

JUST FUTURES

SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSIVITY & EDUCATION

EDITED BY
FARHANG MORADY



<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/den/>

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

IJOPEC
PUBLICATION
London iJOPEC.co.uk Istanbul

**JUST FUTURES
SUSTAINABILITY
INCLUSIVITY &
EDUCATION**

Edited by
Farhang Morady

Just Futures: Sustainability, Inclusivity and Education

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Editorial Board Members: Layla Abdulle, Marharyta Andreieva, Salman Aziz, Afra Bhuiyan, Suheyla Coskun, Durdonabonu Davronova, Edward Dean, Fatima Dosti, Nguyen Chi Dung, Nigina Esanova, Mursal Hakimi, Husna Ibanda, Ramadan B. Kamara, Noor Kazmi, Maryam Khan, Norin Khatun, Paula Lambertz, Que Anh Mai, Fatimata Mamadu, Pinyapatch Meksakunwong, Michelle Mohaimen, Charlene Okai, Anjali Pandya, Renata Pernegrová, Mubina Rahman, Sirawhich Sanohjammong, Mohammad Saif Tanvir, Thanakrit Thongchantr, Ha Thi Kieu Trinh, Grace Villagomez-Akre, and Lucrezia Rachele Zito



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Just Futures: Sustainability, Inclusivity and Education

First Edition, February 2025

IJOPEC Publication No: 2025/03

ISBN: 978-1-913809-53-9

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A catalogue record for this book is available from Nielsen Book Data, British Library and Google Books.

The publishing responsibilities of the chapters in this book belong to the authors.

Printed & published in London.

Cover Design & Composer:

Devika Nambiar |  @malabarpress

Photo by Roman Odintsov from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/students-reading-book-12719334/>

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Democratic Education Network (DEN) thrives as a dynamic and collaborative initiative founded by students, academics, and members of both local and global communities. Established at the University of Westminster, DEN is committed to promoting democratic education through active student engagement, meaningful dialogue, and cross-cultural collaboration. By providing a platform for knowledge exchange, diverse perspectives, and shared experiences, it fosters mutual understanding, respect, and a lifelong pursuit of learning.

This publication has been made possible through the invaluable support, encouragement, and contributions of academic institutions, educators, and students worldwide. Universities and scholars across various regions have played a crucial role in advancing DEN's mission, facilitating intellectual exchanges, and nurturing a shared vision of democratic education. Their engagement has cultivated a global learning community where ideas flow freely, and collaboration leads to collective growth.

Through these shared efforts, DEN has nurtured a more interconnected and inclusive academic environment, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to learn from and inspire one another. The commitment to cooperation and the pursuit of knowledge have helped the initiative flourish, reinforcing democratic values and fostering an appreciation of cultural diversity.

We are deeply grateful to the scholars, academics, institutions, and students whose expertise and dedication have enriched this project. Our international partners have been essential in this journey, contributing through workshops, conferences, and student exchanges. We extend special appreciation to Assistant Prof. Wing Commander Dr. Ngamlamai Piolueang, Dr. Korakit Choomgrant, Dr. Nadhawe Bunnag, Dr. Pailin Kittisereechai, and Dr. Akekalak Chaipumee from Kasetsart University in Thailand; Dr. Tien Thi Minh Nguyen and Ms. Thuy Linh from Hanoi University in Vietnam; Dr. Ismail Siriner from Batman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

University in Turkey; and Dr. Horacio Gago from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. Their dedication to democratic education and cross-cultural dialogue has profoundly shaped this initiative.

At the University of Westminster, we are grateful to colleagues whose guidance and support have been instrumental in DEN's success and the realization of this publication. Many have contributed by delivering insightful lectures and inspiring students to engage in research and projects that align with the University's mission. We particularly acknowledge Dr. Kalpana Surendranath for introducing her research on CRISPR technology, Dr. Pooja Basnett and Soumya Sharma for their lecture on The Cavendish Living Lab and sustainable solutions, Mr. Darrell Kofkin for sharing his work on Rwanda's project, and Dr. Olivia Porter from the Centre of Buddhist Studies at SOAS. Their expertise has inspired students to develop their research and contribute articles to this volume.

Our sincere gratitude extends to Professor Peter Bonfield, Vice-Chancellor of the University, for his leadership and encouragement. We appreciate the unwavering support of Dr. Sal Jarvis, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), and the global collaboration fostered by Professor Dibyesh Anand, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement and Employability). Dr. Andrew Pitchford, Head of the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation, has played a key role in innovative learning approaches, while Dr. Thomas Moore, Head of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Mr. Alan Porter, Head of the School of Social Sciences, have been invaluable in strengthening DEN's mission. We also recognize the students and staff at City and Islington College London, particularly Lee Kennedy, for their long-standing collaboration.

A special acknowledgement is reserved for Dr Farhang Morady, the Academic Director of DEN, whose steadfast dedication, insightful mentorship, and tireless efforts have been the cornerstone of this project. His leadership has provided inspiration and clarity, guiding DEN toward its objectives with passion and vision. We are profoundly grateful for his contributions and his lasting impact on this initiative.

Finally, we extend heartfelt thanks to the students whose enthusiasm, commitment, and intellectual curiosity have been the driving force behind this

initiative. Their dedication to learning, collaboration, and the principles of democratic education embodies the values that DEN upholds.

This book is a testament to the spirit of collaboration and shared aspirations that define DEN. It reflects the power of education to bridge cultures and create a more inclusive, enlightened world.

FOREWORD

I am honored to contribute this foreword to the DEN Annual Book, a publication that exemplifies the enduring and dynamic partnership between Kasetsart University and the University of Westminster. This collaboration has continuously evolved, fostering meaningful academic exchanges and intellectual growth.

Central to this partnership is the visionary leadership of Associate Professor Dr Farhang Morady, whose dedication to promoting cooperative initiatives between our institutions has facilitated numerous academic endeavours. These include campus visits, exchange programmes for both faculty and students and a series of engaging workshops and conferences.

Our collaboration has developed through two primary dimensions. Horizontally, the Faculty of Social Sciences at Kasetsart University—comprising the departments of Psychology, Law, Sociology and Anthropology, Geography, History, and Political Science and Public Administration—has actively engaged in various joint academic initiatives with the University of Westminster. This engagement continues to expand, enriching academic experience for both students and faculty members.

Vertically, our cooperation has been further strengthened through the reciprocal teaching of Middle East studies modules by lecturers from both institutions. This exchange has provided students with a broader perspective on the subject, culminating in the invaluable opportunity to participate in a study trip to Istanbul alongside their Westminster peers. Such experiences extend beyond traditional classroom learning, fostering cross-cultural understanding and intellectual enrichment.

Education, in its truest form, transcends textbooks and lectures. The opportunity for students to explore, interact, and engage in experiential learning is indispensable. The Democratic Education Network (DEN) embodies this

philosophy by encouraging students to challenge conventional educational boundaries and embrace continuous learning and collaborative innovation. The DEN Annual Book stands as a testament to these principles, showcasing the creative contributions of students from various institutions, including Kasetsart University, and serving as a catalyst for further academic collaboration.

I take great pride in our progress and look forward to the future expansion of our partnership, including potential research collaborations and further creative initiatives. The continued development of this cooperation will undoubtedly foster academic excellence and cross-cultural engagement, further strengthening the ties between our institutions.

*Assistant Professor Wing Commander Dr. Ngamlamai Piolueang
Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences
Kasetsart University, Thailand*

FOREWORD

The connection between the University of Westminster and Hanoi University (HANU) has been lively and productive since its establishment in 2015. This relationship has developed over time via a mutual dedication to scholarly interchange, collaborative curriculum development, formal exchange of courses, joint student-led conference organisation, and encouraging democratic participation among students. These initiatives have cultivated a learning environment that surpasses geographical limitations and promotes a global viewpoint among our students and faculty.

A notable feature of this collaboration has been the activities led by the Democratic Education Network (DEN) at Westminster and HANU. These initiatives have provided students with significant opportunities to broaden their global perspective while advancing their academic and professional growth. This book is one of the many significant projects that HANU and the University of Westminster have done together, as well as other international partners. We take great pride in the active involvement of our students in writing and editing, as well as in participating in workshops and conferences held in both London and Hanoi (Vietnam). Their contributions reflect the vibrancy of this collaboration and its profound impact on academic and professional development.

The book brings diverse and interesting topics, including economics, international relations, international law, politics, biomedical sciences, arts, and cultures, that are viewed, condensed, and interpreted from students' perspectives. It's worth reading their articles to learn how creative, talented, and potential our students are and how DEN has empowered them.

*Nguyen Thi Minh Tien, PhD
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FOREWORD

Contestation over Ideas: The Value of Respect

As an institution that prides itself as a “London university with global energy”, we are keen to work with the members of our diverse community (both students and colleagues) and the wider society to nurture responsible global citizenship. The purpose of education for us is to go beyond knowledge sharing and skills gathering; it is to see education as transformative in every aspect of life.

Our world faces several challenges relating to conflicts, inequities, and unfairness. News, both in mainstream and on social media, is often about divisions and violent ways in which various actors seek to resolve differences and exercise power. Education cannot be neutral in such a world, yet it need not be a mere ideological tool.

While acknowledging the contested nature of knowledge and appreciating differences over almost every facet of education, we must try our best to avoid differences becoming divisiveness. We would fail as educationists if we don't reinforce a democratic ethos – that is, think and practice so that differences don't imply enmity. That you and I disagree over something does not mean we see each other as ideological or political enemies. Sadly, the messy reality is one where the democratic ethos is under erasure by various actors. Education is being turned into an arena of contestation where diversity of ideas is no longer tolerated. Respect is being devalued.

In such a world of divisiveness, it is refreshing to listen to and read students who eschew exclusivism and focus on respectfully sharing their ideas on justice, sustainable development, inclusion, and other important topics. The essays in this volume remind us of the value of seeing students as co-producers of knowledge. The contributors here come from more than one country and very different disciplinary and social backgrounds. They illustrate what a network that

treats diversity and difference as strengths and facilitates space of deliberation over contested ideas can achieve. They illustrate the power of a collective shaped not by uniformity of ideology but respect for difference.

As a progressive institution at the University of Westminster, we are super keen to keep supporting our students and initiatives such as the Democratic Education Network that treat respectful contestation over ideas as healthy and thus encourage socially aware local and global citizenship.

*Professor Dibyesh Anand
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INTRODUCTION

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This volume, *Just Futures: Redefining Education for a Sustainable and Inclusive Tomorrow*, represents a significant milestone in the Democratic Education Network (DEN) book series, now in its seventh edition since its founding in 2016. This edition upholds DEN's commitment to providing a platform for students to share their research, insights, and critical reflections.

Key events related to the network featured in this volume include several student conferences and workshops. Among these is the DEN International Student Conference held in May 2024 at the University of Westminster in London, titled *Just Futures: Redefining Education for a Sustainable and Inclusive Tomorrow*. This was followed by DEN's first International Student Conference at Hanoi University, *Democratic Engagement: Navigating Vietnam's Transition, Challenges, and Opportunities*. Additionally, DEN organised a workshop on *Global Engagement in Higher Education* at Kasetsart University, Bangkok, Thailand, in December 2023. Another significant event was a workshop titled *Contemporary Politics and Development in the Middle East*, which took place in Istanbul in November 2024.

The conferences and workshops DEN organised are centred around democratic education, knowledge exchange, participatory governance, and inclusive learning practices. The guiding conceptual framework of DEN emphasizes collaborative decision-making, enabling students and faculty to jointly influence the creation of a dynamic and student-centred learning environment. DEN's commitment to openness and diversity ensures accessibility for students from under-represented and marginalized communities. This methodology is grounded in critical pedagogy, especially the contributions of Paulo Freire, who promotes dialogic and transformative education. A non-hierarchical governance approach enhances student agency in defining their academic experiences, promoting peer-to-peer and experiential learning that cultivates enhanced student-led educational development (Freire, 2017 & 2021)

The contributions in this volume reflect the evolving landscape of higher education, wherein students critically interrogate dominant narratives, engage in meaningful academic discourse, and forge innovative connections between theoretical inquiry and real-world applications. Drawing on theoretical foundations such as John Dewey's experiential learning model, which conceptualises education as a social process, and Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, which highlights the significance of collaborative knowledge-building, the volume emphasises the transformative power of participatory education (Dewey, 1997; Vygotsky, 1993). Additionally, Carole Pateman's work on participatory democracy highlights the imperative of co-creating curricula and governance structures prioritising inclusivity, shared responsibility, and student engagement (Pateman, 1970).

Contemporary higher education is shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, and social forces. Political instability, economic constraints, and restrictive policies challenge equitable access to education, particularly for international students seeking to broaden their academic and professional horizons. Universities must navigate these challenges while upholding the principles of inclusivity and academic freedom. As such, fostering educational environments that empower students to critique and reshape systemic barriers is imperative. Advocacy for policy reforms, the expansion of scholarship opportunities, and the establishment of alternative pathways to higher education are crucial in ensuring that education remains a conduit for empowerment rather than exclusion.

DEN at the University of Westminster fosters student leadership through diverse initiatives designed to amplify student voices and influence the network's trajectory. A notable example is the recently introduced elective year 2 taught module, Democratic Engagement in an International Context, which exemplifies DEN's commitment to global democratic classrooms and the co-creation of curricula. This innovative approach encourages students to take an active role in shaping the structure and content of their education. By connecting students and academics from international partner institutions through an online platform, DEN cultivates an authentic global learning experience. Some of the students' coursework is published in DEN's online magazine and in this volume.

DEN facilitates open venues for discourse among students, scholars, and institutional leaders through its diverse programs, including this volume. Moreover, partnerships with local and global communities augment education outside conventional academic environments. By incorporating democratic curriculum development and peer-led mentorship, DEN reconceptualizes the university as a vibrant and interactive centre for intellectual discourse and civic involvement.

This academic year marks a significant juncture for the DEN, as the expansion of the editorial board for this volume encompasses students joining from a range of geographic backgrounds, including Thailand, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. This diversity emphasises DEN's dedication to global education and inclusivity. The active engagement of these students in the processes of composition, evaluation, revision, and design of this publication exemplifies the collaborative ethos that is foundational to DEN, thereby ensuring that student-led initiatives remain integral to its overarching mission. These efforts resonate with the tenets of social constructivism, which underscores the pivotal role of group dialogue, problem-solving, and collaboration in facilitating profound educational experiences.

This volume is not solely an academic pursuit but a reflection of DEN's primary purpose, which is to foster a culture of respect and collaborative learning. It functions as more than a compilation of research; it encapsulates the transforming experiences and critical interactions of its authors, faculty, and the broader academic community. By cultivating an environment where students motivate and educate one another, DEN persistently contests conventional educational

frameworks and promotes a more participative, inclusive, and transformational academic system.

At its essence, Just Futures embodies DEN's conviction that education is a fluid and progressive endeavour transcending the simple attainment of information. It emphasises the significance of cultivating intellectual connections, promoting creativity, and building a shared sense of social duty. Education must be a continuous journey of study and discovery, allowing students to merge theory with practice effectively. When students assume responsibility for their education, they generate academically demanding, personally significant, and socially pertinent work that yields enduring effects on their academic paths and wider communities.

This volume brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from fields as diverse as biomedical sciences, English literature, economics, international relations, law, politics, sociology, international law, sustainable development, arts, and culture. This diversity reflects DEN's interdisciplinary ethos.

This book is structured into several thematic sections. The first section, Education & Critical Thinking, examines shifts in global education. Nguyen Chi Dung explores Vietnam's transition from a locally focused system to an internationally integrated model driven by globalisation and diplomatic strategy. Marharyta Andreieva compares approaches to teaching critical thinking in the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine, highlighting differences in fostering independent thought. Fatima Dosti analyses how Vietnamese youth navigate traditional values and modern influences in their university experiences, particularly about gender roles and identity. This section includes an interview with Renata Pernegrova, discussing her educational journey from Czechia to London while highlighting the challenges she faced and her personal growth throughout the experience.

The second section, Poverty, Inequality & Social Issues, addresses economic and social disparities. Ramadan B. Kamara discusses how poverty and inequality undermine democratic stability by reducing political participation and fuelling authoritarianism. Ha Thi Kieu Trinh evaluates the effectiveness of the UNDP's poverty reduction strategies in Vietnam's ethnic minority communities, while Lucrezia Rachele Zito examines how UK print media frames homelessness, shaping public perceptions and policy discourse. Husna Ibanda's research

investigates the link between income levels, healthcare access, and tuberculosis prevalence in Vietnam, advocating for expanded universal healthcare.

In the Economic Issues section, Durdonabonu Davronova analyzes the impact of trade openness on inflation in East Asia and the Pacific. Meanwhile, Michelle Mohaimen contrasts the development strategies of multinational corporations in Vietnam with those of grassroots NGOs, advocating for a more balanced approach to development. Finally, Illari Rimarachin Martinez challenges the concept of exceptionalism by illustrating that the political, economic, and social patterns observed in the Middle East are not unique but instead align with broader global trends.

The Feminism & Gender Studies section features research on gender equality and representation. Paula Lambertz explores the impact of feminist activist group Guerrilla Girls on museums, highlighting the paradox of institutional co-optation of activist art. Mursal Hakimi investigates how Afghan women's participation in traditional crafts fosters economic independence and cultural preservation. Mubina Rahman compares gender roles in British and Vietnamese children's literature, discussing how modern adaptations challenge traditional stereotypes.

A special feature where Noor Kazmi interviews Mursal Hakimi, who shares her journey as a refugee from Afghanistan, detailing the cultural and linguistic barriers she faced in the UK and how education became a source of empowerment and stability. She highlights the crucial role of advocacy and representation in supporting displaced individuals.

The LGBTQ+ Studies & Identity section includes Suphanarpha Boonkant's analysis of Thailand's evolving LGBTQ+ rights landscape and Pichapa Rungrueang & Nawapon Sakulpan's examination of shifting policies in Turkey, highlighting the role of activism in countering discrimination.

Cultural Studies & Post-Colonial Legacies follows, with Maryam Khan exploring how colonialism has shaped food traditions in India and Vietnam, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of hybrid cuisines.

The Environmental Sustainability & Waste Management section includes Afra Bhuiyan's assessment of sustainability policies at the University of Westminster and Salman Aziz's examination of how sustainable waste management reduces landfill waste through recycling, reusing, and repurposing, thereby conserving resources and decreasing emissions. Charlene Okai's comparative study analyzes coffee waste management in Hanoi and Westminster, highlighting prospects for sustainable innovation. Lastly, Norin Khatun presents the argument that CRISPR technology possesses transformative potential for environmental sustainability by facilitating biodiversity conservation, improving agricultural practices, mitigating pollution, and supporting climate action. Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider the ecological risks, ethical dilemmas, and regulatory challenges posed by CRISPR, which necessitate responsible innovation and rigorous global oversight.

In Fashion & Heritage, Layla Abdulle investigates how Hanoi blends traditional craftsmanship with global sustainability trends, focusing on sustainable fashion initiatives like Kilomet109 and Van Phuc Silk Village.

The Arts & Poetry section features selected poems, interviews, and paintings by Affaan Amaan & Amaan Minhas. Their interviews with Suheyla Coskun and Anjali Pandya offer a creative and reflective aspect to the volume. Devika Nambiar and Nguyen Dieu Dieu showcase their designs and paintings and explore the deep connections between education, studying, and art, alongside an interview with Edward Dean and Mohammad Saif Tanvir.

Just Futures' diverse contributions reaffirm DEN's commitment to fostering a global community of students who challenge, create, and collaborate. By redefining education as a participatory and socially engaged practice, this book demonstrates how knowledge, when shared democratically, can shape a more just and inclusive world.

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PART **I**
EDUCATION & CRITICAL THINKING

1

An Exploratory Approach towards the Internationalization of Academic Institutions in Vietnam

Nguyen Chi Dung

Abstract

In an increasingly globalized and digitalized world, the flow of information and knowledge transcending borders has interwoven countries and their educational systems into a complex, interconnected network. Recognizing the significance of state-to-state exchanges, Vietnam has actively pursued its agenda of fostering cooperative cultural understanding through various bilateral and multilateral educational programmes. Consequently, this research will primarily focus on addressing three key questions: (1) What drives the shift from an inward-looking educational approach in Vietnam towards a more integrated system? (2) How does this integration enhance Vietnam's diplomatic strategy? (3) In what ways does this integration influence Vietnam's national identity?

Introduction

In the past, especially in the interwar periods, public diplomacy proved itself to be an infinitely effective means of foreign policy. This strategy, broadly conceived, has been carefully and skillfully harnessed by two sides of one of the most heated rivalries in history - two most prominent powerhouses in the previous century, namely the US and the USSR. Propaganda, media utilization, and the public approach played a critically vital role in buttressing their images and fostering in people a heavily biased view towards others. The better informed people were, the more effective the propaganda was. As the international situation enters a new phase, new actors have been introduced into the diplomatic realm, with the majority adopting a non-traditional methodology. Public diplomacy again, is “rejuvenated” with new characteristics, now, accompanied by the

involvement of academic and research institutions as an easily approachable instrument in bolstering state-to-state relations, promoting cultural awareness, especially with a moderately rising country like Vietnam.

Literature Review

The much-trumpeted nobility of a ruler, or put in modern context, elected leaders, are widely covered by the rhetoric: “War is only the last resort”. The concept of the moral rightfulness of war or conflict will not be discussed further however, the citizens should have the permission to know what is actually the “first resort” of the governing. Even in peacetime, the very first instance of country’s governors in the global arena should be diplomacy, in its purest sense. Since the concept of diplomacy, or in the context of this research, cultural diplomacy achieved through the internationalization of academic institutions, have been tumultuously explored by various groups of researchers all over the world. Many of them consider internationalization of education as an instrument for cultural exchanges, mutual trust and national image enhancement (Trang, 2023; Peterson, 2014; Le, 2023) and also to relieve past’s conflictual experiences (Arndt, 2011), but still, point to the intricate difference between educational diplomacy and cultural diplomacy and focus on the diplomatic features of education rather than on the role of education in fostering cultural awareness cross-nationally (Le, 2023).

Le further, analyzes the ambiguous relationship of culture and education in foreign policy argument - an effective complement of traditional diplomacy. Interestingly, the research of Akli also put much weight on the need to brand the image of the country, and compared this task with commercial branding in general, a comparative analogy of two different fields (Akli, 2012). Bislev (n.d.) investigates the actual meaning of international education, delineating the bifurcation of this educational cooperation into two directions: the pragmatic one of achieving political and economic outcomes, and the humanistic orientation towards an idealized world peace. He also presents useful advice for students to be successful diplomatic ambassadors, by training them in three main tasks: dispelling stereotypes, speaking foreign languages, and becoming good listeners.

These writers realize the importance of globalization in reshaping the world's rule of the game, which renders the educational context more challenging, competitive and intellectually demanding (Tran Thi, 2022; Tuyet, 2014). According to research by Necmiye and co-authors in 2011, both globalization and digitization are the main drivers of this shift to international cooperation of universities (Necmiye et al., n.d.). On a more thorough level of investigation, many researchers were concerned about whether education is used as a tool to achieve economic and political objectives or as a learning forum, which has not only complicated the matter but also cast doubts on the legitimacy of the researchers who advocate for a more positive and optimistic relations between countries via mutual understandings (Tran Thi, 2012; Gauttam et al., 2024; Necmiye et al., n.d.). Some of the research highly values knowledge diplomacy as a new actor in interstate relations, further pointing to the noble purposes of educational cooperation to ward off non-conventional issues besetting the world (Gauttam et al., 2024).

Vietnam's Internationalization of Education and Cultural Diplomacy

Previous Vietnamese researchers have comprehensively laid out the fundamental characteristics of the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam in the 21st century; the underlying reasons for this shift, given some notable legal documents and policies of the government were specified, even though the concept of internationalization of higher education was not clearly mentioned in the text (Tran Thi, 2012; Trang, 2023). More specifically, in a work conducted by Trang in 2023, she has stated clearly the opportunities and challenges that are awaiting Vietnam's internationalization of education. Tran Thi (2012) provided an overview regarding the role of cultural diplomacy in Vietnam politics, its indispensability in fostering interstate relations and its impacts on Vietnam's acquirement of specific task in its national interest.

Welch and Jane (Welch, 2009; Jane, n.d.) put forward a no less fundamental aspect of the historical analysis of the external influences from former colonists to Vietnam's domestic educational system, looking at the process by which Vietnam has slowly integrated into the global educational system. Jane, in particular, offered an insightful analysis of Vietnam's educational diplomacy under a historical perspective, by examining the development of education internationalization through different periods after Doi Moi and showing the

difficulties in integrating into the global educational system due to political hesitation (Jane, n.d.). Finally, one research has provided great insights into the conceptualization of educational internationalization as an integral part of Vietnam's national laws (Le, 2023).

The Gap in the Literature

Available research has painstakingly pointed to the dialectical relationship between culture and education, and more particularly, international education in tandem with cultural diplomacy. However, throughout most of the literature, the focal point of cultural diplomacy was discussed merely as a complement for economic and political diplomacy rather as an independent and indispensable pillar of national diplomacy, which highlights the peripherality of cultural diplomacy in the foreign policy paradigm (Tran Thi, 2022; Tran Thi, 2012; Peterson, 2014; Le, 2023; Marta, n.d.).

Another inadequacy in some of the research was the oversimplification of the internationalization of academic institutions into the hierarchical deviation of higher education from a universal model to the discrepancies between the North and South with a heavy neocolonialist perspective (Tuyet, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Gauttam et al., 2024). In the context of Vietnam, researchers have put much effort into depicting the passive internationalization of Vietnam's higher education into other countries sphere of influence, rather than the proactive vision of the position Vietnam's higher education itself in a globalized world and as a robust instrument of cultural diplomacy (Welch, 2009). Therefore, this paper aims to explore the underlying shift behind the so-called "rejuvenation" of Vietnam's academic institutions in an increasingly interdependent world through a historical perspective by looking at the country's foreign policy strategy regarding cultural diplomacy.

Conceptual Framework

Diplomacy

Diplomacy, broadly conceived, is an instrument of a state's foreign policies which aims to achieve an established set of national interests on the basis of pacifist

resolutions, most notably dialogues and negotiations (McGlinchey, 2017; CFR Education, n.d.). Initially, diplomacy was only deemed legitimate when it involves the participation of states, however, this method of bilateral exchanges had expanded to cover summit meetings and other international conferences, parliamentary diplomacy, the international activities of supranational and subnational entities, unofficial diplomacy by nongovernmental elements, and the work of international civil servants, a breakthrough in modernizing diplomatic practices (Marks & Freeman, 2019).

Cultural diplomacy

In this research, the focal point lies in a specific field of diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, which means the exchange of ideas, information, art, lifestyles, values, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture to promote mutual understanding, or an active process of foreign engagement, in which the unique institutions, values, and cultural identities of a nation are promoted at both bilateral and multilateral levels (NCQT, 2016). In Vietnam, the concept of cultural diplomacy is still relatively new. Scholars and policymakers each curate their own definitions of cultural diplomacy. However, most agree that cultural diplomacy is one of the sturdy pillars of Vietnam's diplomacy. According to former Politburo member, former Deputy Prime Minister, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Manh Cam, together with political diplomacy and economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy forms a common front, bringing overall results for diplomacy. Former Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh stated that cultural diplomacy is one of the pillars of diplomacy and not merely a part of foreign culture. It is the implementation of foreign policy to achieve political objectives using cultural tools and measures. In this context, cultural values will serve as a sustainable spiritual foundation for diplomatic activities, exerting pressure on partners to effectively implement national political, economic, and cultural policies (Tran Thi, 2012).

As the definition of this phenomenon varies across different cultures, in this paper, the arguably most accurate and general one is employed. In the changing global landscape, this variation of diplomacy gradually become one of the most notable pillars in national diplomatic strategy, alongside political and economic counterparts. Particularly through the educational medium, namely the internationalization of academic institutions, cultural diplomacy acts as a subject

contributing to the progress of perpetuating and enhancing the country's national identity and image, uniquely in a way that often involves non-state and non-traditional actors (Mamchii, 2023).

Academic Institutions

The scope of academic institutions may include both higher education system of universities and colleges, as well as research centers, international organizations with a view to promote educational exchange and knowledge sharing among countries. Particularly in this paper, a “stricter” concept that will be focused on the higher education (both universities and colleges) in Vietnam as the robustness of Vietnamese research centers is somewhat ambiguous compared to other institutions. Higher education constitutes a fundamental pillar of advanced educational systems. The mission of higher education is to contribute to the requirements of sustainable development and societal progress at large. In contemporary times, higher education transcends the mere function of knowledge dissemination and the training of intellectuals; its scope and mission have expanded into various other domains. There is an increasing recognition that higher education institutions are playing a crucial role in the international context as some scholars also point to the commodification of educational exchange programs to gain economic benefits (Thi, 2022).

Internationalization of Academic Institutions

The growing interconnectivity between cultures urges universities and colleges to embrace students, also teachers to this newly formed paradigm of knowledge distribution and should be institutionalized into a professional pathway of internationalization of academic institutions (AdvanceHe, n.d.). According to Thi, in reality there are numerous perspectives and definitions regarding the internationalization of higher education. It is undeniable that the internationalization of higher education today must be considered at both national and institutional levels, broadly, internationalization can be understood as a term referring to the international aspects of higher education. The internationalization of higher education is considered a process whereby international, intercultural, and global dimensions are integrated into the purpose, functions, and delivery of higher education at both institutional and national levels (Thi, 2022). The internationalization of higher education can

encompass the following core activities: (1) International collaboration (2) Mobility and exchange of students and faculty, which has been considered the foundation of the internationalization process to date (3) Internationalization of curricula and teaching (4) Transnational education cooperation/ international joint training programs, which may include establishing branches, campuses abroad, or joint training programs (5) Development of world-class universities (6) Internationalization of research activities (Thi, 2022; Wit, 2020).

Discussion of Findings

Principles and Vision of Vietnam's Foreign Policies until 2030

According to Ho Chi Minh, the foremost principle in Vietnam's foreign policy is to prioritize the national interests above all else. Therefore, Vietnam is ready to establish friendly and cooperative relations with any country that respects Vietnam's independence and sovereignty, while also being determined to sacrifice everything to maintain the nation's independence and freedom. He affirmed: "Vietnam is ready to establish all friendly and cooperative relations with any country on the principle of: mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence." (Cong thong tin, 2022).

The Resolution of the 12th National Congress of the Party has clearly stated its aim to: "Strengthen and deepen relations with partners, especially strategic partners and major countries that play an important role in the development and security of the country, and bring the established relationship framework into substance". The 13th National Congress of the Party aims to: "ensure the highest national interests, based on the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, equality, and mutually beneficial cooperation". In the current period, the highest national interests are to firmly protect independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity; to protect the Party, the State, the people, and the socialist regime; to maintain a peaceful, stable environment conducive to national development; to protect the cause of renovation, industrialization, and modernization; to protect political security, social order, safety, and national culture (Nguyen Thi, 2024). Deeply grasping

Ho Chi Minh's ideology, in foreign relations, the Party and State always persist in the policy of "Five no's": (1) No interference in the internal affairs of other countries, (2) no participation in military alliances, (3) not being a military ally of any country, (4) not allowing any country to establish military bases on Vietnamese territory, and (5) not aligning with one country against another (Cong thong tin, 2022).

The consistent foreign policies of Vietnam is the foreign policy line of "independence, self-reliance, peace, friendship, cooperation and development, multilateralization, and diversification of foreign relations"; "being a friend, a reliable partner, and a responsible member of the international community"; steadfast in principles and goals, flexible and skillful in strategies, consistently and effectively implemented; at the same time, closely and harmoniously coordinating party diplomacy, state diplomacy, and people's diplomacy", as has been popularly praised by many international organizations (Vu, 2023; Nguyen Thi, 2024).

Vision of Cultural Diplomacy until 2030

On November 30th, 2021, The Prime Minister of Vietnam issued Decision 2013/QĐ-TTg approving the Cultural Diplomacy Strategy until 2030 (Chinh Phu, 2021). The goal is to use cultural tools in diplomacy to deepen and stabilize Vietnam's relationships with partners, ensuring national interests, creating and maintaining a peaceful and stable environment, mobilizing external resources, and transforming favorable conditions and the country's position into resources for socio-economic development. At the same time, diplomatic measures will be used to honor the values and beauty of Vietnamese culture, absorb the essence of global culture, thereby inspiring the aspiration for national development, enhancing soft power, and elevating the country's status. Accordingly, the Prime Minister has set a goal to organize large-scale cultural diplomacy activities by 2030, including events within the framework of "Vietnam Week/Day" and "Vietnam Culture Week/Day" in countries with comprehensive partnerships, strategic partnerships, and traditional friendly neighbors with Vietnam.

By 2030, the goal is for all Vietnamese representative offices abroad to establish a "Vietnam Corner" or "Vietnam - Ho Chi Minh Space"; for major provinces and cities in Vietnam to host significant annual cultural diplomacy events; for

Vietnam to have more than 60 internationally recognized heritage sites and titles; for over 10 Vietnamese individuals to be internationally honored; and to have more Vietnamese candidates and participants in leadership positions at regional and global cultural, scientific, and educational forums (Nam, 2021). Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son emphasized that the Cultural Diplomacy Strategy until 2030 is “a product of collective wisdom, having been widely consulted”. Therefore, the Strategy combines both theoretical and practical aspects, being both specific and comprehensive. The Strategy highlights three notable new points: (1) It clarifies the content of cultural diplomacy and defines its mission as serving two goals: the foreign policy direction and the cultural development policy; (2) It identifies the primary subjects and partners for implementation, which are localities, the public, and enterprises and lastly (3) it updates and specifies five key tasks: promoting relationships, cultural integration, country promotion, advocating for titles, and absorbing the essence of global culture (Minh, 2021).

The Global Context of Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy, is found across the globe and throughout history. The first Asian country to have had the capacity to deploy culturally diplomatic practices with the spirit of a famous ancient philosopher, moralist is China and the so-called Confucius Institute. On the other side of the world, there is also the globally acclaimed strategy of the US with its Fullbright Program, which has achieved incredible success by culturally and educationally penetrating into many other countries, displaying a spectrum of knowledge diffusion.

Confucius Institute

The guiding principle in establishing Confucius Institutes is to enhance the understanding of Chinese language and culture among people worldwide, to develop friendly relations between China and other countries, and to provide favorable and superior learning conditions for those studying Chinese globally. Therefore, the main tasks of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms are to teach the Chinese language and introduce Chinese culture rather than striving to instill Confucianism into the international academic community (Thanh, 2014). The development of Confucius Institutes has become diversified. In

addition to promoting culture and language, there are now Confucius Institutes for Traditional Chinese Medicine, Commerce, Tourism, Culinary Arts, and Tea.

The Confucius Institute took inspiration from Germany's Goethe-Institut, but their development models are entirely different. The vast majority of the Goethe-Institut's operating funds are provided by Germany. Whenever a new institute is established, Germany handles everything from building the headquarters to organizing the teaching. In contrast, most of China's Confucius Institutes adopt a cooperative model with foreign partners. China primarily handles sending teachers and providing teaching materials, while the hardware and local teaching staff largely rely on the resources available from the host country (Do Thanh, 2019). The Confucius Institute itself is a brand, with its method being promotion, its tool being language and culture, and its strategy being cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy and the establishment of a positive national brand are key strategies for image-building and foreign relations. In practice, both approaches should be seamlessly integrated into promotional efforts, both at home and abroad. China has effectively mastered this process. The Confucius Institute primarily concentrates on advancing its own agenda rather than prioritizing how it is perceived by others.

Fulbright Program

Long before the emergence of the Confucius Institute as its counterpart, the US had its own initiative of a so-called first instance of cultural diplomacy in the post-war period. This US-sponsored program is one of numerous United States Cultural Exchange Programs aimed at enhancing intercultural relations, cultural diplomacy, and intercultural competence between Americans and people from other nations. This program facilitates the exchange of individuals, knowledge, and skills, and through it, selected American students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists, and artists can receive scholarships or grants to study, conduct research, teach, or showcase their talents abroad. Similarly, individuals from other countries may be eligible to do the same in the United States (Fullbright, n.d.).

The Fulbright Program is safeguarded from undue political interference and accusations of propaganda by three principal mechanisms: binationalism, an independent administrative body, and a merit-based selection process. Firstly, the

binational nature of the Fulbright Program is among its most lauded attributes. Bilateral exchange agreements are formulated in collaboration with the government of each participating nation, allowing for the negotiation of terms and the consideration of specific national needs. Administrative boards are typically composed of equal representation from the host country and American residents. Since 1961, the majority of participating countries have shared the financial burden of the exchange program, with some even contributing more than the United States to their respective exchanges. These binational aspects ensure that participating governments perceive their interests as being represented in the administration of the program, framing it not merely as an American initiative but as a collaborative venture with the U.S. government (Bettie, 2015). In an international context, these values could be conveyed through individuals, studying at American higher education institutions, as well as through the presence of American students and professors at universities abroad. This educational exchange would not only foster individual intellectual growth but also enhance institutional capacity and create a foundation for shared thought and experience worldwide.

Internationalization of Vietnam Academic Institutions

Historical Perspective

It is of the utmost importance for researchers to explore the progress of the turbulent history of the Vietnamese education system chronologically in order to make sense of its transformation from inward-looking to a highly internationalized model. The process got off to a relatively bumpy start when the world had just entered a new phase of post-war order. The establishment of two Vietnam's in 1945 (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or DRV, in the North, and the Republic of Vietnam, or RV, in the South) heralded two parallel systems of higher education. In the former, the statist rigidities of both the classical "Mandarin" era and French colonialism arguably lent themselves rather too well to the socialist era. In some ways similar to the Chinese form of socialism across the border, the Vietnamese form was, however, strongly marked by nationalist aspirations, and a major early effort was made to extend the use of Vietnamese as the language of instruction.

College and university enrolments in North Vietnam surged from 8,000 to at least 50,000 between 1959 and 1975, eventually overwhelming the existing higher education institutions due to the increasing number of secondary school graduates (Welch, 2009). The significant support from former socialist states, particularly the USSR, greatly accelerated the development of human and institutional resources in Vietnam, far beyond what would have been possible without this external aid. However, the Soviet influence had its drawbacks, as the Vietnamese education and training system inherited many rigidities typical of a command economy. For instance, although the ministry responsible for higher education was theoretically in charge of the entire system, this was often not the case in reality. Numerous Soviet-style institutions existed and were frequently controlled by specialized ministries such as Agriculture or Finance.

In 1983, only 16 universities were managed by the Ministry of Higher and Vocational Education (Welch, 2009). To address the deficit in higher education resources, Vietnam depended entirely on the Soviet Union and Eastern European states until 1990 for essential supplies such as books, data, equipment, facilities, and personnel. During this time, Vietnam annually sent 2,400 students and 22,000 individuals for vocational training to seven socialist countries. Between 1951 and 1990, over 6,783 doctors, 34,000 university students, and 72,000 technical specialists were trained in the former Socialist bloc. In 1992, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet established three conditions under which students could study abroad. First, students could go abroad based on an existing agreement between Vietnam and another government or an international organization. Second, they could study abroad through agreements between a Vietnamese branch, locality, or social, cultural, or economic organization, or a research or training center, and its counterpart in another country. Finally, students could also go abroad under the direct sponsorship of a foreign scientist, institution, relative living abroad, or other scholars (Abuza, n.d.).

Post-1975 educational exchanges with the United States began in 1990 when the Vietnamese government lifted phase two restrictions of “The U.S. ‘Road Map’ Proposal for Normalization with Vietnam”. This change allowed American NGOs to operate in Vietnam. For the U.S., this was a means to maintain contact and understand the Vietnamese educational community, with the hope that such exchanges would lead to reciprocity and opportunities for American scholars. In 1995, the Vietnamese government announced plans to invest \$9m - \$14m to send

500 to 700 students abroad, focusing on fields such as science and technology, information processing, engineering, economics, and planning (Abuza, n.d.).

In the 21st century, a brand new era has been firing on all cylinders, in order to implement the autonomy mechanism for university-level education in line with global trends, the XIII National Congress of the Party emphasized: “There should be a mechanism to support the development of several major universities and teacher training universities to become reputable training centers in the region and the world”, shift the educational process strongly towards “Training people with ethics, discipline, rules, a sense of civic and social responsibility; life skills, working skills, foreign languages, information technology, digital technology, creative thinking, and international integration”. Meeting the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and international integration, the XIII National Congress of the Party emphasized the need to: “Promote the development of human resources, especially high-quality human resources, to meet the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and international integration” (baochinhphu, 2021).

As of December 31, 2019, Vietnam had 525 active foreign investment cooperation projects in the education sector with a total investment capital of nearly \$4.4 bn. Vietnam currently has 5 higher education institutions with foreign investment and over 450 international training programs being taught at 70 higher education institutions. Currently, about 190,000 Vietnamese students are studying abroad, whilst 21,000 international students study at various educational institutions in Vietnam. Annually, Vietnam also receives thousands of international students and teachers participating in exchange programs. The education sector and universities have approved and signed over 530 joint training programs with foreign countries, with approximately 85,000 participants, of whom over 45,000 have completed the programs and received degrees. (Bui, 2021).

