, academics, and even Western leaders themselves. For instance, in 1966, French President Charles de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO's unified command structure, citing concerns about strategic independence and reliance on NATO for operational planning.

NATOs critics have often alleged that it serves as a tool for Western (particularly American) imperialism and aggression, and that it undermines state sovereignty. Detractors argue that the U.S. exploits NATO to pressure member states into supporting its actions, thereby lending them an air of legitimacy. This narrative has been amplified by the Russian state and regulated media to justify actions and threats against NATO states in the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine. However, this article focuses on examining NATO's internal power dynamics rather than questioning its encroachment on state sovereignty. The research explores how smaller states balance sovereignty and security benefits when joining a security alliance with a dominant global power. By incorporating both theoretical insights and case studies, such as the 1999 intervention in Kosovo and the 2011 intervention in Libya, this article provides a nuanced analysis of NATO's decision-making process and the power dynamics that influence the alliance.

Ultimately, this article examines to what extent member states of NATO sacrifice their sovereignty, especially when it comes to self-defence and foreign policy. It aims to answer the question of whether this sacrifice results in NATO members becoming puppets of imperialist powers, or partners in a defensive alliance in which the benefits outweigh the costs of membership.

The alliances: Origins and Evolution

To grasp the complex relationship between NATO and its member states, it is essential to explore the organisation's history and evolution across its nearly 75-year existence. Convening on April 4, 1949, a committee led by veteran American diplomat Theodore Achilles concluded the signing of the Washington Treaty (NATO, 2023). While not the first defensive alliance among Western nations, the Washington Treaty marked a significant departure by establishing a permanent military organisation, ensuring sustained U.S. involvement in European security. Preceding agreements, such as the 1947 Treaty of Dunkirk and the subsequent 1948 Treaty of Brussels, laid the groundwork for NATO's formation, offering valuable insights into the political context and varied motives driving alliance establishment.

In the aftermath of World War II, Britain and France faced strategic challenges. With a devastated economy, Britain sought to strengthen ties with the U.S. to counterbalance the emerging superpowers. France, contending with economic decline and the need to maintain European stability, collaborated with Britain due to shared concerns about potential Soviet aggression and German resurgence. This collaboration materialized into the 1947 Dunkirk Treaty, reflecting Britain's efforts to address French apprehensions and demonstrate to the U.S. a genuine European commitment to a new peaceful order (Baylis, 1982; Reynolds, 2000). Without the Dunkirk and Brussels treaties, conditions leading to NATO's establishment would not have materialized. The U.S. hesitated to engage in European security without evidence of European commitment. These treaties provided the necessary assurance, making American involvement in European security more feasible.

NATO, with its founding treaty's 14 articles, marked a revolutionary departure. Article 5, the mutual defence clause, stood out as the most significant, explicitly stating that an attack on one member would be considered an attack on all (NATO, 2019). The clarity of this clause distinguishes NATO from other alliances, such as the European Union, which has a lower threshold for activation but lacks the explicitness of NATO's response criteria (Clapp & Verhelst, 2022).

Since its inception, NATO has expanded from a group of 12 partners to an alliance of 31 member states, with Sweden expected to join as an additional member in the near future. Although the alliance's primary raison d'etre remains

the coordination of defence in the North Atlantic region among member states (NATO, 2023), the operations that contribute to this goal have undergone significant transformation and expansion since 1949.

While individual member states remain responsible for their day-to-day military activities, strategic operations, and decision-making, the alliance recognises the importance of jointly making key operational and strategic decisions, such as the need for standardised equipment and infrastructure. In the case of standardisation, NATO founded the Military Standardisation Agency (MSA) in 1951, with a focus on enhancing interoperability. Today, the alliance has a plethora of established regulations on the transport of military equipment, railway gauges, weapon munitions calibres, and more (NATO, 2022a). The MSA has since been replaced by the Committee for Standardisation (CS), the NATO Standardisation Office (NSO), and the NATO Standardisation Staff Group (NSSG), all of which continue to fulfil the role for which the MSA was initially established, serving as a testament to how the alliance and its mechanisms have grown and evolved all while maintaining the same purpose.

In conclusion, while contemporary NATO projects a unified front among member states, the organisation's founding era reveals a different narrative. European states had to persuade a reluctant U.S. to engage in joint security, paving the way for NATO's growth and institutional development. The alliance's core functions have remained consistent despite numerous reforms and expansions.

The Decision Making Process

As previously pointed out, NATO has undergone significant reforms and expansion since its inception, however when it comes to the decision-making process, the alliance's highest decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC), remains relatively unchanged since its establishment was set out in NATO article 9. What sets the NAC apart from other NATO institutions is that it is the only NATO decision-making organ to be explicitly mentioned in the Washington Treaty. It is also the sole authority capable of creating new subsidiary bodies such as the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) or Military Committee (MC), which are regarded as necessary to implement the treaties and agreements made by member states (NATO, 2022b). The NAC has been in

session since 1952 and is set to meet twice weekly under regular conditions. Uniquely, the NAC has multiple formations, and any session can be held and attended by member states' permanent representatives, Defence Ministers, Ministers of State or Heads of Government. The decision-making power and authority of the NAC remain the same regardless of what level it meets at (Reorganization of the North Atlantic Treaty, 2013). All meetings are also chaired by the NATO Secretary General, who serves as the alliance's highest-level civil servant, acting in a non-military capacity, ensuring that operational and strategic decisions remain in the hands of individual member states.

As the NAC is set to serve as the final decision-making authority within the alliance, all members must be present for a session to commence, and all decisions must be made, not unanimously, as is often the case with big decisions in similar institutions, but with consensus. Instead of relying on unanimity, similar to the EU's European Council, NATO routinely uses a process known as the silence procedure. Under such procedure, any decisions and resolutions presented in the NAC do not require an affirmative vote like a unanimity-based system would. Under the silence procedure, it is assumed that nations are in support of all proposals and gives members the option to present their opposition privately to save face and maintain the appearance of solidarity (Dial, 2022). This system is often credited with allowing opposing parties to reach agreements quickly, even in the face of adversity thanks to its non-confrontational nature; however, it is not without flaw.

The different levels of contribution that each member state has within the alliance can also garner additional weight behind the actions of larger states. Nations with large military contributions or nuclear deterrents such as the UK, France and the USA will naturally hold more sway within the alliance; despite the private nature of disagreements within the NAC, smaller states will still be hesitant to directly oppose larger members alone. Due to the private nature of the NAC and the silence procedure, it can be difficult to find examples, but there are some cases that can demonstrate this power disparity.

In a 2004 report created for the US congress we can see an outline of the NATO decision-making process in the lead up to the Iraq war. The US had just made a request that NATO start planning military transfers in order to replace US personnel and equipment currently stationed within Türkiye and the Balkans, in

the expectation that these assets would be required in Iraq. During a session of the NAC, France, Germany, and Belgium together expressed opposition to this request and after the silence procedure was invoked, each nation sent letters of opposition as none of these nations supported the American casus belli behind the war. Following these events Türkiye also demanded NATO consultations regarding its defensive needs under article 4 of the Washington Treaty. In order to tackle the opposition, the US requested that Türkiye's defensive requirements be discussed within the Defence planning committee, a committee of which France was not a member due to its earlier withdrawal from the military Unified Command Structure. This allowed the US to both bypass French opposition, and appeal to the German government by implying that any support for reinforcements to Türkiye would be decoupled from the wider efforts to prepare the US for war, resulting in any German support no longer serving as an inherent acceptance of the American war justifications. As a result, the Belgian government, as a small member state, found itself in sole opposition to the US and quickly dropped its objection in order to avoid further isolating itself (Gallis, 2004).

The Trump presidency serves as another poignant example of US influence over the alliance. Across his four-year tenure, President Trump broke away from the norms of American foreign policy in regard to NATO, choosing frequently to criticise both the alliance and its members. In 2017 Trump famously demanded that other NATO allies contribute more financially towards the organisation, and in a further departure from standard convention, did not mention or in any way reaffirm US support for article 5, leading to notable speculation from the media and political allies. Trump would further go on announce the withdrawal of 12,000 US troops from Germany all while claiming that Germany had been failing to contribute financially towards its defence, especially in regard to NATO and the pledge made in 2014 to have all allies spend 2% of GDP towards defence by 2024 (Trump's foreign policy moments, 2021). This was despite Germany being the third highest financial contributor to the alliance at 1.5% of GDP (Borger, 2020). The quick response from NATO allies raised an additional $100bn of funding and the efforts of Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg repeatedly emphasised to Trump that his demands were being heard and met (Schuette, 2021), all of which demonstrates the large capacity for coercion within the alliance. It also begs the question of whether this is the first instance of coercion.

Much of the negotiations in the leadup to big decisions, such as the accession of new member states or the initiation of military action, are often done behind closed doors, and there are some instances where action can be taken without the need for a vote, NATO involvement in Afghanistan is an often cited example, with most of the decisions over the mission and number of troops involved being made through bilateral consultations, rather than a formal vote in the NAC. Yet when it comes to many key decisions, such as alliance expansion, we have yet to see any indication of coercion. The ascension of North Macedonia into the alliance was blocked for 12 years, having been vetoed by Greece in 2008. North Macedonia had originally applied to join in 1999 alongside eight other nations, however due to an ongoing naming dispute between that country and Greece, the Greeks refused to allow NATO to extend a formal invitation for membership. This was only settled in 2018 with the introduction of the Prespa Agreement and NATO was able to finally invite North Macedonia to join (Garding, 2019). What makes the Greek veto notable is that it went against the interest of all other NATO members, including the US, and once the Accession protocol had been signed by all member states, it took North Macedonia less than two weeks to fully join the alliance, clearly demonstrating the strong will of all parties to welcome North Macedonia.

Ultimately, the fact remains that while coercion is possible within the alliance, it is equally possible to see member states veto popular decisions for extended periods while remaining uninfluenced by external pressures, especially when the issue is regarded as particularly sensitive or significant. For NATO to act as a tool for imperialist powers, there would need to be an artificial hierarchy built into its decision-making mechanisms that granted greater power to its largest members.

NATO in the 21st Century

Gallagher (2003) argues against NATO's fitness for the new era, asserting that the alliance had lost its original purpose and struggled to adapt to emerging trends in counterterrorism and insurgency operations. The absence of centralised intelligence sharing exacerbated these challenges until the establishment of the Joint Intelligence and Security division in 2017. Additionally, growing divergence between European and American allies, both in operational interests and the European Union's increasing centralisation of power, fuelled objections to American interventionism. Gallagher also highlighted the risk of perpetuating

underfunded European militaries, as nations relied on American assets stationed in the continent.

Contrastingly, Thies (2009) contends that NATO's enduring strength in the 21st century stemmed from its unique political cohesion forged during its creation amid a conflict-averse era. This cohesion, maintained throughout the Cold War, contributed to the alliance's resilience despite the Soviet Union's collapse. Thies linked NATO's enduring strength to democratic peace theory, emphasising the alliance's commitment to liberal democratic norms and values. This commitment transformed NATO into a democratic actor, surpassing its traditional role as a security alliance and fostering enduring ties with member states.

The Trump era shed light on NATO's dependency on member states' support, with Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg making efforts to appease Trump and secure continued American support. Schuette argued that the alliance's leadership played a pivotal role in this, challenging the mainstream understanding that domestic U.S. political factors were the primary influencers (Schuette, 2021).

The failure of realist and neorealist perspectives to account for NATO's transformation has been attributed to the alliance's shared values, preventing member states from perceiving each other as threats post-Cold War. Liberalist and constructivist theories posited NATO as a "pacific federation," embodying democratic principles beyond its security role (Williams & Neumann, 2000). However, criticisms arose, pointing to NATO's eastward expansion and disagreements over the Iraq war, questioning its ideological consistency. The alliance's lack of a democratic mandate, relying entirely on member states' support, further challenged its constructivist portrayal (Sjursen, 2004).

Despite evolving academic discourse, NATO underwent a fundamental transition in the decade from the Soviet Union's fall to the 9/11 attacks. In a unipolar world dominated by the U.S., NATO faced no near-peer adversaries, pivoting its focus to counterterrorism. The alliance transformed into a "globalized actor," extending its operational sphere beyond the euro-Atlantic region to combat terrorism worldwide (Daalder & Goldgeier, 2006). The strategic shift and NATO's rapid adaptation to counterterrorism were evident in its 1999 and 2010 Strategic Concepts, with terrorism identified as the most imminent threat in 2010 (NATO, 2022c).

Now, amidst the ongoing war in Ukraine and escalating tensions with China, NATO is at another crossroads. Designating Russia as the alliance's primary threat in 2022 signals a shift away from the counterterrorism focus on deterrence against rising global powers. NATO's ability to pivot its focus has been both a strength and a point of criticism. However, this adaptability, coupled with its evolution into a community of shared liberal democratic values, has kept the alliance relevant into the 21st century, and has avoided the creation of a significant power imbalance between member states (NATO, 2022c).

Sovereignty

The exploration of sovereignty is pivotal to this article, necessitating a clear definition and understanding of the term. However, sovereignty, a fundamental concept in international relations, is highly politicised and contested, making consensus on an internationally accepted definition elusive. To grasp sovereignty's contemporary nature, delving into its historical roots is essential.

The Peace of Westphalia, according to many scholars, particularly Gross, represents a critical step toward the modern model of sovereignty. This historical event is credited with establishing a system under which states exercise unrestrained control over certain territories, free from higher authority (Gross, 1948). While debates persist on whether Westphalia marked the origin of modern sovereignty, it is widely accepted that it initiated the multipolar sovereignty model, recognising multiple sovereign states instead of deriving sovereignty from a central authority (Croxton, 1999).

Westphalian sovereignty is based on non-interference in other nations' internal affairs, which marks the end of historical attempts to impose supranational authority over European states, giving rise to classical nationalism (Kohn, 1939).

After the atrocities of the 1940s, states sought to challenge the established Westphalian sovereignty. The 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights signalled a shift away from Westphalian sovereignty by rejecting the idea that states were unaccountable for actions within their territory. This transition curtailed states' absolute sovereignty, emphasising basic human rights within the international system (Donnelly, 2004). By the 21st century, the international order, anchored in international laws and treaties, tasked states with preventing

massive injustices. The UN Responsibility to Protect agreement in 2005 underscored external intervention when states failed in upholding human rights (Grimm & Cooper, 2015).

In the contemporary world, shaped by international institutions and legal systems, state sovereignty dynamics are increasingly complex. Efforts by institutions like the UN to define and uphold sovereignty face challenges due to the lack of a universal definition. The UN Charter and the Declaration on Principles of International Law offer the best framework, emphasising the sovereign equality of all member states and the principle of non-interference (United Nations Charter, 1945; UN General Assembly, 1970).

Globalisation altered the understanding of sovereignty from the Westphalian model. States found themselves needing to cede sovereignty in limited areas to participate in global activities. Tony Blair, in 1999, acknowledged this shift, referring to globalisation as a political and security issue beyond economics. The World Bank exemplifies this new sovereignty, whereby member states receiving economic aid are overseen and assisted in planning development strategies, blurring the lines of non-interference (Blair, 1999; Williams, 2003).

While states retain sovereignty in internal and external affairs, the current global order challenges this concept. Striking a balance between self-determination and participating in international institutions becomes crucial. The case of Brexit raises questions about achieving the right balance, especially when considering security institutions like NATO, where control over security remains a crucial tool in protecting sovereignty. The ongoing struggle for this delicate balance underscores the evolving nature of sovereignty in a globalised world.

Order and Anarchism in International Relations

To address the central question of this article, we must understand the nature of the international system, motivations for NATO membership, and the associated sovereignty restrictions.

Contrary to the regulated image of sovereignty discussed earlier, the international stage is fundamentally anarchic, devoid of a supreme authority over sovereign states (Baldwin, 1993). Both realism and liberalism, dominant theories in

security studies, acknowledge this concept, with idealist theory presenting a counterargument based on democratic peace theory (Layne, 1994). However, the democratic peace observed is attributed more to shared internalised democratic values and structural limitations than empirical law.