Contribution to Vietnam’s Cultural Diplomacy Strategy

The internationalization of academic institutions, especially in higher education, is gaining prominence as a crucial element in advancing Vietnam’s national diplomacy. This strategy not only plays an integral role in our diplomatic efforts but also serves as a foundational pillar for Vietnam’s initiatives abroad. In terms

of cultural exchange, the consistent increase in academic and university exchange programs, combined with students' growing recognition of their roles as cultural ambassadors, further enhances the mission of showcasing Vietnam's unique cultural identity to the global community. For example, Hanoi University, which is one of the most internationalized institutions in the country specializing in language teachings, held the so-called Multinational Cultural Exchange Festival for the ninth time in 2019. The festival is an occasion for nearly 1,000 students from 36 countries around the world to interact and promote their culinary, musical, and clothing cultures to international friends. Through this, they can explore the richness and diversity of cultures around the world. Within the framework of the event, many meaningful activities took place, such as: the Vietnamese Speaking Competition, Sports, the Cooking Competition, and especially the Cultural Performance Program with the theme "Colors of Vietnamese Studies" which attracted the attention of international students, leaving many good impressions on each of them. This is also one of the goals that the Vietnamese Studies Department of Hanoi University aims to achieve (HANU, n.d.). The university board has successfully maintained the spirit of teaching a language, of how to inculcate and instill in the international students the cultural specialties of Vietnam. Therefore, subtly, via the medium of education and social events, Vietnam's so-called 1.5 and 2.0 channel of diplomacy, have contributed considerably to the enhancement of Vietnam's national image.

Conclusion

Vietnam's evolving academic landscape emphasizes the vital connection between education and international collaboration, reflecting the country's expanding role in global affairs. As Vietnam transitions from its historically limited engagement, the establishment of transnational academic partnerships has emerged as a key catalyst for cultural exchange. By fostering cross-border understanding and facilitating knowledge sharing, Vietnam enhances its global connections while safeguarding its distinct national identity. This shift is complemented by the influx of international students, the integration of global academic standards, and active participation in international education networks, all of which signify a move toward a more interconnected and competitive academic environment. These developments align with Vietnam's broader diplomatic vision, where education and cultural exchanges are central to advancing international relations.

As Vietnam accelerates the internationalization of its academic institutions, it must prioritize education that promotes intellectual and cultural enrichment, in harmony with the country's long-term diplomatic objectives. By striking a balance between academic autonomy and strategic international cooperation, Vietnam can effectively utilize its educational and cultural assets to build enduring global partnerships, establishing itself as a significant contributor to global knowledge exchange and a dependable partner in international diplomacy.

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2

Critical Thinking in Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine

Marharyta Andreieva

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of critical thinking in education through a comparative analysis of the educational system in the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Ukraine. Using theoretical frameworks, field observations, and participant insights, the study examines how different educational environments cultivate critical thinking skills among students. This report partly draws from my experiences in the module "Democratic Engagement in International Context" at the University of Westminster, which allowed me to travel to Hanoi and observe its social and educational landscape. My understanding of the educational systems in Ukraine and the UK has shaped my approach to conducting qualitative research for this project.

Introduction

Critical thinking is widely recognized as a cornerstone of modern education, equipping students to navigate complex social, economic, and technological challenges. However, the methods for cultivating these skills vary across nations due to cultural norms, historical contexts, and educational policies.

This study examines how critical thinking is integrated into the education systems of the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Ukraine. These nations represent distinct educational approaches: the UK emphasizes student autonomy and creativity; Vietnam follows a centralized, exam-driven model; and Ukraine adopts a hybrid system amid ongoing reforms. By exploring these systems, this report seeks to uncover best practices, highlight common challenges, and propose actionable strategies for improvement.

To achieve this, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do different educational systems incorporate critical thinking into their curricula?
2. What cultural and policy factors influence the development of critical thinking in students?
3. What best practices and challenges emerge from comparing the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine?

This report integrates theoretical perspectives, including Paul and Elder's (2014) critical thinking model and Ritzer's (2018) critique of rigid educational systems, to provide a

structured analysis. The study incorporates field observations, interviews with educators and students, and an analysis of curricula and policies.

Theoretical Framework

Critical thinking is a foundational concept in modern education, allowing students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to navigate complex challenges. This section explores two key theoretical frameworks underpinning this report's analysis: Paul and Elder's critical thinking model and Ritzer's metaphor of the "velvet cage."

Paul and Elder's Critical Thinking Model

Paul and Elder (2014) define critical thinking as "the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking to improve it." Their model identifies core elements essential for fostering critical thinking, including clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, and logic. This framework emphasizes:

- **Self-Directed Thinking:** Encouraging students to evaluate arguments and evidence independently.

- **Questioning Assumptions:** Promoting an inquiry-based approach to uncover underlying biases and perspectives.
- **Problem-Solving:** Enabling learners to construct reasoned solutions to multifaceted problems.

In Paul and Elder’s model (2014), it is called Intellectual courage. It is the ability of thinkers to assess ideas and beliefs unfamiliar to the individual. The application of this model highlights the need for educational systems to cultivate environments that prioritize

open-ended inquiry, encourage debate, and challenge students to engage critically with diverse viewpoints. This report uses Paul and Elder’s framework to evaluate how the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine integrate these elements into their curricula and teaching practices.

Ritzer’s Velvet Cage Metaphor

Ritzer’s (2018) metaphor of the “velvet cage” critiques rigid and overly standardized educational systems that prioritize conformity over creativity. The “velvet cage” is the most familiar one to the students. It involves absorbing the teacher’s thoughts discouraging the production of new ideas. While these systems may achieve efficiency and predictability, they often stifle innovation and critical thought. Key concepts include:

- **Standardization:** The reliance on uniform curricula and standardized testing can limit opportunities for individualized learning and critical engagement.
- **Cultural Constraints:** Traditional norms, such as deference to authority in classroom settings, may discourage questioning and independent thought.
- **Balancing Structure and Flexibility:** Ritzer argues for a balance that maintains structure while allowing space for creativity and critical exploration.

This metaphor provides a lens to analyze the systemic barriers to critical thinking in Vietnam and Ukraine, where centralized educational policies often prioritize standardized outcomes over fostering intellectual curiosity. Conversely, it helps identify the strengths of the UK's approach, which incorporates elements of flexibility and autonomy.

Integrating the Frameworks

This report establishes a comprehensive framework for analyzing how critical thinking is fostered across educational systems by combining Paul and Elder's model with Ritzer's critique. These theories inform the evaluation of classroom practices, curriculum design, and cultural influences in the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges in promoting critical thinking as a global educational priority.

Critical thinking is defined by Paul and Elder (2014) as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make reasoned judgments. This report also draws on Ritzer's (2018) metaphor of the "velvet cage," which critiques how rigid educational systems can stifle creativity and critical thought. These frameworks provide a lens for examining how different systems foster or hinder critical thinking.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, comparative research design to examine how critical thinking is integrated into the educational systems of the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Ukraine. A multi-method approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive analysis, incorporating field observations, semi-structured interviews, and secondary literature reviews. The study aims to identify best practices and shared challenges in fostering critical thinking by analyzing three distinct contexts.

Data Collection Methods

Field Observations:

- Observations were conducted in classroom settings to capture teaching methods, student participation, and the dynamics of teacher-student interactions.
- Examples of activities included observing group discussions in the UK, teacher-led instruction in Vietnam, and mixed approaches in Ukraine.

Semi-Structured Interviews:

- A total of 30 interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants, including teachers and students.
- Questions were designed to explore participants' perceptions of critical thinking, the barriers to its integration, and the role of cultural and policy influences.

Secondary Literature Review:

- National curricula, policy documents, and academic studies were analysed to provide contextual and theoretical insights.
- Relevant data on critical thinking frameworks and systemic challenges were integrated into the findings.

Research Results

30 students and teachers from Ukraine, Vietnam and the UK were asked the following questions:

1. Do you think online education is better than traditional classroom learning?

2. Can you explain why you agree or disagree with the statement: 'Technology is making people less social'?
3. Imagine that you are planning to change the educational system in your country. What subjects would you prioritize and why?
4. If you had to solve a global crisis, such as a food shortage or climate change, what would be your first step? Why?
5. Do you think that learning languages is important? Why? What are the three main languages that you think people should learn and why?

Observations

1. Subjects from the three countries agreed that online education gives more flexibility to both teachers and students. However, it has discouraged socializing, preventing individuals from gaining communication skills. Students are also more distracted during online school as they are more relaxed in their domestic environment.
2. 70% of individuals from the UK have agreed with the statement that technology has underdeveloped social skills. People become more addicted to social media, which makes them uninterested in participating in the real world. However, subjects from Vietnam and Ukraine have agreed that technologies have allowed individuals to stay connected despite the distance. Social media has also allowed people to find new connections from different parts of the world without travelling.
3. 80% of individuals from the UK agreed to prioritize maths and languages as these subjects improve logic and communication skills. Participants from Vietnam would prioritize subjects that will help them gain skills that are essential in real life, such as critical thinking. This is because the educational system is more theory-based and discourages the production of one's ideas. People from Ukraine have agreed that they would prioritize languages and history. It can be argued that the political situation influenced the answers in the country. Languages are

essential as they allow working abroad and history; it is vital to know the past to understand the present.

4. The majority of British and Ukrainian participants have agreed that it would be essential to establish global cooperation to resolve the crisis. The combination of resources from other states and international organizations would help develop a shared solution. Nevertheless, individuals from Vietnam have said there is a need to educate people about the problem. This can prevent panic and encourage society to cooperate and come up with a plan.
5. Participants from Britain and Vietnam have agreed that learning languages is essential and highlighted that English and Mandarin are the ones that need to be studied. However, British individuals have said that learning those languages is necessary for international cooperation, and the Vietnamese have agreed that English and Mandarin will open several employment opportunities. Participants from Ukraine have argued that the crucial languages to learn are English and Arabic. Knowing English is essential as it is the most spoken language in the world, and Arabic is necessary to learn as the Gulf countries develop economically. To establish international cooperation and encourage inter-state development, it is vital to know these two languages.

Conclusions

1. Britain:

The research has shown that the educational system affects how participants answer the following questions. The answers provided were logically structured and concluded. Additionally, the social environment highlights the importance of establishing global cooperation to resolve crises or have a shared development.

2. Vietnam

The study has shown that the Vietnamese educational system has affected the answers. Individuals agreed that theory-based teaching does not allow the

production of their ideas or improve critical thinking. The economic environment in the countries also influenced the answers, as participants mentioned employment opportunities abroad.

3. Ukraine

Ukrainian citizens' answers were affected by economic and educational environments. The ongoing war in the country has influenced the thinking of individuals who have mentioned the need for global cooperation and development. It can be argued that the post-war educational and economic system will see massive changes as international interventions will influence them. The political situation also affected the answers as the Ukrainian society no longer accepted the previous allies, so there was a need to establish cooperation with other states.

Overall, the research has shown that educational systems affect individuals' critical thinking. However, social and economic factors also have a heavy influence on the way people think (Andreieva, 2024).

Sampling Strategy

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants and schools that reflect the diversity of educational systems in the three countries. In the UK, secondary schools with a strong emphasis on critical thinking were prioritized. In Vietnam, both urban and rural schools were included to capture regional disparities. In Ukraine, schools undergoing curriculum reforms were selected to assess the impact of recent changes.

Data Analysis

The data collected through observations, interviews, and literature reviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Key themes, such as teaching practices, cultural influences, and systemic barriers, were identified and categorized. Comparative analysis highlighted similarities and differences between the three educational systems.

Limitations

While the research design provides valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged:

- **Sample Size:** The relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings.
- **Contextual Differences:** Variations in regional and institutional contexts may affect the comparability of results.
- **Small set of questions:** Limited number of 5 questions does not fully show the differences in critical thinking skills of the participants.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a robust foundation for understanding the integration of critical thinking in diverse educational systems and provides actionable recommendations for future improvements.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was carefully obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Additionally, measures were taken to guarantee anonymity throughout the research process, protecting the identities of all individuals involved. The study adhered strictly to established ethical guidelines, demonstrating a commitment to respecting cultural norms and values while prioritizing the confidentiality of each participant's information. This approach upheld ethical standards and fostered a safe and respectful environment for all contributors (Andreieva, 2024).

Findings

1. The UK: Autonomy and Creativity

The UK's education system emphasizes student autonomy, creativity, and critical inquiry. The classroom culture fosters open-ended discussions, encouraging

students to engage with diverse perspectives and think independently (Ecclestone, 2010). Key observations include:

- **Group Discussions:** Teachers frequently facilitate discussions where students analyze case studies, debate, and collaboratively solve problems. For example, history classes often involve analyzing historical events from multiple perspectives, fostering critical evaluation.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Assignments focus on independent research and problem-solving, with students tasked to design innovative solutions to real-world problems, such as creating sustainable business plans in economics classes.
- **Assessment Diversity:** Beyond standardized tests, the UK system incorporates diverse assessment methods, such as essays, presentations, and group projects, which assess critical thinking.

2. Vietnam: Centralized and Exam-Focused

In Vietnam, the education system prioritizes standardized testing and memorization, often at the expense of critical thinking development. While recent reforms aim to address this imbalance, significant challenges remain (Trines, 2017). Key findings include:

- **Teacher-Centered Instruction:** Classrooms predominantly follow a lecture-based approach, with limited student participation or inquiry. Teachers often focus on delivering content that aligns with national exams.
- **Cultural Barriers:** A strong emphasis on respecting authority discourages students from questioning teachers or engaging in debates - this cultural norm limits opportunities for open dialogue and critical reflection.
- **Reform Initiatives:** Efforts to integrate critical thinking into the curriculum, such as introducing collaborative activities and problem-

solving exercises, are underway but are inconsistently applied across regions.

3. Ukraine: Hybrid Approaches Amid Challenges

Ukraine's education system is in transition, with ongoing reforms aimed at aligning with European educational standards. However, the implementation of critical thinking initiatives is hindered by resource constraints and traditional mindsets (Friedman and Trines, 2019). Key observations include:

- **Curriculum Reforms:** New textbooks and teacher training programs emphasize analytical skills and independent thinking. For instance, science curricula include experiments where students hypothesize, test, and evaluate outcomes.
- **Resource Limitations:** Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack the infrastructure and materials needed to support modern teaching methods, such as interactive technology or updated libraries.
- **Political and Social Contexts:** The instability caused by geopolitical tensions and economic challenges affects the consistent application of educational reforms, particularly in underprivileged regions.

4. Comparative Insights

The study highlights key differences and commonalities across the three countries:

- **Autonomy vs. Centralization:** The UK's decentralized approach contrasts with the centralized models of Vietnam and Ukraine. While autonomy fosters creativity, centralization ensures consistency but often stifles innovation.
- **Role of Culture:** Cultural norms in Vietnam and Ukraine, such as respect for authority, heavily influence classroom dynamics, making it challenging to adopt student-centred learning practices.

- **Resource Disparities:** Both Vietnam and Ukraine face significant resource constraints, affecting their ability to implement reforms effectively. In contrast, the UK benefits from better funding and infrastructure.

5. Challenges in Fostering Critical Thinking

- **Teacher Training:** Across all three countries, there is a need for comprehensive professional development programs to equip teachers with the skills to foster critical thinking.
- **Assessment Practices:** Reliance on standardized testing in Vietnam and Ukraine limits exploratory and critical learning opportunities.
- **Policy Implementation:** Inconsistent application of reforms, particularly in resource-constrained settings, hampers progress in Vietnam and Ukraine.

By synthesizing these findings, the report underscores the importance of systemic changes, cultural shifts, and resource investments to create environments that nurture critical thinking across diverse educational contexts.

Discussion

Key Contrasts

The findings reveal stark contrasts between the educational approaches of the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine in fostering critical thinking.

Focus on Autonomy versus Centralization:

- The UK's decentralized approach, which emphasizes student autonomy and creativity, allows teachers and students greater flexibility in exploring diverse perspectives. This approach fosters a dynamic learning

environment where students are encouraged to question, debate, and collaborate.

- In contrast, Vietnam and Ukraine rely heavily on centralized systems that prioritize standardized testing and rote learning. These models ensure consistency across educational institutions but often stifle innovation and critical inquiry. For instance, the emphasis on preparing for national exams in Vietnam restricts teachers' ability to adopt inquiry-based methods.

Cultural Norms and Their Impact:

- Cultural norms in Vietnam and Ukraine, such as deference to authority, influence classroom dynamics significantly. Students often hesitate to question teachers or engage in debates, viewing such behaviours as disrespectful. This cultural barrier contrasts with the UK, where questioning and independent thinking are encouraged as integral parts of the learning process.

Shared Challenges

Despite their differences, the three countries face shared challenges that hinder the integration of critical thinking into education systems:

Resource Constraints:

- Both Vietnam and Ukraine struggle with limited resources, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. The lack of access to modern teaching tools, technology, and infrastructure inhibits the adoption of interactive and student-centered pedagogies.
- Although the UK is better resourced, disparities still exist in underfunded schools, affecting the quality of education and opportunities for critical thinking.

Resistance to Change:

- Across all three countries, resistance to educational reform is a significant barrier. Teachers accustomed to traditional methods may resist adopting new practices that require additional training and effort.
- Policymakers often focus on maintaining existing systems rather than embracing innovative approaches, fearing potential disruptions to established structures.

Overemphasis on Standardized Testing:

- The reliance on standardized assessments in Vietnam and Ukraine limits exploratory learning and critical thinking opportunities. Tests often reward memorization over analysis, discouraging students from developing independent reasoning skills.
- Although the UK incorporates diverse assessment methods, the pressure of national exams, such as GCSEs, still influences teaching practices.

Opportunities for Improvement

Integration of Global Practices:

- Vietnam and Ukraine can draw lessons from the UK's emphasis on project-based learning and diverse assessment strategies to foster critical thinking. Adopting these practices while tailoring them to local contexts could create more balanced educational environments.

Leveraging Technology:

- Investment in digital tools and platforms can enhance interactive learning and provide access to global resources. For instance, virtual classrooms and online collaborative tools can help overcome resource disparities in remote areas.

Collaborative Learning Models:

- Encouraging peer-to-peer learning and group projects can help students develop critical thinking and teamwork skills. This approach is particularly relevant for Vietnam and Ukraine, where traditional hierarchies often limit collaborative efforts.

Systemic Implications:

The analysis underscores the systemic nature of challenges in fostering critical thinking. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels.

- **Policy Reforms:** Policymakers must prioritize reforms that promote thematic learning, reduce the dominance of standardized testing, and provide resources for teacher training and curriculum development.
- **Teacher Empowerment:** Empowering teachers through professional development programs can help them adopt innovative pedagogies that encourage critical thinking. Collaborative workshops and exchange programs can also expose educators to diverse teaching methods.
- **Community Engagement:** Engaging parents and communities in the reform process can help shift cultural perceptions and build support for critical thinking initiatives. Community-driven campaigns and workshops can create awareness about the value of questioning and independent thought.

In summary, while the UK's approach demonstrates the benefits of flexibility and autonomy, Vietnam and Ukraine highlight the challenges of systemic constraints and cultural norms. By addressing these shared and distinct challenges, all three countries can work towards creating educational systems that equip students with the critical thinking skills needed for the 21st century.

Conclusion

Critical thinking is a pivotal skill for students in the 21st century, enabling them to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing global environment. This

report has provided a comparative analysis of the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine, each representing distinct approaches to fostering critical thinking in their education systems. While the UK demonstrates the advantages of autonomy and creativity, Vietnam and Ukraine illustrate the challenges of centralized and resource-constrained models. These contrasts highlight the intricate interplay of cultural norms, systemic structures, and policy frameworks in shaping educational practices.

The findings emphasize that fostering critical thinking is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour. The UK's success lies in its flexible curriculum and diverse assessment strategies, which encourage open-ended inquiry and collaborative learning. Conversely, Vietnam and Ukraine face significant barriers, including limited resources, cultural resistance to questioning authority, and an overreliance on standardized testing. Yet, both countries are making strides through reforms to integrate critical thinking into their curricula and teaching methods.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic change grounded in collaboration among educators, policymakers, and communities. Key recommendations include enhancing teacher training, revising curricula to prioritize exploratory learning, leveraging technology to bridge resource gaps, and fostering cultural shifts that value inquiry and debate. These strategies offer a pathway toward more inclusive and effective education systems.

Ultimately, this report underscores that critical thinking is not merely an academic skill but a societal imperative. It equips students with the tools to engage meaningfully with the world, make informed decisions, and contribute to their communities. By embracing the principles and practices outlined in this report, the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine can create educational environments that empower students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic global landscape.

Critical thinking is essential for preparing students to navigate a rapidly changing world. This report highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the UK, Vietnam, and Ukraine in fostering these skills. While the UK's emphasis on autonomy offers valuable lessons, Vietnam and Ukraine demonstrate the challenges of integrating critical thinking within centralized and resource-constrained systems.

By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, these countries can enhance their education systems and better equip students for the future. Fostering critical thinking requires a collaborative effort among educators, policymakers, and communities, underscoring its importance as a global educational priority.

3

Shaping Youth Identity in Post-Doi Moi Vietnam: Tradition, Modernity, and the University Experience

Fatima Dosti

Abstract

This study explores the transformative impact of Vietnam's Doi Moi reforms (initiated in 1986) on the identity of its younger generation, particularly university students in Hanoi. Drawing on theories of identity formation, it examines the interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that have shaped personal and collective identities in the post-reform era. The paper highlights how students navigate the tension between tradition and modernity, balancing global influences with deeply rooted cultural values. Through the lens of Hanoi University students, this research reveals how economic liberalization, globalization, and technological advancements have redefined aspirations, values, and self-perceptions. The findings underscore the hybrid nature of Vietnamese youth identity, which integrates global trends while preserving national pride and communal ties. The study also considers the future trajectory of youth identity, emphasizing the need to address social disparities and cultivate a balanced sense of self in a rapidly evolving society.

Introduction

The transformation of Vietnam since the implementation of the Doi Moi reforms in 1986 has engendered significant alterations in the nation's economic, political, and social frameworks. These shifts have profoundly influenced the identity of the younger generation, notably among students at Hanoi University, who have directly engaged with the effects of economic liberalization and globalization. This demographic often grapples with a dual identity, negotiating the tension between traditional Vietnamese cultural values and the myriad opportunities and challenges posed by an increasingly globalized society.

This report aims to critically examine how the Doi Moi reforms have reshaped the identity of Vietnamese youth by exploring various cultural, social, and economic dimensions. The initial section will provide a comprehensive overview of the concept of identity, delving into its multifaceted nature and the myriad factors that contribute to its formation and evolution. Additionally, I will underscore the relevance of this concept within the context of Vietnam's rapid transformation and the complexities it presents to both traditional and contemporary identities.

In the subsequent section, I will analyze the manifestation of these identity concepts among the younger generation in Vietnam, with a particular focus on the students of Hanoi University. This cohort serves as a representative case study due to their unique exposure to both enduring cultural norms and the global influences stemming from Vietnam's socio-economic changes. This exploration will illuminate the intricate interplay between modernity and tradition, elucidating how these students navigate their evolving sense of self within a dynamic and rapidly changing societal context.

The Concept of Identity

Identity, in its essence, is the sense of self that individuals develop over time through their interactions with the world around them. It encompasses personal experiences, social contexts, cultural backgrounds, and historical narratives. As such identity is dynamic, shifting according to external influences and internal reflections. According to social theorist Stuart Hall (1996), identity is not a fixed trait but a process that involves negotiation between the self and the surrounding world. Hall's assertion that identity is formed through cultural practices and social affiliations underscores its fluidity in a globalized world.

The concept of identity can be divided into two main types: personal and collective. Personal identity relates to an individual's understanding of their uniqueness, shaped by their experiences, values, and aspirations. Collective identity, on the other hand, refers to the identity shared by a group, such as national, cultural, or religious affiliations. This group identity is often forged through collective experiences, such as shared history or values. As Hall argues, the negotiation of both personal and collective identity frequently happens in response to socio-political contexts and historical events.

Vietnam's extensive history of colonialism under French rule, coupled with its numerous battles against foreign invaders and the struggle for national independence, has significantly shaped the collective identity of its people. Beginning in the mid-19th century, French colonial governance introduced profound alterations to Vietnam's political, economic, and cultural landscape. The French established their administrative systems, exploited Vietnam's natural resources, and endeavoured to suppress the national identity by promoting Western ideals while simultaneously undermining local traditions.

This colonial experience engendered a robust atmosphere of resistance as the Vietnamese populace fought to reclaim their sovereignty. The brutality of colonial exploitation mobilized movements across diverse social strata, uniting intellectuals, peasants, and other groups in their quest for independence. Influential leaders such as Phan Boi Chau and Ho Chi Minh emerged during this pivotal period, articulating revolutionary ideologies and inspiring subsequent generations of freedom fighters.

In addition to the challenges of colonialism, Vietnam confronted external aggressors, including Japan during World War II and, subsequently, the United States during the Vietnam War. These conflicts inflicted lasting scars on the nation but also reinforced the resilience and determination of the Vietnamese people to safeguard their homeland. Each military engagement became a defining moment, shaping a collective memory characterized by sacrifice, unity, and steadfast resistance against oppression.

The culmination of these struggles manifested in the revolution for independence, encapsulated by the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945, following the August Revolution. While the attainment of independence instilled national pride, it also incurred substantial costs, as the ensuing decades were marked by internal division and prolonged warfare. Nonetheless, these experiences have forged a distinctive national identity deeply rooted in the principles of resilience, solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to self-determination.

Today, Vietnam's history of colonialism and resistance is celebrated as a source of pride and inspiration. It continues to inform the country's cultural narratives, literature, and art, reminding its people of their shared heritage and the sacrifices

of those who came before. This enduring identity serves as a testament to the unyielding spirit of the Vietnamese people, who have emerged from centuries of struggle as a proud and independent nation. Cultural traditions including Confucianism and Buddhism, continue to influence how individuals define themselves, often emphasizing collectivism, family values, and respect for elders. Meanwhile, the economic and political environment - ranging from the years of socialist planning to the recent boom in market-driven policies - also has a significant impact on shaping personal and collective identities.

Dimensions of Identity

Identity is not shaped by a single force; it is a fusion of historical, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions. Historically, Vietnam's identity has been forged through its experience with colonization, war, and independence. The shared experience of fighting against colonial rule and foreign invaders has instilled a strong sense of nationalism and unity among the Vietnamese people. In contemporary times, the young generation's identity is intertwined with the legacy of the Doi Moi reforms, which has opened up new avenues for economic growth and social mobility.

Culturally, Vietnamese identity is deeply rooted in traditions that emphasize family, respect for elders, and communal ties. Confucianism, a significant influence in Vietnam for centuries, promotes values such as respect for hierarchy, the importance of education, and social harmony. However, the younger generation, particularly in urban areas like Hanoi, is exposed to a blend of traditional values and global influences. This creates a unique cultural hybridity, where Western ideals of individualism and success are integrated into the more collective, family-oriented Vietnamese values.

Economically, the Doi Moi reforms have introduced market-driven policies that have reshaped Vietnam's economic structure, creating new opportunities but also new challenges. With the rise of consumerism and capitalism, the younger generation has been encouraged to aspire to individual success, often defined by material wealth and career advancement. However, this shift also creates a tension between traditional values, which prioritize social harmony and stability, and the growing emphasis on personal achievement and individual freedom. The socio-

economic changes brought about by Doi Moi have altered how young people view their roles in society and their future aspirations.

Modernity and Tradition in Identity Formation

Modernity and tradition represent two opposing forces that shape identity formation. Modernity, often associated with globalization, technological advancement, and individualism, challenges traditional notions of community and family. In Vietnam, the rapid economic transformation after the Doi Moi reforms has exposed the younger generation to new values such as materialism, personal autonomy, and individual success. These values are often seen as markers of modernity, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on social relationships and collective well-being.

However, despite these global influences, tradition remains a central component of Vietnamese identity. The younger generation, particularly those in urban centres like Hanoi, finds themselves navigating the tension between modern values and traditional practices. The impact of Confucianism, with its emphasis on familial duty and respect for authority, remains significant. In this sense, the identity of young people in Vietnam today is a hybrid of modern aspirations and traditional cultural values. This dynamic interplay is a central theme in understanding the evolving identity of the younger generation in Vietnam, where global influences are balanced with a deep respect for local traditions and communal ties.

The Impact of the Doi Moi Reforms on Vietnamese Youth

Overview

The Doi Moi reforms, introduced in 1986, were a turning point in Vietnam's socio-economic development. These reforms marked a shift from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy, with an emphasis on liberalizing trade, opening up the country to foreign investment, and decentralizing control over economic activities. This shift brought about a surge in economic growth, lifting millions out of poverty and transforming Vietnam into one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia. The Doi Moi era

also coincided with a growing engagement with global markets, technological advancements, and the spread of Western culture, all of which have had profound effects on the younger generation's identity.

For the youth of Vietnam, the Doi Moi reforms represented new opportunities and challenges. The economic liberalization allowed young people to pursue higher education, engage in entrepreneurship, and access global information and technology. However, it also created disparities, as the benefits of economic growth have not been evenly distributed. The younger generation has had to navigate a new social and economic landscape, balancing aspirations for individual success with the realities of increased competition and inequality.

How Doi Moi Shaped Youth Identity

The Doi Moi reforms have significantly reshaped the values and aspirations of the younger generation in Vietnam. According to Tran (2014), there has been a noticeable shift in aspirations, with many young people focusing on personal achievement rather than contributing to collective social goals. This shift is partly due to the rise of consumerism, where material success and career advancement are seen as the ultimate markers of success.

The influence of globalization has also played a crucial role in shaping the identity of Vietnamese youth. The younger generation is exposed to a wide range of global ideas through its increased access to media, travel, and the internet. These international influences have led to a blending of Western and Vietnamese cultural practices, resulting in a hybrid identity that incorporates both local traditions and global values. For example, students may adhere to traditional cultural practices, such as respect for family and elders, while embracing global trends such as fashion, technology, and individualism. Appadurai (1996) notes that in a globalized world, cultures are no longer monolithic but are continuously shaped by transnational interactions, creating hybrid identities.

Despite the influence of globalization, Vietnamese youth retain a strong sense of nationalism. This is particularly evident in their pride in the country's historical achievements, such as the fight for independence and the reunification of Vietnam. National identity in post-Doi Moi Vietnam is complex, as it is now shaped by both local cultural pride and the globalized aspirations of the younger

generation. Nationalism is no longer a purely defensive reaction to external threats but has become a way for the youth to assert their identity in a rapidly changing world.

Case Study: Hanoi University Students

Hanoi University, one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Vietnam, serves as a key site for understanding how the Doi Moi reforms have influenced youth identity. Students at Hanoi University represent the elite of Vietnam's younger generation, with many aspiring to become professionals in fields such as business, law, and engineering. The university's curriculum is designed to equip students with the skills necessary to succeed in a globalized economy while fostering an understanding of Vietnamese culture and history.

The experiences of Hanoi University students reflect the broader trends in Vietnamese society. Many students express a desire to balance modern aspirations with respect for tradition. For example, while students are increasingly motivated by the prospect of individual success, they also emphasize the importance of family and community.

According to a case study by Ngo (2015), Hanoi University students frequently discuss the tension between pursuing personal ambition and fulfilling their family responsibilities. This tension is emblematic of the broader identity struggles faced by the younger generation in Vietnam.

The role of technology in shaping student identities is also crucial. The younger generation is highly connected to global networks through the internet and social media. This exposure to international ideas and lifestyles has expanded their horizons, influencing their perceptions of self, career, and relationships. Lister et al. (2009) argue that new media play a central role in shaping youth identities, as they offer new avenues for self-expression and connection with others worldwide.

The Future of Vietnam's Youth Identity

As Vietnam continues to develop, the identity of its youth will likely continue to evolve. The tension between modernity and tradition will persist, but the younger generation's experiences will shape a new form of Vietnamese identity that is both

global and local. The continued development of higher education, such as at Hanoi University, will play a significant role in fostering this evolving identity. Students must navigate a complex world where traditional values coexist with the forces of globalization, technological change, and economic growth.

The future of Vietnam's youth identity will also depend on how the country addresses the challenges of inequality and social mobility. As the younger generation faces an increasingly competitive job market, their self-worth may continue to shift towards individual success. However, the enduring influence of family, community, and nationalism will likely continue to play an essential role in shaping their identity in the years to come.

Conclusion

The transformation brought about by the Doi Moi reforms has not only reshaped Vietnam's socio-economic landscape but also profoundly impacted its youth's identity. Hanoi University students exemplify this dynamic evolution, reflecting the broader societal shifts and the unique challenges faced by the younger generation. As they balance traditional values with the pressures of globalization and modernization, these students embody a hybrid identity that bridges Vietnam's rich cultural heritage and its aspirations for global integration.

This duality, however, is not without its tensions. The pressures to succeed in a competitive, market-driven environment often clash with longstanding cultural expectations that prioritize community and familial ties. Yet, it is within this tension that the younger generation demonstrates resilience and adaptability, forging a new identity that is both locally grounded and globally informed. By examining the experiences of Hanoi University students, this report underscores the importance of understanding identity formation as a multifaceted and dynamic process, influenced by historical, cultural, and socio-economic forces.

As Vietnam continues to grow and integrate further into the global community, the evolving identity of its youth will remain a critical factor in shaping the nation's future. Supporting young people in navigating these complexities - through education, policy, and community engagement - will be essential in fostering a generation that can honour Vietnam's traditions while embracing the opportunities of a modern world. In doing so, Vietnam's youth will not only

redefine their own identities but also contribute significantly to the country's ongoing transformation and development.

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4

Renata's Global Study Experience: Excessive Ambition

Interview with Renata Pernegrová

Grace Villagomez-Akre

Studying abroad pushes students out of their comfort zones, exposes them to diverse cultures, and allows for personal development in ways they may never have imagined. This experience is both exciting and challenging. It presents an opportunity to engage with a new country, foster independence, and open doors to new employment and academic paths. However, alongside the advantages, there are also challenges that require perseverance, adaptability, and determination

This interview features Renata Pernegrová, a first-year BA International Relations student at the University of Westminster. Originally from Czechia, Renata shares her experiences adjusting to life abroad and what motivated her to embrace new challenges. She discusses her choices regarding housing, making new friends, balancing employment with education, and managing her finances. Renata reflects on the highs and lows of her journey thus far.

Her story offers insight into the realities of studying abroad—the excitement and the personal growth that often accompanies it. Regardless of the path you choose, Renata's journey provides a realistic and honest perspective on what it's like to start anew in a different country.

Please provide some information about yourself.

I am Renata Pernegrová, from Czechia, currently in my first year studying BA International Relations at the University of Westminster.

Why did you choose the University of Westminster?

I wanted to study in the heart of London, and after reviewing several universities, I found the structure of the International Relations course at the University of Westminster the most appealing.

What motivated you to study in London rather than stay in Czechia?

Although studying in Czechia would have been financially advantageous, with free tuition and accommodation, my long-time dream was to study abroad. With no commitments tying me to Czechia, it was the right time to start a new chapter. Additionally, I recognised that a degree from the University of Westminster would hold more international value.

What was the most important factor in choosing your university?

Location was the primary factor - I only considered universities in London because of its global opportunities. I also wanted a course that approached International Relations and Politics with neutrality, as I believe these subjects are particularly sensitive.

How did your family and friends react to your decision to study in the UK?

My family always knew this was my dream and supported me despite the financial burden. It was a big change for my parents and younger brothers, as we had always lived together. I didn't have many close friends in Czechia, so leaving was relatively easy. Although I miss my family, I think they miss me more!

How did you find the application process for the University of Westminster?

The process was straightforward. My high school didn't provide guidance, as it is uncommon for Czech students to study abroad. However, I received valuable support from the Czech nonprofit agency Unilink, which helped me navigate applications and my visa process.

What challenges did you face in securing accommodation before arriving in London?

Initially, I looked for private accommodation, but prices were too high. I opted for university accommodation instead. Although my first choice was Marylebone Student Halls, I secured a place in Unite Students housing in Wembley, where I am happy.

What was your first impression of London?

I had visited London twice before moving here. Adjusting took about a month—figuring out transport, finding a job, and establishing a routine. Initially, I was overwhelmed by university life, the language, and living alone, but I never considered returning to Czechia.

What were the biggest cultural differences you noticed compared to Czechia?

The language was a challenge. Londoners are generally more polite, and coming from a small village, it was overwhelming to encounter so many strangers daily. The university's FANS group and professors, especially Bridget Cotter, were incredibly supportive in helping me settle in.

How do you find the cost of living in London compared to Czechia?

Since I lived with my family in Czechia, I don't have much experience comparing living costs. I stay in university accommodation in Wembley and commute to the city using the tube or bus.

How different is the academic system in the UK from that in Czechia?

The UK system focuses more on individual learning, while Czech universities emphasise exams over participation. Here, engagement in classes and extracurriculars is essential.

What challenges have you faced in your studies?

Managing workload is about time management. Language was initially difficult, but I improved quickly. Speaking in seminars remains a challenge, but I am improving.

How easy was it to make friends, both with other international and British students?

As an introvert, making close friends hasn't been easy. I have acquaintances to chat with but not deep friendships. However, I joined several societies, including the European Affairs Institute, African Think Tank, Global Diplomacy Initiative, Elsa Westminster, and Model UN.

How did you first hear about the Democratic Education Network (DEN)?

I learned about DEN through Farhang at an event in September. His motivation and the opportunity to write blogs interested me. I have already published a blog and contributed to planning a student field trip to the UN headquarters in New York.

Has DEN influenced your academic or career aspirations in any way?

I have always dreamed of becoming a journalist. DEN has helped me develop skills in planning, public speaking, and leadership, which will be valuable for my career.

What has been your most memorable experience with DEN so far?

I haven't been involved long enough for a standout experience, but my conversations with Farhang have been impactful. He values dedication and hard work. DEN is a great platform for connecting with like-minded people and exploring new opportunities.

What is your favourite part about living in London?

Everything is accessible at almost any time. Back home, even a supermarket trip required a long walk or drive. Here, shops stay open late, making life more convenient.

Do you plan to stay in the UK after graduation or return to Czechia?

I plan to pursue a Master's in journalism in London and later work as an international correspondent, ideally settling in the US.

Have you taken part in internships, part-time jobs, or volunteering in London?

I have a part-time job and am actively seeking an internship. I have also applied for a semester abroad in the US for my second year.

What advice would you give to future international students considering studying in the UK?

I highly recommend working with an agency like Unilink for guidance. Also, students should focus on their final high school grades, as they are crucial for university applications in London.

What is one thing you wish you had known before coming to study in the UK?

A complete guide to London transport would have been helpful. Navigating the tube, bus routes, and transport zones took time to learn. However, discovering the city independently has been a valuable experience.

What has been the most rewarding part of your international student journey?

I've learned that people from diverse backgrounds can connect and collaborate well. The University of Westminster's international environment has made me

feel included. Moving to London alone has been life-changing, and I look forward to what comes next!

PART **II**
POVERTY, INEQUALITY & SOCIAL ISSUES

5

Re-examining Democracy: The Threat from Poverty and Inequality to Democratic Foundations

Ramadan B. Kamara

Abstract

This article investigates the difficulties liberal democracies—developed and developing—have in the face of ongoing systematic disparities, notwithstanding their will to reach equality. It argues that poverty and economic inequality fundamentally jeopardise democratic governments, by generating social tensions and compromising overall stability. The research framework has four dimensions: political involvement, polarisation, authoritarianism, and civil liberties. It emphasises how poverty, not simply inequality by itself, seriously jeopardises democracy by limiting political involvement, so increasing social inequalities, supporting authoritarianism, and compromising civil liberties. This paper stresses the need to fix these disparities in order to protect democratic integrity and ensure sustainable democracy.

Introduction

A pillar of democratic society, equality is nonetheless an elusive goal. Although liberal democracies promote equality, sometimes they hold up systematic disparities that cause marginalization and even exclusion. These paradoxes challenge the values they seek to support.

Widening wealth differences aggravate one major obstacle: economic and distributional inequality. The integrity of democratic values and the general welfare of society depend on a just distribution of resources and life possibilities. Ongoing inequalities hinder access to rights and basic institutions, therefore endangering public confidence and democratic legitimacy. Political institutions

risk undermining democracy's foundations when they neglect to address these problems properly.

Plutocracy, where wealth differences allow elites to disproportionately shape politics and society, is closely entwined with rising economic inequality. This process compromises democratic values, reducing justice, political involvement, equality, and possibilities. Policies aimed at assisting the rich to grow ever richer widen social gaps and erode public confidence in government. Maintaining democracy depends on addressing these differences via responsive institutions and coherent policies.

This study contends that poverty and economic disparity essentially threaten democratic institutions. Although the degree of these dangers differs based on institutional responsiveness and inequality levels, their negative effect on democracy is a constant. This paper specifically looks at how four linked processes—reduced political involvement, increased polarization, the development of authoritarian tendencies, and the degradation of civil liberties—are found alongside economic disparity and poverty which ultimately impairs the healthy functioning of democratic institutions.

Economic Inequality Limits Political Participation

Political engagement is strongly influenced by economic inequality, such as differences in people's wealth and income, which reduces civic activity and representation, compromising the validity of policies and elections. Unequal access to resources compromises democracy, thereby influencing the response of institutions and political players to different income levels and greatly affecting social capital and civic involvement.

Income disparity skews democracy by producing differences in how political players and institutions meet the requirements of various socioeconomic levels. According to Levin-Waldman (2016), high inequality lowers people's feeling of agency, lowering participation and erasing confidence in political systems. Those who feel alienated from the political process and belong to underprivileged groups especially show this decline of trust. According to Levin-Waldman's studies, systematic inequality reduces the link between people and their governments, therefore encouraging apathy and disengagement.

Many liberal democracies have plutocracy, a type of government where the rich rule, which accentuates existing inequalities by favouring those from better socioeconomic origins. Richer people have more first-rate resources and chances to participate in political events including voting, campaigning, and protest. On the other hand, people from lower income levels may feel demoralized and unmotivated to engage. Green (2015) underlines how this unequal participation prolongs the absence of representation for underprivileged groups, therefore aggravating economic inequality. For instance, political campaigns can rely on large financial donations, therefore excluding less wealthy candidates and ensuring policies which match the interests of wealthy donors as a top priority.

In mature democracies like the United States and Europe, economic disparity restricts political involvement over income levels. Examining the 2024 U.S. presidential contest, voter turnout declined dramatically as most of the turnout was formed by wealthy, mostly white people. Policymakers thus gave the needs of these privileged groups priority, so neglecting the worries of lower-income and ethnically mixed areas. Although many non-voters supported progressive ideas, analysis showed that their absence from elections hampered attempts to solve inequality, hence generating a self-reinforcing cycle of political and financial differences. Moreover, systematic obstacles like voter identification requirements disproportionately harmed people on low incomes, therefore lowering their participation.

Roller and Rudi (2008) contend that across democracies in the United States, Western Europe, and Central and Eastern Europe, the civic voluntarism model—which forecasts more political involvement among those with higher socioeconomic levels—is relevant. This universality emphasizes, in developed settings, the systematic link between political involvement and economic disparity. Richer people vote more often and have better access to political representatives, so enabling a direct impact on policy decisions.

Underdeveloped democracies in West Africa, such as Sierra Leone, show how poverty and economic disparity diminish civic involvement. Many times, widespread economic inequalities leave low-income people disconnected from politics. Many might not vote, and those with community support still might not have the means to challenge political stances which impair them. Rich people thus occupy political positions and use their financial might to guarantee election

success. Higher income and education levels clearly predict civic engagement, notes Kalyvas (2019). In Sierra Leone, unequal wealth distribution aggravates marginalization, hence erasing trust in institutions and creating societal divisions. This tendency compromises public action and prolongs inequality, therefore weakening democratic stability. For example, low voter turnout in rural areas with limited access to resources and knowledge often results from this, strengthening metropolitan elites' influence.

According to the democratic theory, liberal democracies give equal chances for political involvement. But as Tocqueville observed, without economic equality political equality is impossible. Structural economic inequalities translate into procedural injustices that hinder lower-income people's potential to participate completely in democratic processes. Richer people can more successfully pursue their political goals, but those with less means sometimes suffer. Low-income people are further marginalized by policies, including voter identification restrictions and campaign financing arrangements that disproportionately impact them. Economic uncertainty, shown in unstable jobs, poor healthcare, and unstable housing, aggravates these difficulties by making people put basic survival before political involvement. Participatory democracy theories—such as Pateman (1970) — emphasize the need for inclusive procedures that empower underprivileged populations.

Economic disparity erodes trust, lowers collaboration, and encourages apathy towards democratic involvement, undermining civic life. This dynamic limits underprivileged groups' capacity to shape public opinion and policy. Such disparities in unstable democracies like Sierra Leone often cause social upheaval and demonstrations. While political parties adopt poverty-reduction programs, the influence of rich elites usually tilts policy decisions to their benefit. Economic inequalities test democratic values even in established democracies such as the United States, Brazil, and India. For example, the 2024 U.S. election clearly illustrated how much wealthy people influence policy debates. Despite several candidates proposing aggressive policies to solve inequality, Levin-Waldman (2020) points out that institutional opposition and the ingrained influence of affluent interest groups helped to maintain systematic inequalities.

Ensuring democratic legitimacy and encouraging broad political involvement depends on addressing economic disparity. Reforms in campaign finance to

lessen the impact of affluent donors, investments in education to empower underprivileged populations, and policies to lower economic inequalities by means of progressive taxation and social welfare programs constitute among the possible actions. Facilitating equitable voting access by abolishing stringent identification restrictions and advocating for universal voter registration can also alleviate inequities. Another important action towards increasing political involvement is strengthening civil society groups that fight for underprivileged communities.

Addressing economic inequality is essential for fostering inclusive political participation and ensuring democratic legitimacy. Potential measures include campaign finance reforms to reduce the influence of wealthy donors, investments in education to empower marginalized communities, and policies to reduce income disparities through progressive taxation and social welfare programs. Ensuring equal access to voting by eliminating restrictive identification requirements and promoting universal voter registration can also mitigate disparities. Strengthening civil society organizations that advocate for underrepresented groups is another critical step toward enhancing political participation.

Income disparity severely threatens civic engagement by creating barriers, reducing motivation, limiting representation, and perpetuating disparities in participation among different socioeconomic groups. While liberal theorists advocate for equality of opportunity, structural inequalities undermine this ideal. Unequal distribution of resources erodes trust, hinders collective action, and distorts democracy's functioning. Comprehensive reforms that address the structural roots of inequality are imperative for fostering inclusive political participation and ensuring democratic legitimacy.

Economic Inequality Increases Polarization

A major threat to democratic nations, economic disparity fuels polarization that separates communities and erodes institutional confidence. Rooted in ideological radicalism, media sensationalism and the ascent of populist politicians can aggravate this polarization (Sunstein, 2018). Drawing on arguments from Fukuyama (2011), Kalyvas (2019), and Gunderson (2022), I contend that the concentration of money and power sustains systematic inequality, hence stoking

conflict and compromising democratic government. Income differences promote divisions that profoundly affect society. Media narratives and populist rhetoric help to magnify the polarization that results from societies separating into opposing ideological extremes (Sunstein, 2018). This split undermines democratic institutions and intensifies political and social stratification, hence creating systematic instability (Fukuyama, 2011). The concentration of money and power among a privileged few lies at the core of this problem fuelling emotions of unfairness and resentment among the less fortunate. This disparity encourages an "us against them" mindset, hence aggravating divides and social instability (Kalyvas, 2019).

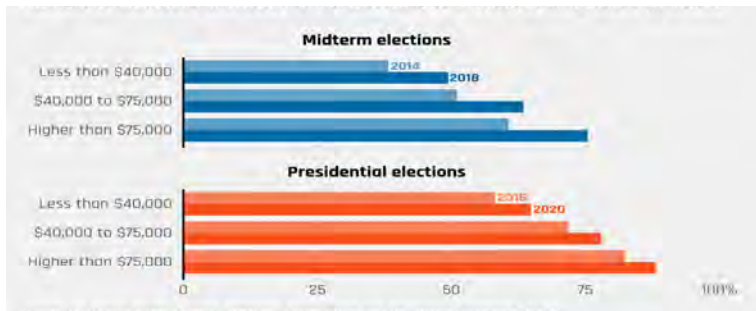
Public opinion is partly shaped by the media, whose polarizing effect greatly accentuates social differences. While social media enhances many points of view including much false information, traditional media frequently use biased reporting. Using emotionally charged phrases and painting intellectual elites as corrupt, populist leaders play on these distinctions, therefore separating the "common people" from the "elite." Divisions based on race and religion, among other identity-based ones, are sometimes presented as existential dangers, hence widening the social rifts. Populist politicians marginalize the opposition and heighten tensions by deliberate use of authoritarian strategies, (Sunstein, 2018).

Hungary offers a stark example of how populism exacerbates polarization. Since 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party have used divisive rhetoric to exploit societal divisions, framing "pure people" against "corrupt elites." This approach has deepened societal divisions, challenged democratic norms, and weakened Hungary's relations with the European Union. It illustrates the dangers of concentrated political and economic power perpetuating polarization.

The link between economic inequality and political polarization is evident in the rise of Donald Trump in the United States and the Brexit movement in the United Kingdom, both occurring in 2016. Both movements emerged from economic grievances among marginalized groups. Studies by McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2016) demonstrate a strong correlation between rising income inequality in the United States and shifts in voting behaviour, with economically insecure voters increasingly aligning with populist candidates. Trump's campaign capitalized on fears surrounding immigration and cultural shifts, resonating with

individuals who perceived their values as under threat. Similarly, Brexit tapped into nationalist sentiments, particularly among voters in economically declining regions seeking to reclaim sovereignty from the EU. These movements intensified political polarization, framing opponents as out of touch and dividing voters into "Leavers" and "Remainers." Demographic trends, notably among older, less-educated individuals facing economic insecurity, underscored support for these movements (Inglehart and Norris 2016).

Figure 1: High- and low-income disparity impacts voter turnout in the US.



Source: Adapted from Austin Clemens et al., 2021.

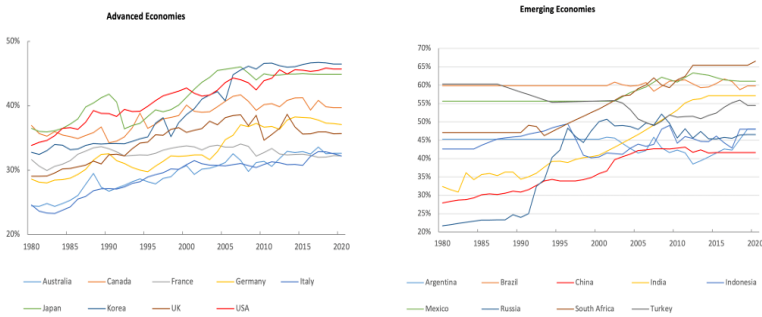
Economic inequality has led to frequent uprisings and demonstrations in Sierra Leone is a developing country with a limited middle class. Wealthy elites control competitive markets, inflating prices for personal gain and influencing government policies to their advantage. The government's inability to address private market inflations exacerbates structural inequality, prompting the poor to resort to violent protests and, in some cases, military coups. Empirical data from the World Bank (2020) indicates that the wealthiest 20% of Sierra Leone's population controls over 50% of the nation's income. These figures highlight the stark economic disparities fuelling societal unrest, demonstrating how severe economic inequality undermines democratic processes and fosters instability.

Income inequality's role in fostering societal unrest is further evident in both France's Yellow Vest movement and Brazil's election of Jair Bolsonaro. France's economic inequality and relative deprivation lay at the root of widespread protests (Jetten, J. et al 2021). Empirical studies by Gethin, Martinez-Toledano,

and Piketty (2022) reveal how income stagnation and tax burdens disproportionately affecting middle- and lower-income households contributed to the Yellow Vest movement. Equally, despite notable economic growth in Brazil, persistent income inequality polarized voters, leading to the election of a far-right leader, Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018.

Extreme inequality pushes political parties toward ideological extremes, creating gridlock that perpetuates division. This dynamic fosters populist movements that exploit grievances, further destabilizing democratic governance (Gundersen, 2022). Wealth concentration amplifies these effects as elites leverage disproportionate power through lobbying, strategic appointments, and coercion (Scheve, Stasavage, 2017). As Fukuyama (2011) notes, "Extreme inequality can lead to conflict and polarization, especially in diverse societies. It perpetuates systemic discrimination and marginalization, hindering progress in policymaking and resulting in stagnant growth and social unrest."

Figure 2: Economic Inequality and Polarization Across Advanced and Emerging Economies Countries.



Source: Adapted from Zia Qureshi, 2023.

Although robust civic institutions can help to offset economic disparity, which greatly fuels polarization, Strong election systems, independent judges, and strong civil society groups support responsibility and inclusiveness. For instance, strong social welfare systems and civic institutions have helped build high trust and political stability in Nordic nations alongside less income inequality (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Active grassroots movements and community-

based projects can help to heal divisions by addressing local issues and encouraging communication even in countries marked by great inequality. Furthermore, countering polarization are democratic systems such as proportional representation and inclusive policymaking. Emphasizing power-sharing and large coalition governments, Lijphart (2017) contends that consociational democracies are more suited to control social divisions. For example, Switzerland's consociational model has helped it negotiate linguistic and cultural barriers while preserving political stability. These illustrations show how well solid civic institutions may counteract the destabilizing consequences of inequality.

Systemic adjustments are necessary to help to reduce the difficulties caused by economic disparity. Crucially important are progressive tax policies, strong social welfare programs, and attempts to minimize the impact of wealth on political institutions. Improved rules and inclusive policies can help heal divisions and rebuild confidence in democratic institutions. Successful policies from Nordic nations, such as universal healthcare and education, show the possibility of reducing inequality and improving society's cohesiveness.

Economic disparity and the consequent polarization endanger democratic government all around. Strong civic institutions also show that polarization is not a certain result of inequality. Targeted reforms, inclusive policies, and strengthening of civic institutions provide means to overcome these obstacles and create more active, more robust democracies.

Economic Inequality Leads to Authoritarianism

High economic disparity seriously compromises the validity and effectiveness of democratic institutions. Trust in the fundamental values of democracy can suffer when many people feel left out of economic possibilities and believe the political system does not reflect their interests. This disenchantment provides the perfect foundation for authoritarian leaders, who frequently profit from economic problems by promising stability and answers while compromising democratic norms and institutions.

Real-world data exposes a clear discrepancy between theory and reality, despite the assertions of neoliberal thinkers that democracies give equal chances for

political and economic involvement. Economic disparity, as Levin-Waldman (2020) contends, distorts democratic representation, reduces civic engagement, and heightens social divisions. Both old democracies like the United States and newly developing democracies like Sierra Leone clearly show this dynamic. In these kinds of situations, the growing disparity between the rich elite and the general population leads to inadequate political representation, societal discontent, and less social cohesiveness—all important elements of a democracy that actually works in practice.

Economic inequalities, especially in terms of income distribution and job development, diminish confidence in political elites and institutions, which causes voters to reject the current government in favour of populist substitutes. Often driven by economic complaints, populist movements promote mistrust in political institutions, undermining democratic systems. By presenting themselves as resolute economic reformers, right-wing populist leaders like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and Viktor Orbán have successfully appealed to their supporters. Once in government, however, such leaders frequently exhibit authoritarian characteristics such as restrictions on press freedoms, centralized control, and erosion of democratic checks and balances (Evans 2020).

Distributional inequality also aggravates social divisions and polarization inside societies, hence generating anger and antagonism between those at different socioeconomic levels. Using these divisions, authoritarian leaders can demonize underprivileged groups whilst projecting themselves as champions of the interests of the ruling class. Gu and Wang (2021) corroborate these phenomena by showing that global political polarization is precisely correlated with economic disparity. Rising national inequality stunts social mobility, which fuels bloody conflicts and raises political unrest.

Both historical and modern instances shed important light on how inequality could open the path for dictatorship. One obvious example is that of Germany between the wars (Evans, 2004). Germany suffered extreme hyperinflation, unemployment, and great poverty following the economic devastation of World War I and the severe reparations mandated by the Treaty of Versailles. These financial difficulties undermined confidence in the Weimar Republic and gave Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party an ideal ground on which to flourish. Hitler positioned himself as a rescuer by using economic complaints and scapegoating

minority groups, thereby strengthening authority and destroying democratic institutions to create an authoritarian government (Tooze, 2007).

Likewise, contemporary Brazil shows how closely economic disparity and the emergence of authoritarian impulses are related. A discontent with conventional political elites has been stoked by persistent inequality, corruption, and economic stagnation. Using populist language, Jair Bolsonaro took advantage of public unhappiness by presenting himself as a strong leader able to solve economic problems and bring order back in place (Hunter & Power, 2019). However, his leadership has been characterized by authoritarian impulses, including subverting democratic standards, limiting human freedoms, and polarizing Brazilian society further (Weyland, 2014).

These examples show how social discontent and economic inequality can undermine democratic institutions, hence exposing societies to authoritarian leaders who offer rapid solutions but usually at the cost of undermining a society's democratic underpinnings. Concentrating wealth in the hands of elites helps them circumvent democratic conventions, therefore aggravating inequality and compromising democratic government. For example, the democratic process suffers by its dependence on companies and affluent people's ownership of media outlets. These elites can shape public opinion, manage narratives, and marginalize dissenting voices effectively reducing political responsibility. Media ownership shapes policies that support economic elites by distorting the flow of information and favouring the interests of the rich above those of the wider population.

Rich people also regularly donate their money to political campaigns, advocate for laws that support their ideological objectives, and set up think tanks advancing their causes. These actions distort political decision-making to their benefit, therefore promoting the interests of the minority. Such policies worsen already existing disparities and undermine public confidence in democratic institutions. For instance, the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling in 2010 allowing unrestricted corporate expenditure in elections in the United States increased the political dominance of the rich. It compromised the equal representation concept (Citizens United v. FEC, 2010).

Income disparity drives a self-reinforcing cycle of poverty and polarization that results in ideologically split masses and radical political movements all around.

Driven by political divisions resulting from economic hardships and identity-based conflicts, nations including the United States, Brazil, India, Turkey, and Poland have seen notable political unrest. Media sources often widen these gaps by elevating political ideas, therefore supporting the emergence of populist and far-right leaders. Left-wing parties simultaneously support progressive welfare programs meant to solve structural disparities (Wang and Gu 2021).

Radical ideas challenging democratic institutions can find footholds thanks to this polarization, discounting dissenting voices, disrupting and overturning policy decisions, and centralizing power. For example, Donald Trump's provocative use of language, often labelling his political rivals as "enemies of the state" helped to highlight how social and economic divisions may direct themselves into authoritarianism and endanger democracy (Müller, 2014).

Often, wealthy people and elites significantly shape state institutions to their benefit. This impact results in unequal legal treatment, reduced civil freedoms, and the concentration of power in ways that support totalitarian inclinations. A lack of openness in government lets these politicians solidify their power and support the continuation of economic inequalities. Thus, the fundamental values of democracy—responsibility, equality, fairness, and so forth—are methodically compromised.

By weakening trust in institutions, encouraging social polarization, and allowing authoritarian leaders to unite power, economic disparity seriously threatens democratic regimes. Wealth and political influence interact to distort democratic representation, prolong economic inequalities, and widen societal divisions. Dealing with these problems requires strong reforms advancing democratic resilience, social cohesiveness, and economic fairness. Only by closing the theory-practice gap will democracies protect themselves from the emergence of authoritarianism.

Distributional Inequality Threatens Civil Liberties

Authoritarian leaders excel in polarized settings and use social differences to centralize control. Labelling critics as dangers or "enemies of the state," these leaders undermine confidence in democratic institutions and limit liberties. One shining example is Donald J. Trump, whose speeches stoke xenophobia, bigotry,

and misogyny; his actions, including branding political opponents as enemies, resulted in the January 6th US Capitol rioting. Likewise, Viktor Orbán in Hungary has centralized authority by compromising judicial independence and limiting press freedom, usually rationalizing these acts as required for economic development. Trump's presidency undermined domestic human rights protections, in the process giving other right-wing populists and autocrats like Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi more confidence (Sabatini, 2022).

A serious threat to civil liberties is economic disparity. It maintains disparities in justice access, stifles free expression, reduces political participation, compromises private rights, and intensifies socioeconomic inequality. Marginalized groups who deal with ongoing economic inequalities find it difficult to access basics, including housing, healthcare, education, and jobs. Significant obstacles to overcoming inequality are created by this ingrained cycle of poverty and marginalization.

The right to free expression is one fundamental civil right impacted by economic disparity. Often, financial power overcomes the worries of underprivileged groups and accentuates the voices of companies and rich people. Rich elites may drown out opposing viewpoints by funding massive lobbying campaigns, controlling media narratives, and influencing political debate. On the other hand, people from poor families cannot reach venues that magnify their opinions. This results in an uneven public domain where free expression exists in theory but is not easily available in practice (Green, 2015).

Another area disproportionately touched by economic disparity is privacy rights. Lower-income people might lack the means to guard against digital surveillance, particularly in workplaces or public assistance programs. Invasive monitoring technology, for instance, could be used disproportionately on vulnerable groups, therefore undermining their autonomy and freedom. Rich people, meantime, can buy technologies and legal protections to protect their privacy.

Economic inequality also compromises equal access to the judicial system, therefore undermining the basic fairness for all. While lower-income people struggle to negotiate complicated legal systems, financially better-off have easier access to excellent legal advice. This difference reduces the rule of law and results in unfair results in court processes. Richer people, for example, can use their

resources to extend litigation or get advantageous settlements; underprivileged groups suffer systematic obstacles to justice (Posner, 1995). For instance, a 2020 Legal Services Corporation (LSC) study shows that low-income Americans who reported civil legal issues received either insufficient or no legal help for 86% of them. Similar studies show that African Americans are six times more likely than their white counterparts to be detained during court proceedings due to a lack of legal representation. This clearly indicates that marginalized groups—such as racial minorities and immigrants—often face major blocks to their civil liberties despite these being available to all in theory (LSC 2020). Under extreme circumstances, economic disparity results in conditions whereby the rule of law loses importance to the interests of the privileged elite, therefore undermining civil freedoms (The Centre for Economic and Social Rights, 2019).

Economic inequalities heighten social injustice and prejudice, therefore disproportionately impacting women, racial minorities, and LGBTQ+ people. These groups must overcome institutional obstacles to access crucial resources and exercise their fundamental rights. Women from low-income homes might, for instance, have limited access to high-quality healthcare, and racial minorities might face discrimination in work and housing. The resultant sentiments of anomie and exclusion support society's malfunction, hence undermining confidence in liberal democracy (Jetten Et al. 2021).

Particularly in underprivileged areas, economic disparity reduces political activity and civic engagement. These communities remain under-represented and political institutions lose sensitivity to their demands when financial obstacles restrict entry to the political process. This under-representation compromises the democratic foundation and calls for responsibility. Furthermore, the concentration of riches in the hands of a few aggravates monitoring and restricts freedom of expression. Although governments could defend these policies as required to uphold discipline, they deepen socioeconomic inequality and divisiveness. For instance, increased monitoring unfairly targets underprivileged people, therefore fostering a climate of fear and repression.

Governments and institutions must give policies that support social justice and fair access to resources a priority if they are to offset the negative consequences of economic disparity on civil freedoms. Among the strategies are guarantees of equal access to high-quality education. By means of campaign finance reforms

and voter outreach programs, healthcare can break the cycle of poverty and empower underprivileged communities so expanding access to legal services for low-income individuals, upholding the principle of equal protection under the law, and enabling political participation among underprivileged groups and so restoring balance and strengthening democratic institutions by limiting the influence of financial elites in politics.

Civil rights and democratic government are seriously challenged by economic inequality and the emergence of authoritarian leaders. Dealing with these problems requires a multifarious strategy stressing social fairness, enhancing legal protections, and encouraging broad political engagement. Solving the underlying causes of inequality will help societies protect human rights and strengthen the democratic values supporting civil freedoms.

Poverty As a Threat

Poverty is the state of not having the means required for basic living, impeding people's civic engagement capacity. In democratic countries, this usually results in reduced voter turnout among low-income groups because of obstacles, including limited access to education and transportation and financial restrictions. Significant portions of the population being politically deprived compromises the validity of democracy and fuels discontent and alienation (Frankfurt, 2015). He supports laws expanding access to education, healthcare, and economic security to help reduce poverty. This strategy builds personal well-being and develops the basis of a more inclusive and resilient democracy. Though different problems to democracy, poverty and inequality are linked, and each affects political involvement and stability.

Poverty greatly affects voter turnout in the United States; low-income people are less likely to vote because of limited access to transportation and financial restrictions. Turnout in lower-income groups during the 2016 U.S. presidential contest was especially low, underscoring how poverty reduces political participation. These people suffer obstacles in their involvement in the political process without enough means.

Defined as differences in wealth and opportunities, inequality separates society and could compromise stability and cohesiveness. Although it might not stop

involvement completely, large degrees of inequality cause emotions of unfairness whereby richer people have a disproportionate political impact. For instance, notable wealth disparities in Latin America have fuelled political polarization and social instability, so erasing faith in democratic institutions (LSC, 2020). Inequality and poverty feed a vicious cycle that deepens political and social unrest. For example, the legacy of apartheid has resulted in continuous poverty and inequality in South Africa, which has spurred demands for resources and opportunities as well as demonstrations. Their encouragement of social conflicts and disenfranchisement compromises democratic involvement and stability.

Though they are related, poverty and inequality present different problems to democracy. Poverty limits resources, therefore depriving political participation; inequality creates divisions that let the rich exercise disproportionate power. Taken together, they can set off a cycle of compromising democratic institutions. Dealing with these issues calls for a multimodal strategy to lower economic inequalities and eradicate poverty, thereby advancing a more inclusive and fair democracy.

A Pathway Forward

A range of strategic recommendations has been put forward to address economic inequality and poverty, each targeting specific challenges. These include enhancing civic education to empower citizens with knowledge about their rights, enacting campaign finance reform to reduce the influence of wealth in politics and expanding access to voting through measures like automatic registration and mail-in ballots. Progressive economic policies, such as wealth taxes and increased public spending on social services, are also critical in addressing economic disparities. Furthermore, targeted policies for marginalized groups, such as affirmative action, should be implemented to reduce systemic inequalities.

Supporting grassroots movements and civil society is essential for amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, while digital inclusion initiatives can ensure equitable participation in political processes. Strengthening social safety nets, investing in education and vocational training, and ensuring equitable labour practices will provide economic security and enhance opportunities for all

citizens. Corporate responsibility and fostering international cooperation are key to addressing global economic disparities.

Examples of successful reforms, such as Finland's civic education system, campaign finance regulations in Europe, and Nordic welfare models, demonstrate the effectiveness of these policies. However, barriers such as political resistance, limited funding, and opposition from powerful interests may hinder implementation. Overcoming these challenges requires strategic advocacy, coalition-building, public support, and international solidarity. By linking each recommendation to the underlying difficulties, these measures offer a comprehensive pathway to creating more inclusive, resilient, and fair democratic systems.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the success of democratic societies is seriously threatened by poverty and economic disparity. These concerns illustrate the inconsistencies inherent in democracy, a system established on the ideas of equality and opportunity. While others argue that liberal democracies naturally give equal opportunities, this view ignores economic inequality's negative effects. Economic disparity erodes political, legal, and opportunity equality, therefore compromising the foundation of democracy. Regardless of socioeconomic level, everyone must have equal chances for democracy to flourish. Furthermore, unrestrained inequality fosters political conflict and increases social divisions, therefore hindering the efficient operation of democratic regimes.

Structural changes guaranteeing fair access to resources help to address economic inequality safeguarding the integrity of democracy. Without such changes, the potential of post-democratic crises increases, therefore compromising the fundamental core of democracy. Consequently, tackling economic disparity is not just a moral need but also a pragmatic one for the survival and progress of democratic norms.

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6

UNDP's Approach to Poverty Reduction in Vietnam: A Case Study of Ethnic Minorities in Ha Giang

Ha Thi Kieu Trinh

Abstract

Poverty reduction has been a pivotal goal for the Party and State of Vietnam, reflecting their commitment to improving living standards and ensuring economic stability. Despite remarkable economic progress since the Doi Moi reforms, challenges remain, particularly among the country's 53 ethnic minority groups. This article examines the role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in poverty alleviation in Vietnam, with a specific focus on Ha Giang Province, one of the poorest regions in the country. By evaluating the socio-economic conditions of ethnic minorities in Ha Giang and UNDP's targeted strategies, this paper highlights the organization's contributions to addressing multidimensional poverty and promoting sustainable development.

Introduction

Before Doi Moi, Vietnam's economy struggled due to centralized management and devastating wars. High poverty rates and poor living conditions were major problems at that time. Since the implementation of the Doi Moi reforms in 1986, Vietnam has seen dramatic economic growth. These market-oriented reforms transitioned the country from a centrally planned economy to a more market-based one, which spurred rapid economic development. Sustainable poverty reduction has always been a consistent goal in the process of building and innovating the country in Vietnam. It is noticeable that poverty reduction is a remarkable achievement in nearly 40 years of implementing the Doi Moi reform. According to the poverty report announced by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA, 2023), the poverty rate per capita (in monetary terms) in Vietnam has dropped sharply from

57% in 1990 to 13.5% in 2014, while the application of the multidimensional poverty standard in 2016 further demonstrated Vietnam's commitment to sustainable development. As it is not only based on average income multidimensional poverty takes into account basic needs such as housing, education and healthcare. The application of this multidimensional poverty standard has more comprehensively assessed people's actual living standards, while minimizing the risk of falling back into poverty. As the result, the poverty rate decreased from 9.88% in 2015 to below 3% in 2022. Vietnam becomes one of the first countries to reach the early target in implementing the United Nations Millennium Development Goal on poverty reduction and is considered as a bright spot in poverty alleviation in the world.

Despite significant progress, poverty reduction in Vietnam is not sustainable, the risk of falling back into poverty is high, and local poverty and inequality still exist. The gap between rich and poor in some regions and population groups is growing. Vietnam has a total of 53 ethnic minorities, accounting for about 15% of the total population. The rate of poor ethnic minority households accounts for about 67% of the total number of poor households in the country (MOLISA, 2023). In particular, Ha Giang province, a remote and mountainous area with a high concentration of ethnic minorities, illustrates the complexities of poverty reduction. Addressing poverty in such areas requires tailored approaches that account for unique socio-economic conditions.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, a donor agency of the United Nations) has assisted Vietnam in developing and implementing national programs on poverty reduction and social assistance for the poorest in society, including ethnic minority communities. Vietnam is seen as a model in its cooperation with other countries and UNDP began its assistance program in Vietnam in 1978. UNDP quickly responded to Vietnam's needs, focusing on establishing the basic systems, technologies and capacities for people-centered sustainable development. From the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) to the current Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030), this organization has worked closely with the government to expand people's choices in terms of more equal access to opportunities to reach their full potential. UNDP plays a critical role in supporting Vietnam's objectives for sustainable poverty reduction. In Ha Giang province, UNDP's initiatives have targeted ethnic

minority communities, focusing on expanding access to basic services and enhancing opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

This paper analyzes the current poverty situation among ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province and to explore UNDP's approach for poverty alleviation in this area. By examining specific strategies and interventions, this article will provide insights into the effectiveness of these efforts and their implications for ethnic minority communities in Ha Giang province.

Definition of Poverty

What is Poverty?

Poverty has attracted the attention of many researchers, leading to the development of a series of concepts and theories on this issue. Over time, the understanding of poverty has evolved from simple financial deprivation to more complex notions encompassing living conditions and social opportunities. Asselin and Anyck (2001) synthesized the concepts of poverty from different schools of thought in their research.

In the Welfarist School, poverty is considered to occur in a particular society when one or more people do not achieve a degree of economic well-being regarded to represent a decent minimum by the standards. This well-being is understood as personal satisfaction or the standard of living. Therefore, poverty in this school is reflected through income and focuses on increasing productivity and creating jobs. According to the Basic Needs School, poverty is defined as “the sustained inability of a family to meet its basic needs for survival (food and nutrition, water and sanitation, health and clothing), security (income, shelter, peace and security), and empowerment (basic education and functional literacy, psychosocial and family care, and participation in political process). This school pays attention to increasing access to basic human needs to ensure quality of life.

Unlike the first two schools, the concept of poverty in the Capacity School emphasizes creating opportunities for the poor so that they can develop their capacity in the way they choose. The poor need giving opportunities to have the capacity to fulfill basic needs (nutrition, health, etc.) and higher needs (respect,

voice and power, etc.). Instead of caring about what is lacking to obtain personal satisfaction or basic human needs, the Capacity School focuses on human capacity. In the field of development economics, Todaro & Smith (2020) introduced the concept of absolute poverty, which is the condition of being unable or barely able to satisfy the subsistence necessities of food, clothes, and shelter. The extent of absolute poverty is defined as the number of people who lack the necessary resources to meet their fundamental necessities. They are counted as the total number of people living under a specified minimal level of real income.

Some international organizations also presented concepts of poverty and ways to measure it in order to more accurately determine the poverty situation occurring in many countries. According to the World Bank, poverty is “pronounced deprivation in well-being”. The poor are individuals who do not have enough money or consumption to get over a certain minimal threshold. Poor individuals frequently lack essential skills. They may have little cash or education, be in poor health, feel helpless, or lack political rights. For the UNDP poverty is more than just lack of money. Therefore, Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a new global indicator of poverty that the UNDP in collaboration with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative has been presenting since 2010. MPI examines how people experience poverty in multiple and overlapping ways. By analyzing ten indicators (nutrition, child mortality, years of education, school attendance, access to cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and asset ownership), MPI identifies acute deprivations in health, education, and standard of living. If someone lacks three or more above indicators, they are considered "MPI poor."

What is Poverty in Vietnam?

Poverty is a complex concept because it is multifaceted. Since 2015, Vietnam has adopted a multidimensional poverty framework to better capture the complexity of poverty. This approach addresses limitations of traditional income-based measures, ensuring that individuals who may not be income-poor but face deprivations in other dimensions are not overlooked. The Vietnamese government's adoption of multidimensional poverty standards marks a significant milestone. It highlights the country's commitment to providing inclusive support to the poor by improving their quality of life, ensuring safe

living conditions, expanding access to basic social services, and enhancing their capabilities. Vietnam measures the multidimensional poverty rate as the percentage of households experiencing multidimensional poverty relative to the total number of households.

$$\text{Multidimensional poverty rate} = \frac{\text{Number of multidimensional poor households}}{\text{Total number of households}} \times 100$$

Multidimensional poverty standard in Vietnam is identified based on two criteria which are income deprivation and basic social services deprivation. In rural areas, a poor household is a household with an average monthly income per capita below VND 1,500,000 and lacking three or more indicators measuring the level of basic social service deprivation. In urban areas, one household is considered poor if this household has an average monthly income per capita below VND 2,000,000 and lacks three or more indicators measuring the level of basic social service deprivation. Basic social services are employment, health care, education, housing, water and sanitation, information.

There are 12 indicators measuring the level of shortage of basic social services.

<i>Basic social services</i>	<i>Index measuring the level of basic social service shortages</i>	<i>Deficiency threshold</i>
1. Employment	Employment	Households with at least one unemployed person (a person of working age who is able to work, willing/able to work but cannot find a job); or has a salaried job but does not have a labor contract.
	Dependents in the household	Households with a dependent ratio of more than 50% of the total population. Dependents include: children under 16 years old; elderly or disabled people receiving monthly social benefits.
2. Health care	Nutrition	Households with at least one child under 16 years old who is malnourished in height for age or malnourished in weight for age.
	Health insurance	Households with at least one person aged 6 years old or older who currently does not have health insurance

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3. Education	Adult education level	Households with at least one person between the ages of 16 and 30 who does not attend training courses or does not have a degree or certificate of education and training compared to the corresponding age [<i>People from 16 to under 18 years old studying or having graduated from junior high school; people from 18 to 30 years old studying or having graduated from high school or primary/intermediate/vocational college; or people from 16 to 30 years old who are recruited by enterprises and certified for on-the-job vocational training (study-work form)</i>].
	Children's school attendance	Households with at least one child aged 3 to under 16 years old who is not attending the right level of education appropriate to their age (<i>children aged 3 to under 6 years old have access to preschool education, children aged 6 to under 12 years old have access to primary education and children aged 12 to under 16 years old have access to secondary education</i>).
4. Housing	Housing quality	Households living in houses/apartments of the non-durable type (of the three main structures: walls, columns, and roof, at least two structures are made of non-durable materials).
	Average housing area per capita	Average housing area per capita of households is less than 8m ² .
5. Water and sanitation	Water source	Households do not have access to clean water for daily use (including: tap water, wells, protected dug wells, protected streams/wells, rainwater, and bottled water).
	Hygienic toilets	Households not using sanitary latrines/toilets (including: septic/semi-septic, flush; improved with ventilation, pit latrines with seats, two compartments)
6. Information	Use of telecommunication services	Household has no members using internet service
	Means of accessing information	Households do not have any of the following means of accessing information: - Shared means: TV, radio, desktop computer, telephone; - Personal means: Laptop, tablet, smartphone.

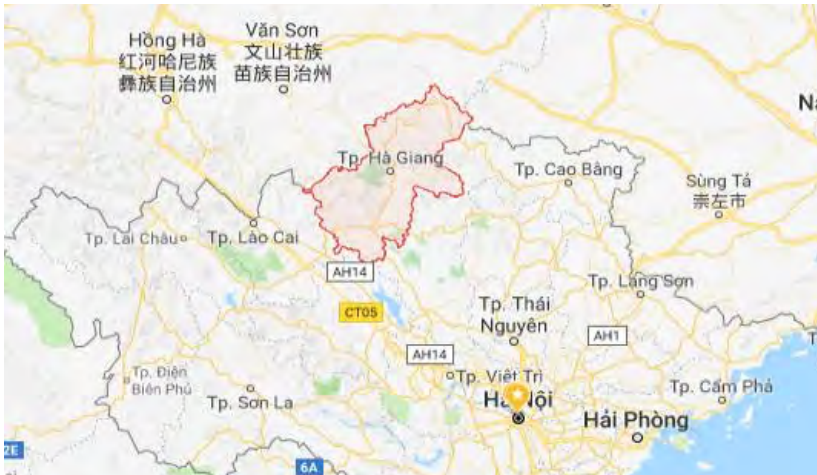
Source: *Labour Newspaper* (2021)

Case Study

Overview of Ha Giang

Ha Giang is a mountainous border province situated in the Northeast of Vietnam, more than 300 kilometers from Hanoi - the capital of Vietnam. It shares borders with Cao Bang province to the east, Lao Cai and Yen Bai provinces to the west, Tuyen Quang province to the south, and the People's Republic of China to the north. The total area of Ha Giang is 7927.55 km². The terrain of Ha Giang province is divided into three regions: the Northern highlands with 90% of the area being limestone mountains, the Western highlands featuring dome-shaped and steep terrain, and the Low mountainous region including flat valleys interspersed with old forests.

Location of Ha Giang province on the map



Ha Giang has undergone various historical phases, evolving from a remote region into an important province in the administrative system of Vietnam. During the French colonial period (1858-1945), Ha Giang province was incorporated into the Second Military Zone alongside Lang Son province and Cao Bang province. In 1959, President Ho Chi Minh signed a decree to merge Ha Giang province

into the Viet Bac Autonomous Region. Subsequently, the two provinces Ha Giang and Tuyen Quang were merged into one province called Ha Tuyen in 1976. However, in 1991, the National Assembly decided to divide Ha Tuyen province into two provinces Ha Giang and Tuyen Quang to facilitate more effective management and development of the Northern mountainous region. From the 1990s to the present, following Vietnam's economic reforms, Ha Giang province has received increased attention for economic development. The provincial government has implemented numerous rural development programs, poverty alleviation initiatives, and efforts to improve living conditions for its residents. Currently, Ha Giang province has one city and ten districts including Ha Giang city, Bac Me district, Bac Quang district, Dong Van district, Hoang Su Phi district, Meo Vac district, Quan Ba district, Quang Binh district, Vi Xuyen district, Xin Man district and Yen Minh district.

The population of Ha Giang province is not too large compared to the whole country, but compared to other northern mountainous provinces, it is relatively large. By the end of 2023, the population of Ha Giang province was nearly 913,000 people, ranked 47th in the country and 5th in the northern mountainous area. The province's demographic composition is predominantly rural, with 84% of the population residing in rural areas and 16% in urban areas. The ethnic composition is diverse, with ethnic minorities comprising 87% of the total population. Ha Giang province has 19 distinct ethnic groups, including the Mong, Dao, Tay, Nung, and La Chi. These ethnic groups are scattered throughout the province, mainly concentrated in remote mountainous areas.

Ha Giang province possesses many unique natural resources including diverse mineral reserves, of antimony, lead, zinc, tin and manganese. These minerals play an important role in the province's industrial and economic development. In addition, Ha Giang province has a large forest area, including nature reserves such as Du Gia Nature Reserve and Phong Quang Nature Reserve. The forests have high biodiversity value, which provide timber or non-timber forest products and habitats for numerous rare species. Furthermore, the province's hydrological resources, with major rivers Nho Que River and Lo River, offer substantial opportunities for hydropower development. Besides its natural resources, Ha Giang is a province with great tourism potential. There are some famous landscapes attracting both domestic and foreign tourists such as Dong Van Stone Plateau, Hoang Su Phi terraced fields, Ma Pi Leng Pass and Nho Que River. In

particular, Ha Giang province is home to 19 ethnic minorities with unique cultural features, special traditional festivals, and many traditional craft villages. Therefore, Ha Giang has become an ideal location for eco-tourism, adventure tourism and cultural exploration nowadays.