Realist and neorealist perspectives, particularly Grieco and Mearsheimer, argue that states prioritise survival, leading to competition in military power rather than cooperation, challenging the existence of strong military institutions like NATO (Grieco, 1988; Mearsheimer, 2014). NATO, however, can be understood as a response to collective distrust of the Soviet Union, forming a coalition to counter a common threat, consistent with realist concepts of balance of power and a "self-help doctrine." NATO's command structures complement national institutions, allowing independent action within the alliance.

Despite these observations, the international system is replete with legal frameworks, alliances, institutions, and non-state actors challenging anarchy theory. International regimes, exemplified by the UN, World Bank, and WTO, establish norms and rules, regulating state behaviour (Krasner, 1982). Since the Westphalian model has been overturned, an international society has emerged, accepting the need for intervention in human rights protection, trade standardisation, and multilateral and bilateral relations regulation. These institutions also create hierarchical power structures, as seen in the UN Security Council.

While these structures challenge the anarchic reality, they do not disprove it. Liberalism argues that while global structures minimise anarchy through international legal norms and cultures, it is an imperfect solution (Grieco, 1988). States like North Korea and Russia, acting against these norms, remain sovereign entities.

Kosovo 1999

The Kosovo conflict in 1998 marked the culmination of the Balkans' disintegration since the early 1990s, witnessing violent conflicts across Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, and ultimately, Kosovo, collectively labelled as Europe's last genocide (Radovanovic, 2020). Initially sparked by the breakup of

Yugoslavia along ethnic lines, the conflict evolved into a multi-ethnic clash with widespread violence and human rights violations (Carment et al., 2006).

NATO's involvement began with Operation Maritime Monitor in July 1992, following the collapse of Yugoslavia. Initially, NATO's role was non-confrontational, enforcing UNSC mandates through various operations, including aerial observation missions, naval blockades, and a targeted air campaign (Ceulemans, 2005). In 1999, NATO intervened in Kosovo, responding to inter-ethnic violence, similar to its previous humanitarian interventions in Bosnia. Unlike Bosnia, Kosovo's intervention was initiated internally within the NAC, reflecting lessons learned to avoid delays seen in previous conflicts. NATO sought to circumvent the complexities of UN civilian oversight, aiming for a more proactive response to real-time events (Grünfeld and Vermeulen, 2009).

Operation Allied Force, lasting three months, involved systematic targeting of Serbian infrastructure and military forces to pressure Belgrade into withdrawing. Despite being politically deemed a success and credited with the withdrawal of Yugoslavian forces, NATO faced criticism for violating the UN Charter by breaching Article 2 prohibiting the use of force without a UNSC mandate (United Nations Charter, 1945).

NATO defended its actions by asserting a threat to regional European security, justifying intervention in the absence of a UN mandate. Supporters highlighted UNSC resolution 1244, passed without objections, outlining a mandate for NATO's KFOR peacekeeping mission. KFOR aimed to deter violence, demilitarise Kosovan militias, and secure the region and its borders (Security Council resolution 1244, 1999).

Despite the effective reduction of violence, NATO's lack of a UN mandate raised concerns about its commitment to liberal democratic values. The decision to intervene, made within the NAC without serious opposition, sparked suspicions of alternative motives. Analysts suggested American interests played a role, showcasing NATO's credibility and expanding US influence into the Balkans, which has historically fallen within the Russian sphere of influence (Ignatieff, 2000).

Libya 2011

NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011, distinct from the Kosovo operation, garnered full UN backing from the outset, though it did not commence under NATO's command, unlike the previous UN mandates in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As tensions and protests grew in Libya in 2011, the government's crackdown drew international attention, reflecting Muammar Gaddafi's increasingly authoritarian rule since 1969 (Williams, 2011). The movement beginning in Tunisia which became known as 'The Arab Spring' signalled potential upheaval, prompting Gaddafi's government to resist protests. The situation escalated into a rebellion, with the National Transitional Council (NTC) emerging as the opposition force. Given Gaddafi's negative international reputation, the UN's authorisation of a humanitarian intervention faced little opposition. The US, along with France and the UK, formed a coalition to strike military targets, mandated by UNSC resolution 1973 (Security Council resolution 1973, 2011). Initially led by the US, UK, and France, the US later assumed a supporting role, hoping European states would increase their leadership role within and beyond NATO (Mesterhazy, 2018).

Tensions arose among coalition partners, with smaller states like Italy objecting to the command structure, particularly French involvement. The perceived conflict of interest for, given its historical ties and economic interests in Libya, led to objections from smaller states. Italy, Germany, and others who pushed for NATO to take operational command. After initial French objections, NATO assumed command, coordinating military assets, and enforcing the UN-mandated arms embargo (Traynor and Watt, 2011). Under NATO's command, a clear chain of command enhanced coordination and prolonged the no-fly zone and arms embargo through resource pooling. While the US advocated for a greater European role in NATO's leadership, there was a decline in interest and commitment from European states due to "intervention fatigue." Unlike past interventions with unanimous NAC support, NATO's assumption of command in Libya reflected a coalition of the willing rather than full alliance engagement. Despite waning European interest, NATO faced no significant criticism, and the Libyan intervention is regarded as a humanitarian success (Kuperman, 2013).

In conclusion, NATO's capacity to coordinate military operations, led by European states rather than American interests, highlights the alliance's flexibility and dynamic leadership structures. Rather than a fixed structure dominated by the US or a partnership between major military powers, NATO considers the concerns of all European members, serving as a tool for compromise in military operational leadership.

Conclusion

This article has sought to delve into the dynamic between sovereignty and NATO, focusing on gauging the extent to which member states relinquish their independence, particularly concerning self-defence and foreign policy. The primary objective was to ascertain whether this sacrifice was counterbalanced by NATO's evolution into an institution that upholds democratic liberal rights.

It has outlined the origins, history, and development of NATO, establishing that NATO is an institution that was not formed out of coercion or imperialist tendencies but rather as a transatlantic partnership of states that had seriously committed to the principles of a lasting European peace through common association and interdependence. This foundational understanding of NATO laid the groundwork for further analysis.

Building on this understanding of NATO's origins, this article examined the decision-making process within the alliance. It concluded that NATO's consensus-building principles and the use of the silence procedure enable the alliance to make decisions through unanimity without the need for any single leader to drive the process. This emphasis on consensus-building ensures that the alliance operates as a true partnership of equals, where each member state's voice is heard and considered. Unlike other international institutions, within NATO, there is no artificial equalisation or hierarchies, such as can be seen with the P5 in the UNSC. While there is still an undeniable level of inequality between NATO members, such as Latvia and the US. This is not due to any organisational structures or artificial hierarchies, but down to the realities of the international stage, in which the US, as a global superpower, will be able to influence global events in a manner that smaller states would find impossible.

By exploring the nature of sovereignty, this article concludes that as a result of our increasingly interconnected and globalised world, nations have been encouraged to selectively sacrifice sovereignty in order to participate in global institutions and benefit from the results of this cooperation. In the same way that member states of the EU can lose some control over economic or trade policy, members of NATO do inevitably concede some independence when it comes to defence planning and policy. However, this loss of sovereignty is understood and done in a transactional nature, granting other, often greater benefits arising from this multinational cooperation.

NATO is a democratic institution that rarely goes against the interests of its members. Unlike other international organisations such as the UN or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, NATO member states are generally in agreement on the majority of the alliance's core issues. This is because of NATO's democratic nature. NATO's Kosovo intervention in the 1990s is an example of this.

However, the Libya intervention showed that if NATO member states have different interests or concerns, there are mechanisms within NATO that allow members to express their concerns and resolve issues. This was seen when Italy and Germany raised concerns over the command structure of the 2011 intervention in Libya.

While NATO members do give up some sovereignty, particularly in defence and foreign policy, the security guarantees provided by the alliance outweigh this. NATO is not an imperialist organization, and if the costs of membership were greater than the benefits, members would withdraw. However, almost 75 years after it was established, membership remains at an all-time high.

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16 |

BROTHER NATIONS

Marharyta Andreieva

Abstract

Russia and Ukraine are often referred to as "brother nations" due to their shared culture and heritage. However, Russia's desire for control over Ukraine is evident in the occupation of Crimea and Donbas in 2014. This article provides an analysis of their relationship by examining Russian attitudes towards Ukraine throughout history. It delves into the periods of the Russian Empire, USSR, post-USSR, and present-day. Additionally, it explores Ukraine's position in the rivalry between Russia and the US during the Cold War.

Introduction

Prior to Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in February 2022, many people were not aware that Ukraine and Russia were separate countries. This misconception might be attributed to the spread of Russian propaganda. Despite sharing a common history with all former Soviet countries, Ukraine has its unique traditions, languages, and values.

The ruling elites in Russia have long considered Ukraine to be their main ally, treating it as if it were identical to their own nation. However, this view needs to

be revised because the two countries have little in common regarding their culture and values. Recent events have made it clear that Ukraine is a separate state, and Russia's aggression towards it serves as a reminder of the importance of understanding history and avoiding propaganda.

The delayed response of the international community, particularly the West, to Russia's military involvement in nearby nations such as Georgia and Ukraine drew criticism as the resulting economic and social challenges must be addressed on a global scale. This highlights the importance of holding aggressors responsible for their past actions to prevent potential worldwide crises.

Ukraine in the Russian Empire

In the 18th century, the territories of modern-day Ukraine were divided between Russia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Crimean Khanate. At that time, the Ukrainian region was called Hetmanate, established in 1649 by the leader of Zaporizhian Sich, Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Ukrainian Cossacks, a military force at that time, fought alongside the Tsardom of Russia in multiple wars and were the main allies of the 'greater nation.' However, when Peter the Great became Tsar, the oppression of the Ukrainians began.

In 1709, during the Great Northern War, Sweden and Russia fought to take control of the Baltic regions. Ukrainian Cossacks were fighting alongside the Russian army during this war. However, in 1708, the Ukrainian Cossack leader Ivan Mazepa changed sides and became a Swedish ally. Feeling betrayed, Peter I sent troops to Hetmanate, captured the capital, Baturin, killed the citizens and chose a new leader for the Cossack army. Ivan Mazepa was called a traitor by the Tsar, and during this conflict, it became evident that the two nations differed in their values and attitudes towards their motherland. The leader of the Cossack army never claimed he was fighting for the Tsar as he was fighting only for his country. He also argued that Russia had always hated Ukraine as a nation and would try to destroy it in the future. In 1721, Russia won the Great Northern War, and Peter I was proclaimed emperor of the Russian Empire.

After his death, Russia returned to authoritarianism with the following rulers and introduced harsher policies towards smaller nations inside the country. Catherine the Second, another famous empress, is known for expanding the country further

and returning primordial Russian territories. She promoted aggressive policies against the 'small nations' inside the state for fear they might establish themselves and stop obeying her rule. Ukraine was one of the nations that did that, which was disturbing for Russia. Zaporizhian Sich, an autonomous state inside the empire, started to develop economically and was trying to promote its politics in the empire. These attempts to separate led to Catherine (commonly referred to as Ctherine the Great) sending troops to Ukraine in 1775 and destroying Zaporizhian Sich. The land was divided into separate regions, and military forces erased any mentions of Ukrainian traditions and values. All the Russian leaders saw imperialism as a driving force to make their country more robust, even if it meant destroying the whole nation with violent force.

During the expansionary policies of Catherine the Great, she claimed land from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Austria, and the Crimean Khanate, citing their initial Russian history. As one of the greatest powers of that time, the empire was able to expand its influence in Eastern Europe and Asia. Interestingly, any official mention of the divisions of the territories disappeared from the archives, possibly done on purpose to allow the empire to invade neighbouring countries and expand 'Mother Russia.' Catherine the Great's imperialist ideology led to invasions of territories and forced changes in religious beliefs. She attempted to push Russian values in captured regions, forcing people to renounce Catholicism and accept the Orthodox faith.

In the late 18th century, Ukraine claimed its autonomy and did not wish to succumb to Russification. Some Ukrainian politicians at that time asked neighbouring countries to help them separate from Russia, but a lack of support led to Ukrainians alone fighting against Russification and preserving their culture. Ivan Kotlyrevski's famous poem, 'Eneida,' encouraged patriotism and helped Ukrainians learn about their culture. Other Ukrainian poets, such as Taras Shevchenko, promoted Ukrainian culture inside the empire and created a national movement that fought for Ukraine's national and social freedom. However, the movement ceased to exist in 1847, and its members were either killed or sent into exile. Publishing anything in the Ukrainian language or using words associated with Ukraine as a separate nation was forbidden.

When Alexander the Second came to power in 1855, he promoted more liberal policies and allowed members of the national Ukrainian movement to return

from exile. Ukraine rose as a nation again and spread its culture across the region. Books were published in the Ukrainian language, and young people read more about their country's history. However, in May 1876, Alexander the Second issued an order to prohibit the promotion of the Ukrainian language, and oppression started again. The emperor prohibited any way of spreading Ukrainian culture and sent members of the national movement back into exile. Despite the repressions, representatives of Ukrainian society fought for the separation of Ukraine from the Russian Empire in the following decades (Plokhii, 2017).

Ukraine under the USSR

During World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917, Ukrainians aspired to gain independence from Russia. Initially, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik party, supported the idea of autonomy for Ukraine. The Bolsheviks hoped that an independent Ukraine would be supportive of the new Soviet government. However, the temporary government of Ukraine did not endorse socialist movements and opposed the Bolshevik party. This led to the withdrawal of the Soviet approval for an autonomous Ukraine (Plokhii, 2017). In their quest to establish themselves as an independent country, Ukrainian forces engaged in a war with the Bolsheviks from 1917 to 1921. After a prolonged conflict, the Soviets captured most of the Ukrainian territory, and in 1922, Ukraine officially became a part of the Soviet Union, with the Kremlin having complete control over it.

Then in 1922, the Moscow government temporarily adopted a liberal approach towards the republics of the USSR, with the aim of establishing a model country where equality was experienced by all. To achieve this goal, they introduced a policy known as 'Ukrainisation', which involved the use of the Ukrainian language in newspapers, education, and entertainment. Regrettably, in the 1930s, the Bolsheviks reneged on this policy and reverted to communist beliefs. The propagation of Ukrainian culture was deemed a direct threat to the Soviet regime, and those who opposed the cancellation of the 'Ukrainisation' policy were either assassinated or exiled.

During Joseph Stalin's reign, the Ukrainian communist party was a prominent autonomous organisation in the Soviet Union. The government supported this

party, allowing it to implement the 'Ukrainisation' policy and appoint Ukrainian representatives to positions of power. The policy led to the spread of the Ukrainian language in books, newspapers, and schools. However, Russian continued to be spoken in cities, preventing the Kremlin from losing control. Other republics, such as Georgia and Belarus, followed Ukraine's example, promoting their respective cultures. This worried the government, leading to many politicians being exiled or assassinated. According to historians, around 883,000 people, including ethnic Russians, were executed as 'counterrevolutionaries' (Trenin, 2019).

Trenin (2019) has noted that countries that resisted the Moscow regime were met with harsh repercussions. During the period of 1928-1940, the USSR faced an agricultural crisis due to the surge in demand for food following the industrialisation plan. To address the issue, the government mandated the forced collection of food supplies from farmers to replenish the food supply. Unfortunately, this policy was also utilised to suppress movements advocating for independence. This led to human-made genocide, 'Holodomor', that killed approximately 3.9 million Ukrainians between 1932 and 1933. The Kremlin started a complete Russification of the Soviet Union and prohibited any spread of the non-Russian languages in other republics.

The government of the Soviet Union implemented a propaganda campaign to cultivate patriotism among its citizens. The media promoted love for the motherland and stressed the significance of the republics being part of the USSR. Russian heritage was popularised in educational institutions, books, theatres, and art galleries. In a Soviet article published in the 'Pravda' newspaper, the patriotism of Soviet republics was praised, while also acknowledging the crucial role of Russians in building socialism (Plokhii, 2017). Inequality between states persisted during the USSR's existence, and the importance of relations with Russia was emphasised. Those who opposed this were viewed as potential traitors. Stalin, who was infamous for his tyrannical rule, dealt with anti-communist individuals with violence to demonstrate the consequences of going against the regime (Trenin, 2019).

The Soviet government aimed to promote the empire's greatness and showcase Russia's superiority in the Union to other republics. Due to the spread of imperialist ideologies, the population, especially the Russians, began to feel like

the most important nation. During World War II, Stalin invaded Poland and the Baltics to spread Russian ideologies and expand their territory. After the defeat of Germany, propaganda in the republics became even more significant. At a Kremlin banquet, Stalin said: "I drink, first of all, for the health of Russian people because they are the most outstanding of all the nations that are a part of the Soviet Union" (Plokhii, 2017).

Cold War

Following the downfall of Nazi Germany, the world was forever changed as the United States and the USSR emerged as global superpowers. These two nations soon found themselves in a fierce competition for international dominance, ultimately leading to increased military tensions and the start of the Cold War in 1947. As both nations raced to develop nuclear weapons, the situation continued to escalate. In an effort to catch up with the US, the USSR sent spies to American laboratories to obtain the necessary information to build their own nuclear arsenal. Regrettably, the Soviet operatives were successful in their mission, which enabled the Soviet Union to conduct successful nuclear testing (Burton, nd).

In 1946, the USSR gained control over Eastern Europe, which posed a direct threat to the West. As a result, President Truman proposed the creation of NATO, an organisation aimed at providing military and diplomatic support to democratic states that felt threatened by the Communists. This aligns with the realism theory of international relations, which views global politics as a competition between self-interested states that want to dominate the world. At the time, war between the Soviets and the US seemed inevitable. However, due to the knowledge that both nations possessed a high number of nuclear weapons, the Cold War did not escalate further. To prevent warfare, the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine was established. This doctrine ensured that any attack from either superpower on each other or their allies would lead to war. MAD served as a way for nations to avoid using nuclear weapons against each other and prevent a global crisis (Miles, 2021).

The end of the Cold War was influenced by several factors, with one of the most significant being the economic and political reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev during his leadership of the Soviet Union. In the late 1990s, President Gorbachev's foreign policy aimed to establish a stable international system by

mitigating tensions between the Soviet Union and the US, whose military arsenals directly threatened each other. The expansion of NATO was a concern for the Soviet Union, which led to negotiations with the West to prevent further alliance expansion to the East.

The country was facing significant economic difficulties at home and could not support its satellite states, which also contributed to the end of the Cold War. These critical reforms led to the weakening of the Soviet Union and a shift towards a more democratic society. Another factor was the strategic arms reduction talks (START) between the US and the Soviet Union, which reduced nuclear weapons and decreased tensions between the two superpowers. The collapse of the Soviet Union's satellite states in Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Hungary, also played a role in the end of the Cold War. These events allowed for greater regional political and economic freedom and marked a significant shift away from the Soviet Union's influence. With the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union aimed to establish diplomatic relations with European nations for future economic and political cooperation. Moscow and Washington agreed not to expand NATO further as part of their agreement. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Gorbachev's request was ignored, and the Western countries captured more members of the Warsaw Pact. This increased tensions between the two sides, as the West's trustworthiness was questioned.

Post-USSR

In the post-Cold War world, Ukraine sought to reassert its independence and restore its unique traditions and values. However, their efforts were challenged when Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency of the Russian Federation in 2004. Putin's ambitious plans included restoring Russian influence and surpassing the power of the US. He hoped to achieve this by forming alliances with countries like Belarus and Ukraine, believing that their people had no significant cultural or social differences.

Despite Putin's efforts, Ukraine's second president, Leonid Kuchma, had different ideas. Kuchma sought to align Ukraine with the West and become a partner of NATO. He believed this would help Ukraine become a democratic state and reduce potential threats from Russia, ultimately making the West more powerful. At the start of Kuchma's presidency, he was seen as pro-Russian.

However, in 1994, he signed a memorandum that guaranteed Ukraine's security in exchange for renouncing its status as a nuclear power. This agreement allowed Ukraine to build stronger relations with the West.

The first three Ukrainian presidents sought to align their country with the West, believing it would accelerate development and advance European values. However, the Kremlin opposed this move, fearing the loss of resources and potential weakening of Russia's position against the US. This rivalry has persisted beyond the Cold War, with NATO's expansion around Russia causing Putin to fear an attack. This mistrust led to Moscow's aggression, as it's often best to strike first in defence. Due to this, Ukrainian presidents were cautious with Western integration, fearing a declaration of war from Putin. Nevertheless, Ukrainian culture and ideology continue to gain ground throughout the country, even in regions with a significant Russian population.

In 2010, Victor Yanukovich emerged as a Ukrainian president who was in favour of Russia and against the country's integration with the West. In November 2013, President Yanukovych made a sudden decision to back out of signing an association agreement with the European Union (EU). He instead accepted a trade deal and loan bailout from Russia, citing economic pressure from the country. This move was highly controversial and was met with widespread protests from the Ukrainian people who saw it as a betrayal of their country's aspirations of closer ties with the EU. Protests against Yanukovych continued to grow, and in February 2014, things reached a boiling point. The Ukrainian parliament declared Yanukovych unfit to govern and removed him from his position as President. Yanukovych fled the country and went into exile in Russia, claiming that he was still the legitimate head of the Ukrainian state.

The new government that took over accused Yanukovych of being responsible for the killing of protestors during the demonstrations that led to his downfall. On 24 February 2014, an arrest warrant was issued for Yanukovych, and he was charged with crimes against the state.

The events of 2013-2014 in Ukraine, which came to be known as the "Euromaidan" protests, marked a turning point in the country's history. (Fisher, 2014).

Occupation

The ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych triggered a political conflict in Crimea. Initially, there were peaceful demonstrations against the newly appointed interim government of Ukraine. However, the situation rapidly escalated and turned violent.

The events of the Dignity Revolution, which took place in February 2014 and led to the ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, triggered a political conflict in Crimea with far-reaching consequences for Ukraine and the wider region. Initially, there were demonstrations against the newly appointed interim government of Ukraine. However, the situation rapidly spiralled out of control. As early as January of that year, the Sevastopol city council passed a resolution calling for the establishment of "people's militia" units to safeguard the city against any potential threats (Miles, 2021). The conflict ultimately led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, which was met with condemnation and sanctions from the international community. The conflict also contributed to ongoing tensions between Ukraine and Russia, which continue to this day.

It has been asserted by Russia that the residents of Southeast Ukraine have long sought to align themselves with Russia, and that military intervention was the only viable means of facilitating their integration. This assertion underscores a persistent historical aspiration for imperialistic supremacy that persists to this day and could conceivably persist in the future if not properly addressed. The ongoing strife in Ukraine has brought Russia's aims into sharp focus, revealing the perils of funding future territorial aggressions in neighbouring nations through diplomatic channels.

The ongoing conflict has had a profound effect on the lives of Ukrainians, altering their perceptions of Russia. A stroll through any Ukrainian city today reveals the impact of war on the atmosphere, with ruined buildings, damaged roads, and military equipment now serving as popular tourist sites. The Russian aggression has had enduring consequences for Ukraine, which will be felt for generations, despite any attempts by Russia to foster cordial relations. The populace's memories cannot be erased, and the trauma of war makes it doubtful that the two nations can reconcile any time soon.

The conflict in Ukraine has had a considerable effect on its economy, with external debt reaching $148.4 billion in September 2023, according to CEIC data. The uncertainty surrounding the West's willingness to offer financial support to help Ukraine rebuild is further complicated by the competing interests of Russia and the West. It's regrettable that a nation that cherishes independence and liberty, like Ukraine, must suffer through such instability. The involvement of outside nations only adds to the ambiguity surrounding the conflict's resolution.

Conclusion

Throughout history, Russia's imperialism has remained steadfast, with the expansion of territories as its primary ideology. This has led to many global rivalries, with superpowers like the US and Russia vying for dominance. During the Cold War, the two nations fought for control, resulting in the adoption of imperialist ideologies. Unfortunately, this has caused an increase in the number of wars and mistrust around the world. Russia's recent declaration of war on Ukraine is a clear example of this, as it feared that its main rival, the US, would gain influence there. It is evident that Russia was not interested in brotherhood with Ukraine but rather in expanding its ideologies and competing with its rivals by acquiring neighbouring land.

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17 |

'I'M BEING DEPORTED TO RWANDA-WHAT IS NEXT FOR ME?' A LOOK INTO THE SYSTEM OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Jake Beasley

Abstract

The United Kingdom's immigration policies have been under scrutiny. The purpose of the policy changes, alongside tightening security and surveillance has been to purposefully create a 'hostile environment' for migrants, refuges and asylum seekers reaching the UK. The response to growing political pressure, fuelled by anti-migrant sentiments and off the back of the 2016 Brexit campaign, has led politicians to pursue ad-hoc, rushed, and ill-thought-out policy implementations, resulting in a pattern of systematic failures that have proved devastating to those affected. Through the investigative work of organisations supporting migrants, it has been found that many individuals are facing a severe lack of welfare screening, psychological health support, and appropriate accommodation, all the while facing uncertainties around their current situation or immigration status. The purpose of this article is to highlight the intersectionality of systematic and societal failures that accumulate and result in rising rates of suicide in state custody, with many individuals being placed into helpless situations with little-

to-no support or understanding of how long they will remain in detention or within the UK at all. Unfortunately, migrants have once again become the scapegoat for rising inequality and poverty levels within the UK and Europe, and many individuals are now becoming subject to the inhumane and helpless treatment caused by UK migration policies and management systems.

Introduction: The Political Context

The political football of immigration has once again taken a symbolic and central role within the political sphere of UK politics, predictably at the same time issues of inequality and real-term poverty are becoming increasingly common for many people across the UK but also throughout Europe. Political debates about resource allocation and priorities have led many people to believe the UK needs to get its 'own house in order' before considering the needs of people elsewhere, or more particular to this article, to people who have travelled to the UK through 'illegal' (irregular) means. This has been an underlying sentiment that has provided support for Conservative policy changes over the years and this is a line that the Conservative party has towed since their election in 2010 with the implementation of increasingly strict visa policies and immigration rules for those entering the UK. These policy changes have caused significant effects for refugees and asylum seekers who are now caught up in these political currents, and now many individuals are facing an extremely uncertain future. After the UK's sharp turn away from the European Union in 2016, the UK has continued to push itself away from the established and agreed modus operandi of the international system regarding migration management. The policy changes enacted by the UK government have butted against international law on numerous occasions which has left many of those who have travelled to live within the UK in a state of limbo and perpetual fear of removal.

Equally, the rushed and haphazard drafting and application of these drastic policy changes have caused confusion and a lack of clarity throughout the organisations that must implement these changes. This has resulted in systematic oversights, poor treatment, and an environment of fear. Arguably the attitude of the current government towards migration policy, as well as being paired with the pressure that is placed on the organisations that manage these implementations, have come together to create an environment that is systematically hostile towards migrants and asylum seekers who arrive in the UK. This article will explore some of the real consequences faced by those affected by these shifts in policy and

attitude within the political debate of migration whilst exploring the mishandling and mistreatment of detainees caused by the UK state through both the state-run and privately-run migrant detention centres.

In January 2023, 1180 people were registered as having crossed the channel between France and England, with UK authorities predicting that 65,000 migrants will attempt to enter the UK throughout 2023. In the previous year, approximately 40,000 migrants were registered as having travelled across the channel from France (DW, 2022). These statistics have sharply risen over recent years, with boat crossings being much rarer before 2018 as many migrants would make their journey to the UK through hiding in vehicles and travelling through the euro tunnel; however due to stricter searches being conducted on vehicles, migrants have had to adapt and instead make the journey by boat. It is hard to know the true figures previous to these years for irregular entry, as arguably migrants making the journey into the UK simply were not found and passed through unnoticed.

For France and the UK, physically managing the flow of migrants between the two is a complex matter, and both governments have had to cooperate to ensure there is a clear understanding of responsibilities and boundaries between the two countries, although predictably this has caused tensions to rise and fall from time to time.
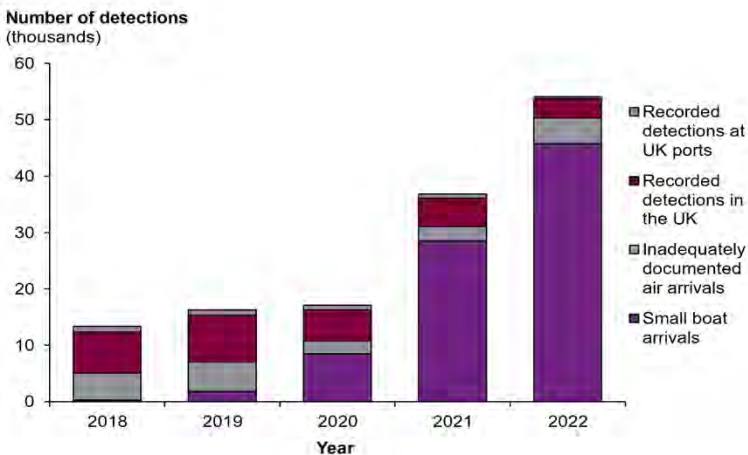
France has six vessels which work to manage the flow of migrants from French shores. This is partly funded by the UK-France deal in 2022 which meant the UK would pay France €72.2 million to help support the management of migrants on French shorelines, this has equated to a 40% increase in French patrols (DW, 2022). These patrols have several objectives: firstly, they are used for interceptions although these are carried out only whilst migrants are still on land before departing; Secondly, to ensure boats that are leaving French waters do not get hit by ships moving in and out of the busy ports. Thirdly, to assist migrant vessels if they come into trouble whilst in French waters. Once migrant vessels reach international waters, migrants will usually send out an 'SOS' signal to then be picked up by UK vessels, otherwise migrant vessels will continue their own journey to UK shores. If a migrant vessel were to get into trouble whilst in the international waters, then it will also be UK vessels that will then assist them.

This article will highlight some of the realities people face when dealing with the prospect of their deportation. It will cover the work of NGOs looking to shed light on the largely obscure conditions of immigration detention centres. The number of people who are being detained in immigration detention facilities is increasing annually, and those who find themselves in immigration detention centres often have little (if any) idea of the outcome of their detention or even for how long they may be detained.

The UK- Rwanda Deal

In April 2022, the Home Secretary of the time, Priti Patel signed a deal with Rwanda's government for £120 million such that Rwanda would accept asylum seekers from the UK that had arrived 'illegally', regardless of the individual's nationality, origin, or culture. It is worth noting that currently there exists no legal way for an asylum seeker to reach the UK, which therefore makes any potential asylum seeker 'illegal' in the eyes of UK law. According to the UK government, the UK-Rwanda deal was in part, intended to deter potential migrants from making irregular journeys to the UK and to attempt to disrupt the networks of traffickers that make money from moving people to the UK and other countries in Europe.

In June the same year, the UK's High Courts challenged the scheme by claiming that the UK-Rwanda deal failed to take each individual's own circumstances into

account and was illegal. However this decision was later reversed in December when the High Courts reversed their decision to say the plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda was in fact, legal with the caveat that the Home Office had failed to consider the specific asylum seekers' conditions which had to be reviewed. The High Court's decision reaffirmed the view that the deportation deal did not conflict with the international Refugee Convention, within which the UNHCR states "The core principle of the 1951 Convention is non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom" (UNHCR, 2023). The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) blocked the first and, so far, the only attempt at deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda in June 2022. As of May 2023, Prime Minister Sunak has been attempting to win support for the Rwanda scheme with European leaders at the Council of Europe conference being held in Iceland (The Guardian, 16/05/2023). Sunak has also hinted at the threat of the UK leaving the ECHR in order to implement the recent immigration policies which would have long term implications for the UK and its allies.
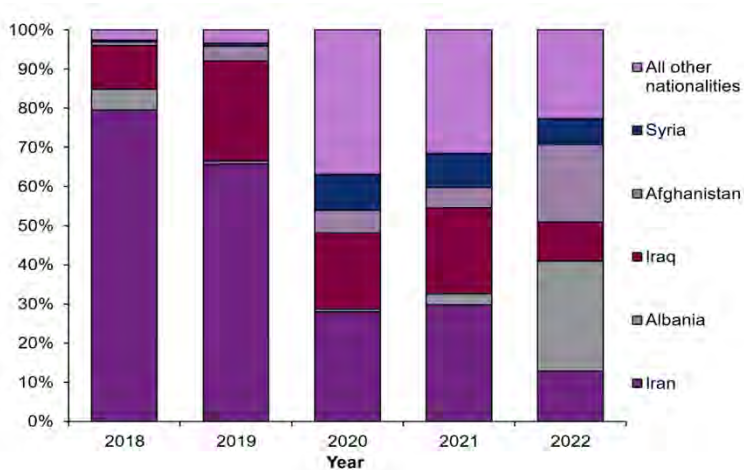

Figure 1: Detections at the UK border, by method of entry, 2018 to 2022 (Gov.UK, 2023)

The Mental Health Crisis in UK Immigration Detention Centres

In 2018, The Guardian published an exposé on the conditions within immigration detention centres and the damaging consequences for those detained within. As part of the investigation, The Guardian submitted a 'Freedom of Information' (FOI) request, and the information uncovered from the response showed that between April and June 2018, on average there were two suicide attempts by detainees every day, in total there were 159 recorded attempts. At this time The Guardian reports that approximately 25,000 people were detained yearly, and 56% of these people showed evidence of either being physically or mentally unwell (The Guardian, 11/10/2018). In total, between 2000-2022, 30 self-inflicted deaths have been recorded within immigration detention centres (Rainbow Migration, 2022). By May 2023 that figure has reached 40 (INQUEST, 2023).