Nevertheless, Ha Giang province faces considerable geographical challenges that contribute to persistent poverty, particularly among its ethnic minority populations. Located in the remote mountainous region of northern Vietnam, Ha Giang's rugged terrain and steep slopes make infrastructure development difficult and costly. Limited road access isolates many communities, particularly during the rainy season when landslides and flooding can cut off transportation routes. Additionally, the high altitude and harsh climatic conditions in some areas affect agricultural productivity and limit the types of crops that can be cultivated, exacerbating food insecurity. These geographical barriers contribute to Ha Giang's persistent poverty rates, particularly among its ethnic minority populations, who rely heavily on subsistence farming and lack access to essential services such as education and healthcare.

Poverty in Ethnic Minorities in Ha Giang

Ha Giang is one of the poorest provinces in Vietnam, with a multidimensional poverty rate significantly exceeding the national average. According to the review of poor households announced by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs in 2023, Ha Giang's multidimensional poverty rate is 42.61%, which is about 8 times higher than the national multinational poverty rate of 5.71%. This disparity underscores the severe socio-economic challenges faced by the province, where a substantial portion of the population not only lack income but also many other basic needs. Notably, the total number of poor households in Ha Giang is 59,496 with 59,097 of these being ethnic minority households. In addition, Ha Giang has seven of the poorest districts in Vietnam including Meo Vac, Dong Van, Yen Minh, Quan Ba, Bac Me, Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man with high poverty rates, ranging from 40% to 52%. These districts are primarily composed of ethnic minorities, making up about 95% of the district population.

The income situation of people in Ha Giang province reflects a worrying picture of poverty in this region. Ha Giang province has one of the lowest average monthly per capita incomes in Vietnam, standing at VND 2.25 million. This

figure is significantly below the national average of VND 4.96 million, positioning Ha Giang as the second poorest province in terms of income. The province also records a clear difference in income between ethnic minorities and other population groups. The per capita income of ethnic minority communities is often much lower than the provincial and national average. This income disparity is largely influenced by several factors, including limited engagement in wage and nonfarm employment. Northern Mountain ethnic minorities devote less time to wage and nonfarm jobs (Cuong, Tuyen & Huong, 2017). The primary economic activity for many ethnic minority households in Ha Giang province is agriculture, specifically crop and livestock farming. However, due to the hard mountainous terrain, agricultural production is often inefficient, resulting in low and unstable incomes. Many households practice subsistence farming, which produce primarily for their own consumption and sell only minimal surpluses. This limited marketable surplus constrains their ability to generate sufficient income to enhance their living standards. In addition, income levels in ethnic minorities are influenced by linguistic factors. Households that are proficient in Vietnamese, compared to those who predominantly speak ethnic languages, tend to earn higher incomes (Hung, Trung & Cuong, 2010).

Besides income, multidimensional poverty in Vietnam also considers the level of deprivation of basic social services. MOLISA publishes the result of reviewing poor households in the whole country and individual provinces every year, highlighting the rate of basic social service deficiency indicators in each province. So, for Ha Giang province in 2023, households with at least one person unemployed or having a salaried job without labor contract accounted for 28% of total multidimensional poor households; and households with a dependent ratio of more than 50% of the total population accounted for 30.35% of the total multidimensional poor households. Investment in industry and services in Ha Giang province is still limited, affecting the ability to create jobs for people. Besides, the rate of the labor force aged 15 and over working in 2023 was 41%, mainly concentrated on the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishery. However, only 21% of this labor force has received formal training. Ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province often have difficulty accessing stable and well-paid employment because they lack the necessary labor skills for new occupations. They mainly depend on agriculture and traditional occupations, with minimal opportunities in non-agricultural sectors. According to Tuyen (2021), only 10% of ethnic minority workers in the whole province have trained jobs, while the

remaining lack technical expertise. The "Simple Labor" occupational group still attracts and employs the most ethnic minority workers, the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery sector accounting for 86.2%. Meanwhile, the employment rate in Industry is 5.2% with Construction and Services sector at 8.6%.

Regarding educational deprivation in 2023, 29% of multidimensional poor households have at least one person aged 16 to 30 who does not participate in training courses or does not have a degree or certificate of education and training compared to the corresponding age; 4% of multidimensional poor have at least one child aged 3 to under 16 who does not attend the right level of education appropriate to their age. Moreover, although the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and over in Ha Giang province has improved significantly over the years from 72% in 2018 to 78% in 2023, it is still much lower than the national average. The rate of children dropping out of school in Ha Giang province is high, especially in ethnic minority households. The rate of ethnic minority students in Ha Giang province participating in primary school reached 90% of the total number of students in the province. However, this rate decreased to 89% at the secondary level and further to 79% in high school. The rate of school attendance at the right age also exhibits a concerning downward trend, particularly 98% for primary school, 92% for secondary school and 51% for high school. This trend indicates that the rate of ethnic minority students participating in primary school is quite high, but this tends to decrease in higher levels of education. In addition, in many areas, especially those with large ethnic minority populations, educational infrastructure is underdeveloped. Schools often lack facilities, learning materials, and teachers. Teachers often have to teach under difficult conditions and with insufficient resources. Some localities in Ha Giang having the highest shortage of teachers are Yen Minh, Meo Vac, Dong Van, and Xin Man (Baohagiang, 2024).

The health deprivation index of poor households recorded in 2023 reveals that 18% of the multidimensional poor households has at least one child under 16 years old suffering from height-for-age malnutrition or weight-for-age malnutrition; 97% of multidimensional poor households has at least one member aged 6 years or older without a health insurance coverage. Additionally, access to health services is particularly limited in Ha Giang's remote and mountainous areas. Ha Giang province, especially in rural and remote areas, suffers from a shortage of medical facilities and healthcare professionals. According to Ha Giang

Statistical Yearbook 2023, in Ha Giang province, only 27% of healthcare personnel have medical qualifications, and 14% are qualified nurses. Health facilities in Ha Giang province, particularly at commune health stations, often lack basic medical equipment and medicines. This affects the ability to provide adequate and timely health services to the people. Moreover, training and retaining health workers in disadvantaged areas is a major challenge. Many health workers do not want to work in remote areas due to difficult working conditions and low wages.

Access to information is a critical dimension of multidimensional poverty. In 2023, 23% of multidimensional poor households in Ha Giang province do not have any members using the internet; and 14% of multidimensional poor households do not have access to televisions, stereos, computers or tablets, or mobile phones. The absence of these information and communication technologies exacerbates the isolation of these households from important socio-economic developments. In particular, ethnic minorities often have difficulty accessing information due to the lack of information services in their own languages. Information and services are often provided in Kinh language, while many ethnic minorities use other languages.

Many ethnic minority households in Ha Giang province are living in low-quality housing. Some houses are built with poor quality materials and lack sustainability. In 2023, the rate of multidimensional poor households living in unstable houses/apartments is 25% and nearly 13% of multidimensional poor household live in a house with average housing area per capital less than 8m²/person. In addition, housing often lacks basic amenities such as clean water, drainage systems, and electricity. In 2023, households that do not use sanitary toilets/laundries account for 62% of the total number of multidimensional poor households; and households that do not have access to clean water for daily life account for almost 17% of the total number of multidimensional poor households. Despite numerous projects aimed at improving ethnic minorities' access to water and sanitation, ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountains continue to have restricted access to electricity, water and toilets (Cuong, Tuyen & Huong, 2017).

Summary of multidimensional poverty indicators in Ha Giang Province in 2023

Location	Multidimensional poverty rate	Rate of basic social service deficiency index of poor households											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Whole country	5.71%	34.82	36.00	12.27	58.77	24.53	4.81	28.28	27.86	17.09	51.53	33.41	17.84
Ha Giang Province	42.61%	28.04	30.35	18.21	96.60	28.99	4.30	25.03	12.79	16.74	62.04	22.87	13.62

NOTE: 1. Employment; 2. Dependents in the household; 3. Nutrition; 4. Health insurance; 5. Adult education level; 6. School attendance status of children; 7. Housing quality; 8. Housing area per capita; 9. Source of domestic water; 10. Hygienic toilet; 11. Use telecommunications services; 12. Means of accessing information

Source: Results of the review of poor households in 2023 (MOLISA, 2024)

Causes of Poverty in Ethnic Minority Groups in Ha Giang

In Ha Giang province, the persistence of poverty among ethnic minority groups can be attributed to several key factors. One of the main reasons is geographical location. Most ethnic minorities live in a remote mountainous area, which hinders access to market information, advanced technology, and efficient transportation networks. This geographical remoteness significantly impedes economic activities, restricting opportunities for capacity building and market engagement, thereby exacerbating poverty. Natural disasters further compound the difficulties as the province's mountainous topography and climatic conditions make it susceptible to frequent natural calamities, such as floods, landslides, and storms. Moreover, the occurrence of frost during cold spells in this area poses severe challenges to agriculture and livelihoods. These environmental hazards disrupt production activities and contribute to the impoverishment of local communities.

Basic infrastructure is a key element of poverty alleviation (Hung, Trung & Cuong, 2010). As stated already, infrastructure in Ha Giang province often presents complex terrain and harsh natural conditions with inconvenient transportation networks along narrow, winding mountain roads that are frequently flooded or subject to landslides during the rainy season. Traffic between districts in the province is divided into many separate routes according to the mountain terrain, branching out without connection. This infrastructure deficit hampers access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and markets, further entrenching poverty among ethnic minority communities.

Furthermore, lack of knowledge and outdated customs can exacerbate poverty (Baulch, et.al, 2007). Many ethnic minority groups in Ha Giang province continue to adhere to outdated agricultural methods and traditional labor tools, failing to adopt modern technologies. A cultural emphasis on labor over education often leads to early dropout rates among children who are required to work to support their families. Some ethnic minority people still rely on traditional medicine, resulting in ineffective treatment of health issues. These actions further impede socio-economic progress.

A notable cause of poverty is gender inequality. According to Mbatha (2024), gender inequality perpetuates a cycle of poverty by constraining women's economic contributions and decision-making power. In fact, Vietnamese women, especially women in ethnic minority communities, have less access to economic opportunities than men and often take on lower-paid jobs. Besides, traditional gender roles and stereotypes restrict women's participation in economic activities and decision-making processes, thereby inhibiting their ability to influence household income and development (Hue & Thanh, 2020).

UNDP's Approach to Reducing Poverty Rate of Ethnic Minorities in Ha Giang

The UNDP has made many important contributions to the process of reducing poverty in Vietnam, mainly assisting in providing policy advice and supporting projects in poor provinces. Ha Giang is one of the poor provinces where support from UNDP's contributions not only helps improve the living conditions of poor ethnic minorities but also promotes sustainable development and social justice. From understanding the current situation as well as the causes of poverty of ethnic minorities in Ha Giang, UNDP has implemented targeted and effective strategies to address these challenges.

Firstly, in terms of policy support, UNDP is helping Vietnam develop and implement national programmes for poverty reduction by publishing national MDG Reports such as "Poverty Reduction in Comparative Perspective: Lessons for Vietnam from International Experience" and "Promoting Accelerated and Sustainable Poverty Reduction in All Dimensions and Everywhere in Vietnam". It also established the Ethnic Minority Policy Forum in 2012 to integrate these ethnic groups into the country's overall poverty reduction efforts.

A transformative milestone in Vietnam's approach to poverty reduction occurred on July 21st, 2014, when the MOLISA in collaboration with UNDP and the Irish Ambassador, held a workshop in Hanoi to develop the Multidimensional Poverty Project. This initiative introduced a unified understanding of multidimensional poverty and identified suitable thresholds for measuring basic social needs deprivation in Vietnam (MOLISA, 2014). As a result, Vietnam adopted multidimensional poverty standards for the periods 2016-2020 and 2021-2025. The application of this multidimensional poverty framework has fundamentally reshaped Vietnam's poverty reduction policies. Unlike traditional income-based measures, this approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of poverty by assessing various dimensions, including access to education, healthcare, housing, and social services. It has enabled policymakers to identify population groups with specific support needs, particularly among ethnic minorities and rural communities, ensuring that poverty reduction programs are better targeted and more effective. By focusing on the diverse aspects of poverty, Vietnam's multidimensional poverty framework has paved the way for more inclusive and sustainable development.

Secondly, with regard to infrastructure, UNDP with funding from its Japanese partner, has facilitated the construction of over 26km of new rural roads, connecting 17 villages in Ha Giang province in 2020 (UNDP, 2020). This initiative has connected the road system between difficult-to-access areas in the region, which helps over 8,000 ethnic minorities living in mountainous areas including women, the elderly and children who are now more able to access education, health services, markets and jobs. Additionally, in order to support the enhancement of public services in poor districts in Ha Giang, UNDP has collaborated with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics to assess the current situation and provide recommendations for improving access to online public services. UNDP has funded USD 40,000 and provided technical support for the project "Improving access to public administrative services for people in remote, isolated and ethnic minority areas". This was implemented in Bac Quang and Xin Man - two poor districts in Ha Giang province.

This project ran from December 2022 to December 2023 and aimed to extend online public services to ethnic minority communities in remote villages. According to UNDP's report (2024), the project gained significant achievements, including the simplification of ten critical administrative

procedures on Ha Giang's Provincial E-Service Portal, the training and mobilization of ten civil servants and a hundred empowered villagers in ethnic minority communities. As a result, mobile e-public administrative services have been established in remote areas. Furthermore, four pilot communes of Bac Quang and Xin Man districts reported a 34.6% increase in year-on-year online dossier submissions.

Thirdly, UNDP and the Government of Japan have supported more than 1,200 poor ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province with income after their livelihoods were severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a significant drop in income from agriculture and tourism due to border closures and travel restrictions, which further exacerbates the already challenging conditions faced by ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province. The financial assistance provided through this initiative played a crucial role in mitigating these adverse impacts. By directly addressing the immediate needs of affected households, the support enabled families to secure essential resources such as food, medicine, and basic utilities during the pandemic. Furthermore, it offered a foundation for rebuilding livelihoods, allowing households to reinvest in small-scale agricultural activities or other income-generating opportunities. This timely intervention not only alleviated short-term hardships but also helped to stabilize vulnerable communities and foster resilience against future economic shocks, particularly for ethnic minorities in remote regions like Ha Giang.

Fourthly, since December 2020, UNDP has partnered with the Department of Information Technology of the Ministry of Health and Ha Giang province to develop and pilot a digital solution known as “Doctor for Every Family” (UNDP, 2023). This innovative software implementation has revolutionized healthcare access by empowering people to choose and schedule appointments with the right healthcare professionals at the most convenient times. This initiative effectively addresses geographical barriers, allowing health workers in mountainous communes to consult with colleagues at higher levels, thereby improving access to quality medical care directly at commune health stations and alleviating the burden on district health facilities. Since November 2022, the “Doctor for every family” software has been installed at 1403 provincial, district and commune-level medical facilities in 5 provinces, including Ha Giang province. In order to further promote the implementation of the remote medical consultation and treatment program, UNDP supported Ha Giang province to establish four

functional rooms in four disadvantaged communes including Sung Trai Commune Health Station in Dong Van District; Huu Vinh Commune Health Station in Yen Minh District; Vo Diem Commune Health Station in Bac Quang District and Po Ly Ngai Commune Health Station in Hoang Su Phi District. Each Health Station is equipped with one computer, speaker, Webcam with integrated microphone to perform remote medical consultation and treatment. The total value of this support package is VND 140 million (Hoa, 2022). During this initiative, equipment was presented to the Department of Health, along with coordination for installation and professional support in the communes.

Last - but not least, UNDP also pays great attention to empowering ethnic minority women and promoting gender equity as essential strategies for poverty alleviation. Ms. Ramla Khalidi, UNDP Resident Representative in Viet Nam, shared UNDP's approach in supporting Vietnam to achieve its poverty reduction goals "Women are increasingly seen as active agents of change. For that reason, UNDP's approach is to empower women as positive change agents in an inclusive public sphere by promoting their equal participation and representation at all levels. Beside tackling structural inequalities, UNDP considers women as strategic partners whose active participation and ability in planning, design and implementation are essential to all of UNDP's programming." (UNDP, 2022). Economic empowerment for women is a direct path towards gender equality, helping to eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth. The fundamental role of women in poverty reduction is one of the most profound lessons from current development experiences. In line with the organization's commitment, UNDP and Viettel Post have signed a memorandum of understanding to explore collaborative opportunities aimed at integrating Industry 4.0 technologies with ethnic minority women and businesses. This initiative seeks to identify and test innovative solutions for economic empowerment and poverty reduction in the province. Additionally, UNDP in Vietnam has piloted and expanded the 4M initiative (Meet - Match - Mentor - Move), which focuses on economically empowering ethnic minority women to manage and operate cooperatives (UNDP, 2019).

Conclusion

It is undeniable that Vietnam has achieved significant milestones in its poverty reduction efforts and has become a global exemplar in this field. However,

disparities persist, particularly among ethnic minority communities, where poverty rates remain disproportionately high. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring equitable and sustainable development across the nation. Recognizing these challenges, the Vietnamese government has implemented a range of targeted programs and policies to support ethnic minority groups, such as Program 135 focusing on building infrastructure, developing the economy and improving the lives of ethnic minority communities; Program to support socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas to support economic and social development, improve the quality of life of ethnic minorities, including projects to support production, health, education and environmental protection; Education and training support policies to create conditions for ethnic minority children to have access to education and improve their educational level; National target program on new rural construction to improve rural infrastructure and improve the lives of rural residents, including ethnic minority communities.

The UNDP has played a pivotal role in complementing Vietnam's poverty reduction strategies. In provinces such as Ha Giang, UNDP has adopted a multifaceted approach encompassing poverty-related policy improvements, income support, infrastructure enhancement, healthcare upgrades, and women's empowerment. These interventions have addressed the unique challenges faced by ethnic minorities, leading to notable achievements in poverty alleviation, access to essential services, and economic development. UNDP's strategic interventions not only meet immediate needs but also serve as a catalyst for long-term sustainable development. Its successful initiatives in Ha Giang demonstrate a replicable model that can be extended to other regions facing similar challenges.

Overall, UNDP's role in these successes cannot be overstated. As Vietnam continues its journey toward eradicating poverty, the combined efforts of the government, UNDP, and other stakeholders remain critical. By bridging the development gaps in ethnic minority areas and building on proven strategies, Vietnam can achieve its goal of inclusive and sustainable growth, ensuring that no one is left behind.

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7

Homelessness in the Headlines: A Critical Analysis of Media Narratives and Their Impact on Public Perception

Lucrezia Rachele Zito

Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of homelessness in the UK print media, with a focus on how framing techniques influence public perceptions, reinforce societal stereotypes and shape policy responses. Employing a systematic review of existing literature, the analysis draws on key theories such as Goffman's framing, media discourse, and cultivation. It investigates both episodic and thematic framing, highlighting their respective impacts on public empathy and support for systemic solutions. By synthesizing findings from various case studies and research, the paper identifies limitations in media practices and underscores the potential of thematic framing to inspire systemic change. Digital media's role in reshaping narratives is also considered, offering a balanced perspective on media's influence and opportunities for positive transformation. Recommendations are proposed for journalists, policymakers, and advocacy groups to promote ethical reporting that challenges stereotypes, fosters public understanding, and drives sustainable policy reforms. The findings aim to contribute to a more informed and empathetic discourse on homelessness.

Introduction

Homelessness in the United Kingdom represents a complex and multifaceted social issue defined by the lack of stable and adequate housing. Rooted in systemic inequalities, economic disparities, and deficiencies in social safety nets, homelessness demands comprehensive policy interventions such as robust housing policies and expanded emergency services (Crisis, 2017). However, beyond policy measures, public discourse—shaped significantly by media coverage—plays a critical role in framing societal perceptions and responses to homelessness. Print media, historically recognized as a key source of information, continues to wield significant influence over

public attitudes and policy priorities (Lundberg, 1926; Schoenbach et al., 2005). Through the lens of framing theory, media not only inform the public but also shape interpretations of complex issues, thereby influencing individual and collective actions. This influence is crucial for social issues like homelessness, as meaningful shifts in public attitudes and behaviour are likely to occur only when the problem gains prominence in the public consciousness (Chauhan et al., 2024). Research indicates that media coverage employs framing—an interpretive scheme through which individuals understand and respond to intricate issues (Arowolo, 2017; Goffman, 1974).

Two predominant forms of framing emerge in homelessness discourse: episodic framing, which emphasizes individual responsibility and personal failings, and thematic framing, which situates homelessness within broader systemic contexts such as economic inequality and inadequate social services (Boukes, 2021). These framing choices profoundly affect public empathy and the likelihood of supporting systemic solutions. This paper employs a systematic review of existing literature to analyze how media representations influence societal attitudes towards homelessness. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Goffman's framing theory, cultivation theory, and agenda-setting theory, the analysis explores the impact of media narratives on public understanding and policy development. By examining case studies and empirical research, the paper identifies limitations in current media practices and proposes recommendations for fostering ethical, inclusive, and solutions-oriented reporting.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to a more informed and compassionate discourse on homelessness, advocating for media practices that challenge stereotypes, enhance public empathy, and promote systemic change.

Literature Review

Media's Role in Public Perception

Although society has undergone significant transformations in how news is consumed, print media remains a trusted source of information and guidance (Lippmann, 1997). Often referred to as the '*Fourth Estate*', mass media stand alongside the legislative, executive and judicial branches as a pillar of democracy,

playing a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes and responses to social issues. By controlling the flow of information and agenda-setting, media outlets act as gatekeepers, influencing public awareness and framing societal narratives (Jhunjhunwala and Verma, 2024). This influence is particularly significant for complex issues like homelessness, where media representations shape public perceptions and policy decisions (Bhosale, 2020).

Theoretical Foundations of Framing

Framing theory, introduced by Goffman (1974), suggests that individuals use 'frames'—interpretative schemes—to comprehend complex information (Arowolo, 2017). Media framing—the selection and emphasis of certain story aspects—affects public understanding and attitudes toward social issues (Tversky and Kahneman, 1985). Media coverage of homelessness often favours episodic framing, which emphasizes individual responsibility and personal failings, thus attributing homelessness to moral or behavioural shortcomings. This approach reinforces stereotypes and limits public support for systemic solutions (Boukes, 2021; Ullmann, 2020). In contrast, thematic framing situates homelessness within broader social, political, and economic structures—such as inequality, inadequate housing policies, and limited mental health resources. Research has shown that thematic framing promotes public empathy and supports systemic reforms (Mussagulova, 2024).

Schema theory complements the discussion by suggesting that audiences interpret and categorize new information through pre-existing cognitive structures (Wicks, 1986; Fiske and Taylor, 2017). Due to limited cognitive resources, individuals filter new information through the lens of existing knowledge. When exposed to episodic framing, individuals may filter stories through stereotypes, reinforcing existing bias (Lippmann, 1997). Conversely, thematic framing has the potential to activate schemas related to systemic understanding, fostering empathy and advocacy for long-term solutions. Similarly, polysemy theory challenges the deterministic view of framing by emphasizing the variability in audience interpretations. Polysemy refers to the ability of a text to carry multiple meanings simultaneously, influenced by the audience's cultural frameworks, prior experiences and ideological standpoints (Pirovano, n.d.; Boxman-Shabtai, 2021). For instance, a newspaper article that frames homelessness as a societal failure may resonate differently with various

audiences. Those with personal experiences of poverty may interpret the story with a degree of empathy and understanding, advocating for compassionate policy responses. In contrast, those with limited exposure to such issues may interpret the same framing through a lens of stigma or blame, potentially resulting in calls for harsher measures instead of supportive social programmes. Such insights stress the need for clarity and consistency in media framing to prevent harmful misinterpretations.

Empirical Evidence on Media Representation of Homelessness

Despite critiques, empirical studies underscore the prevalence of episodic framing in media coverage of homelessness. A study conducted by the University of Alberta (1987-2007) on the representation of homelessness in major Canadian newspapers revealed that of four dominant themes, which comprised 85.3% of overall coverage, only 16.8% referenced economic factors such as government cutbacks, spending reductions, or economic causes as contributors to homelessness (Richter et al., 2012). Similarly, in the UK, austerity measures and welfare cuts—primary drivers of homelessness—are frequently overshadowed by narratives emphasizing individual responsibility (Zahra and Magash, 2023). For instance, case studies show headlines such as 'Homeless on £100 a day', perpetuating the notion that homelessness is self-inflicted and fostering public apathy and stigmatization.

This underrepresentation is significant, given that existing research identifies the withdrawal of federal funding for housing policies as a leading cause of homelessness in Canada.¹

Additionally, as emerged from the Street Health Report (Khandor and Mason, 2007), one-third of homeless individuals indicated they became homeless due to an inability to afford rent (Khandor and Mason, 2007). This incongruence between the reality of homelessness and newspaper portrayals can limit public understanding and hampers efforts to address homelessness effectively.

¹ See Bryant (2004), Carroll and Jones (2000), CIHI (2007), Crowe (2008b), Hulchanski (2002), Khandor and Mason (2007), Layton (2000), Muckle and Turnbull (2006), and Shapcott (2004) for further discussion.

Digital Media and Evolving Narratives

The advent of digital platforms has transformed the landscape of public discourse. Social media platforms like Twitter (X) and Facebook enable user-generated commentary that challenge traditional media dominance. While digital media can perpetuate algorithmic biases and act as echo chambers, risking amplifying homogenous perspectives (Wang et al., 2020), they also provide opportunities for marginalized voices to reshape narratives. Campaigns such as *#HousingNotHandcuffs* illustrate how digital platforms can shift the discourse from criminalizing homelessness to advocating for housing-first policies, challenging stigmatizing portrayals. While digital platforms democratize storytelling, they also demand critical engagement to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Long-Term Impacts and Agenda-Setting

Cultivation theory highlights the cumulative effect of repeated media narratives on public discourse. This theory suggests that consistent exposure to specific media messages shapes individuals' beliefs and behaviours, creating a 'mediated reality' that influences attitudes as well as conducts themselves in life (Nabi and Riddle, 2008; Tversky and Kahneman, 1985). Repeated exposure to episodic framing may lead to the internalization of negative stereotypes so that the homeless themselves come to view homelessness as an individual failing rather than a societal issue. Agenda-setting theory further elucidates how media wield power to determine which aspects of homelessness are deemed relevant by the public (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The frequency and salience of homelessness stories in newspapers shape public perception of the issue's urgency (Richter et al., 2012). For instance, seasonal spikes in coverage often depict homelessness as a transient issue. This can inadvertently reinforce the notion that temporary measures such as providing food and shelter are sufficient responses to the problem (Chauhan et al., 2024; Crisis, 2017). Nonetheless, the agenda-setting theory has faced numerous critiques as it assumes a more passive audience influenced by the media.

In contrast, the uses and gratification theory (UGT) challenges the passive audience model, suggesting that individuals actively select media content that fulfils their needs and desires (Katz, et al., 1973). This reciprocal relationship

between media and audience suggests that media content may reflect rather than shape public beliefs. The third-person effect hypothesis adds nuance to this discussion by suggesting that individuals perceive themselves as less susceptible to media influence than others (Davison, 1983). For instance, when acknowledging the negative impact of episodic framing, individuals might deny that their views are shaped by these narratives, believing themselves to be more critical of media messages. The subjectivity reveals an intricacy that cultivation theory may overlook, complicating efforts to address the biases perpetuated by episodic framing, as audiences may deny the impact of such narratives on their own attitude.

Potential for Media as a Catalyst for Change

Despite its role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes, the media possess the transformative potential to reshape public discourse. Ethical reporting practices that emphasize thematic framing can challenge stereotypes and promote systemic understanding. Journalists can inspire empathy by integrating human-interest stories with structural analysis while advocating for evidence-based policy solutions.

Case Study

Media as Translators of Public Perceptions

Newspapers are influential translators of societal issues, bridging the gap between mediated narratives and daily encounters with homelessness (Kinder, 2007). Without media coverage, public perceptions would largely depend on occasional encounters with homeless individuals (Lee, Link and Toro, 1991). However, journalists' framing choices do more than report facts; they actively shape public narratives and influence societal attitudes (Iyengar, 1994; Robinson and Tuchman, 1978; Van Dijk, 1992).

Challenges Faced by Homeless Individuals in Media

Despite their centrality in constructing narratives on homelessness, individuals experiencing homelessness face significant barriers to representation in the media.

Limited access to resources and a marginalized social status prevents their voices from reaching journalistic platforms (Cress and Snow, 1996; Greenberg et al., 2006; Davis, 1985). Moreover, journalists tend to prioritize experts' sources and public perspectives over the lived experiences of homeless individuals, perpetuating an incomplete picture (Martin and Knight, 1997).

Dominant Portrayals in Media

A study on homelessness coverage in five major British national daily newspapers (1995-1999) found that homeless individuals were represented in three predominant ways: as 'other', as criminals, and as victims (Widdowfield, 2001). Language is pivotal in perpetuating these portrayals, as specific wording can either foster public empathy or reinforce stigma towards those without permanent housing (Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, 2020). Terms such as 'vagabond' or 'beggar' alienate homeless individuals, framing them as a separate group from the rest of society and limiting public empathy. Headings such as 'the law-abiding, tax-paying majority' (*Mail* 8/1/97) and imagery like 'an army of outcasts' (*The Guardian*, 7/3/98), a species apart' (*Telegraph* 13/1/95), or 'inhabiting some different 'other' world' (*Times* 14/4/96) reinforce this sense 'othering' and deepen societal divides (Widdowfield, 2001).

Additionally, when combined with the 'home as a refuge from a dangerous world' model, strong negative emotions are associated with homelessness. According to this model, home is a place of security, loving relationships and protection. When the variable of 'home' is missing, the result is a perception of the issue as alien to 'normal' and undesirable. This association positions homelessness as a deviation from societal norms, emphasizing the absence of safety and integration. By defining 'home' as a refuge, homeless individuals are portrayed not only as vulnerable but as part of the perceived dangers of the outside world, reinforcing stereotypes of deviance and marginality (O'Neil et al., 2017).

Fraudulent and Criminal Narratives

Media narratives frequently depict homeless individuals as fraudulent and unworthy of sympathy. Headings such as 'Homeless on £100 a day' (*Daily Mail* 5/8/96), 'He earns £80 a day—so why work?' (*Daily Mail* 19/11/98), and 'Five

meals a day on easy street' (*Daily Mail* 15/12/99) perpetuate stereotypes that frame homelessness as a lucrative or deceitful condition. The narrative is exacerbated by sensationalized stories, such as the death of 'super-scrounger' John Rowlands, who 'drove his disabled father's leased Vauxhall to a site in Sheffield, changed out of his ordinary clothes and begged in rags claiming to be hungry and homeless' (22/8/95), casting doubt on the credibility of homeless individuals (Widdowfield, 2001). A further example is offered by a father from Newcastle publicly accusing his homeless daughter of being a 'fraud' and urging the public not to give her money, claiming that she would use it to buy heroin (*Daily Mail* and *Daily Mail Express*). These portrayals exacerbate stigmas, casting doubt on the credibility and moral worthiness of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Moral Worthiness and Blame

Homelessness is often framed within a dichotomy of 'deserving and 'undeserving', placing blame on individuals for their circumstances and attributing these failures to personal failings rather than structural causes. For instance, narratives like the one describing 'a homeless loner with violent fantasies' who was jailed indefinitely for a brutal stabbing (*Telegraph*, 10/9/98) or the 'homeless man charged with the murder of three people found hacked to death in an apartment' (*Daily Mail*, 14/9/98), illustrate this point. Another instance includes a report stating that 'homeless men tortured, stabbed, and battered Parvez Masih for less than £100 before dumping him in the freezer of a homeless hostel where they were staying' (*Mirror*, 1/12/98).

These portrayals not only connect homelessness with criminal activities—depicting homeless individuals as dangerous—but also reinforce stereotypes of irresponsibility and moral deficiency. For instance, the *Daily Mail* (23/12/99) reported on a mother living in a homeless hostel who 'abandoned her five children after asking social workers to provide emergency help because she wanted to go out for the evening.'

Narratives emphasizing addiction, mental health issues, or perceived irresponsibility shift the blame onto individuals, fostering public support for punitive measures rather than supportive policies. Moreover, they establish a pervasive association between homelessness and violence, fueling public fear and mistrust toward homeless individuals. Instead of fostering empathy or advocating

for systemic reforms, these depictions perpetuate the belief that homeless individuals pose a societal threat, legitimizing punitive responses such as increased policing, criminalization of homelessness, or restrictive eligibility criteria for social services.

Oversimplification and Hidden Homelessness

Media representations frequently adopt a narrowed perspective by emphasizing the model of 'rough sleeping', thus creating an inaccurate representation of homeless individuals as merely those on the streets (Ullman, 2020). However, research demonstrates that homelessness can also be hidden from both public view and local authorities. Examples include being in housing but at risk of violence or abuse, living in overcrowded quarters and 'couch surfing', where individuals stay with friends or family members temporarily (Ali, 2018; Crisis, 2017).

This oversimplification reinforces stereotypes that homelessness is solely a matter of visible deprivation, excluding the experiences of those facing hidden housing insecurity. As a result, public and policy attention may disproportionately focus on short-term measures for rough sleepers while ignoring systemic issues like housing affordability, domestic instability, and access to mental health services. Moreover, this narrowed framing overlooks the profound impacts of housing insecurity on individuals' health and well-being, further entrenching misconceptions about the scope and complexity of homelessness (O'Neil et al., 2017).

Media's Oscillation between Pity and Demonization

Media portrayals of homelessness oscillate between compassion and stigmatization. While some articles evoke sympathy by depicting 'countless lost souls in filthy, freezing doorways' (*The Mirror* 13/1/97), they fail to address structural causes. *The Times* (3/8/95) gave an account of Matthew Parris's experience living on the streets which offers a more palpable example: 'He was an undernourished spotty youth with ill-fitting clothes, trousers an inch too short. His arms and wrists were painfully thin...and his pale, knotted face bore an expression of permanent anxiety, old before his time...One of those youths that

had never had a youth, but moved from a neglected, abused childhood into some wretched travesty of independence as an adult.’

While these portrayals can evoke empathy, they often fail to address the systemic factors that underlie homelessness. This narrow focus reduces the issue to an individualized narrative of suffering, perpetuating stereotypes of homeless individuals as pitiable but powerless victims. Moreover, this oscillation between pity and demonization reinforces marginalization by stripping individuals of agency and reducing the conversation to extremes (Schneider, 2011).

Implications for Public Engagement and Prevention

Selective and stereotypical media portrayals hinder a comprehensive understanding of homelessness and ultimately hold repercussions on the development of forms of prevention measures (Pruitt et al., 2019). Narratives emphasizing the 'crisis intervention model', prioritizing immediate solutions over systemic reforms, overshadow long-term solutions addressing root causes like economic disparity. These portrayals foster a short-term view of homelessness, often positioning it as a transient issue requiring immediate yet superficial solutions.

Cultural models rooted in fatalism, such as the 'bad break model' or the 'vicious cycle model', frame homelessness as either an inevitable consequence of personal misfortune or an inescapable downward spiral. These fatalistic representations diminish public accountability for systemic causes like housing shortages or inadequate mental health services, discouraging collective efforts for systemic reform (Pruitt et al., 2019). Furthermore, by portraying homelessness through an individualized lens, media narratives often shift responsibility away from policymakers and society at large, fostering public apathy. These portrayals also influence public behaviour. Episodic framing, for instance, reduces public empathy by focusing on individual failings, leading to stigmatization and a preference for punitive measures such as anti-homelessness laws. Conversely, when used effectively, thematic framing can inspire collective responsibility by contextualizing homelessness within structural inequalities, such as inadequate welfare policies and rising housing costs. Empirical evidence suggests that thematic stories are more likely to elicit support for policy-driven solutions and long-term interventions (Geise and Maubach, 2024).

To foster meaningful public engagement, the media must adopt a more nuanced approach to reporting. Ethical journalism should integrate human-interest stories with systemic analysis, highlighting both individual experiences and broader social determinants. By amplifying the voices of those directly affected, the media can challenge stereotypes, inspire empathy, and galvanize public support for sustainable solutions. Collaborative efforts between journalists, policymakers, and advocacy groups can further ensure that narratives drive systemic change rather than perpetuate harmful biases.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted in this study. First, the reliance on secondary research constrains the depth of analysis to existing studies and archival materials, potentially overlooking recent shifts in media narratives. Second, the geographic focus on the United Kingdom introduces a limitation by excluding broader context, though illustrative examples from other contexts, such as Canada, were referenced for contextual insight rather than systemic reviews. Lastly, the emphasis on print journalism, while historically influential, may not fully capture the evolving role of digital media in shaping contemporary discourse.

Conclusion

Media representations of homelessness play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes, influencing policy priorities, and fostering societal attitudes. This paper has demonstrated the dominance of episodic framing in perpetuating stereotypes and reducing public empathy by attributing homelessness to individual failings. These narratives obscure systemic factors such as economic inequality, inadequate housing policies, and social safety net deficiencies, hindering the development of long-term solutions.

However, the media also holds transformative potential. By adopting thematic framing, which contextualizes homelessness within structural inequalities, journalists can foster a deeper understanding of the issue, challenge prevailing stereotypes, and promote evidence-based policy responses. Practical strategies include integrating human-interest stories with systemic analysis, using inclusive language, and leveraging visual storytelling that preserves dignity without sensationalism (Ullmann, 2020; Sangiuliano, 2024). However, care must be

taken to avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes or voyeuristic tendencies (Michel, 2024).

To advance this shift, collaboration between journalists, policymakers, and advocacy groups is essential to create narratives that not only inform but inspire action. Ethical journalism can catalyze systemic change, helping to mobilize collective actions toward equitable policies and sustainable solutions. In doing so, the media can move beyond episodic portrayals and contribute to a more compassionate and informed public discourse on homelessness, ultimately contributing to the creation of equitable policies and a more inclusive society.

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8

Tuberculosis and Healthcare Disparities in Vietnam: A Case Study of Hanoi

Husna Ibanda

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between income levels, healthcare accessibility, and tuberculosis (TB) prevalence in Vietnam, particularly in Hanoi. Utilizing both secondary data analysis and primary data collection via bilingual questionnaires, the research assesses the distribution of healthcare facilities, income disparities, and the potential correlation between TB and autoimmune disorders. According to participant responses, the findings suggest that healthcare coverage (UHC) may positively impact TB outcomes. However, notable limitations - such as a small sample size, demographic imbalances, and time constraints - restrict the generalizability of the results. Despite these challenges, the study emphasizes the importance of equitable healthcare access in reducing TB incidence. It also highlights the need for further research with more diverse participant samples to enhance these insights.

Introduction

The impact of income levels and healthcare access on tuberculosis (TB) in Vietnam, with a particular focus on Hanoi, is explored. Through a blend of academic insights and practical observations gained during a field trip, the research highlights the interplay between healthcare accessibility and socioeconomic factors. The field trip included interactions with local communities and institutions, providing firsthand exposure to Vietnam's healthcare landscape. By analyzing healthcare distribution and the influence of universal healthcare coverage, the study aims to shed light on critical gaps and inform strategies to address TB in densely populated urban areas.

Incorporating our assignments into our weekly lessons was a way to connect us more whilst also getting feedback from students who may understand certain aspects of the assignment better. Part of our assessments required completing

blogs that recounted the previous week's lessons and the connection that they had to our courses. This was a way of establishing a link between the different subjects we all take and the applicable sessions we had, providing a varied and subjective approach to learning. It allowed the students in the class to not only find a way to connect to all of the topics discussed but learn about things that are out of their field of study. The first week of the module was structured as an introductory session. We all familiarized ourselves with each other, gauging an understanding of our interests, courses, and personal life. This was important with such a small class as we had a field trip that involved being in another country for just over a week.

The flight to Vietnam was on the 5th of December, where we stayed at the Golden Lotus Luxury Hotel in the Old Quarter. Our packed itinerary involved trips to historical sites, temples, and the University of Hanoi. We also enjoyed amazing food at local restaurants and coffee shops. Being able to live amongst the locals assisted me with my research for my project on "Income and Access to Tuberculosis Medical Care in Vietnam." Whilst going outside and visiting the popular tourist destinations, we were able to frequently travel through the city, giving me an opportunity to observe the various medical centres and hospitals that were populated in the area. This was extremely beneficial to me as physically witnessing healthcare centres gave me some idea of their distribution and allowed me to compare it to what I am used to. Where I live in London, many medical practices allow people to have a GP who is easily accessible.

The Project

Research Question

How do income levels and access to healthcare influence the prevalence and treatment of tuberculosis (TB) in Vietnam, and what is the potential link between TB and autoimmune disorders?

Research Focus

My project aimed to explore the impacts of healthcare accessibility and income on the prevalence of TB and its progression into autoimmune disorders in

Vietnam. As part of this exploration, I sought to examine healthcare availability, income disparities, and their influence on healthcare outcomes for TB patients. To investigate the distribution of healthcare facilities in Hanoi.