After the announcement in 2020 by the UK government to relocate asylum seekers to settle in Rwanda through chartered flights as part of an agreed asylum deal between the two countries, the risk of suicide sharply rose. More vulnerable communities, such as those of the LGBTQI+ community have particularly faced additional danger and stress due to the prospect of being further victimised. The Home Office's own website states the following in relation to travel advice for people when travelling to the country whom identify with the LGBTQI+ community, saying that, "Homosexuality is not illegal in Rwanda but remains frowned on by many. LGBT individuals can experience discrimination and abuse, including from local authorities. There are no specific anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBT individuals" (GOV, 2023). Often people who are claiming asylum in the UK are fleeing persecution in their home countries and being deported to Rwanda can further endanger those who have already been traumatised. Rainbow Migration comments that "being detained puts many people who are often already traumatised, at even greater risk of poor mental health and suicide" (Rainbow Migration, 2022).

My interest in the topic on the management of the asylum review process and immigration detention has been brought about through the introduction of INQUEST's work, an NGO which supports family members of those who have lost their lives whilst in state custody. INQUEST helps families navigate the complicated, slow, and often frustrating process of an Inquest which follows the death of an individual in state care. State custody ranges from any facility or

situation within which an individual is under state care and responsibility. INQUEST's website lists a record of recorded deaths for those in detention as well as the reported cause of these deaths, and it is frightening to see the percentage of total deaths in immigration detention facilities that are self-inflicted. Out of the 40 recorded deaths since the year 2000, 17 have been self-inflicted, 18 non self-inflicted, and 2 are awaiting classification. These unfortunate statistics reflect the seemingly hopeless situation that many refugees and asylum seekers find themselves facing.

INQUEST reported on the death of Alexander Tekle, who died on 6 December 2017 "aged 18 less than a year after he arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied asylum seeker from Eritrea" (INQUEST, 2022). The inquest that followed revealed a series of failings by the social service teams to address Alex's issues with alcoholism and depression, even after it was known that Alex had self-harmed and told people that he did not want to live any longer. Unfortunately, Alex faced 'distrust' by social service workers which undermined his care, in part due to the scepticism held by the carers regarding Alex's age, as they believed him to be over 18 years old and therefore, a legally independent adult. INQUEST additionally report that "Alex's inquest follows three other inquests relating to the deaths of young Eritrean asylum seekers. These four friends all took their lives within a 16-month period after arriving in the UK. In recent years, there have been an alarming number of suicides among teenagers who arrive in this country as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, highlighting issues with how people like Alex are looked after by local authorities" (INQUEST, 2022). A friend of Alex, Benny Hunter said "I was witness to gate-keeping of services, high levels of suspicion about his general character and a general lack of care for Alex's wellbeing" (INQUEST, 2022). Sadly, this is the inevitable consequence to the hostile environment that has been created and perpetuated by the current political discourse on migration as political apathy and suspicion seeps into the psyche of the public, as well as into the organisations that work to support asylum seekers. When these factors are combined with the huge amount of pressure that is put onto social workers to meet the care needs with resources that have been cut year-after-year, it creates an environment that is susceptible to situations like Alex and his friends.[1]

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[1] If you wish to hear more about the conditions within immigration detention centres, then I encourage you to visit 'Bail for Immigration Detainees' page on 'Voices from Detention' where you can read first-hand accounts from people who have been detained within these facilities.)

The Medical Justice Report

"Medical Justice is the only charity in the UK to send independent clinicians into all the 'immigration removal centres' (IRCs) across the UK" (Medical Justice, 2022:4). It is an organisation that specialises in offering health checks to those in detention centres and released a report on its findings from health care visits in 2022. The UK has a network of 10 immigration detention centres, and throughout their visits the NGO has found a consistent pattern of evidence of people having experienced torture prior to arriving in the UK, as well as detainees experiencing a wide range of physical and psychological conditions, mental trauma, and witnessing a clear deterioration of health whilst being inside the detention centres.

Out of the 36 people included in the report:

- 26 had indicators of torture.

- 17 had indicators of trafficking.

- 15 had a diagnosis or showed symptoms of PTSD.

- 1 likely to have a psychotic disorder and lack of capacity to instruct a solicitor.

- 11 have suicidal thoughts.

- 13 assessments found that detention has already or will likely cause harm.

- 16 assessments state that treatment will like only be given upon release.

Out of these 36 people:

- 33 are male and 3 are female.

- 2 face challenges to their age of 18 years old.

- 7 have family within the UK.

- All came to the UK to claim Asylum between 9th May- 21st June 2022.

- 32 arrived by boat, 2 arrived by lorry, and 1 is unknown (Medical Justice, 2022).

A large amount of people that are interviewed by Medical Justice workers have faced traumatic events in their lives and are often suffering the consequences of this whilst being detained in the detention centres. Medical Justice holds a clear stance on the impact of these detention centres based on their extensive research and experience, that "the only way to eradicate endemic health care failures in immigration detention is to end immigration detention" (Medical Justice, 2022:4). From this summary it is clear that immigration detention centres are not fit for purpose, and the conditions surrounding their detention have led to a clear pattern of a deterioration of people's health. In particular, Medical Justice are assisting those affected by the recent policy decision to move Asylum seekers who arrive in the UK, to Rwanda. The criteria for someone who is eligible for removal to Rwanda is not fully clarified, and the only known criteria is that they must have arrived by a 'dangerous route' after 1st January 2022, and/or have an asylum claim which is deemed inadmissible, and/or are not accompanied by an asylum-seeking child.

The process after being selected is riddled with complexities, for example the 'Notices of Intent' (NOI) which informs the asylum seeker of their future deportation to Rwanda is written in English, and these NOI are often given without a translator who would be able to explain the circumstances. This is a seemingly impossible oversight, and yet this is the reality and exemplifies the rushed nature of the policy implementation which has led to many people being served a NOI without entirely understanding what is happening to them. This is extremely significant as the NOI states that the recipient has 7 days to challenge their deportation and respond. Medical Justice says "the NOI is accompanied by a leaflet titled 'I'm being relocated to Rwanda- What does this mean for me?" (Medical Justice, 2022:11). The information inside the leaflet is of little use, as it provides no substantial information of the conditions they should expect when arriving in Rwanda, nor about any of the potential conditions that will allow someone the ability to legally challenge this deportation. Even if someone were

to understand that they were being relocated to Rwanda, the 7-day timeframe that is given for an individual to challenge the notice makes finding legal aid and collecting evidence incredibly hard for asylum seekers who are already in an extremely vulnerable position.

As part of the asylum claim process, a screening interview is carried out on the individual claiming asylum to determine their personal details, circumstances, and to assess any safeguarding needs or concerns. Medical Justice state that this initial process has not been updated to reflect the changes with the Rwanda process, again highlighting the lack of preparedness for the process (Medical Justice, 2022:13). Medical Justice had access to 23 individuals' screening interviews: 13 of these were conducted in person, 4 were over the phone, and for 6 it is unknown how they were conducted. Medical Justice reports that the interviews do not identify specific vulnerabilities, including histories of torture and trafficking (Medical Justice, 2022, 14). Considering the hostile environment that has been created around the process, it could be suggested that perhaps these investigatory questions are omitted in order to remain purposefully ignorant, as to identify an individual as a victim of one of these crimes would trigger a safeguarding response whereby an identified individual would be referred to the 'National Referral Mechanism', a framework within the UK that recognises and supports survivors of modern day slavery and trafficking. This would then lead to an investigation to assess if the individual has, in fact, been a victim of these crimes within 45 days. If this is believed to be true, this can be used to challenge the deportation order as to then further expose them to harm is in direct harm of the 'non-refoulement' principle of the Refugee convention (Medical Justice, 2022: 16-19).

'Info Migrants', a journalistic organisation comments further on the Rwanda medical report, stating the "Home Office seem somewhat unperturbed by the findings". It quotes the Home Office saying, "it features a number of inaccuracies and misrepresentations about the policy which we have previously addressed" (Info Migrants, 2023). Other than similarly dismissive remarks, the Home Office is reluctant to comment further, although clearly the conditions for people who are detained under the Immigration Act 2016 are extremely stressful both physically and psychologically and that the process to evaluate people's health is omitting serious evidence of mental and physical trauma.

	Total to date (2018- 2022)	2022
Small boat arrivals	83,236	44,666
Asylum Applicants (people)	76,134	40,302
Of which, applications (main applicants only)	68,693	35,836
Applicants awaiting a decision	56,883	34,793
Applications withdrawn	1,622	703
Applications which received an initial decision (% of applications)	10,188 (15%)	340 (<1%)
Of which:	-	-
Granted refugee status or other lave (grant rate)	6,242 (61%)	210 (62%)
Refused	952	87
Not considered on third country grounds	2,994	43

Figure 2: Statistics for Arrivals of Migrants to the UK and mode of arrival, from 2018 to 2022 (Gov.UK, 2023)

Who can be detained?

'Bail for Immigration Detainees' (BID) details the parameters for those who are being detained. Under the Immigration Act 2016, the State can detain anyone within these three groups:

- People subject to immigration control who can be detained pending examination and a decision on whether to grant, cancel, or refuse leave to enter.

- People subject to immigration control who have entered the UK illegally or overstayed a visa, have been refused leave to enter, have failed to observe conditions attached to leave to enter, who have used deception in seeking leave to remain, can be detained pending a decision on whether to issue removal directions and pending administrative removal. People reasonably suspected of falling within these categories can also be detained.

- Foreign nationals who have served a criminal sentence of 12 months or longer or who are the subject of a recommendation for deportation can be detained post-sentence pending deportation (BID, 2023).

Anyone deemed to fall within these categories is subject to being detained. BID highlights the lack of legal checks and balances that exists within these processes,

a theme that is clear throughout this research. Firstly, there is no maximum limit to the length of detention for asylum seekers, and whilst there are domestic and international precedents under the ECHR that states the detention period must be appropriate to the cause, this routinely fails to effectively the Home Office from detaining individuals for overly long-term detention periods. Secondly, the decision to detain an individual is down to the immigration officers themselves and is not automatically reviewed. As BID states "Immigration detention is subject to fewer checks than detention within the criminal justice system. Many detainees have no legal representation and therefore do not access elective bail procedures" (BID, 2023). Currently, there are 30,000 people a year being detained under the Immigration Act 2016, with 3% of them being detained for 6 months or more. The UK government's view is that these detention powers are "used sparingly and for the shortest period necessary" (BID, 2023) although BID claims this has not been what the organisation has witnessed.

Furthermore, the reasons given by the Home Office to justify who can be detained are the following:

- They believe a person will abscond if released.

- They need to establish a person's identity.

- The person is shortly to be removed from the UK (their removal is `imminent') (BID, 2023).

"The use of detention is often justified on the basis that unsuccessful asylum seekers and foreign nationals will otherwise abscond, deliberately lose contact with the authorities, and go 'underground'. However, the Home Office provided evidence to a parliamentary inquiry into immigration detention stating that 95% of people complied with their conditions" (BID, 2023).

To give an example of the UK governments attitude towards these legal and practical challenges faced by asylum seekers, 'Info Migrants' quotes Rishi Sunak in 2022 stating he "promised to crack down on people 'frustrating removal attempts with late or spurious claims or appeals' (InfoMigrants, 2023), and once removed from the UK, he declared those people 'should have no right to re-entry

settlement or citizenship'" (BID, 2022). There seems to be little sympathy for those that are presumed as to have no right to be in the UK legal or otherwise.

Accommodation Shortfall

Due to the increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees, there has been a shortage of accommodation facilities throughout the UK which has become a tough and expensive logistical issue for the government to solve. Currently asylum seekers are being housed in hotels throughout a network of private partners who are accommodating the shortfall in suitable accommodation available to house asylum seekers. The Telegraph reports that "the number of migrants being housed in private is now above the 50,000 mark, a 20-fold increase in less than three years" (Telegraph, 20/03/2023). The accommodation costs to the government and hence the taxpayer are an obvious concern as the costs accumulate to tens of millions a year and so the Home Office are searching for alternatives. However, similarly to the rushed implementation of other policies idiscussed in this article, the Home Office has rushed to find alternative accommodation options and has run into multiple issues doing so. Disused military bases have been put forward, however upon review Chief Inspector David Bolt of Borders and Immigration said in April 2021 that "conditions at Napier Barracks in Folkestone, Kent and Penally Camp in Wales were 'utterly unacceptable' and represented 'serious failings on the part of the Home Office'" (Sky, 2023). Equally, the public reaction has either condemned the use of decrepit facilities to house people or lamented the use of military historical sites for the housing of migrants. More recently a ship has arrived in Portland Port, Dorset to provide accommodation to asylum seekers (GOV.UK, 2023). The decision has stirred up further controversy over the suitability and morality of housing people on a ship rather than on land. The ship named 'Bibby Stockholm', operated by the Liverpool-based company Bibby Marine is planned to accommodate 500 people and is currently contracted to be used for 18 months.

Some asylum seekers have found themselves held in prison facilities for extended periods of time detained under the Immigration Act. This happens when an individual was previously serving a prison sentence in a prison facility and despite their sentence being completed, they have remained in prison indefinitely. At this point when the detainee has served their prison sentence, the asylum seeker

should not be treated as a criminal any longer if they are being kept within the prison facility, the home office claims that this is ensured yet BID states that "one only has to visit prisons where immigrations detainees are held, as BID legal managers do on a regular basis, or read letters to BID from detainees held in prisons, to discover this is not the case (BID, 2023). BID states that on the first day of 2021, 665 people were being held in prisons under the Immigration Act. This is a scary precedent to be establishing, as individuals who have served their time in prison are still being held indefinitely as a prisoner, within a prison. You could argue that this is simply a logical solution to a shortage of accommodation facilities, but the lines between the legal system and the 'just rule of law' are beginning to be moulded by a sense of 'mob justice' that adjusts the norms of the legal system for the those who are deemed the 'public enemy' and therefore, somehow are less deserving of basic moral and legal rights than others.

Safeguarding issues for children have also been highlighted across the network of 6 hotels that are reportedly being used to accommodate young asylum seekers. In early 2023 it was revealed that nearly 200 children had gone missing from these hotels, with fears they had been targeted by organised crime units that kidnap vulnerable children to then recruit them into their gangs. "Neil Blackwood, the GMP detective superintendent leading Operation Vulcan 'Children are taken into county lines, put to work by their own nationality selling drugs. They have come to our attention within weeks of arriving in the UK'." In March it was further reported that some of these children had been found and recovered, however 66 are still missing. The Guardian reported that it was not confirmed whether these are 66 children missing from the initial 200, or if more children had gone missing since.

Lack of security measures leave the network of hotels vulnerable to further targeting and the increasing tensions that surround the conversation of migration management leaves migrants and the establishments that accommodate them at risk. In February 2023, protesters demonstrated outside a hotel in Knowsley housing asylum seekers, undeniably a frightening experience for those inside. One asylum seeker told 'iNews': "to protesters who think asylum seekers come to the UK for an 'easier life', I have not seen my wife and children for eight years out of fear for them and they are still in Turkey'" (iNews, 2023) and that "most asylum seekers desperately want to work and pay their way" (iNews, 2023). A common anti-migrant sentiment is often based on the notion that people migrate

to the UK for an 'easy ride' and to benefit from the local social welfare systems. Yet asylum seekers are not allowed to work whilst their case is being processed, preventing them from further integrating into the community and becoming self-sufficient. This means that asylum seekers are inherently dependent on the state to accommodate them and pay for their needs, something that people use as an argument against supporting asylum seekers and stirs up anti-migration attitudes.