Methodology

The study combined secondary data analysis with primary data collection through questionnaires distributed at the University of Hanoi. The primary data focused on participants' financial status, healthcare access experiences, and personal or second-hand experiences with TB or autoimmune disorders. On December 10, 2024, I presented my project at a conference at the University of Hanoi. To gather the primary data, I prepared a questionnaire focusing on financial status, perceptions of universal healthcare coverage (UHC), and personal experiences with TB or autoimmune disorders. The questionnaires were translated into Vietnamese and distributed by Ha Thi Kiu Trinh to students attending the conference.

Objectives

1. To investigate the distribution of healthcare facilities in Hanoi.
2. To assess the correlation between income levels and access to TB care.
3. To explore the potential link between TB and autoimmune disorders.

Variables

- Independent Variables: Access to healthcare, household income.
- Dependent Variables: Occurrence of TB, progression to autoimmune diseases.

An insight into Tuberculosis

Caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, Tuberculosis (TB) is a highly infectious disease that can be transmitted via air droplets. When transmitted, it

affects the lungs and the respiratory system (Bloom et al., 2017). Ten percent of people who have been infected have active TB within their body, whereas the other 90% have it inactive. When it is inactive, it tends to be asymptomatic. Despite inactive TB being easier to control, there is still a possibility of it being reactivated (Bloom et al., 2017). Pulmonary TB (the TB associated with infected lungs) often presents pleural effusion, confusion, vertebral collapse, cutaneous lesions, neurological deficit, weight loss, and fever (Jilani et al., 2023). A large population of the world has contracted TB. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported approximately 8 million people are infected, with an estimated 2 million dying annually. Roughly 35% of the cases were reported to be in Africa and 45% in Asia (Jilani et al., 2023).

The majority of countries that have been afflicted with TB tend to be low-income countries, with an estimated less than 10 cases per 100,000 people annually. However, when compared to the top 30 countries with TB being predominant, it is significantly lower, as they have a combined 183 cases per 100,000 people when estimated (nd, Cox and Pai, 2019). To make the situation even more dire, a form of drug-resistant TB is slowly curbing the efforts to manage TB as each year more than 500,000 people are diagnosed with rifampicin resistant variants of TB (Furin, Cox and Pai, 2019).

A study was conducted that investigated Rifampicin resistant mycobacterium Tuberculosis in Vietnam between 2020-2022. They specifically analyzed multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) in Ho Chi Minh city and Hanoi. In 2022, WHO stated that there were an estimated 100,000 people with TB in Vietnam. 4% of the diagnosis are often resistant to isoniazid, making them Rifampicin resistant strains (Furin, Cox and Pai, 2019). Being able to provide testing services is important to be able to rapidly diagnosis TB. Despite there being some diagnostic services available for the TB recognition and the resistance to Rifampicin, these services cannot alert the resistance to other kind of TB medications. (Furin, Cox and Pai, 2019). Being able to test bases on phenotypes in cultures is a very slow developing process and requires a lot of money with experts who would understand how to carry out these tests. The characteristic of the people that were chosen in the study were adults over the age of 18 that are resistant to Rifampicin. Specifically, by Xpert MTB/RIF. Xpert MTB/RIF is a test that can diagnose both Rifampin (RIF) resistant TB and TB itself. This can be done in as little as 2 hours (CDC, 2024). This study had been very important when tackling TB as it

provided an insight onto to the testing that is done in Vietnam to investigate and understand diagnosis and treatments. Their study had concluded that approximately more than 50% of the samples belonged to smokers and over 50% having previously had TB in the past (Furin, Cox and Pai, 2019). As well as that they stated that the primary risk factor for TB having a prior episode of TB is HIV.

An Insight into Autoimmune disorders

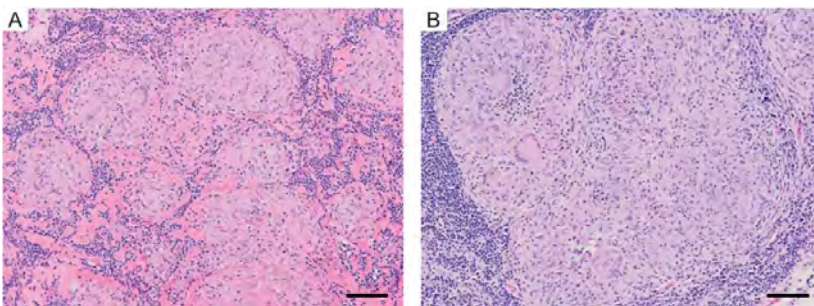
Understanding the importance of autoimmune disorders was essential for carrying out the study. An autoimmune disorder is described as a disease that causes the immune system to attack the body (Pisetsky, 2023b). There are circumstances that cause autoimmunity to occur when there are no symptoms of the disease. When the B cells and the T cells are reacting abnormally, this can be a typical cause for autoimmune disorders to occur (Pisetsky, 2023b). As well as that, diagnosing a patient could be incredibly difficult given that a lot of symptoms that occur during these disorders are very similar to symptoms of other non-related disorders (Pisetsky, 2023b). It is essential to be able to describe the direct cause of autoimmunity happens. There isn't a lot of information onto the exact cause of the irregular immune response, however some studies have suggested that some immune disorders occur due to genetic, environmental, or even infectious factors (Smith and Germolec, 1999). Some examples of autoimmune disorders could be *Insulin-Dependent Diabetes Mellitus*, *Systemic Lupus*, *Rheumatoid Arthritis*, *Erythematous*, *Multiple Sclerosis*, *Scleroderma* and *Thyroiditis* (Smith and Germolec, 1999). Women are said to have a larger risk of developing autoimmune disorders in comparison to men with a significant of cases being females (roughly 75%). (Smith and Germolec, 1999). Autoantibodies are a typical method for diagnosing autoimmune disorders, however they are not enough to diagnose a specific disease. Despite this, they are incredibly efficient in the prediction of autoimmune disease developing (Miller, 2023). There is a lot of concern about the increase of autoantibodies occurring within the population base. Like previously mentioned, a lot of cases of autoimmune disorders can be occur after infections (Miller, 2023). There are large implications that occur due to autoimmune disorders and can occasionally affect the families of those diagnosed. As well as that, there is also the impact on the health care system (Miller, 2023). It is essential that research is done in order to improve diagnostic procedures. Understanding the risk factors that increase autoimmune

disorders is also incredibly pertinent as they could be very common things that people are not aware of. There is also an importance in the improvement of preventing these diseases and developing therapeutic approaches (Miller, 2023).

The connection between TB and Autoimmune disorders

Tuberculosis is typically spread by people that have pulmonary TB. The immune system of the person that has TB is a large part of how the infection is being controlled. When a person has HIV, the risk of TB increases as the immune system is a lot weaker than it would be if the patient is healthier. The immune system can also damage the lungs. When HIV has become severe, they don't often get cavities within the lungs, but when there is immune system reconstruction, this can result in some damaged (Elkington, Tebruegge and Mansour, 2016; Miller, 2023). When tested on rabbits, there is evidence for cavities occurring more quickly when the patient has had TB before. When doctors treat TB, there is a large correlation between TB itself and autoimmune diseases. An example of this is the antibodies that are connected to autoimmune diseases like Systemic Lupus Erythematosus are found in roughly 40% of TB cases (Elkington, Tebruegge and Mansour, 2016; Miller, 2023).

Figure 1: The similarities between the lymph node biopsy in Image A, which shows sarcoidosis, and the lymph node biopsy in Image B, which shows tuberculosis (TB).



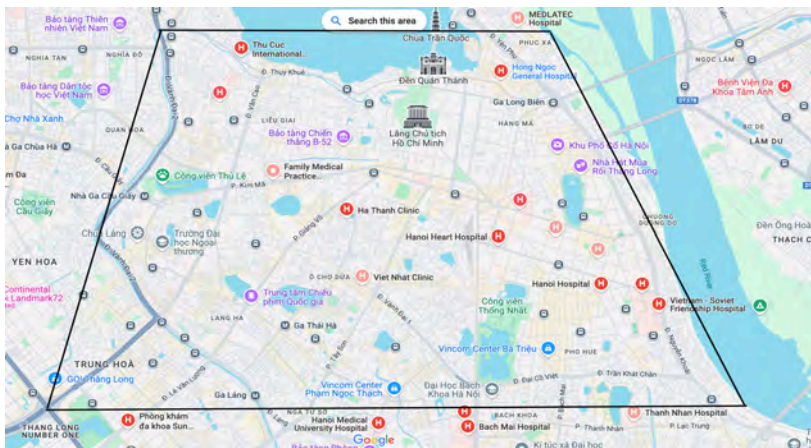
Source: Elkington, Tebruegge and Mansour, 2016; Miller, 2023)

Another example is Poncet's disease which is an inflammatory arthritis that may occur in TB diseases. It happens when there is no mycobacteria. Despite the lack

of mycobacteria, the immune system still responds to the infection that can be found in the spaces between joints. Even with no Mycobacterium, TB can cause Uveitis in the eye. Uveitis is something associated with autoimmune diseases like inflammatory bowel disease. However this can still be amended with anti mycobacterial treatment. And Uveitis is something that can be associated with inflammatory bowel disease or other autoimmune diseases. As well as that erythema Nodosom can take place When an individual has TB and Crohns Disease, it is an inflammatory cutaneous disorder which can impact the shins.

Data Overview

Figure 2: Distribution of Hospitals and Medical Practices in Hanoi

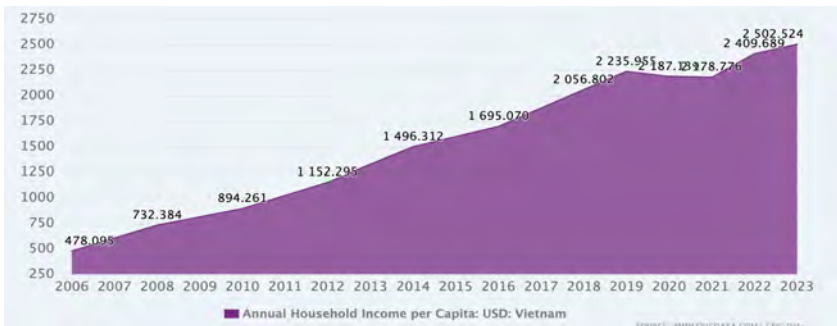


Source: Google Maps, 2019

Figure 2 shows the distribution of healthcare centres and hospitals within a specific area of Hanoi, using Google Maps (2019). The map provides insight into whether access to healthcare is limited due to location or affordability. With a population of 5,431,800 in 2024 (World Population Review, 2024), Hanoi has an average of 579 health clinics and hospitals (Yen, 2023). Dividing the population by the number of clinics indicates there are roughly 9,386 people per clinic or hospital. This ratio highlights the potential strain on healthcare resources (Elkington, Tebruegg and Mansour, 2016; Miller,2023).

From figure 3 we can see evidence that Sarcoidosis which is an autoimmune disorder and Tuberculosis can be very similar in appearance. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that through animal and clinical studies autoimmunity can develop as a result of TB and it is essential that this is further investigated.

Figure 3: The change in Annual Household Income per Capita in Vietnam



Source: Ceic Data, 2022

The household income per capita in Vietnam has steadily increased over the past decade, reaching \$2,250 USD in December 2023 (Ceic Data, 2022). This growth is attributed to economic reforms such as Doi Moi, which modernized Vietnam’s economy and infrastructure (Le, 2022).

Results

The study revealed that universal healthcare coverage (UHC) had a potentially positive impact on healthcare access for tuberculosis (TB) patients, as reflected by the responses of three out of six participants. Among them, one respondent who had direct or second-hand experience with TB confirmed the benefits of UHC. However, no correlation was observed between TB and autoimmune disorders, as none of the respondents reported such conditions. The data also highlighted a lack of sufficient responses to firmly establish the relationship between income and access to healthcare. Despite these limitations, the findings suggest a need for broader research to better understand these dynamics in Vietnam.

From the six completed questionnaires, two respondents had personal or second-hand experience with TB. Of these, one found UHC beneficial during diagnosis, while the other selected N/A. None reported autoimmune disorders. Three respondents agreed that UHC positively influenced their healthcare experiences. However, the limited sample size makes it difficult to generalize findings.

The data provided insights into income levels, TB experience, and UHC perceptions, yet lacked depth due to the small sample size. It would also be more beneficial to focus on the research from a more clinical perspective. Being able to work in an environment where these tests are done scientifically and accessing this information in a science-based university would have provided me with better results. As well as that, I could have gained a more nuanced insight into these issues in comparison to simply obtaining my information through questionnaires which may hold some bias or mistruths.

Evaluation

The project had strengths, such as cultural sensitivity in questionnaire design and the use of bilingual materials, which facilitated participation and understanding. The integration of firsthand experiences from Hanoi further enriched the study. However, significant limitations were evident.

1. **Sample Size:** The study relied on only six responses, which is inadequate for generating statistically significant results or drawing generalizable conclusions.
2. **Demographic Imbalance:** The data collection predominantly represented urban participants, neglecting rural and minority populations, which are critical to understanding healthcare disparities in Vietnam.
3. **Time Constraints:** Administering the questionnaire during a short window, specifically at the end of a lunch break, likely restricted the number of responses and quality of data collected.

Future research should focus on addressing these limitations by targeting a larger, more diverse sample and ensuring sufficient time for data collection. These steps would enhance the reliability and applicability of the findings. Future projects

should employ larger sample sizes, include diverse demographics, and allocate more time for data collection.

Conclusion

This study offers valuable preliminary insights into the intricate relationship between income levels, healthcare access, and the prevalence of tuberculosis (TB) in Vietnam, with a particular focus on the urban context of Hanoi. By systematically examining the distribution of healthcare facilities, analyzing the impacts of universal healthcare coverage (UHC), and conducting small-scale questionnaire-based research, this study has identified critical gaps and areas warranting further investigation.

The findings indicate that UHC has the potential to enhance access to healthcare services for TB patients, as supported by the experiences reported by some respondents. However, significant limitations in healthcare accessibility were also uncovered, particularly regarding affordability and the geographical distribution of services. This underscores the necessity of equitable healthcare distribution in densely populated urban areas like Hanoi, where the allocation of resources may fail to meet the demands of a growing population. Furthermore, while the potential link between TB and autoimmune disorders was not substantiated within this study, it remains a significant area for further inquiry due to its profound implications for diagnosis and treatment.

Despite its strengths - such as integrating primary and secondary data and considering cultural sensitivity - this study faced notable challenges. The small sample size and demographic imbalance constrained the generalizability of the findings, and the limited timeframe for data collection restricted the depth and breadth of insights obtainable from the study. These limitations highlight the need for more comprehensive and large-scale research efforts to build upon the initial findings.

Future research should prioritize the expansion of sample sizes to incorporate a broader demographic spectrum, ensuring the inclusion of rural and underrepresented populations to achieve a more holistic understanding of healthcare disparities in Vietnam. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to assess changes over time, providing a more robust comprehension of the

relationship between income, healthcare access, and TB outcomes. Additionally, subsequent research should explore innovative methodologies, such as using clinical data and advanced diagnostic technologies, to enhance our understanding of the connections between TB, autoimmune disorders, and other comorbidities.

The broader implications of this research are significant. Addressing healthcare disparities and improving access to TB diagnosis and treatment are vital not only for combating this infectious disease but also for fortifying the overall healthcare system in Vietnam. Collaboration among policymakers, healthcare providers, and researchers is essential to design targeted interventions that effectively address both urban and rural healthcare needs. Equitable access to healthcare represents a fundamental aspect of public health that can significantly enhance quality of life and economic productivity, particularly in a rapidly developing nation such as Vietnam

While this study lays a foundational framework for understanding the multifaceted impact of income levels and healthcare access on TB in Vietnam, it simultaneously emphasizes the critical need for ongoing research and systemic improvements. By addressing the gaps identified in this report, future efforts can yield more effective strategies for reducing TB prevalence, enhancing healthcare equity, and ultimately advancing public health outcomes in Vietnam and beyond.

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PART **III**
ECONOMICS, TRADE & DEVELOPMENT

9

The Impact of Trade Liberalization on Inflation: Evidence from Selected Asian Countries with the Emphasis on Romer Theory

Durdonabonu Davronova

Abstract

Globalization, as understood by economists, tends to prioritize external influences over internal factors in shaping inflation rates. One of the key indicators of globalization is trade openness, which can significantly impact inflation rates. This paper presents a unique research study exploring the effects of trade openness on 14 selected developing countries in East Asia and the Pacific from 1993 to 2022. By employing panel data analysis, the research offers valuable insights into how trade liberalization can serve as an effective policy tool for managing inflation in developing economies. The findings support Romer's (1993) hypothesis, revealing a significant negative relationship between trade openness and inflation for the selected East Asian nations. Consequently, the study recommends that the governments of these countries carefully consider the potential adverse effects of trade openness on inflation, ensuring that their monetary policy frameworks are both transparent and robust while maintaining the independence of their central banks.

Introduction

Trade liberalization has been a cornerstone of global economic policy, fostering greater integration and growth. Ozturk & Radouai (2020) stated that trade liberalization can accelerate economic growth by encouraging effective resource allocation and increasing total factor productivity through the transfer of technology and knowledge. However, its impact on inflation remains a debated topic, with implications for both developed and developing economies. Romer's theory claims that trade liberalization can reduce consumer prices by increasing competition and efficiency, but its impact on

inflation is controversial. Understanding this dynamic is critical, particularly in the context of East Asian and Pacific developing countries, which have undergone significant trade reforms over the past decades.

Exchanging goods and services openly fosters competition in the domestic markets, and diminishes the pricing power of firms, all of which contributes to a lower inflation rate (Kurihara, 2013). It has been stated that trade openness has been implemented as a protection measure against inflation (Chhabra and Alam, 2020). According to Romer (1993), trade openness and inflation have an inverse relationship. There are two possible explanations for this relationship: first, trade openness boosts competitiveness, which in turn decreases inflation. Furthermore, trade openness encourages diversification, thereby reducing the impact of price fluctuations and potentially leading to a reduction in inflation. However, Evans (2007) claims that trade openness is positively associated with inflation, implying that domestic countries import not only foreign manufactured goods and input but also foreign inflation. Additionally, others claim that increased economic openness to trade in a country may reduce its ability to regulate inflation through fiscal and monetary policy (Dachito and Alemu, 2017). Extensive empirical literature has attempted to determine the exact relationship between trade openness and inflation, but still, various relations have been absorbed which show the dependence on the state of the economy under the research.

This paper examines the relationship between trade liberalization and inflation in 14 selected East Asian and Pacific developing countries. These countries are ideal for this study due to their diverse economic structures, which range from emerging industrial economies to agriculture-dependent nations. The region has witnessed rapid trade expansion over recent decades, driven by liberalization policies and integration into global markets. Additionally, the varying inflationary trends among these countries provide a unique opportunity to analyze how trade openness interacts with macroeconomic factors under different economic conditions. By employing pooled OLS, Fixed Effects, and Random Effects models, the study addresses a critical gap in empirical research and compares the findings to established theoretical framework.

This paper is organized as follows. First, Section 1 briefly reviews the theoretical framework and literature, Section 2 describes the methodology and data analysis

of this study. Section 3 presents empirical findings and Section 4 summarizes the paper and provides some recommendations.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Inflation-targeting policies gained traction in the 1990s, especially in small countries that continue to be highly welcoming to international trade (WTO, 2023). Hence, the notable global macroeconomic performance of the past few years has been the significant decrease in inflation rates worldwide. Reduced constraints on trade between nations lead to greater economic integration and prosperity.

According to Roncaglia de Carvalho et al. (2017), price shocks like natural disasters will only have a short-term effect on inflation, and prices will eventually revert to equilibrium. Therefore, inflation will only result from any surplus money that the central bank "injects" into the economy when the government or the private sector uses that money to buy goods and services. Dachito and Alem (2017) state that several monetary, fiscal, and structural factors are thought to have an impact on inflation. Furthermore, as countries integrate politically and economically on a global scale, new variables can surface that could impact domestic inflation. The main concept from the Monetarist School about the relationship between openness and the inflationary process in a closed economy is that the "fiscal deficit" is the primary factor causing inflation largely as it impacts the money supply. According to Friedman (1977), inflation is a monetary phenomenon that occurs everywhere and constantly.

The Structuralist School of Thought argues that structural constraints in developing countries, such as inflexibility in nominal prices, supply shocks, bottlenecks in manufacturing and transportation, a narrow tax base, and underdeveloped financial markets, lead to price increases and inflation. This is particularly true in the farm sector. In contrast, Kydland and Prescott (1977) established the existence of a typical mechanism that encourages policymakers to produce unexpected inflation if imperfect competition arises and monetary expansion has an impact on real output. However, expansion is limited by price

and wage-setting expectations. Without prior commitments, monetary policy may result in inefficiently high inflation and inferior production. Barro and Gordon (1983) confirmed Kydland and Prescott's approach, providing extensive literature on the phenomenon. According to New Growth Theory, trade openness is likely to have an impact on inflation by influencing output. Ashra (2002) states that this link could function primarily through: a) increased effectiveness which can result in lower costs; b) improved resource distribution; c) increased capacity utilization and d) openness that can draw foreign investment, which, if managed well, could encourage output growth and ease additional pressure on the level of prices.

Empirical Literature

The question of whether trade liberalization affects inflation is highly debated. For instance, Romer's hypothesis which holds that trade openness negatively influences inflation was evaluated using cross-section data from 114 different nations. Romer's hypothesis (1993) states that openness has a significant negative impact on the rise in domestic prices and that inflation is lower in small, open countries. This was supported by the findings of Hanif and Batool's (2006) study. Also, Zakaria (2010) found that trade openness significantly lowers inflation in Pakistan.

According to Badinger (2007), trade openness has a strong negative influence on inflation. He estimated that developing countries have higher inflation than developed nations. For Terra (1998), Latin American developing countries are responsible for the negative correlation between openness and inflation. The analysis confirmed the validity of the theory for seriously indebted countries during the debt crisis. Nasser et al. (2009) disputed Terra's argument, as it was argued that a negative relationship exists for countries experiencing pre-debt crises. However, Munir et al. (2016), on the other hand, claimed that Romer's hypothesis does not apply to Asian economies, indicating that trade openness is not the primary cause of high inflation in these nations. The authors intend to examine Romer's hypothesis for specific economies. Fixed and random effects estimations demonstrate no correlation between inflation and trade openness, contradicting Romer's concept. Lotfalipour et al. (2013) contradict Romer's hypothesis, while Munir et al. (2015) confirms it. The outcome suggested that interest rates had a very detrimental effect on inflation. Similarly, Temple (2002)

challenges Romer's (1993) negative openness inflation relation by establishing a relationship between trade openness and the slope of the Phillips curve. However, the results do not support the theoretical prediction of a link between openness and standard measures of the output-inflation trade-off. Gruben and McLeod (2004) found no significant link between openness and inflation in OECD nations.

The findings of Mukhtar (2010) indicate that trade liberalization and inflation are negatively related, which confirms that Romer's hypothesis exists in Pakistan. Moreover, Sachsidia and Cardoso (2006) used current panel data methods to analyze 152 nations between 1950 and 1992. The study's econometric results support the negative correlation between inflation and openness proposed by Romer (1993). According to Sachsidia and Cardoso (2006), greater openness leads to lower inflation levels in countries. Sepehrivand and Azizi (2016) noted in their research that when trade opens, certain nations' national economies become more susceptible to outside influences, which can raise inflation and cause exchange rate swings. The study found that monetary policy has a significant impact on global markets, causing fluctuations in domestic consumption demand. Inflation is positively impacted by low competition and currency volatility, contradicting Romer's theory. Increased foreign direct investment, more efficient resource allocation, and improved production efficiency are required for open trade to lower inflation. They employed techniques including the Chow, Hausman, Lewin, Lin, and Chu unit root tests, and the Fixed and Random effects model in their study. There were six variables in total: GDP growth, inflation, exchange rate fluctuations, inflation, liquidity growth, trade openness (measured by total exports minus total imports as a percentage of GDP), and employment level.

Ojokolin et al. (2014) used the VECM approach to study the relationship between trade openness and inflation and confirmed that there was a negative correlation between the variables. Zakaria's (2010) empirical analysis of Pakistan found a positive correlation between inflation and trade openness from 1947 to 2007. Lin's (2010) study used panel data from 106 nations, including 58 in debt crisis in 1980, to examine the correlation between trade openness and inflation from 1970 to 2007. His findings indicate that trade has a detrimental impact on inflation when it is high, but not when it is low. This negative effect is linked to rising inflation and continues to grow. Economic openness to trade and inflation

in the 1990s and 2000s were shown to be significantly correlated, according to Kurihara (2013), with the effect being larger in Asian nations than in OECD nations. Moreover, trade openness and GDP coefficients were negative but not statistically significant in the 1990s. As stated by Manni and Afzal (2012), trade openness has no impact on inflation.

Furthermore, the OLS technique's results demonstrated that trade openness promotes economic growth, with higher levels of openness leading to increases in the volume of imports and exports. Gruben and McLeod (2004) used dynamic panel estimation to confirm Romer's hypothesis for economies that implemented floating exchange rates in the 1990s. Wu and Lin (2008) found that the robustness of results varies depending on whether the study includes or excludes model restrictions. The review of literature for different countries shows that there is no clear perspective regarding trading openness to reduce inflation. Thus, the following paper examines the impact of increased trade openness on inflation in 14 selected Asian countries and proposes solutions to address any negative effects on trade integrity. Additionally, the study aims to validate Romer's hypothesis for selected developing countries.

Methodology, Model, and Data

This part of the paper considers the relationship between inflation and trade openness in selected East Asian and Pacific countries. The basis of empirical analysis serves the panel data for selected 14 East Asian and Pacific countries, including Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Micronesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu and Viet Nam in the period between 1993 and 2022.

GDP per capita growth, agriculture, current account balance, domestic credit, exchange rate, claims on central government, and real interest rate are used in the model as control variables, which have positive or negative effects on inflation (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the chosen variables (source: elaborated by author).

Variable	Units/measure	Codes	Source
Inflation	Consumer Price Index, 2010=100	CPI	World Development Indicators (WDI), World Bank (online)
Trade openness	% of GDP	TO	
Real Agriculture Value added	% of GDP	Agric	
Official exchange rate	LCU per US\$, period average	InER	
GDP per capita growth	annual %	GDPpc	
Real interest rate	%	RIR	
Domestic credit to the private sector	% of GDP	DC	
Claims on central government, etc.	% GDP	CCG	
Current account balance	% of GDP	CAB	

Hypothesis testing is used to investigate the relationship between trade openness and inflation:

H0: There is no relationship between trade openness and inflation.

H1: There is a significant relationship between trade openness and inflation.

Since inflation is a complicated phenomenon, it is challenging to identify an empirical model that accurately describes the circumstances of every developing economy. Nevertheless, it is feasible to identify the primary variables that could influence inflation in various nations. Hence, we should develop an empirical model based on a theoretical framework and use an econometric method for the relevant hypothesis.

A General Dynamic Model for Inflation

A general-to-specific modeling strategy for econometric model construction has been evaluated. The general-to-specific modeling approach is related to the encompassing theory, which states that a model is said to encompass other models if it incorporates all the information offered by the other models. Using non-nested hypothesis tests, the comprehensiveness of four models previously estimated for diverse data sets and published in general academic literature will be evaluated.

The first model drawn by Mukhtar (2010), no data was provided for budget deficit variables in selected countries, so this variable is excluded. The budget

deficit is used by Mukhtar (2010) to argue that the monetary basis of the economy needs to be strengthened because it only influences inflation when it is monetized. This model was chosen as it employs all relevant variables to test the relationship:

$$CPI_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 * GDPpc_{it} + \alpha_2 * lnER_{it} + \alpha_3 * lnTO_{it} + \tau_{it} \quad (Model\ 1)$$

The second model is based on Hanif and Batool's study (2006). The model indicates agriculture value added to wheat prices in Pakistan:

$$CPI_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * lnAgr_{it} + \beta_2 * lnM2_{it} + \beta_3 * IR_{it} + \omega_{it} \quad (Model\ 2)$$

The third model represented by Badinger (2007) includes the impact of external debt stock, which is a main issue in Asian economies. Financial market openness is used by the author as an indicator of trade openness:

$$CPI_{it} = \varphi_0 + \varphi_1 * FMO_{it} + \varphi_2 * ln\ ln\ TOT_{it} + \varphi_3 * ln\ ln\ ED_{it} + u_{it} \quad (Model\ 3)$$

The last model is based on the paper by Coutinho (2012), which discusses the determinants of inflation. The following model differs from the previous model by using claims of central government instead of debt-to-GDP ratio as external debt.

$$CPI_{it} = \psi_0 + \psi_1 * CCG_{it} + \psi_2 * ln\ ln\ CA_{it} + \psi_3 * ln\ ln\ DC_{it} + v_{it} \quad (Model\ 4)$$

Since the random effect model in the current investigation violates certain assumptions, a feasible generalized least square (FGLS) regression was used to assess these models. According to the FGLS, the estimated standard errors for models 1, 2, 3, and 4 are, respectively, 4.93, 4.65, 4.97, and 4.49. It can be seen that the lowest standard error of regression is obtained from model 4. By observing the F-stat probability value from these models, model 3 is insignificant, models 1 and 2 are significant at a 1% level, and our model encompasses model 4. We consider seven control variables (indicated before), trade openness as an independent variable, and CPI (consumer price index) as a dependent variable of this academic paper.

*Table 2. Feasible Generalized Least Square (FGLS) Regression Results
 (t-values are in parentheses (t-statistics) while ***, **, and * designate the level of significance
 at 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively) (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).*

VARIABLES	FGLS
GDP pc growth	-0.699** (0.277)
Agriculture value added	-2.973*** (0.234)
Domestic credit	0.183*** (0.0392)
Current account balance	-1.452*** (0.197)
Claims of central government	-0.207* (0.108)
Exchange rate	0.00192*** (0.000265)
Trade openness	-0.0199 (0.0279)
Real interest rate	0.167 (0.165)
Constant	124.4*** (7.304)
Observations	289
R-squared	0.672

FGLS is an econometric technique that modifies common errors to provide more robust theory testing (see Table 2). The FGLS indicator indicates that specific financial elements have a significant impact on the CPI. GDP per capita growth, agriculture's contribution to GDP, domestic credit, and current account balance are all significant indicators of the consumer price index in this study. Increasing GDP per capita development and agricultural value added are associated with a fall in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) due to improved economic efficiency leading to lower inflation. An increase in domestic credit is linked to a rise in the consumer price index, which could indicate inflationary pressures resulting from increased lending and investment. The current account balance also has a negative impact on the CPI, as a current account surplus may be associated with a reduction in inflation by increasing the supply of foreign exchange and reducing pressure on domestic prices.

Cross-Sectional Dependence Test in Panel Data Analysis

Cross-sectional dependence influences estimation based on specifications such as magnitude and nature. Baltagi (2005) highlighted cross-sectional dependence as a potential issue in long-term macro panels spanning 20-30 years. When the number of years (T) exceeds the number of countries (N), the Breusch Pagan (1980) Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test is employed for estimation. The null hypothesis claims that residuals among countries are uncorrelated (the error term is assumed to be independent and identically distributed across cross-sections).

Table 3. Cross-Sectional Dependence Test Results (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).

Model with test	Results
CPI GDP pc growth Agric DC CAB CCG ER TO RIR (Fixed Effect)	F-star F (8, 274) = 71.03 Prob>F = (0.0000) *
Breusch Pagan (1980) Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test of Cross-Sectional independence	chi2(30) = 108.89 Prob>chi2(30) = (0.0000) *
CPI GDP pc growth Agric DC CAB CCG ER TO RIR (Random Effect)	Wald chi2 (8) = 373.21 Prob > chi2 = (0.0000) *
Breusch Pagan (1980) Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test for random effects	Chibar2(01) = 55.09 Prob> chibar2 = (0.0000) *

Table 3 indicates that the null hypothesis of the Breusch Pagan LM test is rejected and concludes that the cross-sectional dependence existence and error term are not independent. It also indicates that second-generation panel unit root tests should be used.

Second Generation Panel Unit Root Test Analysis

The study involved first and second-generation panel unit root tests - Maddala and Wu's (1999) Panel Unit Root test (MW) and Pesaran's (2007) Panel Unit Root test (CIPS) specified with and without trend to determine whether a panel of time series contains unit roots. Because it directly addresses cross-sectional dependence in its methodology, the CIPS test is especially helpful in panels where this is a concern. The primary distinction between the two generations of tests is the assumption of cross-sectional independence. According to Hurlin (2004), first-generation tests presume independent cross-sections, while second-generation tests allow for more flexibility.

By applying Pesaran's (2007) Panel Unit Root test, the hypothesis is formulated (at a 5% significance level):

H0: There is a unit root (the series is non-stationary).

H1: The series is stationary (no unit root).

*Table 4. Second Generation Panel Unit Root Test Results
 (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).*

(B) Pesaran (2007) Panel Unit Root test (CIPS)				
Variable	lags	Zt-bar	p-value	t-bar
CPI	0	-2.633	0.004	.
CPI	1	-3.320	0.000	.
GDP pc	0	-4.752	0.000	.
GDP pc	1	-3.314	0.000	.
TO	0	-2.376	0.009	.
TO	1	-2.049	0.020	.
CAB	0	-1.910	0.028	.
CAB	1	-1.439	0.033	.
RIR	0	82.941	0.000	.
RIR	1	44.635	0.000	.
Agric	0	-2.770	0.003	.
Agric	1	-2.339	0.010	.
ER	0	8.782	0.553	.
ER	1	9.423	0.492	.
CCG	0	11.230	0.340	.
CCG	1	12.232	0.270	.
DC	0	2.645	0.998	.
DC	1	6.192	0.906	.

The results indicate that we reject the null hypothesis in the case of CPI, GDP per capita growth, trade openness, current account balance, real interest rate, agriculture value-added, and exchange rate, and conclude that unit root does not exist in these variables. However, in the case of claims of central government and domestic credit, we fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the unit root exists at a 0.05 significance level (see Table 4).

Estimation

This academic paper uses pooled OLS, fixed and random effect models, which were used by Al Naseer et al. (2009), Samimi, et al (2012), Sachsida et al. (2003), Mehmet, et al (2009), Munir et al (2015) and stated as BLUE (best linear unbiased estimator) for the regression analysis.

By employing second-generation panel unit root and cross-sectional dependence tests, the econometric model was constructed as follows:

$$CPI_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 * TO_{it} + \alpha_2 * GDPpc_{it} + \alpha_3 * Agric_{it} + \alpha_4 * DC_{it} + \alpha_5 * CAB_{it} + \alpha_6 * CCG_{it} + \alpha_7 * lnER_{it} + \alpha_7 * RIR_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where $\alpha_0, \dots, \alpha_7$ are coefficients, and ε is an error term. Moreover, $i=1 \dots N$ is a cross-sectional unit (country name), and $t=1 \dots N$ is a time series (years). Table 5 represents the summary statistics of each variable used in this model.

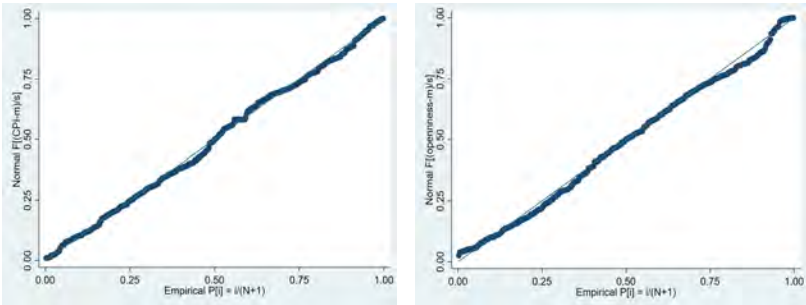
Table 5. Summary Statistics (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).

Variable	N	Mean	Std. dev	Min	Max
CPI	413	92.18982	37.74593	4.86087	251.1725
Trade openness	393	98.05865	37.17455	25.90043	220.4068
GDP pc growth	418	2.951952	4.628926	-37.21617	19.35091
Agric Value Added	420	18.5303	8.551011	7.04302	51.85271
Domestic credit	368	58.49571	44.73073	2.371986	185.3635
Current Account Balance	395	-2.209592	8.429466	-43.77123	17.22826
Claims of central government	405	1.180256	21.22882	-132.0875	53.47985
Exchange Rate	420	2849.47	5336.561	0.9781767	23271.21
Real interest rate	382	5.367247	7.369991	-42.09865	50.97911

As panel data was employed for the analysis, pooled OLS, Fixed Effects, and Random Effects models are the best methods for the regression analysis. Furthermore, panel data was examined for the four major OLS assumptions to establish if OLS fits the econometric models in this study. The first OLS assumption is *normality*, which examines the normal distribution of residuals in the model. For the normality test, the Shapiro-Wilk test or Jarque-Bera test is often used, however; visual inspection of the residuals is employed in this study (see Graph 1). One of the fundamental assumptions underlying ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is the absence of *perfect multicollinearity* among the

independent variables. *Perfect multicollinearity* refers to a case where one independent variable may be precisely and completely predicted based on the other independent variables.

*Graph 1. Normality graphs of inflation and trade liberalization
(source: elaborated by author, STATA17)*



To test for this assumption, this study employed a VIF test for each of the given econometric models. To analyze the degree of multicollinearity of independent variables, the variance inflation factor should be measured. A predictor's low or no correlation with other predictors is shown by a VIF of less than 5. According to James et al. (2013), a VIF value of greater than 10 denotes a strong, intolerable correlation of model predictors, whereas a value between 5 and 10 shows a moderate correlation (see Table 6). This table concludes that there is no multicollinearity between explanatory variables in both models, showing the degree of correlation of the variables is less than 5.

Table 6. Multicollinearity test
 (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).

	VIF values	1/VIF values
<i>DC</i>	2.13	0.468982
<i>Agric</i>	1.95	0.513100
<i>CCG</i>	1.44	0.694394
<i>TO</i>	1.31	0.761548
<i>lnER</i>	1.15	0.867894
<i>CAB</i>	1.15	0.870521
<i>GDPpc</i>	1.08	0.922388
<i>RIR</i>	1.08	0.927629

No autocorrelation is the next OLS assumption employed in this research paper. Wooldridge test (2002) for serial correlation is commonly used for panel data. The serial correlation appears when there is a correlation among the error terms in a regression model over time. In panel data, this often means that there is a time-dependent correlation between observations for a specific cross-sectional unit (such as a country or individual). Serial correlation in panel data can result in biased and inefficient parameter estimates, hence reducing the validity of statistical analysis. Hence, it is essential to conduct tests for serial correlation while analyzing panel data. To test this OLS assumption, null and alternative hypotheses were established:

H_0 : There is no first-order autocorrelation

H_a : There is first-order autocorrelation;

and if $Prob > F$ is less than 0.005 (significant), then we accept the H_a and reject the null hypothesis. After conducting the test, it was observed that the serial correlation among residuals doesn't exist, which also states parameter estimates are not biased (see Table 7).

*Table 7. No autocorrelation and homoscedasticity assumptions
 (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).*

<i>No autocorrelation test results.</i>		<i>Homoscedasticity test results</i>	
<i>Inflation</i>			
<i>Prob > F</i>	0.0541	<i>Prob > chi2</i>	0.5203

Finally, the study tested the homoscedasticity/heteroscedasticity assumption of the data, employing the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for panel data analysis. In a regression model, heteroscedasticity denotes the circumstance in which the variance of the error term changes at various levels of the independent variables. Heteroscedasticity in panel data analysis occurs when variations in the error term's variability occur between individual units or across time. Researchers use it to evaluate if the assumption of constant error variance is violated. This is crucial for ensuring the reliability of regression findings and the accuracy of statistical inference in panel data analysis. Hypothesis testing of this assumption is:

H0: Constant variance

Ha: The variances are not equally distributed;

and if Prob > chi2 is more than 0.05 (significant), then we fail to reject the H0, reject the alternative hypothesis, and conclude that the variances are equally distributed (see Table 7). After testing five main assumptions, it was observed that OLS is BLUE estimator for this selected panel data.

Fixed and Random Effects Models

The study employs panel data analysis, comparing Fixed Effects and Random Effects models to account for unobserved heterogeneity across countries. In a fixed effects model, it is assumed that the individual entities in the panel (such as individuals, firms, countries, and so on) have distinct characteristics that remain constant throughout time but could vary between entities. The fixed effects model accounts for time-invariant unobserved variables that could otherwise distort estimates. By conducting a time-dependent comparison of each entity,

this method enables concentrating on the relationship between differences in the dependent variable and the independent variables as they correspond to each entity (Torres-Reyna, 2007).

In a random effects model, it is assumed that the individual entities demonstrate random effects, which are unobserved features that vary among entities but are believed to not correlate with the predictors. In contrast to the fixed effects model, the random effects model states that the unobserved components are not connected with the independent variables. Random effects are commonly represented by random intercepts or random slopes in statistical modeling. Random intercepts believe that each entity has a unique starting point for the dependent factor, whereas random slopes allow for varying slopes for each entity (Torres-Reyna, 2007).