Conclusion: Some Final Thoughts

The points discussed in this article highlight just some of the myriad of issues that plague the process of immigration detention, notably the gaps within the care system that has left so many individuals trapped in a system that is not adequate to handle the management of detainees through the review process for asylum seekers. I have attempted to give a brief insight into some of the issues that many vulnerable people who have travelled to the UK to claim asylum face within the system that seems as if it is inherently built against them. Whilst the topic of migration and migration management is a complex one with many differing opinions, I think it is fair to say that no one deserves to be left in the bureaucratically heavy, and apathetic system that has materialised due to the hostile environment created towards migration.

This political scapegoating has been heavily emphasised in political discourse over recent years and the consequence has been a level of toxicity towards 'the migrant' which has permeated throughout UK society. This has been particularly damaging for migrants who are themselves in the care of either overworked, overstressed, or suspicious and unsympathetic carers. The mental health crisis that exists for immigration detainees is a symptom of the powerless situation that they find themselves in, I would argue that for the large majority of people who make the dangerous, expensive and long journey to the UK, giving up their home and often leaving their family members, do not do so to simply leech off the UK social welfare system, but instead are extremely motivated to work and to earn their own way in the world. Yet changes in regulations towards migrants and work visas mean that people who come to the UK to claim asylum and refuge, are simply not allowed to gain employment and earn money. Instead, they are forced to remain in the UK at the whim of the UK state or face the prospect of going to Rwanda (likely an even more alien place to them), or to be repatriated

to their country of origin, which as highlighted in the report by Medical Justice, show that often is not a safe option for the individual.

It is clear that there are systemic issues that fail to place adequate safeguards in place for individuals from their very first encounter with the UK state from the screening interviews, all the way to being potentially put onto a plane to Rwanda (with no legal ability to return to the UK in future). It is clear also that the UK government is attempting to wipe their hands clean of all responsibility and affiliation with asylum seekers, pulling away from previously agreed norms of international law, and from European allies regarding the national and global responsibility that we all face. Without getting too bogged down in the political debate, this apathetic political approach is one that simply exacerbates issues of migration. The UK's attempts at isolating itself from the world is out-dated, callous, and prevents the establishment of truly effective forms of alleviating global issues through collaboration. simply excluding refugees from integrating into UK society and essentially ostracising these people from any potential social or economic productive activity, works only to further divide communities and creates a larger financial burden for the UK taxpayer to fund. By forcing people to not be able to work and engage with the community and simply wait for a decision to be made on their asylum case, their only choice is to be a financial burden on the community. Or, by forcing people out of the legitimate work market, migrants may be pushed towards engaging in illegal activities as their only means of survival. It is only through inclusive policy changes that we can stimulate positive social change and raise everyone up within the UK against the rising tide of inequality that we all face.

"Recognize yourself in he and she who are not like you and me."- Carlos Fuentes

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INQUEST: FIGHTING FOR CHANGE AND JUSTICE

Euan Southwell

Abstract

During my second year of university, I had the opportunity to intern as a heritage officer with INQUEST. My main task was to scan and archive historical documents, which were then digitally preserved. This experience gave me a deep understanding of INQUEST's rich history, including its struggles and successes over the last four decades. I was responsible for coding interviews for the "Unlawful Killing" podcast, which featured in-depth conversations with people involved in the inquest process during that same period. I worked on scanning and coding in the archives and on a meaningful project that involved photographing squares representing the victims who passed away and were to be made into a tapestry. One square even had the clothes of the victim, which was a compelling experience. This experience strengthened my desire to contribute to INQUEST and help families pursue justice. This report has been written to support INQUEST's legal reform mission, amplify its call for change, and advocate for a more accessible and just inquest process.

Introduction

INQUEST is a UK-based charity that provides support to families who have lost their loved ones in state custody or detention. This organisation has launched three campaigns to address the challenges within the inquest system and provide easier access to justice for family members seeking justice for their loved ones.

The first campaign aims to make legal representation readily available and cost-free for families during inquests. The cost of legal representation can be prohibitive for many families, often resulting in unequal access to justice. INQUEST aims to increase access to legal representation so that families can participate fully in the inquest process. The second campaign advocates for the establishment of a national oversight mechanism that would be responsible for investigating incidents and generating evidence-based recommendations to improve public services and prevent future tragedies. The current system lacks transparency, consistency, and accountability. INQUEST aims to create an independent entity that can investigate incidents impartially and provide recommendations that are based on evidence. Lastly, INQUEST promotes the implementation of the Hillsborough Law, which emphasises principles of transparency, cooperation, and truthfulness to hold public authorities and officials accountable. This law creates an obligation for public authorities and officials to cooperate fully with investigations and disclose all relevant information. The goal is to improve transparency and accountability in the inquest process.

These campaigns are aimed at addressing the challenges within the inquest system and providing easier access to justice for family members seeking justice for their loved ones. They aim to create a more transparent, accountable, and equitable inquest system that serves the needs of all families.

INQUEST

"INQUEST is the only charity providing expertise on state-related deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, lawyers, advice and support agencies, the media and parliamentarians." INQUEST (2024).

Established in 1981, INQUEST is an organisation that offers assistance to families navigating the inquest process, which can be a perplexing and isolating experience for those who are mourning the loss of a loved one. They specialise in providing support for families dealing with deaths in police and prison custody, immigration detention, mental health settings, and cases involving multiple agency failures. A crucial part of INQUEST is publishing and monitoring the deaths of people. "The monitoring role at INQUEST is one of its key functions. The organisation has been at the forefront of ensuring that information about the numbers of deaths in custody has been made viable, analysed, and placed in the public domain." (Coles and Shaw, 2006: 136). INQUEST produces reports and policies that bring attention to the inadequacies of the inquest system and the legal system's political structures. They are the only charity in the country that provides support and services to bereaved families, often unsupported financially by the government. John Crace states that INQUEST IS "…an organisation that shines a light into the state's darkest corners, often on behalf of society's most vulnerable people." (Crace, 2011).

An inquest is a legal process that takes place in cases where an individual dies in unusual or unexplained circumstances. The process aims to determine the cause of death and whether there is any responsibility for that person's death. The proceedings of an inquest are presided over by a coroner - a specialised type of judge appointed by local authorities to investigate deaths. Coroners can be lawyers or legally qualified medical practitioner, and they operate within a legal framework established by Parliament. Despite being appointed by local authorities, they are independent judicial office holders (Ministry for Justice, 2020). Their primary role is to conduct an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death and to make findings as to the cause and manner of death.

The duration of an inquest will vary depending on factors such as the number of witnesses and evidence available, the nature of the death, and other circumstances deemed relevant. The proceedings are open to the public, and the coroner has the power to call witnesses and require them to give evidence. The primary goal of an inquest is to determine how someone died and whether there is any person or organisation responsible for the death. It is worth noting that an inquest is not a trial, and no one is prosecuted or charged during the proceedings. However, if an inquest finds a link between a person or organisation and the individual's

death, then the family members of the deceased may use the findings to proceed to criminal court.

An inquest is a crucial part of the legal process and helps to ensure that justice is served when someone dies in unusual or unexplained circumstances. The findings of an inquest can provide closure and answers for the family members of the deceased and can also help to prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future.

Legal Aid

Inquest aims for the "Automatic non-means-tested legal aid funding for families' specialist legal representation immediately following a state-related death to cover preparation and representation at the inquest and other legal processes." INQUEST (2024). This is to combat the uneven distribution of legal aid that is received for families and to what the police receive during inquests. Furthermore it aims to make inquest proceeding fair with better accesses to coroners for families.

"The Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime (DMPC) has discretion under Section 3(6) and para. 7 of Schedule 3 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to fund police officers' legal expenses in proceedings if they consider that providing the funding secures the maintenance of an efficient and effective police force." (London Assembly,2017)

This provision presents a legal opportunity for police officers to access legal aid during court hearings and proceedings. The Metropolitan Police alone reported a total legal cost of £15,648,608.80 at the end of 2021 (Metropolitan Police, 2022). Of this amount, over £8 million was allocated to civil pay-outs, while the remainder was utilised for external legal fees, including barristers and professional fees. It is important to note that these figures encompass all legal expenses incurred by the Metropolitan Police (MET) force, not solely related to inquests. Moreover, when examining the broader scope of the police force, it is estimated that since 2018, the English and Welsh police force has set aside a £12 million legal fund to support officers accused of crimes (Kersley, 2023). This allocation reflects the financial resources directed towards legal aid for officers within the criminal justice system.

However, in the context of legal proceedings, particularly inquests, public services (including the prison service and the NHS) receive significantly more support than family members seeking justice for their deceased loved ones who died under state care. As previously mentioned, providing legal aid to officers is viewed as a means of maintaining an efficient and effective police force. This legal aid extends to officers attending inquests as part of investigations, ensuring representation for individual officers and the collective police force. Taxpayers cover these costs, and it is often observed that the police force who may be those accused of causing deaths, have the most robust legal representation in the room.

In contrast, victims' families must apply for means-tested legal aid, and many applicants are denied access, leaving them without legal representation and having to navigate their fight for justice alone against publicly funded police officers responsible for their loved ones' deaths. Families seeking justice during inquests must either secure funding independently or rely on organisations like INQUEST to access legal guidance. Since 2022, INQUEST's efforts have introduced non-means-tested legal aid for specific exceptional cases. While this represents a step in the right direction towards providing legal aid to all individuals involved in an inquest, it remains a lengthy and arduous process for families applying under the new system. Notably, two justifications allow for an extreme case to qualify for legal aid: when Article 2 (the right to life) of the Human Rights Act is engaged by the inquest or when the Legal Aid Agency deems it to be in the wider public interest to provide the family with legal aid funding.

The application process for this funding could be faster, often taking years to obtain and experiencing delays along the way. Even if the process is completed, there is no certainty that the family will receive the aid, potentially resulting in multiple applications or appeals to secure the necessary funding. Such applications can be emotionally taxing for the bereaved family members, as they must meticulously outline and explain why their loved one's death is arguable in violation of Article 2 of the Human Rights Act. Moreover, due to the lengthy process, there are instances where lawyers are compelled to withdraw from representing families as legal aid has not been received in time for the inquest, or lawyers take the risk of not being paid at all (Varney and Bawdon, 2023).

Another crucial aspect to consider is the coronial system's impact on access to justice for families at inquests. Coroners hold a central role in the inquest process, acting in a capacity similar to judges. However, coroners are not integrated into the national courts service in the UK; instead, they are appointed by local authorities (Varney and Bawdon, 2023). The appointment of coroners at the local level can result in differences in expertise, experience, and training among those holding these positions. These discrepancies may impact the understanding and application of legal aid regulations and policies, potentially leading to inconsistencies in providing legal support to families at inquests.

Furthermore, the discretion granted to coroners in determining the need for legal aid in individual cases can introduce additional challenges. The criteria and interpretation of eligibility for non-means tested legal aid may vary depending on the coroner overseeing the inquest. This variation can result in inequalities, where some families may struggle to obtain the necessary legal representation while others receive more comprehensive support.

A National Oversight Mechanism

Inquest was one of the first organisations to push for a National Oversight Mechanism (NOM), and further evolve the idea to be better structured in delivering recommendations to the government. The proposed body would function independently, operating separately from the judicial or policing system and any government departments. This deliberate separation aims to afford the independent body a significant degree of autonomy in generating recommendations based on the evidence presented, ensuring impartiality and preventing potential biases from government or public services departments. Consequently, this autonomous entity would comprehensively examine multiple facets of policing, judicial systems, and inquests.

It is proposed that the NOM will gather recommendations from various post-death investigations, inquiries, and inquests which would then undergo comprehensive analysis, seeking to understand the specific circumstances, root causes, and broader systemic issues arising from each recommendation. Furthermore, the NOM will aim to identify common themes or trends that emerge across different investigations and inquiries. By recognising these patterns, the NOM gains valuable insight into recurring issues related to policies,

procedures, training, infrastructure, and other factors contributing to the investigated incidents.

INQUEST has demanded for a NOM to be utilised in examining the Grenfell tragedy. Deborah Coles, the director of INQUEST, stated: "This fire was predictable and preventable. A national oversight mechanism is urgently needed, to ensure official recommendations from inquiries and inquests are systematically followed up. The lasting legacy of Grenfell must be structural change. This requires meaningful action from the inquiry and government, to ensure those affected are not failed once again." (INQUEST, 2019)

INQUEST points to the failure to learn from the Lakanal House recommendations which highlight the urgent need for a NOM. This was a fire in a tower block in 2009 in Camberwell, resulting in six deaths and at least twenty injuries. "The All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group wrote to ministers 21 times between 2014 and 2017 to ask for the Lakanal House recommendations to be implemented. When the Grenfell Tower fire happened, these recommendations had still not been actioned." (INQUEST, 2019) This illustrates the failure to prioritize and implement vital safety measures even when earlier recommendations were available. Organisations such as the Centre For Women's Justice agree that "…the current systems fall short in translating failings that have been identified into changes which impact on the lived experience of survivors." (Centre For Women's Justice, 2021).

INQUEST stresses that swift and robust action is necessary from both an inquiry and the government to ensure that the lessons learned from such incidents are not disregarded or forgotten. The establishment of a NOM would play a crucial role in preventing similar tragedies in the future and ensuring justice for those affected. INQUEST's advocacy for a National Oversight Mechanism represents a significant and urgent call for enhanced accountability, transparency, and systemic change in policing, judicial systems, and inquests. By proposing an independent body separate from government and public services, INQUEST emphasises the crucial need for unbiased and evidence-based recommendations.

The Public Authority (Accountability) Bill

The Hillsborough disaster occurred during a 1989 FA Cup semi-final match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield. As a result of overcrowding and poor crowd management, a crush occurred in the standing-only section of the stadium, leading to the deaths of 96 Liverpool fans. David Duckenfield was in charge of the police operation on that day, and it was later revealed in 2017that his decisions and actions contributed to the tragedy. One of the key factors was the opening of an exit gate, which led to an influx of fans into an already overcrowded central pen of the stadium, resulting in a fatal crush.

The South Yorkshire police force, including Duckenfield, gave a false narrative, which shifted blame onto the supporters rather than acknowledging the failures of the police operation. The original inquest verdict in 1991 ruled the deaths as accidental, but this decision was overturned in 2016 after a new inquest. During the legal process, suspicions arose about the alteration of police statements to paint a false picture of events. In 2021, three retired police officers, Donald Denton, Alan Foster, and Peter Metcalf, were tried for their alleged involvement in amending witness statements. However, they along with Duckenfield were acquitted of charges related to perverting the course of justice (BBC 2022). The families and loved ones of the victims spent 26 years fighting for justice and accountability from the South Yorkshire police. Their tireless efforts eventually led to a ruling that the supporters were unlawfully killed due to grossly negligent failures by the police and ambulance services to fulfil their duty of care. Throughout those 26 years, the families and loved ones faced significant challenges as they confronted a police force that engaged in deception and covered up evidence to prevent the truth from emerging. Despite these obstacles, their determination ultimately resulted in the acknowledgement of the failures and the pursuit of justice for the victims of the Hillsborough disaster.

The Hillsborough law was introduced in 2017 but was later scrapped due to elections. The bill has three main features:

1) Duty of Candour: Public authorities and officials would be legally required to tell the truth and cooperate fully with official investigations and inquiries. This duty aims to promote transparency and accountability and prevent cover-ups.

2) Parity of Legal Representation: The law would ensure that victims of disasters or state-related deaths have equal legal representation during inquests and inquiries. This provision addresses the power imbalance between bereaved families and public bodies, ensuring a level playing field.

3) Criminal Offence for Non-Compliance: Failure to comply with the duty of candour would be considered a criminal offence, adding a legal consequence for public authorities and officials who withhold information or obstruct investigations. (INQUEST, 2022)

The Hillsborough Law aims to change the prevailing culture of denial, delay, and defensive practices that have obstructed the pursuit of truth and justice in cases of state-related deaths and disasters. Its objective is to establish a new norm where public authorities and officials are held accountable, emphasising transparency, cooperation, and a commitment to the truth. As Margaret Aspinall, a family member who lost her son at Hillsborough, poignantly states: "It's a disgrace that we have to put this into law because I always thought there was a duty of candour for the police to tell the truth anyway… we've got some bad laws in this country, and they need to be fixed." (INQUEST,2022).

The Hillsborough Law seeks to address these systemic shortcomings, ensuring that the duty of candour is enshrined in legislation and that accountability and justice prevail over obfuscation and cover-ups. Additionally, the law aims to provide comprehensive support and equal legal representation to the families and loved ones affected by these tragic events, recognising their right to truth, justice, and closure.

Conclusion

This report provides a detailed analysis of three major campaigns led by INQUEST, which play a crucial role in advocating for justice within the inquest process. The first campaign emphasises the importance of providing legal aid to family members and loved ones of the deceased involved in the inquest process. This campaign aims to ensure that all individuals have equal access to legal representation, similar to the support provided to public service members facing similar investigations. The provision of legal aid will help level the playing field

for families in the inquest process, which can be challenging, complex, and emotionally draining.

The second campaign highlights the necessity of establishing a national oversight mechanism. This independent body will be responsible for investigating incidents and issuing evidence-based recommendations to enhance public services and prevent potential tragedies. The campaign recognises the need for an independent body to oversee the inquest process, which can be fraught with potential conflicts of interest, especially when public authorities are involved. An independent oversight mechanism will provide impartial, evidence-based recommendations, ensuring that all stakeholders are held accountable for their actions.

Lastly, the Hillsborough Law campaign promoted by INQUEST seeks to hold public authorities and officials accountable, emphasizing principles of transparency, cooperation, and truthfulness. This law aims to introduce a legal duty of candour on public authorities and officials involved in an inquest process, requiring them to be open, honest, and transparent in their dealings with families and the public. The Hillsborough Law also aims to provide families with an equal footing in the inquest process, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged in their pursuit of justice.

These campaigns collectively aim to address the inherent challenges within the Inquest system, fostering a more equitable and accessible process that upholds principles of justice for all stakeholders. It is crucial to recognise and support these campaigns, as they represent significant steps towards ensuring a fair and just Inquest system that serves the interests of all individuals involved.

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THE HARM OF GLOBAL TOURISM: LAND OWNERSHIP AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Mariana Bernardes Ciolfi

Abstract

As the global tourism industry continues to expand, the detrimental effects it has on Indigenous communities are often overlooked, hidden behind the facade of a successful and peaceful enterprise. This article seeks to bring attention to how tourism development perpetuates colonial power dynamics, leading to Indigenous displacement and dispossession. Drawing from case studies in Argentina and the Philippines, the article highlights the harmful impacts of global tourism on Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and survival. By delving into the complexities of the tourism industry, a disturbing pattern of Indigenous rights violations can be uncovered, calling into question the notion that economic progress can be achieved through tourism.

Introduction

Tourism is often presented as a peaceful and profitable industry that can contribute to economic growth and generate tax revenue. As the industry continues to grow and more and more tourists travel the world to experience new environments, it is essential to examine how this growth is distributed and who benefits from it, particularly in relation to local and Indigenous communities.

The development of the global tourism industry is rooted in particular economic, social and historical complexities, and to understand the true impact of tourism, it is necessary to analyse it through its connection with land dispossession and Indigenous rights. Those complexities also provide an opportunity to analyse tourism's real economic impact on the host country and rural communities. Going beyond statistics such as the number of arrivals and income generated, analysing how the data is used, the types of job opportunities created by the industry and the quality of life of workers provides a better understanding of the industry as a whole, without overlooking the impact of tourism on Indigenous communities.

To further critically examine tourism's economic, cultural, and social impacts on Indigenous communities, this article draws on specific examples from the Guarani people in Argentina and the Ati, a semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer Indigenous group in the Philippines. Ultimately, the article concludes that global tourism perpetuates colonial power relations and harms Indigenous communities by dispossessing them of their lands and resources.

Defining Global Tourism

Tourism is a popular and dynamic activity that involves people visiting places outside their homes to experience new environments, cultures, and lifestyles. Tourists have a variety of motivations for travelling, ranging from leisure, education, and business to pure adventure. Depending on their motivations and needs, tourists engage in various activities during their visits, which leads to different types of tourism.

- Spiritual and religious tourism can be traced to ancient times with pilgrimages. While the territory for religious tourism is fluid, its roots are in religious traditions with rituals, performances and religious practices at its centre. To this day, spirituality and religion remain strong motivators for people's travels (Shinde, 2021).

- Adventure tourism includes physical activities, usually at high-risk levels, such as mountain climbing, bungee jumping, and white-water rafting. This type of tourism allows tourists to step outside their comfort zone and explore local communities where such activities are practised (Apollo and Andreychouk, 2022).

- Halal tourism is a niche market growing exponentially in the global tourism industry, offering halal-friendly travel motivators such as halal-certified food, prayer facilities and other religious requirements for Muslim travellers (Han et al., 2019).

- Cultural tourism is the process of a country promoting its cultural heritage with tourists visiting historical sites, museums and attending cultural events to learn about the country's culture and traditions. When done sustainably, this type of tourism can help preserve, protect and maintain cultural heritage sites (Jelinčic, 2022).

- Educational tourism provides an educational exchange network where tourists can learn, study or research a specific subject in a different environment. While learning will inadvertently occur in almost all other types of tourism, educational tourism is when education is the primary purpose of the tourist (Vieira et al., 2022).

- Health/medical tourism involves travelling to a different country to receive medical treatment or to improve one's well-being, such as visiting spas or health retreats (Yu, Seo, and Hyun, 2021).

The different types of tourism offer tourists a wide range of experiences, allowing them to explore different cultures, lifestyles, and environments.

Global Tourism and Economic Development

Global tourism has grown exponentially since globalisation. With the advancement of transportation and technology, tourism has become more accessible and economically advantageous for states and some individuals. The movement of services, goods and people around the globe for tourism makes this industry one of the top three largest export industries (Rasool, Maqbool and Tarique, 2021) and the second largest industry globally (Dogru, Suess and Sirakaya-Turk, 2020). This industry's global growth and success are usually measured in terms of its economic impact and the number of tourist arrivals. In reference to those measures, the United Nations World Tourism Organization calculated that global tourism in 2017 resulted in 1/10 of jobs globally, US$1.6 trillion in exports (7% of the world's exports), 10% of the World's GDP and 1.326 million international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2018). It is estimated that by 2026, travel and tourism will represent 10.8% of the global gross domestic product (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2016), while in some countries, tourism is already the main contributor to the gross domestic product (Schubert, Brida and Risso, 2011).

These figures represent tourism's increased impact on the local and global economies. The tourism industry can create direct and indirect jobs, increase the country's GDP and, therefore, real per capita income, increase tax revenues and attract external investment (Dogru et al., 2019). Furthermore, some academics argue that alongside those economic factors, tourism also has a trickle-down effect that positively affects rural communities and the informal sector, such as the improvement of social welfare in those communities (Snyman, 2012), reducing gender barriers and increasing the overall quality of life (Jeon et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that there is a lively debate regarding the actual positive economic aspects of global tourism, as measuring the size of tourism is conceptually and analytically difficult. Indicators from the number of arrivals and receipts (expenditures by visitors, including payments for goods and services, usually calculated in US dollars) can provide completely different results in regard to the tourism industry's size.

Comparing the Tourism industry of Samoa and Vanuatu exemplifies this point beautifully; while Samoa received 10% more visitors than Vanuatu, the former received half as much income from tourism than Vanuatu in 2013. Similarly, while Papua New Guinea ranked fifth place in the number of arrivals from

between the Pacific Island Countries in 2013, it ranked twelfth place in the number of receipts and last in receipts per capita (Perrottet and Garcia, 2016). Other authors expand on this by arguing that the size of the Tourism industry, as given by tourism and travel organisations, is highly unreliable, as the collection, reporting and analyses of different data lead to each organisation estimating a different size for the Global Tourism industry. While the World Trade Organization (WTO) only examines data from international travel receipts, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) uses data from world tourism receipts, resulting in the WTTC reporting double the amount of receipts than WTO (Lew, 2011). This also applies when analysing the Tourism industry through GDP, with data from the World Travel and Tourism Council being criticised for overestimating tourism's size (Perrottet and Garcia, 2016).

Additionally, the idea that economic advantages brought by tourism result in a better quality of life is questioned. Yu, Cole, and Chancellor (2018) defined quality of life as individuals' life satisfaction, which includes a combination of other domains such as local services and physical, social and economic community conditions. While there is an increase in research about tourism and quality of life, it is important to differentiate the two strands of research as each presents contrasting conclusions. The first research focuses on tourism's impact on tourists' quality of life, which shows almost unanimously that travelling and tourism can increase tourists' perceived quality of life (see Uysal et al., 2016, for an in-depth literature review).

However, research focused on examining residents' quality of life illustrates a more nuanced and complex relationship between tourism and quality of life. Belisle and Hoy's (1980) research in Santa Marta, Colombia, found that while most residents could see positive impacts, those were only accrued by a minority of the population, usually composed of foreigners and companies, with the rest struggling with rising food prices, increased criminality and pollution. Alongside this, Allen et al. (1988) concluded that while tourism development initially benefits the host communities, the quality of life is perceived to decline as tourism development continues. Furthermore, Nichols, Stitt & Giacopassi (2002) found that different levels of proximity and demographic characteristics can result in different perceived impacts on quality of life, while Renda, Mendes & Valle (2011) found that tourism negatively affects residents' emotional and community well-being.

Furthermore, there is an argument that the overall type of employment that tourism generates is below average, comprising low-salaried, low-skilled jobs with little opportunity for career growth (Lacher and Oh, 2011). The tourism industry is known for high staff turnover rates and wages below those paid in other industries (Casado-Díaz et al., 2020). In Portugal, Santos and Varejão (2007) compared the wage rates of tourism workers and non-tourism workers, with the former having an average hourly salary significantly lower than that of other workers. Similar results from Spain (Muñoz-Bullón, 2009), Sweden (Brandt, 2016), the USA (Dogru et al., 2019) and Brazil (Silva and Guimarães, 2017) support the fact that globally, the tourism industry offers low salaries as compensation for their employees work. Research from the 1990s illustrates that this trend is not a new phenomenon within the industry (Lee and Kang, 1998). In all instances, this leads to what Riley and Szivas call the "distress element to the selling of labor." (2003, p 462) where tourism workers, and more specifically in their research, Indigenous workers, have to work longer hours for a poor wage to maintain their place in the tourism development pool.

Riley and Szivas go on to argue that the few employees who are not part of this trend, being properly and fairly remunerated for their work, are foreigners, resulting in an unequal distribution of jobs and opportunities. While most workers in the tourism industry are low-paid, a few sectors, such as hotel management and air transport, exceed the industry average wages and are listed as high-income sectors. More precisely, Choy (1995) found that in Hawaii, air transport paid its employees twice the wage of those working in eating and drinking establishments. Foreigners occupy those high-paying jobs, while locals hold the jobs that are low-paid, low-skilled, temporary and/or part-time, usually in the hospitality sector where training is limited, career growth is discouraged, and long-term career opportunities are few (Zampoukos and Ioannides, 2011).

Still, many governments have prioritised tourism industry development through international financial institutions' funding and foreign investments, disregarding its economic effects on local communities. The tourism industry continues to grow significantly with an expansionist development approach to tourism, including creating tourist strategies and goals, establishing infrastructure, and incentives such as low taxation for developing tourism facilities (Richter, 2008). To achieve all that, the tourism industry requires land. This can be seen in the Philippines' long history of declaring entire islands as

tourist zones (Maguigad, 2013) or Cambodia, where large land areas were leased for foreign investors to create tourism facilities (Neef and Touch, 2015). These lands, however, are not empty. Creating tourism zoning while promoting infrastructure development results in the displacement of local communities, with Indigenous people being dispossessed of their homes justified by the erroneous idea of economic prosperity brought in by tourism development. To fully understand the consequences of land dispossession, it is first necessary to understand Indigenous rights and their connection to the land.

Understanding Indigenous Rights

According to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, Indigenous Rights feature 46 articles built on the existing human rights standards. Even though the Declaration is not legally binding, it still represents a significant landmark, with most UN Member States supporting the creation of the Declaration. Furthermore, the Declaration was negotiated between states and Indigenous people and recognised both Indigenous rights to self-determination and the historical injustices they suffered with colonisation and dispossession of their lands and resources (United Nations, 2007). In particular, Article 10 reinforced the concept that no Indigenous person should be forcibly removed from their lands, and no relocation should happen without the free and informed consent of the Indigenous people. At the same time, Article 25 reiterated the right of Indigenous people to maintain their spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned land and other resources.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also provides states with a framework to reduce inequality. Andreas Neef (2019) explores how the Declaration can be used as a tool for the protection of Indigenous peoples from tourism-related land dispossession, as it clearly condemns all forms of forced displacement of native peoples and provides specific requirements for any relocation through appropriate and equitable compensations. Unfortunately, the UN Declaration and Indigenous Rights are often neglected, ignored, or disregarded by the global tourism industry, principally when it comes to land and resource ownership.

Postcolonialism and Land Ownership

Currently, the countries presenting the highest tourism growth rates are former colonies, characterised by weak land governance laws maintained from colonial times. Colonial legal frameworks were designed to consolidate the power and racialised privilege of the colonial elites by favouring private land ownership and disregarding Indigenous customary ownership. The result was the legalisation of the theft of Indigenous and subject peoples' lands justified by the ideology of improvement. Those who were not seen as proper subjects using their land on an economically productive basis were deemed wasteful and needed improvement. These ideas continued to modern times, with modern property laws casting certain groups of people and ways of producing and connecting to land as having more value worthy of legal protection. Modern property laws emerged along with colonial modes of appropriation and, in many instances, continue to perpetuate it today.

Those laws are used by the tourism industry actors, including governments and foreign investors, to pursue their economic agendas without regard for Indigenous communities. Power differences between elite or government powers and Indigenous communities, dating back to colonial times, result in many instances where host governments do not act to protect minority groups within their society (Price, 2015). Colonialism produced a racial regime of ownership that persists to this day, with private property ownership and the use of land being thoroughly racialised. Even countries that have made progress in establishing laws that focus on the protection of land access for minority groups have found their laws are not enough to control the exploitation from the tourism sector. Bakker and Reerink (2014) analysed Indonesia's 2012 Land Acquisitions in the Public Interest Law that proclaimed to protect the customary right to natural resources but, in many instances, acted to perpetuate forced dispossession of locals of any land smaller than 5 hectares.

Alongside the lack of laws to protect the Indigenous rights to their land, the tourism industry also uses the narrative of empty or idle land. This narrative derives from the colonial times myth of 'terra nullius', which proclaimed Indigenous land as no one's or empty land. This myth became the colonial doctrine enabling colonial occupations, fostering development ideas and economic productivity (Sen, 2017). Nowadays, the idea of no one's land is used in tourism to justify the exploration of resources and land grabbing. The action

is done in the mould of colonialism, having no regard for Indigenous communities living there. Alongside this argument is the idea of proper use of the land, which would argue that Indigenous people are not properly using or taking care of the land and resources. This argument fails to acknowledge that Indigenous people have a different conception of land and resource ownership than the Western understanding of land property (Small and Sheehan, 2008).

Furthermore, when taking over the land, foreigners develop the land and infrastructure according to their needs in complete disregard to the Indigenous residents' rights, culture and needs. Alongside losing their sovereignty over the land, Indigenous people are deprived of their spiritual connection to their ancestral land, are susceptible to the loss of local knowledge, and are at risk of social marginalisation and reduced self-determination. As a result, land grabbing, dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people for tourism follow colonial precedents. Los Esteros del Iberá in Argentina is a great example of this phenomenon. The largest nature reserve in the country, spanning more than one hundred and fifty thousand hectares, was bought by a private American conservation enterprise for tourism purposes. The local Indigenous community raised questions and concerns over the fact that a foreigner could obtain a large quantity of land in Argentina, principally considering the historical fight of Indigenous over land ownership (Busscher, Parra and Vanclay, 2018). While the land was made into a conservation park, the Guaraní people no longer have their spiritual connection or access to the resources from their ancestral land.