Hausman Test – FE or RE?

The Hausman test is used to choose between fixed and random effects and is more appropriate for panel data analysis. The null hypothesis is that the random effect model is accepted, while the alternative hypothesis is that the fixed effect model is chosen. If the Hausman test indicates that the fixed effects are statistically significant (i.e., the FE model is picked), it is considered more appropriate when individual-specific effects are correlated with the independent variables. To select between fixed and random effects, the Hausman test is estimated, where the null hypothesis is that the random effect model is preferred, and the alternative one is the fixed effect model. The results of the Hausman test state that $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.0000$, which means we reject the null hypothesis, and the Fixed Effects model is preferred in this paper.

Empirical Results and Analysis

The regression results of pooled OLS, fixed, and random effects models with robustness checks are summarized in Table 8, using the panel data for selected 14 East Asian and Pacific countries, including Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Micronesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu and Viet Nam in the period between the years 1993 and 2022. A robustness check is an approach employed to evaluate the reliability and stability of results derived from a regression model. This process involves

assessing the extent to which changes in the data, model specifications, or estimation techniques affect the sensitivity of the coefficients of regression and the overall level of model fit. This study checked the robustness of four estimated effects to control for homoscedasticity. In empirical research, it is important to check for robustness, namely with panel data, to check that the findings are not the result of specific model assumptions, sample selection, or outlier data points.

*Table 8. Pooled OLS, Fixed, and Random Effects Results with robustness check (t-values are in parentheses (t-statistics) while ***, **, and * designate the level of significance at 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively) (source: elaborated by author, STATA17).*

VARIABLES	OLS	FE	RE
GDP pc growth	-1.803*** (0.501)	-0.399 (0.841)	-1.412* (0.797)
Agriculture value added	-3.375*** (0.330)	-3.587*** (1.102)	-3.927*** (0.916)
Domestic credit	0.238*** (0.0440)	0.522** (0.178)	0.347** (0.156)
Current account balance	-1.062*** (0.205)	-0.146 (0.313)	-0.637** (0.284)
Claims of central government	-0.626*** (0.128)	-0.624** (0.276)	-0.802*** (0.258)
Exchange rate	0.00215*** (0.000251)	0.00645*** (0.00174)	0.00371*** (0.000720)
Trade openness	-0.121*** (0.0357)	-0.563*** (0.116)	-0.288*** (0.108)
Real interest rate	0.614** (0.271)	0.143 (0.309)	0.410 (0.303)
Constant	141.2*** (9.998)	153.6 (27.78)	157.9* (26.90)
Observations	294	294	294
R-squared	0.748	0.675	0.630
Country FE	NO	YES	NO
Country RE	NO	NO	YES
Number of countries	14	14	14

$$\text{Regression model: } CPI_{it} = 153.64 - 0.56 * TO_{it} - 0.40 * GDPpc_{it} - 3.59 * Agric_{it} + 0.52 * DC_{it} - 0.15 * CAB_{it} - 0.62 * CCG_{it} + 0.006 * lnER_{it} + 0.14 * RIR_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

The results of this academic paper indicate that Romer's (1993) hypothesis is true for the selected East Asian and Pacific countries, which means that there is a significant negative relationship between inflation and trade openness. Domestic credit has a positive influence on inflation, as a 1% rise causes a 0.52% increase in inflation at a 1% significance level. This indicates that excessive credit growth can fuel inflation by increasing demand for goods and services. Policymakers should monitor and regulate credit expansion to prevent overheating the economy, particularly in sectors where supply constraints exist. Implementing macroprudential policies, such as stricter credit controls or sector-specific lending limits, could help maintain price stability. There is a significant negative relationship between the claims of the central government and the inflation rate. A decline in claims from the central government may indicate fiscal discipline, enhancing public and investor confidence. This highlights the importance of maintaining fiscal prudence to manage inflationary expectations and ensure currency stability.

A 1% rise in agricultural value-added results in a 3.59% decrease in the inflation rate, as evidenced by the significant negative coefficient at the 5% significance level. This underscores the critical role of agriculture in stabilizing prices. This result is consistent with Munir et al (2015) discovery that the local inflationary process is statistically significantly influenced by the rate of growth of agricultural output. The exchange rate is significantly related to inflation, and a 1% rise in the exchange rate, a 0.006% increase in the CPI index. This finding emphasizes the inflationary impact of currency depreciation, particularly in economies reliant on imports. Policymakers should adopt measures to stabilize the exchange rate, such as building foreign exchange reserves, diversifying trade partners, and implementing sound monetary policies to mitigate the pass-through effect of exchange rate fluctuations on domestic prices. However, this academic paper does not show any significant relationship between inflation and GDP per capita growth, current account balance, and real interest rate. This suggests that these factors may have a limited direct influence on short-term inflationary trends in the selected countries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper uses the general-to-specific modeling principle to investigate the existence of Romer's hypothesis in 14 selected East Asian and Pacific developing

nations between from 1993 and 2022 while controlling for other inflation factors. The theoretical framework corresponds to the empirical results of the present study, and the selected explanatory variables meet the econometric model and expectations. The findings reveal that increased trade openness has a statistically significant deflationary impact, supporting the theoretical prediction that openness to trade can help stabilize prices. The study also shows that agriculture value added, and claims of the central government have a strong negative impact on the inflation rate, whereas domestic credit and exchange rate are significantly positively related to the dependent variable.

Policymakers in the examined East Asian and Pacific countries should enhance the capacity of monetary institutions to respond to inflationary pressures arising from external shocks. By maintaining stable exchange rates and controlling domestic credit growth, countries can mitigate the inflationary impact of trade liberalization. Governments should invest in agricultural productivity through contemporary technology, subsidies, and improved infrastructure since agriculture has a vital role in lowering inflation. This would ensure stable food prices and reduce vulnerability to supply-side shocks. Countries should diversify their trade agreements and reduce their reliance on single markets or unstable imports to mitigate the inflationary consequences of exchange rate changes. To prevent the deflationary effects of trade liberalization from being weakened, governments should concentrate on keeping balanced budgets and minimizing excessive public borrowing. The empirical findings support Romer's theory, indicating that trade liberalization reduces inflation when combined with effective macroeconomic policy. This emphasizes how crucial it is to combine trade policy with monetary and fiscal policies to achieve price stability. The study highlights the broader impact of trade openness and provides insightful advice to developing countries seeking stability and sustainable growth in a globalized economy.

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Development Dilemmas: Lessons from Vietnam's Dual Strategies

Michelle Mohaimen

Abstract

This paper is derived from my presentation at the Democratic Education Network in Hanoi in December 2024. Following the presentation, I finalized my coursework, which has evolved into this paper. This paper expands my research by using comments from colleagues and teachers at both Hanoi University and Westminster. The article examines several development tactics used in Vietnam, stressing top-down strategies guided by multinational companies like Samsung and bottom-up projects run by NGOs like Sustainable Rural Development (SRD). Using models like dependence theory, Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach, and modernization theory, the study highlights Samsung's economic contributions - job creation, industrial expansion, and technical innovation. It also addresses the dangers related to environmental damage and foreign financial dependency, though. Though they sometimes struggle with scalability, bottom-up methods highlight localized success in addressing socioeconomic inequality and environmental difficulties.

Introduction

On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh formally declared Vietnam's freedom from French colonial control and founded the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in Hanoi. Representing the change from colonial control to national independence, this significant event marked a turning point in Vietnamese history. Since then, adapting to a fast-changing technical environment and the demands of globalization, the course of growth for the newly sovereign Vietnam has greatly affected its political, social, and economic achievements.

Doi Moi's introduction in 1986 marked a dramatic change from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy, therefore producing

significant changes in Vietnam's economic structure. One clear result of this policy change has been the effective attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI), which has changed Vietnam's economic scene to be dynamic and forward-looking. Well-known multinational companies (MNCs), including Samsung, have made large capital expenditures, improving the country's industrial capacity and infrastructure. These companies' participation has not only helped to transfer technology and create jobs but also resulted in an increase in FDI, which is an absolute necessity for Vietnam's economic development.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognize the vital contributions of grassroots, bottom-up development projects. These initiatives, frequently spearheaded by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Sustainable Rural Development (SRD), emphasize the empowerment of local communities and the direct improvement of living standards. By prioritizing sustainable practices, community engagement, and the strengthening of local capacities, these initiatives play a crucial role in addressing social inequities and fostering inclusive growth.

This paper aims to give a full picture of Vietnam's growth structures by looking at the different approaches of top-down strategies, which are mostly shown by companies like Samsung, and bottom-up initiatives led by groups like SRD. This report will look at the pros and cons of these development strategies using relevant theoretical frameworks, such as dependency theory (which questions the need for foreign investment and how it might keep unequal power dynamics going) and Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach (which stresses the importance of personal agency and individual potential). The report also gives specific suggestions for how to make both ways work better. In the end, it will need a more unified approach to growth that combines the advantages of business funding with the efforts of neighbourhood groups. Vietnam can aim for more fair and long-lasting growth by getting these two sides to work together.

Concepts and Theory

Top-down development is when governments or multinational companies run big projects to boost the economy as a whole. Building up infrastructure, industrialization, and joining global markets are the main goals of these policies. Top-down development is based on the idea that multinational corporations and

state-led planning investments can boost economic growth by sharing technology, creating jobs, and raising output. Dependency theory, conversely, disagrees with this model and points out that poor countries often need foreign money, which can keep inequality going and prevent the country's own growth (Todaro & Smith, 2020; Chambers, 1983).

A Case Study of Samsung in Vietnam

In 2009, Samsung opened its first plant in Bac Ninh Province in Vietnam. Over the years, Samsung has grown its business by adding new sites in Thai Nguyen and Ho Chi Minh City. Because of these investments, Vietnam now makes up Samsung's biggest production outside of South Korea. Over 30,000 people work at the huge Bac Ninh plant, which makes smartphones, tablets, and other electronics for sale around the world. Samsung's presence has given opportunities for local suppliers, contractors, and direct jobs. This has helped small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) grow. For example, the company buys parts from more than 200 local suppliers, which helps other businesses grow and share technology knowledge. Vietnam has become a major player in the tech industry by becoming part of the global supply chain.

Samsung has also invested in projects that help communities grow. The company has set up training programs and jobs linked with universities like Hanoi University so that students can learn useful skills in high-tech fields. These attempts aim to connect academia and business so that Vietnam's growing tech sector always has talented people to hire.

Economic Contributions

Samsung's investments in Vietnam's economy have been remarkable, amounting to over \$17.5 billion directed toward the development of industrial parks, infrastructure enhancements, and research and development initiatives. This has created thousands of jobs and greatly increased the country's export earnings. The Yen Binh Industrial Park is a great example of how Samsung's investments have promoted industrial growth with on-going societal impacts. The company's operations there have not only lowered unemployment rates but also created a pleasant environment for workers. There are many useful features in the park, such as well-equipped cafeterias serving healthy food, easy access to medical

facilities and dependable transport services to make it easy for workers to get to and from work. Samsung's method balances the well-being of its workers with the efficiency of its factories showing that it cares about both economic growth and social responsibility. Samsung is a key player in Vietnam's wider economic transformation by putting the health and happiness of its workers first. This is helping to build a stronger and more stable future for the country.

Threats and Difficulties

Although Samsung makes significant and notable contributions to Vietnam's economy, its total influence perfectly illustrates dependency theory in action. Vietnam's strong dependence on Samsung for foreign direct investment (FDI) leaves the country vulnerable in many different economic respects. For example, the practice of profit repatriation—that is, returning earnings to the home nation—can seriously impede local economic development and progress. This dependence also limits Vietnamese businesses' chances to compete, innovate, and grow, restricting local sector development. Furthermore, it is becoming clear over time that Samsung's industrial activities in Vietnam have effects on the surroundings. Many times, the growth of manufacturing facilities and industries results in major environmental damage including waste management issues, air and water pollution, and deforestation. This pressing problem highlights how much stricter environmental rules and governmental controls are required to safeguard both human health and natural resources.

To effectively mitigate these risks and create a more resilient economy, the Vietnamese government should focus on diversifying its sources of foreign direct investment. This entails attracting investments from a wider range of countries and industries, which can help reduce dependency on a single corporation. Strengthening legal frameworks is equally vital; implementing policies that foster fair competition and support local businesses can empower the Vietnamese economy. Prioritizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives is essential for ensuring that international companies like Samsung contribute positively to Vietnam's social and environmental landscape. By encouraging ethical business practices and community engagement, Vietnam can work towards achieving sustainable development that benefits both the economy and its citizens in the long run.

Development from the Bottom Up

A strategy known as "bottom-up development" emphasizes strongly community-driven projects which are meant to directly solve certain social, financial, and environmental issues at the grassroots level. This approach guarantees that local community members' perspectives are heard and their demands are given top priority by their active engagement in the decision-making process. Bottom-up development helps underprivileged people to recognize their own issues and create customized solutions reflecting their own situation and ambitions and ultimately empowering them. This strategy is rooted in well-established ideas like participatory development and sustainable livelihoods, which support measures that increase local capacities rather than encouraging reliance on outside resources. Focusing on the natural strengths and abilities of a community helps to promote responsibility among local participants by means of bottom-up development.

Unlike top-down approaches, which sometimes push answers from higher authority without enough regard to local circumstances, the bottom-up model encourages inclusivity and allows a wide spectrum of voices to help to shape the development process. This inclusiveness generates development solutions that are both sustainable over the long run and culturally suitable. It also promoted social capital, therefore increasing community relationships and promoting cooperation. Bottom-up development seeks to produce strong communities that can adjust to changing conditions and guarantee that the solutions are pertinent to the people they are meant to benefit. It is hoped that investing in local knowledge and capabilities can open the way to more significant and successful growth results.

Goals of Sustainable Rural Development

Using localized initiatives, NGOs such as Sustainable Rural Development have addressed socioeconomic inequities. For example, through education and capacity-building seminars, SRD's mangrove restoration project in Quang Tri Province has strengthened environmental resilience, lowered poverty, and empowered people. These initiatives show how well bottom-up solutions could fill in for state-led and market-based solutions (Mansri & Rao, 2013). However, budget limitations and scalability issues restrict the influence of NGOs. Although

localized solutions work well, they lack the breadth to address systematic problems sustained by MNC-driven policies. Public, commercial, and non-governmental sectors thus need to work together to increase the scope and influence of these projects, therefore promoting a fairer development model.

Development Concepts and Theoretical Integration

Modernity Theory

According to the modernizing hypothesis, nations move from a traditional agrarian economy to an advanced industrial economy in a straight line. According to this view, modernizing countries will see a notable increase in living standards and major economic development. One may clearly observe this theory in Samsung's significant Vietnam investments: establishing industrial parks, Samsung has been instrumental in helping Vietnam to enter world markets. Along with strengthening the industrial foundation of the nation, these expenditures have driven major technological and infrastructure developments, therefore supporting general economic growth.

Although modernization theory stresses the need of industrialization, it sometimes ignores the related socio-environmental expenses and the dependence hazards resulting from such fast development. In Vietnam's instance, the quick modernization drive has resulted in greater socioeconomic inequality, environmental damage, and more dependency on outside investment and technology. These difficulties emphasize the need for a more complex knowledge of development that considers not just economic results but also the societal and environmental consequences of such changes (Todaro & Smith, 2020; So, 1990).

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory holds that inequality and reliance typically follow from economic interactions between industrialized and developing countries. Dependency theory looks at the difficulties Vietnam's great reliance on foreign direct investment (FDI) presents. In this sense, the predominance of international companies—especially Samsung—clearly shows the dynamics of core-periphery in action. Such dynamics result in a situation whereby

technological knowledge from international companies and external capital injection define Vietnam's economic development mostly. This dependency leads to unbalanced power dynamics that define the interaction between Vietnam and international investors most of the time. This disparity reduces Vietnam's capacity to develop and boost indigenous businesses in addition to its negotiating power in luring FDI. Consequently, this reliance on foreign investment runs the danger of undermining Vietnam's long-term developmental goals and economic sovereignty, so compromising a self-sustaining and robust economy (Todaro & Smith, 2020; So, 1990).

Amartya Sen's Capabilities Methodology

The Capabilities Approach of Amartya Sen emphasizes the need to improve human liberties and extend chances for individuals' social and personal growth. As she argues, real development calls for not only financial success but also personal capacity to participate in things one values (Sen, 1999).

In this regard, Samsung is quite important since it provides skills development programs and job possibilities for its employees. By allowing more access to employment marketplaces and improved income possibilities, these programs empower workers economically and increase their technical competencies. Workers are therefore more suited to follow their dreams, which results in more general economic empowerment of societies. But it is important to acknowledge the social and environmental disparities that sometimes follow expansion spurred on by MNCs like Samsung. Although MNCs might boost economic growth, their operations can also aggravate already existing inequalities, especially with relation to social justice and environmental sustainability. This circumstance emphasizes how urgently MNCs must embrace more inclusive and sustainable practices that give fair development top priority and solve these disparities so that development would benefit all the stakeholders.

Postcolonialism

The theory of postcolonial development looks at how colonialism still influences modern development methods. It questions how worldwide economic institutions, mostly controlled by multinational companies like Samsung, copy colonial dynamics of exploitation and reliance. Foreign direct investment reflects

neo-colonial power systems in Vietnam, in which economic liberalization gives outside capital first priority over local sovereignty. This viewpoint challenges the inequities maintained by the current global economic hierarchy by supporting more robust state-led policies and localized methods to guarantee fair and sustainable development results.

Understanding the complexity of economic liberalization can be applied to Vietnam's experience. Although the nation has adopted market-oriented reforms, these developments have resulted in more reliance on foreign capital. Vietnam has struggled to retain its sovereignty and implement autonomous policies reflecting the needs of its people. Stronger governmental interventions are proposed by this theoretical framework to guarantee a fairer distribution of the advantages of economic growth. Postcolonial philosophy aims to empower local people and defend them against possible exploitative activities of strong MNCs by supporting proactive government measures. Ultimately, the goal is to build a development model that values social justice and sustainable growth over mere economic measurements.

Comparative Study: Strengths and Weaknesses

The situation of Samsung shows the benefits of top-down growth, which at national or regional level can result in significant economic gains. Large MNCs who can mobilize major resources, provide employment, and propel technological innovations usually form part of this strategy. This approach does, however, also run the danger of fostering reliance on these companies, hence fostering economic inequality whereby the advantages are not shared equally among the people.

By involving local people and giving environmental sustainability a priority, bottom-up development plans seek to foster inclusiveness. Usually including grassroots projects that empower people and local organizations, these Bottom-up strategies sometimes suffer with limited resources and finance, which can restrict their efficacy and scalability. On the positive side though they have the advantage of promoting community involvement and greater guarantees that development initiatives are customized to the particular requirements of the local population.

Adopting a balanced strategy combining the advantages of both techniques is crucial to maximize development results in Vietnam. The country can build a more fair and sustainable development model that benefits a larger section of society and solves the important problems confronting the environment by using the efficiency and resources of MNCs while simultaneously integrating the community-centric focus of NGOs.

Applications of a Theoretical Framework

Dependency theory emphasizes the possible dangers of Vietnam's reliance on foreign capital, including vulnerability to outside economic changes and possible neglect of local businesses. By contrast, Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach stresses the need of complete development that empowers people and improves their capacity to lead happy life. Combining these two points of view helps legislators design changes that give social equality and sustainability top priority in addition to fostering economic development. This strategy would guarantee that every person has access to the tools and chances required to raise their quality of life, thereby promoting a more inclusive society where the advantages of the economy are mostly shared.

Policy Advice Notes

All of these are strategies which can be of great benefit: One should diversify FDI sources by drawing investments from other industries and geographies, so depending less on Samsung. Stiffer employment and environmental rules (which are enforced) will help to hold MNCs responsible. Working with NGOs and NGRs will help scale localized solutions and close resource bottlenecks. Subsidies and incentives help to protect young businesses, hence lowering their economic reliance. Investment in R&D and education, paying particular attention to skill development and innovation to move from a manufacturing-driven to a knowledge-based economy. Enforcing CSR projects and mixing green technologies to reduce polluting effects of rapid industrial development.

Conclusion

The development path of Vietnam offers interesting angles on the merits and drawbacks of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Accelerating economic

growth and drawing foreign capital have been greatly aided by the participation of global companies like Samsung. This dependence on a few strong corporations, however, also exposes the nation to the dangers of dependency, whereby small businesses may find it difficult to flourish on their own and can result in further population inequality.

On the other hand, non-governmental groups such as Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) highlight the amazing influence community-driven initiatives can have on grassroots development. By attending to their particular requirements and encouraging sustainable habits, these projects can strengthen localities in which they work. Still, these initiatives need more support, money, and scalability if they are to fully realize their benefits and appeal a larger audience. The Vietnamese economy and its people would benefit from a complete strategy combining the capabilities of market processes with efficient state control and grassroots projects if it is to reach long-term sustainable development. This combined approach helps to solve the fundamental systematic inequalities that still exist and advances a more inclusive economic environment. Vietnam can aim to create a development model that is not only strong and commercially profitable but also socially fair and environmentally sustainable by making sure that progress is distributed throughout several spheres of life. Such a strategy will serve to protect the environment and the welfare of its people as well as foster a strong economy.

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Beyond the Exceptionalism Thesis: Rethinking Middle Eastern Development in a Global Context

Illari Rimarachin Martinez

Abstract

Middle Eastern exceptionalism has significantly influenced academic and policy debates on the region's evolution. By demonstrating that the political, economic, and social patterns observed in the Middle East are not unique but rather reflect broader global trends, this article challenges the notion of exceptionalism. It argues that these challenges are neither exclusive to the Middle East nor inherently tied to its cultural or religious characteristics. Instead, they stem from factors such as resource dependency, authoritarian governance, colonial legacies, and popular discontent. Comparative studies of Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia reveal that post-colonial governments, resource-rich economies, and authoritarian regimes face similar structural constraints. This research moves beyond essentialist interpretations, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of Middle Eastern development within a global context.

Introduction

Middle Eastern exceptionalism has been a prominent topic in scholarly and policy debates, asserting that the developmental trajectories of the Middle East are inherently different from those of other global regions. Proponents of this perspective often attribute the distinctive characteristics of the Middle East's governance structures, economic trends, and social issues to a combination of cultural determinism, deep-rooted religious influences, and excessive reliance on resource wealth, particularly oil and gas. However, these views often overlook the complex interplay of historical, geopolitical, and economic factors that shape the region (Halliday, 1995; Said, 2003; Lewis, 2001).

This paper analyzes the thesis of exceptionalism, arguing that the developmental trajectory of the Middle East is neither anomalous nor unique. Instead, the region shares similarities with other resource-dependent economies, post-colonial states, and authoritarian regimes worldwide. By engaging with the works of esteemed scholars such as Fred Halliday and Bernard Lewis, this study situates Middle Eastern development within broader global patterns. The rentier state model, the impact of colonial legacies, and the persistence of authoritarian governance are not exclusive to the Middle East but are also evident in regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia.

The case for Middle Eastern exceptionalism overlooks structural factors that extend beyond regional boundaries. Resource-rich nations such as Venezuela and Nigeria have faced similar economic and political challenges. The lasting impact of colonial interventions is evident in the governance structures of Africa and South Asia. Furthermore, the presence of authoritarian rule in countries such as China and Russia demonstrates that political repression is not unique to the Middle East. This paper seeks to foster a comparative perspective on Middle Eastern development by challenging the notion of exceptionalism.

Development Beyond Oil Dependency

Often, justification for Middle Eastern exceptionalism is its strong dependence on oil and gas, which has fundamentally changed the political and economic systems of the area. Advocates of this point of view sometimes blame the Middle East's particular difficulties—including underdevelopment and autocratic government—for its reliance on resource riches. Still, resource reliance is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Middle East. Fred Halliday contended that in other areas including Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia, oil riches and the so-called "resource curse" have had analogous effects. Rentier economies have similarly encouraged trends of authoritarian governance, economic volatility, and a lack of diverse expansion in these spheres. Nations such as Venezuela and Nigeria, for example, reflect the Middle Eastern experience and show that depending too much on resource riches is a structural economic problem rather than a natural or unique feature of any one country.

Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani's (2015) influential concept of the rentier state provides a theoretical framework for understanding the challenges faced by

resource-dependent economies. The rentier state model suggests that when a state's revenue primarily comes from external rents, such as oil exports, rather than domestic production or taxation, it fundamentally alters the social contract. In such states, governments have little need to tax their citizens, leaving the people with limited means to demand political accountability. This dynamic often leads to the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes, as leaders exploit resource wealth to maintain power through patronage, subsidies, and repression. Furthermore, resource abundance exacerbates economic inequalities, hinders investment in other productive industries, and makes these nations vulnerable to global price fluctuations.

Although this paradigm has been widely applied to the Middle East, Halliday criticizes its exclusive focus on the region. He emphasizes that many resource-rich states outside the Middle East face similar structural challenges. For example, Venezuela, which heavily relies on oil exports, has experienced political instability, hyperinflation, and cycles of authoritarian rule. Likewise, Nigeria's resource wealth has contributed to economic mismanagement, ethnic conflict, and corruption. These examples illustrate that the "resource curse" is a global phenomenon, not limited to the Middle East. Expanding the scope of analysis reveals that resource dependency is not a hallmark of Middle Eastern exceptionalism but a common trait of rentier economies worldwide.

Furthermore, attributing the economic and political challenges of the Middle East solely to oil and gas dependency oversimplifies the region's complexity and underestimates the significance of other historical, geopolitical, and social factors. For example, countries such as Lebanon and Jordan have minimal oil reserves yet face governance and development challenges similar to those of resource-rich nations. This suggests that broader structural factors, including colonial legacies, regional conflicts, and external interventions, play a crucial role in shaping the trajectories of Middle Eastern governments.

The concept of the rentier state can be criticized for its deterministic perspective, which often oversimplifies the complex relationship between economic and political factors. While resource wealth may reinforce authoritarian tendencies, it does not preclude the possibility of economic diversification or democratic governance. Norway provides a notable contrast to the rentier state model, demonstrating that resource wealth, when managed effectively and transparently,

can coexist with democratic institutions and sustainable development. This underscores the importance of governance quality, institutional strength, and policy choices in shaping the outcomes of resource dependency. The assertion that the Middle East is uniquely defined by its rentier nature fails to account for the broader global context of resource dependency. Comparing the Middle Eastern experience with that of other resource-rich regions reveals that the challenges associated with oil wealth are not exclusive but rather part of a broader structural issue. This perspective promotes a more nuanced understanding of the Middle East, moving beyond notions of exceptionalism and recognizing the region's shared challenges as well as potential pathways for reform.

Governance: A Global Trend, Not an Exception

The notion of Middle Eastern exceptionalism largely stems from the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in the region. Governance models play a crucial role in shaping the Middle East's economic and social development. Many countries in the region are governed by authoritarian systems or absolute monarchies, where power and decision-making are centralized within a small elite. This concentration of authority weakens civil society, as wealth and political control remain in the hands of a few, hindering the development of a more balanced relationship between the ruling elite and the broader population. Although these governance models may provide stability in certain contexts, they often restrict citizen participation and hinder transparency, which negatively impacts the fair distribution of economic benefits. The absence of strong democratic institutions has created an environment where corruption and resource mismanagement are widespread, reducing the potential for economic growth to lead to inclusive development. Critics often argue that the Middle East is unique in its persistent resistance to democratic governance and its deeply entrenched authoritarian regimes. However, a comprehensive analysis of historical and global trends shows that authoritarianism is not confined to the Middle East.

Fred Halliday, a prominent scholar, has argued that many political systems in the Middle East are primarily shaped by external factors rather than being intrinsically linked to cultural or religious characteristics. Colonial legacies established rigid political institutions designed to serve imperial interests rather than local communities, a phenomenon not exclusive to the Middle East. Additionally, the Cold War had a geopolitical dimension, as both Western and

Soviet powers supported authoritarian regimes throughout the region to advance their strategic goals. These foreign interventions mirrored trends observed in other parts of the world. Latin America, for example, has experienced prolonged periods of authoritarian rule. Similar to the Middle East, this phenomenon was significantly influenced by external interference. During the Cold War, the United States and other international powers supported authoritarian regimes in Latin America under the pretext of countering communism. This example demonstrates that authoritarianism emerges from similar structural and historical conditions across many regions, challenging the notion of Middle Eastern exceptionalism.

Bernard Lewis, a scholar known for associating Islamic traditions with resistance to democracy, has acknowledged that non-democratic governance is not confined to the Islamic world. He observed that pre-modern European nations, including those now considered the origins of democracy, were governed by monarchy and various authoritarian regimes for extended periods. This argument suggests that the lack of democracy in the Middle East is not an exception, but rather a characteristic of a broader historical trend observed worldwide. The ongoing presence of authoritarianism in many parts of the world today further supports this point of view. Along with some regions of Africa, countries like China, Russia, and others have political systems characterized by centralized, non-democratic governance. These examples demonstrate that authoritarian rule is not confined to the Middle East or inherently tied to its culture or religion; instead, it often results from historical, geopolitical, and economic elements.

Colonial Legacy and External Interventions

The colonial history of the Middle East undermines the concept of uniqueness, contesting the belief that the region's issues with political instability and ineffective administration are intrinsically self-imposed. Halliday opposes this viewpoint by emphasizing how colonial powers intentionally molded the Middle East to fulfill their own agendas. Arbitrary borders, established with minimal consideration for the ethnic, religious, or tribal dynamics of the area, were enforced following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. These arbitrary boundaries not only split established communities but also engendered new, frequently antagonistic divides that continue to incite internal conflicts to the present day. The partitioning of regions like Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon resulted in

multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian populations governed by centralized regimes not prepared to handle such variety. This reflects colonial involvement in other areas, including Africa and South Asia, where similarly arbitrary border delineations resulted in persistent unrest and economic difficulties.

Halliday's argument elucidates the systemic repercussions of colonial manipulation, emphasizing that what is frequently regarded as Middle Eastern exceptionalism—a purported distinctiveness in its political and social dilemmas—is, in fact, a common result among other post-colonial states. The artificial establishment of nation-states undermined indigenous governing systems that had operated efficiently, albeit in various forms, for centuries under the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, conventional power structures were undermined or completely eradicated, creating a void that was occupied by emerging political elites, frequently appointed or endorsed by foreign entities.

The legacy of colonialism extends beyond borders and governance systems, significantly influencing global support for authoritarian governments. Throughout the 20th century, Western powers backed autocratic leaders in the Middle East to protect their geopolitical and economic interests. As Bellin (2004) points out, this pattern was not limited to the Middle East; similar interventions took place in Latin America during the Cold War. For instance, Salvador Allende was viewed by the U.S. as a Marxist threat and was brutally replaced by Augusto Pinochet, who established a military dictatorship. In both regions, external powers prioritized stability and access to resources over the promotion of democracy or the well-being of local populations.

This broader historical perspective reinforces the idea that the Middle East's political structures are not inherently exceptional but are instead shaped by global power dynamics. The enduring influence of colonialism has created a situation where governance, conflict, and economic development are deeply intertwined with external interventions and the interests of global powers. Understanding the region's struggles through this lens helps dismantle the myth of Middle Eastern exceptionalism and places its challenges within a shared, post-colonial context.

Cultural and Religious Factors: A Misinterpreted Influence

Renowned historian Bernard Lewis contends that Middle Eastern government and development have been greatly shaped by Islam. Although the idea that Islamic traditions have influenced political systems has some validity, this point of view has been extensively criticized for its overly deterministic and reductionist attitude. Lewis ignores the complex interaction of historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical elements that have molded the Middle East over millennia by blaming Islam for the political and developmental problems in the region. This reductionism obscures the varied experiences with government and reform in the region and sustains a homogeneous perspective of Islam.

Lewis's thesis has a major flaw in its reliance on cultural essentialism, the theory that some religious or cultural elements are intrinsically opposed to specific political systems, such as democracy, or resistant to change. This point of view ignores the flexibility and dynamism of Islamic traditions throughout history. Like other systems impacted by religion, Islamic governance has changed in response to shifting historical and social contexts. Lewis's emphasis on Islam as the main driver of Middle Eastern governance, for example, overlooks comparable religious influences on political systems abroad, such as the role Christianity played in shaping medieval European kingdoms or Confucianism's influence on East Asian governments. These analogies show that no single religion can be solely blamed for the political outcomes of a given region.

Furthermore, academics like Halliday, who highlight the existence of democratic movements in the Middle East and the achievements of democratic governments in other Islamic-majority nations, completely invalidate Lewis's claim that Islam is intrinsically in conflict with democracy. For instance, Indonesia and Malaysia have shown how Islam may coexist with and even enhance democratic values. These examples challenge the assertion that Islam or the cultural system it represents impedes democratic growth. Rather, they argue that historical legacies, including colonialism, authoritarianism, and foreign involvement, more accurately explain the challenges facing democracy in the Middle East than inherent cultural or religious causes. Lewis's analysis also neglects the role of external powers in shaping governance in the region. By framing the Middle East's struggles as a product of Islamic culture, he diverts attention from the impact of colonialism, artificial borders, and decades of Western support for authoritarian regimes. These historical and geopolitical forces have had profound

consequences for state-building and political stability in the region. For example, the arbitrary division of territories after World War I, combined with Cold War-era interventions, disrupted indigenous governance structures and entrenched authoritarianism. Such factors are critical to understanding the region's governance challenges, yet they are often marginalized in Lewis's framework.

Furthermore, Lewis's portrayal of Islam and the Middle East has been criticized for perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes, which depict the region as inherently backward or resistant to progress. These stereotypes have been used to justify interventionist policies and frame the Middle East as fundamentally "other" compared to the West. Edward Said, in his seminal work *Orientalism*, critiques scholars like Lewis for their role in constructing a narrative that portrays the Islamic world as stagnant and incapable of modernization. This narrative not only distorts the region's history but also undermines the agency of its people, who have long fought for political and social reform. While Lewis's work has contributed to the study of the Middle East, his arguments about Islam's role in governance and development are overly simplistic and problematic. They fail to account for the diversity of Islamic traditions, the adaptability of political systems, and the profound impact of historical and geopolitical factors. By focusing narrowly on Islam, Lewis overlooks the broader structural and historical dynamics that have shaped the region. A more nuanced and critical approach recognizes the agency of Middle Eastern societies and the complexity of their struggles for reform, democracy, and development.

Youth Unemployment and Social Unrest: A Shared Global Challenge

Another aspect frequently referenced in debates about Middle Eastern exceptionalism is its youthful demographic and the challenges associated with economic stagnation. The demographic profile of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is characterized by a significant percentage of youth, particularly those under the age of 30. The "youth bulge" is frequently regarded as a double-edged sword. It signifies substantial potential for innovation, productivity, and economic expansion. Conversely, inadequate investment in education, job development, and infrastructure may intensify unemployment, social discontent, and political instability.

It is essential to recognize that the challenges of youth unemployment and economic marginalization are not exclusive to the Middle East. Comparable issues are evident in other areas of the developing world. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, rapid population growth combined with limited access to quality education and job opportunities has created a cycle of poverty and instability. In Latin America, elevated youth unemployment rates have incited unrest, resulting in rallies advocating for enhanced equality, improved governance, and increased prospects for upward mobility. In South Asia, millions of youths entering the labor market annually encounter intense competition, restricted opportunities, and diminishing trust in state institutions to resolve these challenges.

The Arab Spring protests of 2011, often regarded as a distinctive event linked to the Middle East, exemplify the emergence of youth-led movements responding to economic grievances, social inequality, and discontent with authoritarian regimes. While these uprisings were significant, their underlying causes extend well beyond the region. In recent years, mass protests in Latin America have similarly been fueled by demands for economic justice and political accountability. A striking example is the 2019 protests in Chile, where a mere \$0.04 increase in subway fares ignited widespread demonstrations led by young university students.

In sub-Saharan Africa, movements like #EndSARS in Nigeria have underscored the efficacy of youth activism in addressing structural injustices and advocating for reform. Furthermore, uprisings in Hong Kong and India demonstrate that youth discontent with governance is a global phenomenon that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. Moreover, the demographic challenges facing the Middle East closely parallel those in other developing regions, where rapid population growth, coupled with inadequate economic development, has contributed to political instability. The notion that youth-driven protests and reform movements in the Middle East are 'exceptional' disregards the commonality of these dynamics on a global scale. Across the world, young people share many of the same frustrations—disillusionment with corrupt leadership, lack of meaningful employment, and unequal access to resources—and these frustrations often serve as the catalyst for widespread social unrest.

Instead of promoting a narrative of exceptionalism, it is crucial to acknowledge the common challenges and ambitions of youth globally. By doing so,

policymakers and scholars can embrace a more comprehensive strategy to tackle the fundamental causes of adolescent unhappiness. Efforts aimed at enhancing educational frameworks, promoting entrepreneurship, and generating inclusive economic opportunities could transform the "youth bulge" into a catalyst for global advancement instead of a cause of instability.

Reevaluating Exceptionalism

The assertion that the Middle East is 'unique' in its development fails to withstand examination when evaluated from a global and historical standpoint. Although the region encounters distinct obstacles, including a significant dependence on oil earnings, its difficulties are not singular. Numerous regions throughout the world have contended with analogous challenges, such as resource dependency, authoritarian rule, colonial legacies, cultural dynamics, and pervasive civil discontent.

The notion of Middle Eastern exceptionalism has often been used to oversimplify the complexities of the region's development. Scholars like Halliday have stressed, meanwhile, that these difficulties are not limited to the Middle East. His criticism of Middle Eastern exceptionalism emphasizes how worldwide problems, such as political unrest and economic dependency, are often addressed in connection with the Middle East. Oil dependency, for example, is also a major problem for nations in sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America, where resource abundance sometimes results in what economists call the "resource curse." Marked by economic stagnation, inequality, and corruption, this structural threat cuts across national borders. Likewise, a quality sometimes linked with the Middle East, authoritarian government, is not limited to this area. Authoritarian governments have struggled globally—from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa—in juggling authority with demands for political reform and responsibility. Many times, these governments have emerged from colonial legacies—where arbitrary borders and exploitative practices have weakened the foundations of stable government. Though important, the Middle East's colonial past reflects the experiences of Africa and South Asia, which also struggle with the long-term effects of empire.

Cultural influences are frequently overstated as a defining trait of the Middle East. While Lewis and other historians have recognized cultural inequalities as

significant in shaping the region's destiny, these differences do not necessarily preclude the Middle East from the broader patterns of world development. Cultural considerations affect political and economic systems globally, from Confucian traditions in East Asia to the influence of Catholicism in Latin America. Recognizing these impacts as components of a collective global mosaic, rather than as indicators of exceptionalism, facilitates a more nuanced understanding of regional dynamics. Though it is a trait usually associated with the Middle East, social unrest is a global phenomenon. As historically significant as it was, the Arab Spring upheavals were driven by problems including unemployment, political persecution, and economic inequality that have spurred demonstrations around the world. Protests against corruption in Peru, anti-austerity demonstrations in Greece, and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States all signify social unrest—that is, general anger with government, inequality, and limited opportunity.

Scholars and politicians should place the Middle East within a larger framework of global political and economic tendencies instead of considering it an anomaly. This helps to create plans that address the problems of the area in a more inclusive and efficient way, as well as to learn from comparable events. By appreciating the common challenges faced by countries around the world, one can help dismantle the antiquated and false concept of exceptionalism and replace it with a more integrated approach to understanding and promoting development. Reinterpreting the story helps one focus on what links the Middle East to global development rather than on what distinguishes it. This viewpoint not only helps clarify the difficulties of the area but also paves the way for cooperative solutions based on the achievements and lessons from other regions.

Conclusion

The assertion that the Middle East possesses intrinsic exceptionalism in its developmental path fails to withstand analysis when viewed from a comparative global perspective. The region encounters specific issues, many of which are common to other resource-abundant economies, post-colonial nations, and authoritarian governments globally. The endurance of rentier economies, the influence of colonial legacies, and the dominance of authoritarian rule are structural phenomena that transcend the Middle East. Authoritarianism is not only a Middle Eastern phenomenon; it is a tendency that is evident in many

historical and geographical settings. Often referred to as exceptionalist arguments, cultural and religious grounds fall short of explaining the range of governance systems both inside and outside the region.

It is more helpful to place the Middle East's development within more general global trends than to view it as an outlier. This strategy not only challenges outdated ideas of exceptionalism but also helps to enable comparable policy responses addressing shared developmental concerns. By shifting the emphasis from the differences of the Middle East to its links within the global narrative of progress, this approach fosters a more realistic and comprehensive understanding of the region's path.

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PART **IV**
FEMINISM & GENDER STUDIES

12 |

Feminist Culture Jamming and the Museum: An Institutional Response to a Disruptive Cultural Practice

Paula Lambertz

Abstract

*This research examines the activist practice of culture jamming which co-opts and reinterprets communication to subvert and critique capitalistic power relations. While it often plays with the visual language of advertising and is placed in public space, this work focuses on culture jamming and its relation to cultural institutions. The activist group The Guerrilla Girls has been exposing and criticizing art institutions and prevailing power structures in society through feminist culture jams since the 1980s. Paradoxically, they have themselves become exhibits in leading art museums around the world. Analyzing the exhibition ‘The F*Word – Guerrilla Girls and Feminist Graphic Design’ at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (MK&G) in Hamburg, Germany, this article explores how feminist culture jamming, exemplified by the Guerrilla Girls, fosters critical institutional reflection and challenges traditional museum practices. Examining aspects of the recuperation of subversive practices and the contradiction of institutional critique within the institution, this paper suggests that feminist culture jamming as exhibited and discussed in the MK&G can foster a critical reflection of art institutions and pave the way for a more democratic design of contemporary cultural organizations.*

Introduction

Culture jamming is a strategy of disrupting everyday life through surprising acts that playfully co-opt the communication means of commercial culture. It therefore appropriates and employs the language of brands, institutions, or advertisement to subvert the original meaning of disseminated messages. It is a playful and humoristic form of criticizing capitalist communication with roots tracing back to the early twentieth century. While culture jamming often operates anonymously and in public spaces, making it difficult to analyze the direct impact of this practice, the activism of the Guerrilla

Girls offers a broader scope for analysis as it directly addresses institutions of art. One of these institutions is the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (MK&G) in Hamburg, Germany which has dedicated the exhibition *The F*Word - The Guerrilla Girls and Feminist Graphic Design* (2023) to the Guerrilla Girls and their institutional criticism. Not only did the museum purchase all the works of the activist group to include in their design collection, but it has also taken the demands of the group seriously by using the exhibition as a platform to practice self-criticism.

The MK&G is one of many museums that has recently devoted itself to revising its collection. Projects like the rehang of the Tate Britain's collection of British art or the critical self-questioning of the MK&G are examples of several institutions that have undergone a revision of their collection and a "rethinking of how knowledge is constructed in the museum" (Gosselin, 2020:51). These changes focus on questions of representation and diversity both in terms of the contributing artists and the museum's audiences. Hence, these projects of rethinking, rehang, and revising take place in the consciousness that art institutions must be more inclusive if they are to serve and represent the public, self-aware of their history and power, and explicit in their intentions and limitations (Ibid.). In doing so, these changes seem to directly answer to some of the aspects raised by the Guerrilla Girls in their work. However, the question arises to what extent these critical art pieces can be exhibited and discussed in the very institutions they criticise.

Therefore, this essay aims to investigate the relation between culture jamming and art institutions by analysing how the MK&G in Hamburg self-critically engages with the work of the Guerrilla Girls. This research asks: How does the discourse evolve between activists, museums, and visitors? What are the main themes that emerge and what do these tell us about culture jamming and its relation to cultural institutions? Moreover, this research aspires to contribute to discussions on culture jamming and its political and social outputs. It seeks to shed a critical light on the institutional negotiating of criticism and whether such an appraisal of culture jams offers the potential to create pedagogical spaces for critical thinking. The interplay of activism, art institutions, and spectators opens a field of tension along which the potential for a public debate can be outlined. A critical examination of the museum's handling with culture jams is crucial as the art institution itself is part of the consumer culture the jams aim to attack

(Kuni, 2012:104). Finally, this research seeks to outline whether the art institution can be a political space in which culture jams encourage critical questioning of our world.

Culture Jamming and its Pedagogical Potential

In line with the tactic of *détournement*, which seeks to divert present means of communication and questions the power structures in which messages and images arise, culture jammers aspire to disturb and interrupt. The term jamming evokes associations with its musical use in which it refers to the disordering of established musical conventions. In a musical context, jamming defines the improvisation and informal merging of different instruments and musicians (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). It is primarily practised in jazz and rock music in so-called *jam-sessions*. It is therefore not surprising that it was the American band *Negativland* who first coined the term Culture Jamming in their 1984 album *JamCon '84*.¹ The album is presented as a convention of radio jams, a practice that describes the pirating of public radio frequencies with the aim to disrupt and use them for independent communication. *Jamming signals* are thus harnessed to distort the flow of information and the reality presented by mass media. It is the "audio-dada" (Dery, 1990) practised by *Negativland* that introduces culture jamming as a tool to discompose the flows of communication: "Cultural jamming, by extension, is artistic 'terrorism' directed against the information society in which we live" (Ibid).

From the 1980s onwards, culture jamming developed into a globally represented practice exposing corporate culture. A prominent example is the Canadian group *Adbusters Media Foundation*, which became known through campaigns such as the annual Buy Nothing Day and the Occupy Wall Street movement (2011), as well as through the publication of the magazine *Adbusters* and several so-called subvertisements in public space debunking cooperate marketing strategies. Another North American example of culture jamming is the film duo *The Yes Men*, which produced three films (2003, 2009, 2014) that hoax and expose the dehumanising tendencies in corporate and governmental organisations. While these two groups *jam* the media of the press, the internet, and film, another

¹ An audio sample of the album *JamCon 84'* is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZKHekCtZz4&t=7s> [last accessed: 4th August 2024].

popular motif of culture jammers is the billboard in public space. For instance, the British activist group *Led by Donkeys* has been criticising Conservative politicians since 2018 by satirically misappropriating their tweets and distributing these on crowdfunded billboards across the United Kingdom. Such *billboard-culture-jamming* is also pursued by the Guerrilla Girls, who disseminate feminist messages through their posters, exposing the sexism entrenched in the art industry and its institutions. (Figure 1).

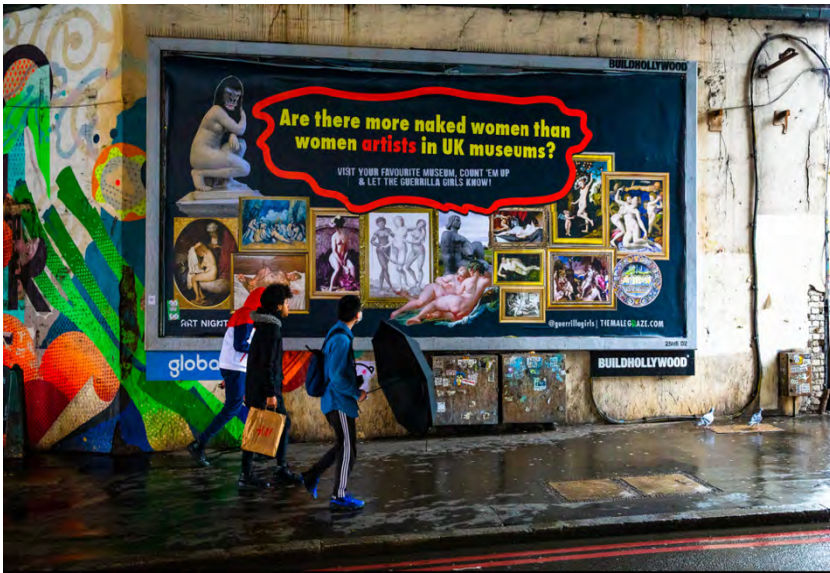


Figure 1: Example of billboard culture jamming. The Guerrilla Girls, *Are there more naked women than women artists in UK museums?* (2021). Available from: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects> [last accessed: 20th January 2025].

This symbolic reversion serves as a means of debunking the myth that confines "women in their place as muses, not creators of art, and as objects rather than agents of history" (Demo, 2000:142). Once these myths are unveiled, however, the question arises as to how the feminist culture jamming by the Guerrilla Girls can initiate actual social change? According to social scientists Sandlin and Milam, culture jamming has an inherent potential to create spaces for a "critical public pedagogy" (2009:250). By this, they mean that through the impulse of

the jams, the individual member of the audience begins to reconsider their own position in relation to others "[...] for the purposes of questioning and challenging the current political and social milieu" (Ibid:255). Once again, this approach puts emphasis on the audience as a crucial dimension that benefits a jam's unfolding. Moreover, they propose an understanding of culture jamming as a practice that can encourage participatory cultural production in which hierarchies of learning are blurred and sense of community politic can be fostered. From this viewpoint, culture is not regarded as a static product but rather as a process in which culture jammers provide an impetus for collaborative pedagogical practice. It is further argued that cultural resistance that seeks to reappropriate communication and signs can pave the way for a collaborative renegotiation of the use of public space (Ibid:253).

Moreover, by adding a pedagogical dimension to culture jamming, the practice can be directly linked to education as one of the art museum's core functions (McClellan, 2008:14). In this regard, culture jamming and museums have mutual aims: they both attempt to create educational environments and can only fulfil their purpose by actively involving the audience. The latter is thus not only a consumer but further invited to "[...] engage in the (re)creation, (re)negotiation, and (re)conceptualisation of culture" (Sandlin and Milam, 2009:251). In doing so, Sandlin and Milam ascribe to culture jamming the potential to create "transitional spaces" a term they borrowed from media and education scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth. These are "spaces of play, creativity, and cultural production; they help us bridge the boundaries between the self and the other" (Ibid:257). Therefore, these spaces invite the audience to take part in the process of knowledge-making rather than being confronted with a static cultural environment. Is not the museum as a place for encounter, education, and interpersonal exchange in which the self can learn in relation to others a predestined "transitional space"? Unlike culture jamming activities that take place in the public space, a museum that engages with culture jamming - such as the MK&G - could thus transform into a space for collective cultural production.

To further connect culture jamming with the museum, it is necessary to highlight how art institutions themselves have been objects as well as places of critique. The terms *institutional critique* and *New Institutionalism* describe practices intending to uncover the ideological structures of the art world. Thus, these are approaches that are concerned with the "relationship between art and socio-economic fields

of power" (Charnley, 2021:51) and understand the museum as a political space. According to political scholar Chantal Mouffe, it is precisely through the institutionalization of criticism that the museum can become a democratic space. Mouffe propagates museums as places where moments of immanent critique can arise "with the objective of transforming institutions into a terrain of contestation of the hegemonic order" (Mouffe, 2010). It is because these institutions are part of a particular structure of power relations that has historically evolved that they can and must be challenged. Therefore, Mouffe states that an engagement with institutions is "absolutely crucial for envisioning democratic politics today" (Ibid). Rather than dismissing museums as neoliberal institutions or keeping political interventions from their scope, "the task of radical politics is to engage with them, developing their progressive potential and converting them into sites of opposition to the neoliberal market hegemony" (Ibid.). Mouffe advises against rejecting institutions in the desire for political autonomy. Rather, these should be harnessed as public places in which conflicting positions can be confronted and "radical democratic alternatives [...] be imagined and cultivated" (Ibid.). Institutions thus transform into powerful sites of critique.

In the following paper, the MK&G is examined more closely to outline how the institution responds to the feminist culture jamming of the Guerrilla Girls and to investigate to what extent this sets off a rethinking of institutional structures.

The exhibition "The F*Word - Guerrilla Girls and Feminist Graphic Design

"Another exhibition devoted to women? Yes!" (MK&G, 2023)

Opening with the question "Is there still a problem?" the exhibition invites visitors to explore the museum's aim to examine female representation in its design collection. The starting point for this investigation is the anonymous American artists group The Guerrilla Girls whose current body of work was acquired by the museums with the help of the grant "Stiftung Hamburger Kunstsammlungen" (tr. Foundation Hamburg Art Collections). The first room showcases approximately one hundred works by the activist group, covering their published books, posters, and films. The exhibits elucidate that their criticism is not only concerned with art institutions in the USA but expands to cultural industries more broadly. Questions of representation are thus extended to the film, music, and media industries and specified through country-specific local

references. The posters provide, for example, statistical insights into the Venice Biennale in Italy, question gender stereotypes in Malaysia, or address the disproportionate visibility of male artists in shows, academia, and management positions in Ireland, summarised in the slogan "Let's toast Irish art, lads!"

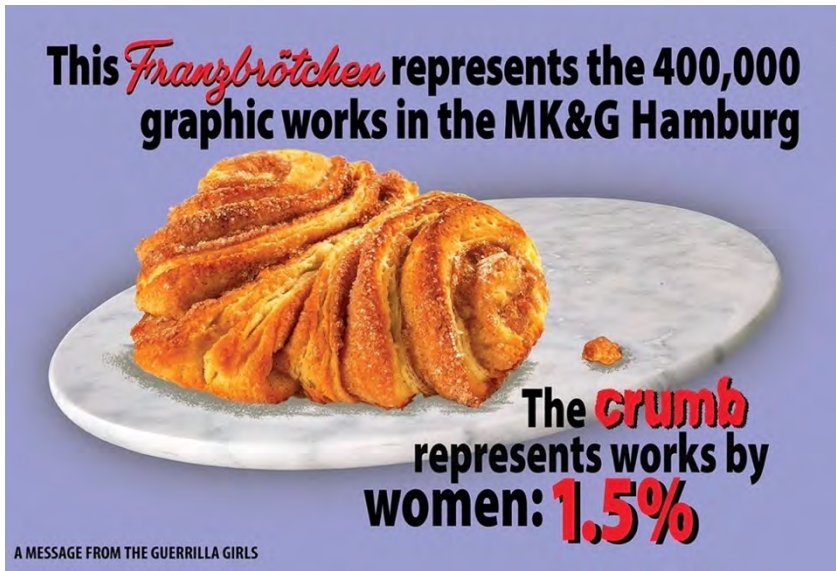


Figure 2: Example of billboard culture jamming. *The Guerrilla Girls, Are there more naked women than women artists in UK museums?* (2021). Available from: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects> [last accessed: 20th January 2025].

A striking work that has a local reference to Hamburg is the poster *Eine Botschaft der Guerrilla Girls* (trans.: A Message from the Guerrilla Girls), which was commissioned by the museum and designed by the Guerrilla Girls for the exhibition (Figure 2). It shows a Franzbrötchen, which is a pastry typical for Hamburg. A crumb lying on a plate next to the Franzbrötchen symbolising the representation of women in the MK&G's graphic design collection. The text on the poster explains: "This Franzbrötchen represents the 400.000 graphic works in the MK&G Hamburg - The crumb represents works by women: 1,5%". This work was exclusively made by the Guerrilla Girls for the exhibition, thus linking the group directly with the museum. Displaying this work alongside other pieces

of the Guerrilla Girls emphasises that the MK&G joins the ranks of the previously criticised institutions and provides an insight into the museum's statistics upon entering the exhibition. The museum only contributed to this work by providing the internal statistics on female designers in its collection, which were meticulously compiled in preparation for the exhibition. It thus committed to the uncertain outcome of the poster's message and handed down power to the artists.



Figure 3: Example of billboard culture jamming. The Guerrilla Girls, *Are there more naked women than women artists in UK museums?* (2021). Available from: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects> [last accessed: 20th January 2025].

Additionally, this poster is displayed on the facade of the museum, which is in the immediate vicinity of Hamburg central station (Figure 3). The poster thus has an impact beyond the museum and enables its message to be perceived in public space. By revealing the museum's statistics publicly this piece *jams* the expectations that passers-by have of an exhibition poster. Instead of promoting

an exhibition, the institution itself is criticized and the space that is usually used for advertising is occupied by a critical piece of culture jamming. Furthermore, the audience engaging with the poster is not only limited to museum visitors but extended to people in the public sphere. In line with culture jamming's definition, the message can therefore be described as "[...] on the move - emerging in unexpected places, adapting new contexts" (Fink and DeLaure, 2017:24). According to sociologist Oliver Marchart, this enhances the unfolding of the political message: "A truly political art practice cannot be kept within the borders of a genre such as 'political art' or 'critical art', nor can it be kept within the walls of art institutions" (Marchart, 2019:14).

Taking the artwork out of the museum space and into the public space is therefore an attempt in line with the Guerrilla Girls' strategy to expand the outreach of criticism and to "present it in a way that cannot [sic] be ignored" (The Guerrilla Girls, 2010:203). It speaks to people in an almost intrusive way and even imposes its message on people who do not initially perceive the institutional critique as such.

The Self-Reflective Institution and the Public

Based on the work of the Guerrilla Girls, the exhibition then shifts focus to the museum's own collection by giving insights into its statistics and numbers. In doing so, the museum adopts a two-dimensional approach. On the one hand, the design collection is scrutinized, revealing that it is only in the last twenty years the museum has increasingly inventoried works by women, 80% of whom live and work in Europe. On the other hand, the museum's employee figures are shown graphically, disclosing that the institution has been run by men for most of its history. This not only reveals insights into their collection but also into the internal staffing of employees. Both the Guerrilla Girls and the MK&G thus utilize a form of mimicry of institutional language. However, the impersonal language of the statistics with which the museum responds to the allegations of the Guerrilla Girls loses its authority as the museum humbly concludes from its statistical evaluation: "If we want to live up to our ambition of representing the diversity of society, we must change our acquisition strategies and exhibition practices" (MK&G, 2023). Subsequently, in the second room posters are being displayed by female artists from the museum's design collection, which have not or rarely been previously shown. These posters take, for example, a closer look at

the historical situation of women and their access to design schools and art networks. Furthermore, it is noted that the museum expands its collection in line with already existing collection patterns. It thus interrogates historical ways of collecting as well as systems of values and further aims to propose how these criteria might be changed in the future.

This approach can be interpreted as the institution's first step towards visualizing the diversity of its collection. However, as the museum's statistical data has shown, these are predominantly works by white, middle-class designers from Europe. Therefore, in a third section, the attempt is made to offer a perspective for the museum's future collection in which a more diverse selection of designs with regard to gender, ethnicity, and economic status is presented. Hence, the museum has launched an *Open Call for Feminist Zines*. The submitted zines were collected and exhibited without further pre-selection. An approach like this highlights that exclusion, discrimination, and invisibility begin with the selection of works to be collected or exhibited. Through this open submission, the museum enables that "[...] works by established artists [...] are hung alongside those of amateur or emerging artists" (George, 2015:32). Hence, the museum itself makes use of strategic juxtaposition by *jamming* the different cultural artefacts.

Furthermore, zines as a medium seem to convey an inherent consumer-critical and participatory message. They can be classified as "underground culture" (Duncombe, 1997:8) with the potential to move the critique of consumption out of its privileged position. Accordingly, zines can be understood as a medium that expresses political consciousness and stance in which consumers are lifted out of their passive position and gain autonomy through a do-it-yourself approach. By exhibiting such zines, the museum seems to perpetuate the underlying message of the artistic form: "Make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you" (Ibid:7). The *Open Call for Feminist Zines* can thus be interpreted as a gesture through which the museum surrenders its institutional power over what is preserved and exhibited to its audience and society. Once again, a characteristic of culture jamming itself is applied in the exhibition, as the former is described as a practice that "[...] solicit participation by the public at large" (Fink and DeLaure, 2017:18).

Nevertheless, the call is the most controversial aspect of the exhibition. Curator and head of the design collection Dr Julia Meer stresses in an interview that these

zines are, on the one hand, a chance to invite new voices into the museum. However, she is aware that, on the other hand, there is a lot of work behind each zine that is neither remunerated nor adequately appreciated. Accordingly, the *Open Call for Feminist Zines* draws attention to the co-dependency of audience and institution: "I find it very crucial in institutional self-questioning, that the institutions are also losing their position of power if and because they want to remain relevant" (Meer, 2023).

The self-critical approach pursued by the MK&G thus seems to not only question its own collection but also the legitimacy of the institution itself by foregrounding its dependence on the participation of artists, visitors, and the public. One could argue here with art historian Claire Bishop that the institution involves the public because it is "a guarantee of authenticity, through [its] proximity to everyday social reality" (Bishop, 2012:237). The celebration of *consumer-production* in this institutional context can be interpreted as wielding alternative culture to create "profits for the commercial culture industry" (Duncombe, 1997:9). Nonetheless, Bishop ascribes to this form of (self-)exploitation the potential to find pleasure in self-display, which can further critically reflect society's relationship to the capitalist mode of production "[...] through the presentation of conventionally underexposed constituencies" (Bishop, 2012:239). By committing to the unforeseen outcome of the call, the institution delegates control to the voices of the zine authors, provides cultural provision, and further paves the way for a more democratized culture (see Wright, 2022:55). Participative cultural production, which the MK&G invites with its *Open Call for Feminist Zines*, can thus contribute to the unfolding of "culture jamming's potential power as critical pedagogy" (Sandlin and Milam, 2015:330).

Moreover, the third room of the exhibition is introduced as an attempt to challenge ways of spectatorship through exhibiting works of female self-representation. Rather than attempting to create a "female-gaze", the exhibition aims to show a variety of voices, self-representations, and feminist concerns. The multitude of works presented in the third room thus emphasizes that feminist design history should rather be approached by recognizing its complexity, instead of reconstructing it through a uniformly feminist point of view. In doing so, the exhibition accomplishes what museum scholar Elizabeth Carnegie regards as crucial for feminist history-making in museums: "Making women's history means accepting that there is more than one history and hence no single truth"

(Carnegie, 1999:55). Indeed, it is crucial to consider that "collecting, displaying and communicating women's history means creating new histories (and therefore symbols) from existing collections" (Ibid:54).

Culture Jamming or Recuperation?

"How [...] can we imagine [...] a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification?" (Fraser, 2005:409)

This quote by artist Andrea Fraser points to a tension between activist art and cultural institutions that also demands special attention in relation to the exhibition at the MK&G. Is it possible to claim to criticize institutions from an outsider's perspective while being exhibited within the targeted machinery? Does artistic intervention of this kind contribute to the reproduction of the very structures it seeks to critique?

To explore the extent to which such contradictions are present in the discourse evolving in the exhibition at the MK&G, it is helpful to consider the concept of *Détournement* (tr. diversion, turning around) introduced by Situationists International in the 1950s. These were not only concerned with *détouring* images through which society accordingly perceives reality, but also with the absorption of subversive acts by the system this critical action seeks to defy. This account implies that there is *no* outside of the spectacle and that "criticism, dissent, and resistance occupy an internal relation to the system they oppose" (Plant, 1992:75). Hence, the term recuperation describes the process of how capitalist society co-opts and neutralizes radical critical ideas. Accordingly, this society must constantly "refine its mechanism of spectacularisation" (Canjuers and Debord, 1960) to maintain its mode of existence. In the process of recuperation, critical voices, images, and ideas are "rendered harmless by their absorption into the spectacle" (Plant, 1992:75). That means that critical gestures, like the interventions of the Guerrilla Girls, become subject to the institutions they attack, like the MK&G, and hence run the risk of supporting the "existing networks of power" (Ibid:76). Under the aspect of recuperation, the presentation of feminist culture jamming in the museum is an endeavour in which critique itself becomes a spectacle, or as Plant puts it: "[...] criticism becomes an object of contemplation itself" (Ibid:77).

To what extent does this apply to the previously outlined exhibition at the MK&G? It can be argued that exhibiting the Guerrilla Girls in the museum renders them an object of contemplation as their culture jams are given the status of a work of art, whereby their critical messages which aim to disrupt cultural institutions recede into the background. The MK&G, however, succeeds in counteracting the process of reification by taking the Guerrilla Girls at their word. Not only does the museum exhibit the group's works, but they also decidedly deal with their content and apply this to their own collection. Furthermore, by taking up the visual language of the Guerrilla Girls, the museum repeatedly refers to the group throughout the exhibition as an equal dialogue partner. The entire exhibition design is thus a *mimicry* of the Guerrilla Girls' culture jams.

Nevertheless, the Guerrilla Girls are not the sole focus of the exhibition. On the contrary, they even take back seat at times with the museum devoting itself to underrepresented female designers and its own ways of working. It is this decentralization of the activists that contributes decisively to the museum's ability to counteract a recuperation, naturalization, and de-radicalization of the criticism. The focus is not on the Guerrilla Girls as an exhibition object but on the discussion and practical realization of the criticism and demands they express. Hence, it can be stated that the museum paradoxically amplifies the messages of the Guerrilla Girls by decentralizing their art pieces in the exhibition.

Culture Jamming for Institutional Change?

In this process of institutional rethinking, the visitors to the exhibition play a pivotal role. In line with the idea that culture jamming is participatory because "culture jammers invite imitation and often provide free materials and practical instructions to empower others to become jammers, too" (Fink and DeLaure, 2017:17), the museum animates the audience to contribute to their design collection. It does this by first *jamming* its institutional operations to reveal the internal working structures of the museum. It interrupts its daily endeavour, its regular flow of communication, to expose that what is being presented is incomplete and must be restructured. It does this not simply to illustrate that the MK&G presents a design history in which women are underrepresented but with the aim of changing the existing working structures in the future. The question

driving the museum's self-criticism is: "How do we want the collection to evolve in the years ahead?" (MK&G, 2023).

The audience is a crucial dimension in approaching an answer to this question. Through interventions like the *Call for Feminist Zines* and the *Vision Wall* the museum proposes to collect together and fill in the gaps in the museum's design collection. One could argue that it is precisely this audience-oriented approach that allows the feminist culture jams of the Guerrilla Girls to unfold their potential for a critical pedagogy as Sandlin and Milam (2009) have envisaged. The MK&G provides a concrete physical-geographical platform for the culture jamming to create transitional spaces in which "the learning self is invited to play, to explore, [and] to investigate partial knowledges in the making" (Sandlin and Milam, 2009:258). Moreover, the museum can build a bridge between culture jammers and the audience. While culture jams that are placed in public spaces are criticised as 'only' pointing to grievances without proposing alternatives to them (Harold, 2004:66), the museum can become the place where jams transcend their symbolic meaning. However, that does not mean that the museum and its visitors find ultimate solutions. Instead of presenting the museum's investigation into its internal structures and statistics as a finished project, it is rather conceived procedurally as a "knowledge-in-the-making" (Bjerregaard, 2020:4) project that proposes collective research as a possible starting point for art institutional change. Although the prerogative of interpretation of design history still lies with the museum, the MK&G creates a space for public negotiation precisely because it outlines its institutional constraints. By engaging with both artists and the audience, the MK&G invites to debate and re-constitute the museum's field of action and further exposes "institutions as negotiable entities" (Ibid:15).

The museum's engagement with critique offers the possibility to increase the agency of culture jamming. The criticism is no longer separated from its target but is placed "[...] in the middle of discourses and power relation as that to which it refers" (Sternfeld, 2013:2). According to cultural scholar Nora Sternfeld, it is particularly the places where the canon of knowledge is (re)produced that inherently provide scope for change. Accordingly, it is by applying deconstructive approaches that institutional logic can be questioned. In this respect, culture jamming as a disruptive, exposing, and destructive practice seems to offer a suitable role model for museums. It allows to dislodge

and provide new perspectives on reality. Therefore, it appears significant that culture jamming is not simply exhibited in the museum but is taken up and applied as a critical practice. As such, the exhibition can foster wider awareness and challenge cultural institutions.

Conclusion

This work has explored the relationship between culture jamming and art institutions. Accordingly, the essay took an exemplary look at the exhibition *The F*Word - Guerrilla Girls and Feminist Graphic Design* at the MK&G in Hamburg to investigate how art institutions and culture jammers engage into dialogue. This case study has shown that the discourse evolving throughout the exhibition takes place less between the Guerrilla Girls and the museum than between the latter and its audience. The Guerrilla Girls form the exhibition's starting point and contribute through their renown and poster designed for the exhibition to the dissemination of the analysis of the MK&G's collection. However, the actual debates about institutional change are conducted between the museum and its visitors. This suggests that culture jamming provides impulses for institutional rethinking but that these benefit from a geographically defined space for exchange and debates to reflect on institutional logics. The example of the MK&G proposes that the museum is such a space.

This case study has outlined that the museum has not only used the works of the Guerrilla Girls as an opportunity to take a closer look at its own collection but has also become a culture jammer itself. In the same way that culture jamming appropriates and decontextualizes messages from their original context, the MK&G has tried to debunk its internal structures and open novel perspectives on the history of female designers the museum represents. Once the institutional work is exposed and interrupted, it is the zines that invite active participation in the construction of an alternative history of female designers. As culture jamming seeks to create moments of consternation by debunking prevailing systems of power, the exhibition appears to aspire to unmask museological conventions and to "[...] create sudden moments of revelation in the beholder" (McClellan, 2008:108). Hence, it can be said that it is the museum itself that *jams* its own ways of working.

If art institutions run the risk of exhibiting criticism as an object of contemplation, museums like the MK&G find ways of jamming their own institutional working methods and thus take a step towards the institutional rethinking that the Guerrilla Girls have been campaigning for since 1985. It remains to be observed how the insights gained from the exhibition will influence the MK&G's work in future. What the exhibition has shown, however, is that the disruption of cultural institutions is a crucial task of our time:

*"Jam your culture. Remake your institution."
(The Guerrilla Girls, Video Script, 2016:141)*

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Figure 2: The Guerrilla Girls, A Message from the Guerrilla Girls, (2023). Available from: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/> [last accessed: 20th January 2025].

Figure 3: Exhibition poster designed by the Guerrilla Girls on the facade of the MK&G, (2023). (Image by the author).

Interview

Meer, J. (2023). Interview conducted on the 15th of August 2023 by the author. Transcript in English and German available on request.

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Empowering Women Through Tradition: Exploring Gender Equality in Afghanistan's Craft Industries

Mursal Hakimi

Abstract

A key component of sustained social and economic development, gender equality still presents a great obstacle for developing countries such as Afghanistan. Afghan women's vital contribution to cultural preservation and family economy is highlighted by their involvement in traditional crafts including textiles manufacture and jewellery-making. But strongly ingrained cultural standards, political unrest, and institutionalized obstacles can prevent their empowerment. By means of several theoretical frameworks, including Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD), Postcolonial Feminist Theory, the Capabilities Approach, and Cultural Relativism, this paper explores the dual nature of Afghan craft industries - as both instrumental in empowerment and reflective of systematic inequalities. It examines the geographical dynamics of craft production, the intersectionality of the difficulties experienced by women, and the economic value of their contributions as well as how international cooperation might offer necessary assistance. The paper underlines ways to overcome structural obstacles, including promoting world economic ties, improving access to education and legal safeguards, and creating culturally sensitive solutions respecting local traditions while so enabling slow changes in gender norms. Using these strategies, Afghan women artists can achieve more agency, increase their contributions to national development, and assist to design a more inclusive and fair future.

Introduction

An essential component of sustainable social and economic development is gender equality—that is, equal rights, responsibilities, and chances for people of all sexes. It guarantees that, whether one is accessing resources, making decisions, or working towards their objectives, no one is disadvantaged or discriminated against solely based on their gender. Although progress has been

made worldwide in lessening gender inequalities, many underdeveloped countries still find great difficulty reaching gender equality. Often stemming from deeply set cultural standards, political unrest, and institutional hurdles sustaining uneven chances for men and women, these difficulties are Afghanistan is a particularly interesting case study since it shows how in a convoluted sociopolitical environment tradition, gender norms, and emancipation interact. Afghanistan's craft businesses—textile manufacture and jewelry-making—offer a prism through which one may view these dynamics. Deeply ingrained in Afghan cultural traditions, these crafts both represent systematic inequality and provide women with financial opportunity. Women's involvement in these fields emphasizes the dual character of conventional roles: both symbols of limited norms and means of liberation. Examining this paradox helps us to better appreciate how traditional roles and crafts impact gender relations not only in Afghanistan but in other emerging countries as well. The contributions of Afghan women in the craft sectors are examined in this paper using theoretical frameworks like the Women in Development (WID) method, Gender and Development (GAD) perspective, Postcolonial Feminist Theory, and the Capabilities method. It also explores how respect of local customs and international cooperation with culturally sensitive solutions might empower Afghan women even more. This conversation ultimately seeks to highlight ways to remove structural obstacles and promote more fair growth (Jayachandran, 2014).

Regional Dynamics and Textile Production

The textile industry is among Afghanistan's oldest and most important cultural sectors. Engaging in felt-making, tailoring, carpet weaving, and embroidery, women—especially in rural areas—form the foundation of this work. Many times, passed down over decades, these customs preserve talents and deepen ties within communities. By ensuring that traditional patterns and techniques survive in the rise of globalization and modernism, women significantly help to protect Afghanistan's cultural identity through their creative efforts. Particularly important in provinces like Herat, Kandahar, Bamiyan, and Badakhshan are women's contributions to textile manufacture. Herat is known, for example, for its traditional weaving and sophisticated needlework; many women use handlooms to produce beautiful fabrics for both domestic and export markets. With vivid designs including animals, landscapes, and geometric patterns, hand-

knotted carpets and felt-making in Bamiyan highlight the artistic legacy of the area. While women in Badakhshan create robust woollen fabrics and rugs utilizing local materials, Kandahar's traditional Pashtun needlework features complex motifs and vibrant colours. Nonetheless, despite their important contribution, women in the textile sector deal with systematic obstacles including poor infrastructure, limited access to modern markets, and low pay. These hurdles draw attention to the more general disparities still present in Afghan society. Their social and economic contributions may be much improved by bettering market access and giving women the tools they need to scale their activities.

Making Jewellery

Particularly in areas like Herat, where specific training programs have been launched to enhance their jewellery design and production techniques, skilled and culturally significant Afghan women also play a major part in the jewellery-making sector. Deeply entwined with Afghan customs, this art reflects socioeconomic level, family wealth, and cultural identification. Women artists may mix modern designs with traditional themes to create unique works appealing to local and worldwide markets. By teaching sophisticated jewellery-making processes and helping women to create independent lives, Herat programs have effectively empowered women. Many women have also set up cooperatives, which let them pool resources, share expertise, and access bigger markets together. These projects increase women's social standing in their local communities and financial independence.

Still, major challenges remain. Women have limited market opportunities, restricted access to raw materials, and cultural standards that undervalue their labour. Dealing with these issues calls for focused measures, including strengthening ties between countries for trade and endorsing Afghan jewels on world markets. This would help to magnify the financial and cultural value made by Afghan women artists.

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Empowerment

The contributions of Afghan women in the craft industries can be analyzed through several key theoretical frameworks.

The Women in Development (WID) approach stresses the critical need of include women into economic activities as a route to reach more general development goals. It first surfaced in the 1970s to challenge women's exclusion from more general development plans. This strategy acknowledges that women's needs and contributions have sometimes been undervalued in development programs. WID supports women participating in social and economic events to help them meet more general developmental goals. Emphasizing the financial gains of empowering women for general society development, it focusses on ensuring women's involvement in education, employment, and decision-making procedures. WID heralded a major turn towards gender inclusion, but it has come under fire for failing to address the more fundamental structural causes of gender inequality, including power imbalances and cultural standards (Moser, 1993).

Two important sectors in Afghanistan, the textile and jewellery sectors, provide women with chances to actively engage in the economy, therefore enabling them to acquire financial independence and skills that can improve their quality of living. Notwithstanding these chances, WID's activities expose major constraints mostly related to the ongoing systematic hurdles that women experience. Women's mobility is often limited by cultural standards and traditional practices, which keeps them from visiting marketplaces, getting education, or fully engaging in their own communities. These conventions can also restrict women's capacity for decision-making in the home and in more general society. Increasing women's involvement in economic activities alone is not enough to solve the more fundamental structural inequities causing gender gaps. Challenging and changing the fundamental cultural and institutional elements that support these inequalities will help to produce long-lasting transformation. This entails not only encouraging women's economic involvement but also pushing for changes in society perceptions and laws undermining women's rights and possibilities.

Gender and Development (GAD) is a paradigm meant to correct social power disparities and change social interactions to support actual gender equality. Emerging in the 1980s as a reaction to the shortcomings of previous frameworks such as Women in Development (WID), GAD is a development strategy Examining power relations, societal institutions, and interactions between men and women helps GAD to identify the underlying reasons of gender disparity. Unlike WID, which stresses include women into current development projects,

GAD supports changing these systems to support equality. It draws attention to intersectionality and how experiences of inequality are shaped by the interactions of class, ethnicity, and age with gender. GAD looks for lasting answers for real gender equality by seeking to change social conventions and institutions (Moser, 1993).

In Afghanistan specifically, women's involvement in crafts questions accepted gender roles and promotes notable changes in family dynamics. This more involvement helps women to have more impact on decisions taken in their homes and in the larger society. Though these encouraging advancements, women's progress is still fragile. Maintaining and expanding on these achievements is seriously hampered by Afghanistan's continuous political unrest as well as ingrained patriarchal views. The efforts of women trying to exercise their rights and responsibilities in society may be undermined by the opposition from conventional power systems. Understanding these difficulties, GAD stresses the need of using long-term plans addressing the underlying reasons of gender inequity. Such policies should guarantee legal protections against gender-based discrimination and violence, increase access to education for women and girls, and generate fair economic possibilities enabling women to fully engage in the workforce. Through emphasizing these fundamental problems, GAD hopes to build a more fair and equal society in which women's contributions are appreciated.

Feminist Theory Postcolonial Approach

Particularly in Afghanistan, where long-standing customs and religious beliefs significantly shape gender norms, this paradigm highlights the vital requirement of culturally responsive strategies to advance gender equality. Empowerment plans have to negotiate these complexities by honouring local customs and simultaneously promoting slow, significant change (Mohanty, 1988). Encouragement of traditional crafts as a means of women claiming their autonomy could be one successful strategy. Through these crafts, women can honour their cultural legacy and find economic autonomy and independence inside their own customs. This strategy lets them respect their social setting while nevertheless helping their homes and communities. But the comeback of the Taliban creates major obstacles for women's emancipation. Women's mobility has been greatly constrained and their chances to participate in economic

activities have dropped under their control. This regression not only influences specific women but also stunts social advancement and economic growth all throughout the country. Therefore, every plan for promoting gender equality in Afghanistan needs to negotiate these obstacles while keeping awareness of the cultural terrain.

Capabilities Approach (Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum)

This strategy sees empowerment as the extension of women's freedoms and choices in all spheres of life. Particularly in Afghanistan, this entails providing women with necessary tools, educational possibilities, and encouraging surroundings that let them grow in their competency. The Capabilities Approach stresses the immense and transforming power that more liberties may have by arming women with the tools they need to follow their interests - whether in artistic crafts, formal education, or leadership roles. Such empowerment highlights the important part women play in establishing a rich society by helping the community's general social and economic development as well as by encouraging individual progress (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999).

Cultural Relativism

This viewpoint stresses the pressing need for solutions specifically adapted to the particular situation of Afghanistan. They reflect cultural aspects. These solutions should respect and include local cultures, traditions, and community values while so encouraging good social change. Programs meant to empower Afghan women have to be developed with knowledge of the sociocultural terrain and appreciation of the complicated variables affecting their life.

These interventions should interact with local communities to be successful since they should match the values and way of life of the people they intend to assist. Furthermore, these programs have to progressively solve the current gender inequality in Afghan society. Programs can bring about permanent change that benefits people and enhances the larger society by enabling an environment where women might flourish and have their views heard. This strategy encourages a teamwork to empower women while honouring and including local values, therefore enabling a more equitable society (Herskovits, 1947).

Intersectionalism and Financial Worth

Age, ethnicity, financial level, and whether a woman lives in rural or urban surroundings all interact to affect her involvement in the crafts industry. Evidence points to women living in rural areas having far more difficulty obtaining infrastructure, markets, and basic supplies than those in cities. Among these challenges are few choices for transportation, uneven internet access, and less chances for skill development and training. Moreover, women from ethnic minority origins can face compounded difficulties stemming from the junction of gender and ethnic prejudice. Their access to capital, market prospects, and professional networks—all of which are essential for business success—may be greatly limited by this dual disadvantage. Notwithstanding these challenges, women-run craft businesses make significant economic benefits. According to recent surveys, many rural Afghan families rely heavily on sectors like textiles and jewellery; in some areas, these businesses can account for up to 20% of household income.

Enhancing women's access to markets, along with the provision of targeted financial support and training, has the potential to amplify the positive economic impacts of these craftsmanship sectors. Additionally, global markets and international organizations are instrumental in supporting Afghan women artisans. Working with fair-trade projects and non-governmental organizations (NGRs) helps to link Afghan handicap producers with global consumers, therefore guaranteeing that artists get just pay for their work and may create sustainable careers. Additionally, the development of internet stores and e-commerce channels offers women great chances to advertise and market their handicaps to a worldwide market. Some of the local obstacles, such limited market access and rigid cultural standards, can be lessened by these internet channels. Using technology, Afghan women artists can reach clients all over and highlight their original workmanship and inventiveness while also encouraging economic empowerment for themselves and their local communities.

Towards Afghan Women's Sustainable Empowerment

By means of traditional crafts like textile manufacture and jewelry-making, Afghan women significantly contribute to the preservation and development of their cultural legacy. Their contributions highlight not just their inventiveness

and talent but also their fortitude against many structural obstacles. These women have the power to greatly propel economic development as well as cultural preservation in their hometown. Still, systematic obstacles founded in firmly ingrained cultural standards, continuous political unrest, and significant financial restrictions can impede their attempts.

A multifarious strategy is necessary to properly handle these issues and advance sustained empowerment among Afghan women artists. This strategy should stress cultural awareness, promote global cooperation, and apply focused policy changes to create an environment that supports these women.

Developing international economic ties that improve Afghan women artists' market access is a key tactic for getting over obstacles. Afghan women can have the tools and networks required to interact with larger markets by creating and supporting worldwide alliances with fair-trade campaigns, buyers, and companies. This enlargement of market access guarantees that their goods get fair and sufficient compensation on the global scene in addition to raising the awareness of their crafts. For example, attending international trade shows gives women great visibility and chances to present their work to possible consumers all around.