The aggressive pursuit of global tourism also leads to hardship for Indigenous communities trying to establish their livelihoods after relocation. Moving to different regions means the loss of interactions with customary resources and natural surroundings, as well as the decline in traditional Indigenous knowledge and diminished resilience to change (Movono, Dahles and Becken, 2017). Indigenous people, by not being able to secure financial stability from their land and the resources therein, are left at the mercy of the tourism industry for subsistence. The story of the Ati, a semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer Indigenous group in the Philippines, truly exemplifies this.

As the original settlers of Boracay Island, they were all forcefully dispossessed when the Philippine authority declared the whole island a tourist zone in 1978. In 1999, due to the Philippines president's efforts, the Ati were relocated to a

one-hectare piece of land on the Island. However, they continue to suffer harassment by the tourism industry, and the Department of Tourism decided that a viable solution for this would be to include Ati in the tourism industry by creating a housing project to serve as a tourist attraction. The Ati rejected the project on the grounds that it would be dehumanising. Another proposal rejected by the group was their relocation to the mainland, arguing that this would result in the loss of their close ties to their ancestral land (Baleva, 2019). Indigenous people remained scattered across the island without proper access to land or resources until 2011 when Indigenous lobbying efforts resulted in the government granting them 2.1 hectares of land. While they slowly started the gradual process of self-installation, the threats and violence from the private landowners in the region resulted in the death of one Ati. To this day, they face multiple litigation cases against their ownership of their ancestral land and are still unable to go home.

Conclusion

The global tourism industry has been found to cause more harm than good. This is because it perpetuates colonial power relations and leads to the dispossession and relocation of Indigenous communities worldwide. Although the industry generates economic gains, the harm done to Indigenous people and their land outweighs the benefits. The industry takes advantage of weak land governance laws and colonial-era myths such as "no one's land." This leads to land grabbing and resource exploitation, which disregards Indigenous people's connection to their ancestral lands and their sovereignty. Despite the ethical framework provided by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the industry disregards it, leading to Indigenous peoples being economically marginalised, without financial stability and holding low-skilled and low-paid jobs offered by the tourism industry. While global tourism can bring economic benefits usually visible as increased GDP, this comes at the expense of Indigenous rights and the perpetuation of colonial power dynamics. Ultimately, scrutinising global tourism reveals a complex tapestry of Indigenous rights violations that undermine its idyllic portrayal.

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20 |

FROM LEGAL TO REAL: CHALLENGES IN RECOGNISING LGBT MARRIAGES IN VIETNAM

Que Anh Mai

Abstract

Vietnam has made significant progress in promoting and safeguarding the rights of the LGBT community in recent times. At the Human Rights Council, Vietnam was among the countries that supported a resolution condemning discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. As a result, it was ranked as one of the leading nations in Asia for defending LGBTI rights. However, despite this progress, members of the LGBT community in Vietnam still face discrimination and stigma from society in their daily lives. They also encounter obstacles while exercising their rights, particularly the right to marriage. Therefore, this article sheds light on the current situation of LGBT marriages in Vietnam and the reasons why there are still obstacles for LGBT people to register for marriage. It also suggests several methods to build a more just society.

Introduction

There is no doubt that gender equality is always considered a significant aspect of sustainable development, as human rights issues are considered more highly than ever before. In Vietnam, an economically developing country, it is undeniable that the country has made significant progress toward equality for women's rights in every sphere, from education and healthcare to employment and politics. Despite several achievements that the Vietnamese government has made in promoting equal rights for females in recent years, it seems that equality for other genders, particularly those from the LGBT community, is still a matter that requires further efforts from both authorities and the whole community. This article, thus, would highlight the right to marriage of two main groups in the LGBT community: same-sex people and transgender people in Vietnam.

According to the iSEE and VESS 2021 report, it is estimated that the number of LGBT people in Vietnam accounts for about 9-11% of the total population - a community not too small compared to the population structure but one which is extremely disadvantaged under the lens of social prejudices. Recognising the significance of protecting human rights in general, and LGBT rights in particular, the Vietnamese Party and State have recently made significant changes and additions to the legal framework. Specifically, in the 2013 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Chapter 2 to regulations on human rights and civil rights, Article 14 clearly states: "In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, human rights and citizens' rights in the political, civic, economic, cultural and social fields are recognised, respected, protected and guaranteed in concordance with the Constitution and the law." Article 16 further stipulates "1. All citizens are equal before the law. 2. No one shall be discriminated against based on his or her political, civic, economic, cultural or social life." (International IDEA, n.d.)

The above regulations have created a very important foundational framework. However, it also raises the question of whether Vietnamese law is specific and comprehensive enough to ensure the rights of people in the LGBT community in real life. Hence, it is noticeable that several rights still need to be clearly recognised. In terms of the right to marriage, even though same-sex or transgender marriages have been regulated through law and customs in many countries globally, it is still controversial in terms of legislation and social responses, and Vietnam is no exception. By analysing and synthesising aspects

related to Vietnamese society, this article aims to shed light on the current context of LGBT marriages, including same-sex marriage and transgender marriage in Vietnam, in which both achievements and obstacles will be considered. Subsequently, the article will propose the underlying reasons why there are still challenges in recognising LGBT marriages; thence, several recommendations will be given in order to help recognise and legalise marriage within the LGBT community in Vietnam.

Discussion of Findings - The Concept of LGBT and LGBT Marriages

Definition of LGBT and Related Terms

LGBT Ireland defines LGBT as an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and along with heterosexual, they are terms used to describe an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is defined as an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people that is not dependent on their gender identity. It is normally divided into three main categories: heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

Gender Identity

Gender identity is one's innermost concept of self as male, female, a combination of the two, or neither. To be more specific, it is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. Gender identity can be the same or different from one's birth-assigned sex (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

Definition of LGBT Marriages

Same-sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage is the practice of marriage between two men or two women. Despite the fact that same-sex marriage has been regulated through law, religion, and custom in most countries of the world, the legal and social reactions and responses still range from celebration on the one hand to outright punishment on the other (Britannica, n.d.).

Transgender Marriage

When a change in gender identification is acknowledged by the law within the framework of matrimony, it is referred to as transgender marriage. Courts inquire as to a person's gender for the purposes of marriage legislation since the majority of jurisdictions define marriage in terms of opposite-sex couples. Hence, transgender marriages only happen if governments and legal systems acknowledge that a person's gender identification determines their sex in general (IJC, n.d.).

The Current Situation of LGBT Marriages in Vietnam

Notable progress in recognising LGBT marriages in Vietnam

It is undeniable that the Vietnamese government has spared no effort in recognising and ensuring the rights of the LGBT community by revising and amending previous laws and regulations that were considered outdated and inappropriate nowadays, which might violate the rights of LGBT people and challenge them to get married.

Achievements in Recognising Same-sex Marriage

The Law on Marriage and Family first addressed same-sex partnerships in 2000, when it was revised to forbid same-sex marriage and cohabitation. In 2002, the official media campaigned for the arrest of gay couples and referred to homosexuality as a "social evil" on a par with prostitution, gambling, and drug

trafficking. Following decrees in 2002, 2003, and 2006, same-sex adoption, surrogacy, and marriages to foreign nationals of the same sex were all declared unlawful.

Nevertheless, a significant shift in political views occurred within just one decade. In 2012, when Minister of Justice Ha Hung Cuong raised the contentious issue of same-sex marriage and publicly denounced discrimination against homosexuals, there was a rapid surge in public awareness of homosexuality and the LGBT population in Vietnam. In the 2000 draft of the Law on Marriage and Family, he also acknowledged that the absence of a system to deal with cohabiting same-sex couples caused problems for those couples. For the first time, a prominent figure from the government discussed the LGBT community in a way that was inclusive of all parties. A few months later, the Vice-Minister of Health, to show his encouragement for the legalisation of marriage between same-sex people, declared: "…in the angle of human rights, homosexuals also have the right to live, eat, wear, love and be loved and pursue happiness. In terms of citizenship, they have the right to work, study, have medical examination and treatment, register birth, death, marriage…" (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

In response to a request from the Ministry of Justice in Vietnam, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Vietnam convened a workshop in December 2012, bringing together national and international experts to exchange experiences across borders regarding same-sex marriage. Throughout the 2013 legislation on the Marriage and Family amendment process, UNDP Vietnam collaborated closely with UN Women and UNAIDS to provide input on the proposed legislation, which was based on the idea of equality for all individuals, irrespective of their gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The National Assembly's Committee on Social Affairs, which is in charge of amending the law, received the workshop minutes. In November 2013, the government issued the Decree No. 110/2013/ND-CP decriminalising same-sex marriage ceremonies and granting same-sex couples the right to cohabitate, which was dated 24 September 2013 and came into effect on 12 November 2013. It nullified parts of the previous decree that levied punishment for organising or taking part in a same-sex marriage ceremony. However, in June 2014, the National Assembly passed a revised Law on Family and Marriage with no provision that would forbid or acknowledge same-sex marriage. In practice, this

means that same-sex weddings would not be penalised as they formerly were, but same-sex couples would not get any advantages or legal recognition either.

As the Vietnamese government abolished the ban on marriage between homosexuals and deleted the administrative fine on same-sex wedding ceremonies, the needs of sexual minorities started to be considered in the process of revising laws. As a result, social stigma against LGBTI people has been reduced substantially.

Achievements in Recognising Transgender Marriage

When it comes to transgender rights in general and their right to marriage in particular, it is undeniable that the government has made a significant contribution to legalising the basic rights of transgender people, typical of Article 37 in the 2015 Civil Code, which officially went into effect on October 1, 2017. It stipulates the issue of transgender, which undeniably serves as the foundation for Vietnam's Gender Affirmation Law-making process. Transgender individuals will then have a complete legal foundation upon which to exercise their rights, even the right to marriage.

In the past, Article 36 of the 2005 Civil Code declared that individuals had the right to have their gender re-determined, but only in cases where their gender was incorrectly assigned or congenitally impaired. Furthermore, point e, Article 27 of this Code only allows people whose "gender has been re-determined" to change their name. Decree No. 88/2008/ND-CP of the Government defining gender reassignment later clarified Article 36 of the 2005 Civil Code. This decree forbids gender reassignment for individuals who have achieved gender perfection and prohibits performing gender reassignment without permission from the Ministry of Health or the Department of Health of a province or centrally administered city (Article 4) (Phuong, 2017).

On November 24, 2015, The National Assembly adopted the 2015 Civil Code which contains provisions pertaining to gender transition. The 2015 Civil Code specifically states in Article 37 that "Gender transformation is carried out in accordance with law. An individual whose gender has been transformed has the right and obligation to register civil status changes in accordance with the law on civil status; and has personal rights suitable to the transformed gender pursuant

to provisions of this Code and other relevant laws." (Economica Vietnam, n.d.). With this regulation, Vietnam is now the eleventh nation in Asia to legalise gender transition, following Iran, Israel, Syria, Nepal, China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, and Singapore (Phuong, 2017).

Although there is no specific provision on the right to change gender, the content of Article 37 of the 2015 Civil Code implicitly recognises this right. This new regulation is considered a cornerstone for realising many other human rights of transgender groups, such as the right to have gender reassignment surgery, the right to change name and gender in identification documents, the right to marry, and so forth. Therefore, if they meet the marriage registration conditions, transgender people would have the full right to register for marriage.

Current Obstacles for LGBT People to Exercise the Right to Marriage

Despite the significant progress that the Vietnamese government has made in ensuring the rights of LGBT people recently, there are still several obstacles that impede people in the LGBT community in Vietnam from getting married in practice.

Challenging Recognising Same-Sex Marriage

As mentioned above, Article 8 of the Law on Marriage and Family 2014 stipulates that "The State does not recognise marriage between persons of the same sex." Clause 5, Article 3 of the Law on Marriage and Family 2014 further states that "Marriage is a marriage between a man and a woman and establishes husband and wife relationship with each other in accordance with this Law on conditions for marriage and marriage registration." Therefore, although there is no legal prohibition against same-sex marriages, the Law on Marriage and Family 2014 does not recognise homosexual partnerships. This implies that although they are able to get married and live together as husband and wife, they are ineligible to officially register their marriage with a legitimate state body.

It follows that since homosexual couples are not allowed to register as married and are not acknowledged as husband and wife under the law, there would be no legally binding social contract between them (Tai, and Nguyet, 2020). As a result, other relationships such as parent-child relationships or property

relationships do not exist either. In particular, with regard to property relationships, it is evident that non-recognition of the marriage between same-sex people would result in non-application of the provisions of the Law on Marriage and Family and other pertinent laws concerning matters pertaining to the emergence of a property relationship, such as common property between husband and wife, inheritance rights, and so on. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to properly settle property disputes and protect the interests of the parties involved or the interests of children adopted as their own by same-sex couples who are not recognised as parents by law meaning that these adopted children cannot exercise the right to inherit property.

Challenging Recognising Transgender Marriage

Although the state allows transgender individuals the right to marry when eligible, they still face many barriers when registering for marriage because until now, competent authorities have not yet issued any legal documents or professional instructions guiding the implementation of this provision, resulting in transgender people facing many difficulties in their everyday lives. For more than 8 years since the rights of transgender people were recognised, the LGBT community is still waiting for the draft transgender law to be officially passed because the Civil Code stipulates that "Gender transformation is carried out in accordance with the law." (Duc, 2023). If transgender people fail to have their birth certificate modified to suit their new identity, they could hardly carry out administrative or legal procedures (including marriage registration) that require a birth certificate.

With an emphasis on those who desire sex reassignment surgery, western countries have established a healthcare system for transgender individuals in the midst of ongoing issues about human rights and the right to healthcare. (Phuong, Binh and Tu, 2012). In Vietnam, there is no medical system for the gender transition process of transgender individuals since they are not yet seen as a population in need of care. In addition, before having sex reassignment surgery, a proper procedure with certification from psychologists is required to assess if a transgender individual is suitable to undergo the surgery. As of now, transgender Vietnamese patients are unable to locate a qualified doctor who would certify them for surgery abroad. Furthermore, since their physical characteristics differ from their IDs, it is challenging to return to the country after surgery. Thus,

transgender individuals seek to be able to undergo surgery and be provided with favourable conditions so that their post-surgery gender is recognised.

In light of the fact that there are still many obstacles to carrying out sex reassignment surgery and changing gender on post-operation papers, transgender people have expressed their desire to be legally acknowledged for marriage to same-sex partners or cohabitation of two individuals of the same sex in order to maintain a more long-term relationship as well as to protect their personal rights and assets during the cohabitation. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, marriage between same-sex people has still not been officially legalised.

Underlying Reasons Why LGBT Marriages have not been Legalised

It may be thought that the Vietnamese legal system has not yet recognised LGBT marriages but that this is not necessarily because the lawmakers do not want to recognise it, but rather that it is mainly due to many other aspects, including legal issues as well as social stigmas and prejudices.

Legal Issues

Looking at the scope of regulation of the law related to LGBT marriages, if the arbitration agreement is accepted, it would lead to a change in a series of legal provisions within the legal system to suit the subjects, competence, procedures, and so on. Furthermore, Vietnam's recognition and legalisation of LGBT marriage raises questions about international law that must be taken into account. How will the legal rights and interests of a married couple from a recognised nation and a non-recognised country be governed? Is recognition there in this instance or not? What rights would the inhabitants of the two nations have if a Vietnamese citizen marries a citizen of a non-recognised nation? Consequently, in the case that LGBT marriages are instituted and legalised, the member states are required to establish a common framework that applies a set of standards across those nations that have accepted this type of marriage and those that are still 'tough' on this behaviour (Tai and Nguyet, 2020).

Before being reflected in legal documents, thorough calculations are required for each set of legal issues. In the case of transgender marriage particularly, there are still several argumentative points proposed in the draft Gender Affirmation Law

such as citizens are required to perform medical intervention to change gender, which is believed to create huge financial and health obstacles, leading to a large number of transgender people still not being able to access the right to change gender. Moreover, the age limit for accessing hormone therapy is 16 and the age limit for changes in documents is 18, raising criticism that accepting 16-year-old children to use hormones but only changing the information on the documents until they are 18 years old also unintentionally creates a 2-year gap when there are differences between appearance and documents (Duc, 2023).

Lack of experience in legal adjustment may also be a reason that hinders the process of legalising LGBT marriages in Vietnam since Vietnam is still a young country as is its legal system. So far, monogamous marriage or polygamous marriage are familiar in traditional society but it rarely acknowledges other types of marriage such as homosexual or transgender marriage, and historically there is little evidence of these types of marriage. Hence, when lawmakers incorporate new legal facts into the legislation, acclimatising to them presents a challenge. In terms of homosexual marriage, for instance, despite the fact that there are 30 countries and territories around the world who have recently recognised same-sex marriage recently, it is not a simple matter for Vietnamese legislators to always apply the law because of local characteristics of the population, society, traditions and culture. (Tai and Nguyet, 2020).

Social Stigmas and Prejudices

There are many barriers and difficulties for transgender people originating from social stigmas and discriminatory treatment against them while there is no legal framework yet to protect their rights against gender stigmas. This is mainly due to cognitive and social obstacles as well as traditional and cultural obstacles.

First and foremost, cognitive and social obstacles could be seen as the greatest barrier that LGBT people encounter when they want to fight for the legalisation of marriage as well as legal recognition. Common misperceived causes of the LGBT community include biological changes during fetal development and psychological disorders (UNDP & USAID, 2014). LGBT people are discriminated against, physically and psychologically assaulted, and abandoned by their families. There are even parents who seek to 'cure' their children because they think this is a disease, using all methods in order to brainwash and change

their gender identity or sexual orientation. LGBT people may even be forced into marriage to those whom they do not love, which can lead to the breakdown of marriages after a short period of time, further damaging the image of LGBT people.

Secondly, traditional and cultural obstacles also explain why Vietnamese LGBT people have to face harsh reactions from the community because of their gender expression. To be more specific, Vietnamese society is heavily influenced by Confucianism and Eastern traditional values that emphasise the role of males in the family (Cuong, 2012). When assessing the role of the family, marriage is an institution designed to give birth to children, and especially to give birth to a son to continue the family lineage. LGBT marriage, thus, is perceived to be inconsistent with Vietnamese customs, family traditions, and biological laws, and undermines the role of the family. Thus, from a historical point of view, LGBT individuals continue to be influenced by cultural ideals that are deeply embedded in the collective unconscious of all citizens. Because of the misconceptions that have been propagated and embedded in their minds, even they might not embrace themselves.

Thus, from the analysis of the above-mentioned obstacles, it can be seen that there are many factors that influence whether it is possible to overcome these barriers to legalize homosexual marriage in Vietnam.

Recommendations

Despite the fact that LGBT marriages are more open than before, the lack of legal recognition still makes it difficult for LGBT couples to register for marriage. Hence, in order to help LGBT marriage to soon be recognised and legalised in the future, it is significant to ask for the encouragement and contribution of all individuals in the society not just rely on the efforts of the legislators.

Policy Advocacy

Vietnam is undergoing significant legal reform, with the forthcoming era seeing the amendment of numerous fundamental laws, including the Constitution, the Civil Code, the Labour Code, the Residential Code, and the Law on Marriage and Family (UNPD & USAID, 2014). The LGBT community has a chance to

be involved in this process ensuring their rights are upheld. Additionally, this is the chance to include rules against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation.

While amending these laws is essential, it is even more crucial to include the general public in the process to empower them and raise their awareness of their rights. Instead of the other way around, citizens and grassroots civil society should assist the government. Regular meetings between the LGBT community and working groups on legislation, legislators, and the government are necessary to discuss the difficulties they encounter. In situations where communication is impossible, campaigns to gather opinions from the public and community should be organised.

Public Awareness Raising

It is necessary to carry out extensive propaganda work to the community so that people have a full and correct understanding of the LGBT community, thereby the community instead of having a disdainful or discriminatory attitude toward them, welcomes the LGBT community and so will accept their marriages as well. In respect of training and education programs, training materials should be updated to account for the LGBT movement's recent advancements and address the inadequacies of earlier training sessions. Prominent individuals are encouraged to be involved in awareness-raising programs aimed at fostering a positive image of the LGBT community. Students and young people should also be educated about LGBT issues through lectures, discussions, and via openly accessible online databases and platforms.

Another effective tool in raising awareness of LGBT issues in Vietnam is the media. To present society with an accurate image of LGBT people, more LGBT couples and families should be highlighted in the media. Moreover, documentaries, movies, and exhibitions on topics of sexual diversity can promote the rights of LGBT people in general and the right to marriage in particular. To support more positive representations of gender roles and the family, other kinds of communication like plays and performances should also be investigated.

Support Services

Legal consultation clinics are necessary to assist LGBT individuals with everyday legal concerns. Since many community members are unaware of their rights, this is also a means of educating them. Legal advice should be provided to LGBT individuals by integrating LGBT-related information and expertise into a nationwide network of legal clinics and hotlines. To offer prompt, accessible, and relevant perceptions on LGBT issues, organisations that protect the rights of the LGBT community and speak for them collectively should be established and encouraged. Civil Society organisations (CSO) that promote equality for people from the LGBT community should be able to register as legal entities to operate more effectively. Building a model of vocational centres for LGBT individuals is something that community and self-help groups should actively pursue. Supporting organisations might offer human resources and technical assistance to make this feasible.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that in the past, Vietnamese society did not show significant prejudice to or make distinctions between people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and the rest of society (UNDP & USAID, 2014). However, in modern times, a paradigm of gender and sexual relationships was institutionalised, dictating who individuals should be and who they should love while marginalising those who did not belong to that model. As a result, homosexual and transgender people suddenly became outsiders to modern society. Furthermore, in the current context, people with different sexual orientations or gender identities are also subjected to stigma and prejudice from the majority, and even discriminated against by their own family members. Consequently, it is difficult for LGBT people to live a full life and their integration also encounters many obstacles.

In spite of certain achievements in the legal system related to LGBT rights, it remains true that regulations and policies are still general with no separate law regulating LGBT issues. In the case of LGBT marriages, whether or not legalisation is possible, attempting to overcome the obstacles to it are a just means of expression and a rationale for its benefits; this has the potential to have a positive impact on society and the state. It is only when this pressure reaches a

certain equilibrium threshold that the legalisation of LGBT marriages will be provided for in the law. It appears that there are always differences in any society, and those within the LGBT community, will always account for a certain proportion of the population. As a result it is anticipated that when all the requirements are met LGBT marriages will, in the near future, get formal legal and societal recognition.

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ARTS AND EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE LEGACY OF ART WITH DEN

Artemis Rafaella Port Rabello

The Democratic Education Network strives to foster a learning environment that encourages students to discover and pursue their passions, regardless of their academic disciplines. At the core of this network lies the belief that students should be inspired to explore their unique strengths and interests. An insightful interview with Artemis Rafaella Port Rabello highlights the inseparable connection between education and the arts. Despite focusing on politics and international relations, Rabello continues studying and appreciating the arts.

How long have you been painting and why?

Art has been a passion of mine for as long as I can remember, much like many individuals. It all began during my childhood and continued to be a significant part of my life as I grew older. Initially, it was merely a hobby that I used to occupy my time, but over time it became an instinctual way to pass the time.

One of my fondest memories from that time in my life was when I was about 11 or 12 years old. I remember feeling that my interest in art had shifted from a casual enjoyment to a desire to learn more and improve. My cousin, who is only 11 months older than me, introduced me to fundamental anatomy and techniques to begin this journey. When she taught me, everything clicked for me.

From that moment on, I knew I didn't want to stop. I wanted to learn how to paint and draw my favourite characters and people and capture the beauty of a scene in a way that surpassed my poor photography skills. Art has always been the driving force behind my motivation and inspiration.

What inspires you to create paintings or sketch drawings?

I enjoy creating artwork, specifically drawing characters from my favourite shows and animations and scenes that remind me of specific styles and mediums. Regarding materials, I prefer watercolours for characters, pencil graphite for portraits, and oil paints for scenery. The motivation behind my art is less important than the motivation for art to come to me.

As for the connection between my education and artwork, I believe they are strongly intertwined. As someone with ADHD, I have found that sketching during class helps me retain information better than simply sitting still or using fidget toys. Art has been an essential component of my educational journey.

Do you have a preferred style of art, or do you follow specific artists?

Although I don't have a specific style, I like experimenting with different mediums for different scenarios. For instance, I use pastel oils for sky scenes, graphite and watercolour for portraits, black and white pen works for cartoons, etc. My art style varies depending on the reference and the outcome I want to achieve. I have a personal style where I prefer certain colours and looks, and I tend to draw shapes and forms in ways that are more appealing to me than following the reference exactly. However, I believe it's crucial to have a good grasp of the basics of art, such as anatomy, colour theory, shapes, light and shadow, etc., instead of focusing too much on developing a specific style.

Have you ever thought of studying arts instead of Politics and International Relations?

I did want to pursue an arts degree for a brief period, and I still do out of interest for the subject. However, art is something I do for myself, as a personal project of growth and love. I don't think I could ever sell my pieces or have to meet deadlines for creative work. I prefer to let my art come at its own pace, which can sometimes be overnight or take weeks. "If I had to drag it out to meet work deadlines, I wouldn't be as comfortable or fascinated with art."

When did you paint these portraits?

I possess a delightful assortment of paintings that serve as a testament to my evolution as an artist. The oldest piece in my collection dates back to 2015 and depicts a woman in a serene field. My most recent addition is a striking portrait from last year. My artistic voyage has been far from uniform; rather, it has been a dynamic journey that ebbs and flows with the various stages of my life. These paintings serve as a record of my artistic maturation and I am convinced that art grows alongside me, progressing at the rhythm I have set for my life.

Please describe Portrait 1 and 2. What inspired you to paint it?

I crafted a stunning landscape painting of an oil city for my parents, who were seeking a piece to adorn their recently refurbished bedroom. While perusing an aged book, they stumbled upon a faint rendering of 'Le boulevard Poissonnière en 1834' by Isidore Dagnan and were enamoured with the ambience depicted in the artwork. They approached me with a request to recreate the same image, resulting in the painting's finalization around 2016-17.

Please describe Portrait 3 and why you created it.

This stunning mixed-media landscape, known as Portrait 3, draws inspiration from the captivating world of anime. Created using a combination of watercolours and coloured pencils, it features the main character standing at the centre of the scene. The original concept comes from the acclaimed Japanese production Hunter X Hunter, created by Yoshihiro Togashi. Notably, the frame from the 1999 anime version evokes the timeless painting Wanderer above the

Sea Fog by Caspar David Friedrich. However, this rendition adds a romantic layer to the reflective nature of the original work by incorporating a striking, deep sunset colour palette. Picture 3 is a true masterpiece, crafted in 2023.

Please tell us about portrait 4; what is it, and why did you draw this?

I'm sharing Portrait 4, an oil painting I created as a tribute to John William Waterhouse's Boreas artwork. It was originally intended as a gift for a friend whom I've since lost touch with, but the painting still holds a special place in my heart. It serves as a reminder of the inspiration my friend brought into my life and the love that I've shared with others. I take pride in this painting, which I completed in 2015-16.

Please tell us about portrait 5; what is it, and why did you draw this?

The fifth image in my collection depicts a graphite pencil portrait of a character hailing from the same anime as the second picture. This artwork marked my initial endeavour to transform a 2D character into a lifelike individual. The subject of this piece is none other than Hyde, a member of the celebrated Japanese band L'arc-en-Ciel. During the creative process, I uncovered the fascinating fact that Hyde's countenance was the actual inspiration behind the character's inception. It's worth noting that this portrait was crafted in 2023.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

I cannot thank you enough for your unwavering support and belief in my art. It means the world to me that you have encouraged me to showcase my works alongside other exceptional pieces in this book. It is an honour and a privilege to have my art recognised and appreciated in this way. Your trust and faith in me have encouraged me to push my boundaries and strive for excellence.
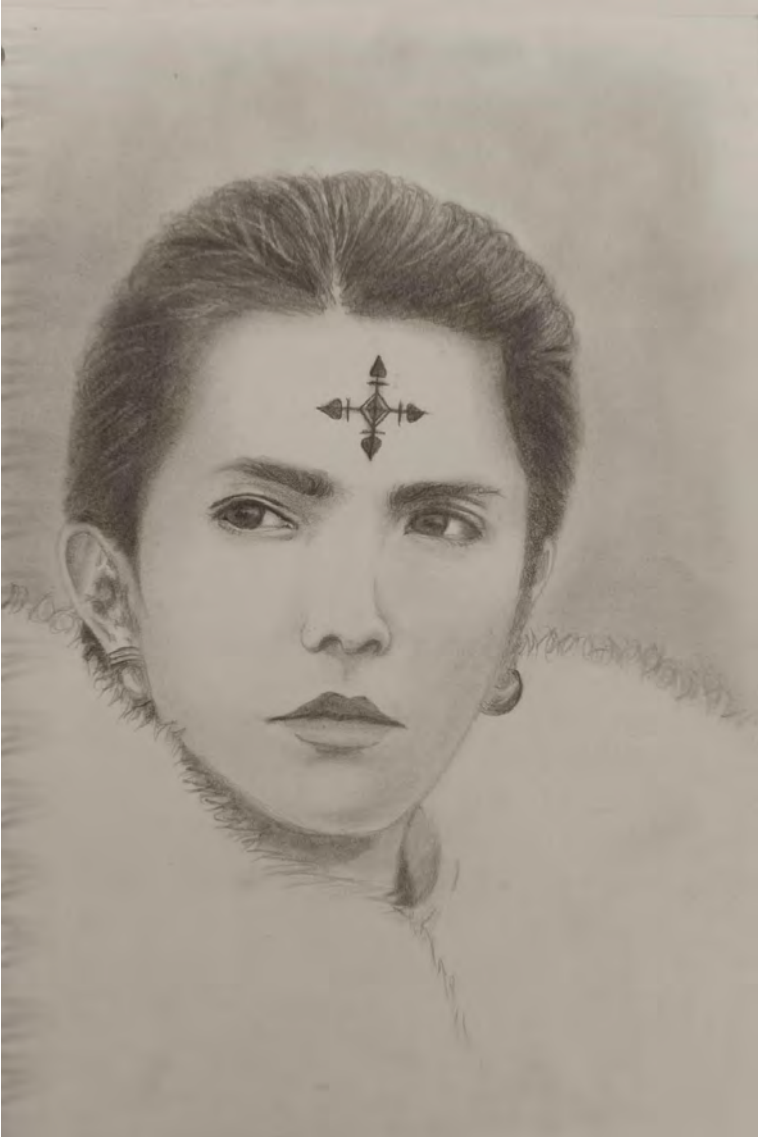
Portrait 1

Portrait 2

Portrait 3

Portrait 4

Portrait 5

EDUCATION, EQUALITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Actions Speak Louder than Words

The Democratic Education Network (DEN) is committed to fostering collaborative, democratic, and respectful learning environments. At the core of DEN's educational philosophy lies the belief that learning should be a communal endeavour where students are empowered to learn from one another and their educators. DEN's 6th annual book is a valuable resource for students and the broader community, offering practical insights into their most pressing concerns and the most effective techniques for democratic education.

Dr Farhang Morady
Director of the Democratic Education Network

We are enriched by the creative, critical, and thoughtful work being undertaken by students in the DEN. This collection of student-led and student-produced work speaks volumes about our commitment to growing the impact of the Sustainable Development Goals at the University of Westminster. From global development to the politics of climate change, we celebrate this work for confronting some of our most pressing global challenges and for building a community of responsible leaders who actively value equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Dr Thomas Moore
Head, College of Liberal Arts and Science

As a 'global University with London energy', we are keen to nurture the talents of our students from diverse backgrounds and champion them as producers of knowledge about the world. The multi-disciplinary contributions to this volume show that our students desire not only to know the status quo but to challenge it. This is fully aligned with our progressive ethos as a University.

Professor Dibyesh Anand
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement and Employability)

EDUCATION, EQUALITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY
Actions Speak Louder than Words

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