Apart from improving market access, it is necessary to increase legal protections for women and education. Giving women technical training catered to the particular requirements of the crafts sector will help them to grow in their competency. Coupled with financial literacy campaigns, these projects can provide women the skills and confidence needed to run their own companies. Moreover, programs for developing leaders might enable women to fight for their rights and assume more important responsibilities in their societies. Similarly crucial is putting in place and enforcing legal protections against wage exploitation, discrimination, and limited market access that guard women. Establishing a strong legislative framework would help to create surroundings in which women artists may flourish and achieve.

Any plan meant to empower Afghan women has to also understand the need of social inclusion and cultural relevance. Programs meant to empower women should honour Afghan customs and traditions while advancing slow changes in gender roles. Men actively engaged in community-based projects as allies in the

empowerment process will help to promote gender equality and inclusivity. Fundamentally, involving males in awareness efforts stressing the importance of women's contributions to homes and society is. Such initiatives could help to reduce opposition to change and enable more society acceptance, therefore creating a more favourable atmosphere for women artists.

Conclusion

It is crucial to empower Afghan women artists using a thorough and culturally aware strategy. This approach has to solve the more fundamental systematic injustices that support gender inequality in society as well as the urgent financial difficulties these women face. Focusing on programs that give artists access to markets, capital, and tools will help them economically empower. Possible actions might be the founding of cooperatives allowing women to pool their resources and expertise, support of fairtrade alliances, and availability of business management and marketing training. By increasing their consumer base and hence improving their lives, these projects can enable women artists to become financially independent. Second, improving education is essential. Projects meant to increase women's and girls' access to high-quality education can help to empower next generations of artists. Programs for vocational training tailored especially for modern business practices and traditional crafts can provide women with the skills required to succeed in the current market. A culture of respect and equality and understanding of women's rights also depend much on education.

Furthermore, safeguarding the rights of women artists depends on strengthening the legal foundation. Legal reforms advocating gender equality and protecting women's economic rights will help create more favourable surroundings for women to function freely. In this sense, addressing concerns, including property rights, inheritance rules, and market access, is imperative.

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Shaping Minds: Gender Roles and Identities in Children's Literature Across Cultures

Mubina Rahman

Abstract

This article investigates the representation of gender roles and identities in children's literature from two distinct cultural contexts: the United Kingdom and Vietnam. It critically examines how traditional fairy tales and folktales reflect societal norms, influence cultural perceptions, and shape the developmental experiences of young readers. British literature, such as "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood," has historically reinforced rigid gender binaries, often depicting female characters as passive and male characters as active saviours. In contrast, Vietnamese folktales, notably "Tấm and Cám," foreground themes of resilience and familial duty, framing the strength of women within traditional contextual boundaries. The analysis engages with the evolution of these narratives, comparing traditional storytelling with contemporary adaptations that promote inclusivity and challenge entrenched stereotypes. It underscores the dual function of children's literature as both a custodian of cultural identity and a potential catalyst for societal transformation. By scrutinizing the societal implications and global influences that shape these stories, the essay reveals the capacity of literature to stimulate critical thinking, foster diversity, and encourage a more equitable understanding of gender roles across different cultural landscapes.

Introduction

Literature has consistently functioned as a mirror of society, encapsulating its values, conflicts, and aspirations. It plays a pivotal role in shaping individual perceptions of the world, facilitating an understanding of historical contexts, and guiding present-day social and political reality. Among its diverse forms, children's literature emerges as a critical influence in early cognitive and social development via the embedding of societal norms and ethical frameworks within the minds of young readers. Literature exerts a substantial societal impact and often incites controversy due to its capacity to challenge or

reinforce dominant ideologies and communities. This is evidenced down the centuries by events like the burning of the ancient Library of Alexandria, the recent burning of the libraries in Palestine, the subjugation of intellectuals in Asian countries Bangladesh and Vietnam, and the recent book ban in the US.

Literacy in the 21st century is at an all-time high, with children being given more access to education globally. However, the historical mode of learning was done orally and visually, and so written Children's literature is a newly emerging genre. Similarly, the purpose behind children's books and media being both educational *and* entertaining is a modern global phenomenon. Children's literature also serves as a cultural instrument that helps fulfil two principal purposes: the preservation of cultural heritage and the fostering of imagination.

In Southeast Asia, oral storytelling traditions have historically played a significant role in the transmission of moral and cultural values. These narratives, which have been handed down through generations, impart lessons about resilience, community, and justice, frequently characterized by vivid protagonists and relatable ethical dilemmas. Conversely, in the United Kingdom, the emergence of formalized children's literature in the late 18th century introduced written narratives that significantly influenced the ethical and cultural development of young readers. The texts frequently underscore themes of moral behaviour, obedience, and individualism, mirroring the prevailing societal hierarchies of their respective historical contexts. Each era and culture offers distinct interpretations of these myths that serve their particular agendas; while some interpretations preserve the fundamental teachings, others are significantly altered.

A major theme in children's literature across various cultures is the depiction of gender roles and identities. These narratives not only mirror societal expectations but also serve to reinforce or challenge them. Children are taught these expectations from a young age and adults rarely unlearn these behaviours due to fear of societal pressure. The enforcement of gender roles is the enforcement of power and authority over people using 'tradition' that is taught by their childhood stories: in many of them, women are oppressed and discouraged from learning, either psychologically or physically.

Traditional fairy tales, such as "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood" in the UK, have historically perpetuated rigid gender binaries, portraying passive female characters alongside heroic male saviours. Similarly, Vietnamese folktales like "Tấm and Cám" uphold values of familial duty and resilience, often celebrating women's strength but within conventional roles. However, both cultural contexts are undergoing a gradual evolution in their narratives, with contemporary storytelling increasingly embracing diversity and inclusivity.

This paper will examine the portrayal of gender roles and identities in children's literature within two distinct cultural contexts: the UK and Vietnam. By analysing traditional fairy tales and folktales alongside modern adaptations, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which these stories reflect and reinforce cultural norms, their societal implications, and the potential of evolving narratives to challenge stereotypes and promote progressive change.

Literature and its Role in Cultural Transmission

Literature has historically functioned as a crucial medium for cultural preservation and moral instruction, reflecting the values of diverse societies while facilitating communication across generations. Storytelling, in its various forms, has served as an essential method for instilling ethical principles, reinforcing traditions, and imparting historical lessons. Oral storytelling, in particular, has been a cornerstone of cultural transmission, predating written language. From ancient epics recounting the adventures of legendary heroes to simple narratives shared during bedtime, these stories encapsulate the essence of a community's identity, providing a framework for understanding their cultural heritage.

In Southeast Asia, oral storytelling remains an integral aspect of societal life. Local tales are frequently adapted to reflect the unique customs and evolving norms of the region. These narratives operate not only as entertainment but also as educational tools, imparting important moral lessons to children. Prevailing themes include filial piety, respect for the nation, the significance of community, and the value of hard work. For instance, folktales such as "Tấm and Cám" illustrate the complexities of human relationships and societal expectations while simultaneously conveying deeply ingrained cultural values that emphasize collectivism, moral integrity, and resilience in the face of adversity.

In contrast, the tradition of children's literature in the UK underwent a significant transformation as it transitioned from oral storytelling to the realm of written works during the late 18th century, ultimately becoming a formalized genre. Early children's books often mirrored the societal hierarchy and moral codes of their time, teaching young readers about obedience, discipline and piety. These narratives were designed not only for entertainment but also to shape children's character within the context of contemporary values. However, as societal values evolved throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, so too have the themes explored in British children's literature. Today, this literature engages with more complex themes, including individualism, social justice, cultural identity, and the intricacies of human experience. This evolution reflects the UK's status as a multicultural society and its democratic ethos, highlighting the changing dynamics of family, community, and individual identity.

Both oral storytelling and written literature underscore the dual role of literature as both a preserver of cultural identity and an agent of change. While oral storytelling adapts organically to societal transformations, written literature serves as a deliberate medium for both the reinforcement and challenge of existing norms, addressing societal issues, and proposing new ideals. This dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation renders children's literature a powerful tool for shaping societal perspectives, particularly concerning gender roles, identities, and the values that guide human interactions. Through these narratives, readers can explore diverse perspectives and cultivate critical thinking about their beliefs and the world around them, ultimately influencing the cultural discourse of future generations.

Gender Roles in Western Children's Literature

In Western societies, particularly in the UK, traditional fairy tales have historically reinforced stereotypical gender roles, establishing clear distinctions between masculinity and femininity. These narratives frequently feature active male protagonists embarking on heroic quests, while female characters are often depicted as passive figures requiring rescue. Even in tales where women occupy titular roles - such as Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty - their characterizations generally revolve around themes of beauty, obedience, and dependence, positioning them as reliant on male figures for their salvation and fulfilment.

The origins of these fairy tales can be traced back to the works of prominent authors like Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. These narratives emerged within patriarchal societies where gender roles were strictly defined and socially enforced. Consequently, many of these stories served as cautionary tales aimed at young girls, warning them about the dangers associated with defying societal norms and expectations. For instance, the narrative of Little Red Riding Hood is often interpreted as a moral lesson in conformity and obedience, illustrating the perils of straying from the designated path and underscoring the importance of adhering to societal expectations.

As noted by Kneeskern and Reeder (2022), male characters in traditional Western children's literature are seldom depicted in nurturing roles or engaged in activities deemed "feminine." Tasks such as sewing, caregiving, and emotional expression are typically relegated to female characters, which perpetuates a limited understanding of masculinity that excludes vulnerability and emotional depth. This narrow framing restricts not only the portrayal of male characters but also creates a significant gap in representing non-binary identities and experiences, thereby limiting the depiction of diverse gender expressions.

However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have ushered in substantial transformations within Western children's literature. Contemporary adaptations and original works have emerged that feature atypical protagonists, thereby subverting conventional gender norms. For example, 'The Paper Bag Princess' by Robert Munsch introduces a resourceful and independent heroine who challenges the "damsel-in-distress" trope. Instead of awaiting rescue, this character assumes control of her own destiny and questions societal expectations surrounding marriage and dependence on male figures. Concurrently, male characters are increasingly portrayed in diverse and multifaceted roles, embracing traits such as vulnerability, emotional intelligence, and nurturing behaviours.

The rise of gender-inclusive narratives in Western children's literature reflects broader social changes, including the advancements of the feminist movement and the growing visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. These progressive narratives provide crucial representation for underrepresented groups, enabling children from various backgrounds to see themselves reflected in the stories they encounter. Furthermore, these stories encourage children to critically

examine and expand their understanding of gender roles and identities, fostering a more inclusive mindset.

Despite these advancements, Kneeskern and Reeder (2022) highlight a significant ongoing challenge: atypical protagonists are often positioned as "unique" or "special," which can hinder relatability for a broader audience. This suggests that while progress has been made toward greater representation, achieving the widespread normalization of diverse gender portrayals remains an ongoing struggle within Western children's literature. There is an urgent need for narratives that depict a wider array of gender identities and experiences in ways that resonate with all young readers, thereby paving the way for a more inclusive future.

Gender Roles in Vietnamese Folk Tales

Vietnamese culture is fundamentally rooted in the values of family, community, and respect for elders, which are vividly illustrated in its rich tapestry of folk tales. In stark contrast to Western narratives that often portray passive female characters awaiting rescue, Vietnamese folk tales - most notably "Tấm and Cám" - highlight strong, active, and resilient female protagonists. These characters confront significant adversities with remarkable determination and resourcefulness, actively shaping their own destinies through cleverness, bravery, and perseverance.

"Tấm and Cám," frequently regarded as the Vietnamese equivalent of Cinderella, presents a narrative that diverges significantly from traditional Western fairy tales. Rather than focusing solely on themes of romantic love or transformation, this story emphasizes moral complexity, the significance of hard work, notions of justice, and the obligations that family members hold towards one another. The intricate plot reveals a society that balances individual agency with familial duty, showcasing Tấm's journey through betrayal and envy as she adeptly overcomes challenges to reclaim her rightful place and happiness.

In these folk tales, male characters often take on passive or secondary roles, underscoring the cultural focus on women's virtues as central figures of strength and resilience. Despite this emphasis in Tấm and Cám, many stories also reflect traditional gender expectations, depicting women primarily as caregivers and

nurturing figures while men fulfil the role of providers. Notably, when women demonstrate qualities such as strength, cunning, or intelligence, their success is frequently correlated with their ability to maintain familial harmony and adhere to traditional roles, highlighting the delicate interplay between empowerment and societal expectations.

Central to these narratives are the cultural values of collectivism and filial piety, which prioritize family and community above individualism. Characters are often motivated by a profound sense of duty towards their families and communities, and the moral lessons distilled from these tales emphasize the necessity of mutual respect and cooperation. This stands in sharp contrast to the Western conception of self-actualization and personal achievement, which typically emphasizes individual success and fulfilment.

The late 20th century Đổi Mới reforms, aimed at promoting modernization and integrating Vietnam into the global economy, have begun to challenge and transform traditional gender roles within Vietnamese society. Women have gained new opportunities in entrepreneurship and education, leading to a gradual reconfiguration of their societal standing. Nevertheless, the fundamental responsibilities assigned to women within the household largely persist, creating a complex dynamic that reflects both progress and tradition. Contemporary reinterpretations of these folk tales increasingly incorporate evolving gender roles, merging enduring values with modern concepts of gender equality and empowerment.

Moreover, urbanization and the influence of global media have significantly impacted the gender norms depicted in Vietnamese storytelling. While traditional folk tales continue to occupy a cherished place in cultural heritage, younger generations are now exposed to diverse narratives that challenge rigid gender expectations and celebrate a broader spectrum of identities. This ongoing evolution not only underscores the power of storytelling but also highlights literature's dual role in preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously fostering progressive social change, thereby facilitating dialogue and understanding in an ever-evolving society.

Comparative Analysis

The cultural priorities of the UK and Vietnam are vividly represented in their children's literature, which significantly influences and articulates gender roles and societal values. In the UK, traditional fairy tales predominantly focus on themes of individualism, personal achievement, and self-discovery, mirroring the broader Western cultural emphasis on autonomy and self-expression. Protagonists such as Cinderella and Snow White are frequently depicted as passive characters whose fates are altered by the actions of external forces, typically represented by male figures, such as princes or guardians. While contemporary narratives increasingly endeavour to subvert these traditional tropes by showcasing more assertive and independent female characters, the overarching theme of individual accomplishment remains a salient aspect of Western storytelling, reinforcing the notion that success is attainable through personal merit.

In stark contrast, Vietnamese folktales emphasize collectivism, community harmony, and the significance of interdependence within familial and societal contexts. These narratives often centre on moral choices that benefit not only the individual but also the broader community. For instance, in tales such as *Tấm* and *Cám*, female protagonists exemplify resilience, resourcefulness, and moral integrity, all while functioning within a framework of familial obligation and societal expectations. The narrative arcs within these folktales serve to impart vital cultural teachings, underscoring values such as respect for elders, duty to family, and the essential nature of unity and cooperation among community members.

Historically, the children's literature of both the UK and Vietnam has entrenched traditional binary gender roles, typically casting women as caregivers and nurturers while portraying men as providers and protectors. However, a notable shift in narrative focus can be observed in contemporary literature from both cultures, as modern authors increasingly challenge these traditional depictions. In the UK, the rise of feminist and LGBTQ+ movements has catalysed the inclusion of more diverse gender representations in children's literature, presenting protagonists who transcend conventional stereotypes and embody a broader spectrum of identities and experiences. Similarly, in Vietnam, the forces of urbanization and globalization have begun to inspire younger generations to interrogate and redefine rigid gender norms. Notwithstanding this evolution,

traditional values continue to exert a significant cultural influence, creating a complex landscape wherein old and new narratives coexist.

Despite these distinct cultural contexts, a growing influence of global media has precipitated a convergence of storytelling themes between the UK and Vietnam. As both societies increasingly engage with international narratives, children's literature from these contexts is beginning to adopt more inclusive themes that celebrate diversity and challenge entrenched stereotypes. However, the pace of this transformation is not uniform; the UK has witnessed a more rapid progression, propelled by broader societal shifts and robust advocacy for gender equality, while Vietnam's changes occur more gradually, often shaped by its deeply embedded cultural norms and traditions.

This comparative analysis illuminates the role of children's literature as both a mirror reflecting societal values and a potential catalyst for change. By examining the narratives within children's literature from the UK and Vietnam, we gain valuable insights into the cultural dynamics that shape gender roles and societal expectations. Furthermore, literature possesses the capacity to foster inclusivity, promote understanding, and challenge inequitable norms across diverse cultural contexts, ultimately contributing to the advancement of a more equitable society.

Impact of Gendered Narratives on Society

Gendered narratives in children's literature exert a profound influence on societal attitudes and the formation of individual identities. Early exposure to narratives that reinforce traditional gender roles can significantly constrain children's perceptions of their potential, embedding enduring stereotypes that often carry into adulthood. For instance, stories that feature passive female characters with dominant male protagonists, shape children's understandings of leadership, ambition, and emotional expression.

In the context of the UK, traditional fairy tales such as "Sleeping Beauty" and "Cinderella" have historically perpetuated the notion of women's dependence on male figures, thus reinforcing ideals of beauty, passivity, and compliance. In contrast, contemporary narratives, exemplified by works like "Malala's Magic Pencil" and "Ada Twist, Scientist", actively challenge these stereotypes by portraying empowered female characters as agents of social change. These

modern narratives cultivate a culture of equality and encourage young readers to embrace diverse aspirations independent of gender constraints.

Similarly, Vietnam's rich tapestry of folk tales has long highlighted collectivist values and familial responsibilities, often depicting women as resilient yet bound by traditional expectations of caregiving and harmony. While these narratives impart essential lessons on perseverance and moral integrity, they also risk reinforcing restrictive gender norms. For example, stories that celebrate a woman's strength exclusively within a familial context can constrain perceptions of gender equity and individual agency.

The implications of these narratives extend well beyond childhood, influencing societal dynamics and professional opportunities. Gendered storytelling shapes prevailing attitudes toward leadership, emotional labour, and career aspirations. Efforts in both the UK and Vietnam to modernize children's literature by integrating inclusive and diverse narratives are effecting a transformation in societal perceptions, fostering a greater acceptance of fluid gender identities and shared responsibilities among genders. Furthermore, globalization and increased access to digital platforms amplify these shifts by introducing children to a broader spectrum of narratives. Exposure to multicultural stories allows young readers to transcend traditional gender roles, thereby fostering empathy, critical thinking, and inclusivity. Narratives that celebrate non-binary or LGBTQ+ characters, such as "Julian is a Mermaid", serve to provide representation and challenge entrenched stereotypes.

Nonetheless, significant challenges remain. While progressive narratives gain traction, traditional and stereotypical storytelling continues to dominate the mainstream landscape of children's literature. This reality underscores the urgent need for ongoing advocacy aimed at ensuring diverse representation and equitable storytelling that accurately reflects the complexities of contemporary society. By reimagining gendered narratives, children's literature has the potential to become a powerful catalyst for cultural transformation, inspiring a future wherein all identities are recognized and celebrated.

Conclusion

Children's literature serves both as a reflection of societal values and as a catalyst for change, making it a vital medium for addressing entrenched gender norms. Historically, it has reinforced traditional gender roles across various cultures; however, its evolution demonstrates a powerful capacity to inspire progress and inclusivity.

In the UK, fairytales have gradually evolved to feature empowered female protagonists and more diverse representations of gender. Stories like "Sleeping Beauty" and "The Paper Bag Princess" illustrate the societal journey toward greater gender equity. Likewise, Vietnam's folk tales, while steeped in traditional values, are beginning to reflect modern shifts in gender expectations, influenced by globalization and the younger generation's openness to change.

Despite these advancements, challenges continue to exist in ensuring inclusive representation and dismantling stereotypes. The enduring prevalence of traditional narratives in both contexts underscore the need for sustained advocacy for diversity and equitable storytelling. By promoting literature that empowers all identities - regardless of gender - we can help shape future generations to embrace equality and respect. By nurturing narratives that celebrate diversity and inclusivity, children's literature can become a transformative force, bridging cultural divides and inspiring a more equitable and compassionate world. This highlights the crucial role of stories in shaping societies where every child, irrespective of their identity, can see themselves as capable, valued, and celebrated.

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Leaving Home, Finding Hope: A Refugee's Journey

Interview with Mursal Hakimi

Noor Kazmi

Mursal's journey is a remarkable story of resilience and determination. Born in Afghanistan, she faced significant challenges in her pursuit of education. Inspired by her mother's dedication to advocating for girls' rights, Mursal became passionate about fighting for the rights of girls. Now settled in the UK, Mursal has triumphantly navigated language barriers and cultural transitions to pursue her passion for education, politics, and journalism. She aspires to use her voice to advocate for Afghan women and refugees globally. Her story serves as a powerful testament to the transformative impact of education and the strength of perseverance.

Tell us about yourself. Where were you born? What was your family like? What was it like growing up and going to school?

I was born in Afghanistan. My childhood was full of promise, largely because of my mother, who was a dedicated head teacher. She was a beacon of hope in our community, especially for girls who longed for an education. However, as the political landscape shifted, education, particularly for girls, became increasingly dangerous. My mother faced daily threats, told me to stop teaching or face severe consequences. Despite the risks, she never wavered in her belief that girls had the right to learn. She became my role model, teaching me that education is worth fighting for, no matter the obstacles.

What challenges did you face as a young woman in Afghanistan that influenced your decision to leave?

My family's struggles were not just about education; they were about survival. My brother was kidnapped, and for a year, we lived in agonising uncertainty, waiting for news. The ransom demanded was beyond our means, and eventually, we received the devastating news he had been killed. The pain of losing him was unbearable. We sought safety in Kabul, but even there, we were targeted. Our home was attacked with rockets, and my father's car was bombed. He miraculously survived that attack, only to be killed later at a wedding. At that point, we knew we had no choice but to leave Afghanistan. Staying meant waiting for another tragedy. Leaving meant hope.

How did Afghanistan's political and societal changes impact your access to education?

The instability in Afghanistan meant that education was never guaranteed, especially for girls. Even when schools remained open, the fear of attacks, threats, and violence made it difficult to study freely. My mother fought for girl's education, but she did so at great personal risk. Her determination inspired me, but it also showed me how dangerous it was to be a woman who sought knowledge in Afghanistan.

Were there specific moments or events in Afghanistan that made you realise you needed to leave to pursue your dreams?

The loss of my brother and father, the constant fear, and the attacks on my family made it clear that Afghanistan was no longer safe for us. But beyond just survival, I wanted more than just safety; I wanted the chance to study, to build a future where I could make a difference, and use my education to help others.

How did your family or community view your desire to continue your education as a young woman?

My mother always supported my education, but pursuing education as a girl was not always welcomed in the broader community. There were expectations and restrictions, but I was determined to follow in my mother's footsteps and

continue learning. Trust me, even here, I struggled to go to university openly, but I had to fight.

What were the greatest risks you faced while leaving Afghanistan as a young woman?

Leaving meant stepping into the unknown. It meant abandoning everything familiar: our home, our culture, and our loved ones, without knowing if we would ever return. But staying meant living in constant fear. The hardest part was knowing that we were leaving behind the memories of my father and brother, saying goodbye to a home that no longer felt like home. The night before we left Afghanistan to the UK, my father went to a friend's son's wedding with my little brother. That night, he was attacked by a group of people at the wedding and shot. To this day, I still don't know how he died.

Were there individuals or groups who supported you during your journey?

Support came in different ways, sometimes from family and strangers who understood our struggle. But when we arrived in the UK in 2018, I had to find strength to navigate a new world.

What were the biggest cultural adjustments you had to make after arriving in the West?

Everything was different. The language, the way people interacted, and even simple things like how schools functioned. I arrived in a school where I spoke no English, surrounded by unfamiliar faces and customs. It was overwhelming. I felt lost, but I knew I had to adapt if I wanted to succeed. Every day, I pushed myself to learn the language and understand my new environment.

Did you face any challenges related to language, religion, or cultural differences when settling in?

Yes, the language barrier was one of my biggest struggles. Being unable to express myself the way I wanted sometimes made me feel invisible. But I refused to let

that define me. I worked hard, and over time, I gained confidence in my ability to communicate.

Were there Afghan or female support groups in your new community that helped you?

No, not really, but I did get a lot of support from my teachers at school.

What differences did you notice between the education systems in Afghanistan and the West?

In Afghanistan, education was often disrupted by conflict and restrictions on girls. In the UK, education was more structured and accessible, but as a newcomer, I still faced barriers, especially with language. The biggest difference was that I could study freely in the UK without fear.

Were there specific barriers you faced in accessing education as a refugee from Afghanistan?

The biggest barrier was language. Studying subjects like English and science when I could barely understand the words was extremely difficult. But I worked hard, and eventually, I passed my GCSEs and continued to Sixth Form.

What subjects or fields of study are most important to you, and why?

Politics and International Relations are my passions because I want to be part of the conversations that shape global policies. I want to help countries like Afghanistan, where people still struggle for basic rights. Journalism also inspires me because I believe in the power of storytelling to create change.

How has your journey from Afghanistan shaped your understanding of education and empowerment?

I know first-hand what it means to be denied education and to fight for it. Education is more than just learning a tool for survival, for empowerment, for

change. My journey has made me determined to ensure that other girls don't have to fight as hard as I did for their right to learn.

What are your dreams for the future, and how do you hope to contribute to Afghanistan or the global community?

I want to use my education to be a voice for those who cannot speak. Whether through politics or journalism, I want to bring attention to the struggles of Afghan women and refugees and work toward policies that create real change. Writing my book is one of my big dreams. It will be a big inspirational book for teenagers and adults.

Do you envision yourself helping other Afghan women and girls achieve their educational goals?

Absolutely. I already have experience teaching young children in villages back in Afghanistan. I want to continue that work by supporting Afghan women through mentorship, advocacy, or policy work.

What advice would you give to young Afghan girls or any girls facing restrictions on education?

To every girl who has ever been told she cannot study, I want you to know this: your education is your power. It is your voice, your strength, and your future. No one can take away the knowledge you gain. I know what it feels like to be afraid, to wonder if it is even worth fighting for, but I also know that every book you read and every lesson you learn is a step toward freedom.

When I first arrived in the UK, I struggled with the language and felt like an outsider. I could have given up, but I reminded myself why I had come so far to build a future for myself and the women and girls who never got the chance. It is not always easy, but resilience is about pushing forward, even when the road is uncertain.

Some people believe in you, even when it feels like the world is against you. Seek out mentors, teachers, and friends who will support you. And never stop learning,

whether it is in a classroom, through books, or even through personal experiences; education is everywhere.

What lessons have you learned about resilience as a young Afghan woman?

Resilience is not just about surviving hardships. It is about transforming them into strength. I have faced loss, fear, and displacement, but through it all, I have learned that resilience comes from believing in yourself when no one else does.

For me, resilience meant walking into a classroom where I did not understand a word being spoken and refusing to let that stop me. It meant failing, trying again, and pushing myself until I succeeded. It meant carrying the weight of my past while still looking forward to my future.

One of the most powerful lessons learned is that resilience is contagious. When one woman stands up for herself, she inspires others to do the same. I have seen this strength in my mother, who continued to teach girls despite the threats against her. I have seen it in Afghan women who continue seeking education, even when schools are closed. And I have seen it in myself as I navigate this new life with hope and determination.

How can governments and organisations better support Afghan women or any women seeking education?

Governments and organisations must do more than express concern; they must act. Education should not be a privilege; it should be a right accessible to every girl, no matter where she is born.

One of the most immediate ways to support Afghan women is through scholarships and remote learning opportunities. Many Afghan girls are currently unable to attend school, but with technology, online education can be a lifeline. International institutions should create programs specifically designed to reach these students.

Governments should also provide more legal pathways for refugees seeking education. When I arrived in the UK, I had to navigate an unfamiliar system, and many refugee students faced financial and bureaucratic obstacles that made

higher education nearly impossible. Universities should offer more support services, including mentorship programs and financial aid for displaced students.

Lastly, there needs to be more representation of Afghan women in decision-making spaces. Afghan women's education policies should be made with their voices at the table. We know our struggles better than anyone, so let us be part of the solution.

What message would you share with the world about the importance of education for refugees, especially women?

Education is about personal success and breaking cycles of oppression and poverty. When you educate a girl, you do not just change her life but her entire community. An educated woman can support her family, contribute to society, and inspire future generations.

To the world, I say this: do not see refugees as victims. See us as future leaders, doctors, teachers, and changemakers. We are not defined by what we have lost but by what we have the potential to achieve. Given the opportunity, we will not just survive but thrive and give back to the world in ways you cannot yet imagine.

I study today because I dream of a better tomorrow, not just for myself but for every girl who has ever been told she is not enough. I want to be part of a world where no girl must fight for her right to learn. And I hope that through my journey, I can show others that education is the light that leads the way even in the darkest times.

PART **V**
LGBTQ+ STUDIES & IDENTITY

16 |

Beyond Borders: Thailand's LGBTQIA+ Journey in Media, Advocacy, and Equality

Suphanarpha Boonkant

Abstract

Thailand is currently recognized as one of Asia's safest and most welcoming nations for LGBTQIA+, a significant departure from its conservative origins, where a culture of tolerance, progressive media portrayal, and various legislative advancements have favourably influenced the lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Thailand. Through the prism of intersectionality of media, people, politics, and positive portrayal, this essay investigates the path the country is taking towards LGBTQIA+ acceptance. Media's major influence in raising LGBTQIA+ visibility in Thailand is shown by milestones like the worldwide success of "The Hangover Part II" and the pioneering efforts of visible transgender activists Treechada "Poi," Hongyok.

Introduction

Thailand's rich cultural past explains why it is among the most-friendly countries in Asia for LGBTQIA+ people. Many gender identities have been increasingly acknowledged alongside great social openness, which is now clearly seen in all aspect of Thai society. From lavish cabaret events to highly energetic fashion presentations, the Thai LGBTQIA+ community enjoys worldwide access to some of the most vibrant queer-centric entertainment. Moreover, the constant activism carried out by many helps to advocate for everyone's rights and visibility among the LGBTQIA+ population. Often translocated as "ladyboy," the moniker "Kathoey" emphasizes the cultural value and visibility of transgender people in Thailand. In Thailand, kathoey—ladyboy—are revered for their unique performance and gender presentation. Buddhism is the source of this general acceptance since it advances nonjudging attitudes, compassion, and empathy. These courses provide an environment that

welcomes and supports all kinds of variation, so making sure LGBTQIA+ people feel valued and included. Nonetheless, institutional problems and political motives continue to be barriers to fully legal and social equality for LGBTQIA+ people living in Thailand.

Historically, conservative political opinions prevailing cultural norms, and societal views have, in various ways, impeded legislative advancement and activism, leaving the LGBTQIA+ population nearly entirely vulnerable. The legal acknowledgement of same-sex unions, extensive anti-discrimination laws, and the provision of non-subsidized healthcare are among the fundamental challenges confronted with a nearly insurmountable barrier. The lack of legal recognition obstructs the provision of fundamental rights essential for the welfare, dignity, and security of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

A change has lately accompanied increased media attention and strong grassroots movements. Using both online and offline media, activists, supporters, and community leaders have successfully raised awareness, informed the public, and strengthened support inside the LGBTQIA+ group as well as in the larger society. The rise of several social movements has helped to identify and coordinate different groups to promote common goals including justice, equality, and human rights, so changing society to be more sensitive and encouraging. This improvement will enable more support for LGBTQIA+ issues, so reflecting a positive trend for society at large.

A major turning point in the history of same-sex weddings was reached in 2024 when the Marriage Equality Act was passed, therefore attaining LGBTQIA+ rights. In the United States, this ground-breaking law has clauses allowing same-sex marriage and marriage equality. Legalisation of same-sex marriage not only acknowledges same-sex couples but also marks a significant progress in inclusivity and equality of rights. It underlines how the law has to provide fair treatment for every person regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Media and International Exposure

The Hollywood movie "The Hangover Part II" unintentionally pushed Thailand's transgender population centre stage in 2011, generating a lot of discussion on societal acceptance and understanding. Mostly set in the vibrant

city of Bangkok, the movie features "ladyboys," a term used often in Thailand to describe effeminate gay men and transgender women. The comedic film relied mostly on stereotypes thereby encouraging misunderstandings and prejudices about the lived experiences of the transgender population which helps to perpetuate them. Though the movie relied on comedy, it piqued a lot of interest in Thailand's diverse LGBTQIA+ culture. Following its release, LGBTQIA+ travel surged as travellers sought to come to Thailand and see for themselves if it lived up to its growing reputation as a LGBTQIA+ friendly location. Tourists were eager to discover the rich cultural legacy and practices unique to the local LGBTQIA+ community as well as the active nightlife and entertainment options in Bangkok and Pattaya. This heightened attention enhanced Thailand's reputation as a tourism destination in general, as well as highlighting its cultural diversity.

The depiction of transgender individuals in "The Hangover Part II" prompted significant enquiries over media representation. Proponents of LGBTQIA+ rights and visibility emphasized the pressing necessity for more nuanced and precise portrayals of LGBTQIA+ experiences. This initiative urged a departure from oversimplified and frequently detrimental stereotypes, promoting instead genuine narratives that accurately depict the true experiences, problems, and accomplishments of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Addressing the urgent necessity for improved representation is crucial for cultivating a more accurate public view and for enhancing understanding and acceptance within the LGBTQIA+ community and the wider society in Thailand and beyond. By disseminating more intricate narratives, society can enhance its appreciation for the complexity of LGBTQIA+ lives and counteract the misconceptions that frequently obscure them.

Thai Media Representation

Historically, depictions of LGBTQIA+ characters in Thai media have often been confined to positions that predominantly provide comic functions or are characterized by exaggerated stereotypes. Such representations not only inadequately represent the real experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals but also perpetuate harmful societal beliefs. These representations foster a limited comprehension of the LGBTQIA+ group, leading to pervasive misconceptions

and, in numerous cases, an escalation of discrimination and prejudice within society.

Recently, a notable transition has occurred, primarily driven by the emergence of social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. These platforms provide LGBTQIA+ content makers with essential opportunity to convey genuine experiences, viewpoints, and stories. Through the use of various mediums—such as vlogs, short films, and interactive content—these producers adeptly confront the preconceptions that have traditionally defined LGBTQIA+ representation. Their efforts have fostered increased empathy and understanding among audiences while also catalyzing a progressive transformation in societal attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ population.

With the advancement of digital media, Thai television and cinema have undergone significant modifications, notably illustrated by the rise and popularity of the Boys' Love (BL) genre. Series like "I Told Sunset About You" and "KinnPorsche" have received considerable recognition and have been instrumental in popularizing LGBTQIA+ storylines. These shows are characterized by their intricate narratives, often examining issues of love, identity, and the complicated societal expectations encountered by LGBTQIA+ individuals. Unlike previous representations that wholly depended on superficial characterizations, modern dramas include well-rounded characters portrayed with greater complexity and realism. This method cultivates a personal bond between the audience and the characters' experiences, enhancing relatability and comprehension. The popularity of these shows has captivated fans in Thailand and resonated with foreign viewers, demonstrating the universal appeal of inclusive storytelling. As a result, Thai media has progressively adopted a wider array of tales that represent the varied and profound experiences of the LGBTQIA+ population. This transition greatly enhances the current dialogue around acceptance, equality, and the necessity for representation. Thai media illuminates the intricacies of LGBTQIA+ experiences, significantly challenging dominant societal standards and fostering a more inclusive comprehension of love and identity within the wider cultural context.

Treechada "Poi" Hongyok

Renowned in Thai media for her great accomplishments as a transgender actor and model, Treechada "Poi" Hongyok has overcome her long-standing challenges and managed to modify cultural norms around skill and beauty. Poi started to become well-known after she was named Miss International Queen, a famous worldwide beauty contest honouring transsexual people. This achievement made her a well-known advocate of transgender rights and a community emblem of honesty and fortitude. Her involvement in well-known modelling campaigns for luxury brands like Louis Vuitton and Cartier not only highlights her extraordinary talent but also increases the profile of Thailand's LGBTQIA+ population abroad.

Poi's influence goes beyond mere show as she actively contests dominant preconceptions and promotes a more inclusive conception of beauty. Poi is actively involved in multiple programs promoting transgender visibility and rights, for example, her involvement in Pantene's transgender visibility advertising, which sought to highlight and celebrate multiple identities across mainstream media. Furthermore, she has been a vocal proponent of legalizing same-sex marriage in Thailand, thus utilizing her platform to promote equality and acceptance. Poi's concerted efforts have motivated many in the LGBTQIA+ community to accept their true selves. This example demonstrates the significant influence media personalities can exert in promoting social change. Her journey signifies both a personal victory and a powerful monument to the ongoing fight for rights and recognition within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Thailand's View on LGBTQIA+

The cultural acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Thailand is profoundly shaped by Buddhist precepts that highlight essential virtues, like compassion, tolerance, and non-judgment. These principles foster an environment where variety is not merely recognized but frequently appreciated. Transgender individuals, known as "Kathoey" or "ladyboys," have historically held a unique and important position in Thai society. They have engaged in diverse societal roles across numerous areas, including traditional rites, entertainment, and the arts. This active involvement has granted Kathoey folks a degree of visibility and

acceptability sometimes lacking for LGBTQIA+ individuals in other international contexts.

This cultural acceptance distinguishes Thailand from many countries in which LGBTQIA+ individuals face systemic discrimination, violence, and significant legal obstacles. The prominence of Kathoey in public life, particularly during lively performances and traditional festivities, displays a significant recognition and respect for many identities within Thai society. Events like Songkran (Thai New Year) and numerous local festivals frequently include performances by Kathoey, highlighting their artistic talents and societal achievements.

However, this ostensible cultural tolerance is juxtaposed with substantial limitations impacting LGBTQIA+ individuals in Thailand. Numerous individuals have societal expectations that restrict them to particular, frequently stereotypical roles. Prevalent occupations for LGBTQIA+ individuals encompass beauticians, cabaret artists, and diverse positions within the entertainment sector. Although these pathways may offer some level of acceptance, they concurrently restrict the diversity of representation and impede access to wider professional prospects in fields such as business, healthcare, and education. Thus, this situation may hinder economic autonomy and professional progression beyond these conventional roles, maintaining a cycle of restriction and reliance.

This intricate interaction highlights the duality of Thai society. Thailand is acknowledged for its relatively open attitude towards LGBTQIA+ individuals; yet this exists alongside deeply rooted conventional standards and societal expectations. The interaction between acceptance and restraint exemplifies the persistent obstacles that LGBTQIA+ individuals encounter in their daily existence. Moreover, societal opinions of LGBTQIA+ individuals are diverse and differ across various demographics and areas in Thailand. Thai culture generally exemplifies a "live and let live" philosophy, recognizing the contributions of LGBTQIA+ individuals to its cultural and social fabric. A sense of solidarity frequently exists, especially among women, who may have shared experiences of marginalization within patriarchal systems. Even so, obstacles persist, particularly in rural regions with more prominent conservative views. In many societies, conventional views can engender stigma and discrimination towards LGBTQIA+ individuals, negatively affecting their mental and emotional health.

The impact of media and education on changing societal opinions about LGBTQIA+ individuals is significant. Along with awareness efforts, the explosion of initiatives to include LGBTQIA+ people in curricula has gradually shaped younger generations' more open and inclusive viewpoint. These initiatives aim to remove stereotypes and promote understanding, therefore improving acceptance and validation of LGBTQIA+ identities inside the larger Thai society. This generational change points to a more inclusive future by means of consistent societal growth.

Advocacy and Legal Advancement

Thailand's attempt for marriage equality started in 2012. Reflecting the growing societal acceptance of LGBTQIA+ rights in Thailand, this idea first attracted public support. However, several obstacles hampered the quest for legal change, including political unrest and opposition from conservative lawmakers, which caused significant delays surpassing ten years.

Many advocacy groups aggressively sought reform during this period using public awareness campaigns, event planning, and lobbying of government authorities. These groups teamed with progressive political movements, most famously the Move Forward Party, which grew to be a key ally in the advancement of marriage equality. Notwithstanding the shifting political climate, their combined efforts helped to maintain public conversation on LGBTQIA+ rights.

A significant event transpired in 2024 when the Thai Parliament successfully adopted the Marriage Equality Act. This significant act redefined marriage as a union between two individuals, regardless of gender. As a result, LGBTQIA+ couples received equivalent legal rights and protections as heterosexual couples, including rights pertaining to inheritance, adoption, and healthcare decision-making. This landmark event established Thailand as the inaugural nation in Southeast Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, hence setting a crucial precedent for other countries in the area. The implementation of the Marriage Equality Act signified a substantial triumph for the LGBTQIA+ community in Thailand and constituted a pivotal moment in the wider fight for human rights in Southeast Asia.

Social Media

Social media channels and advocacy groups have dramatically helped advance the cause of marriage equality. Marginalized voices have been much enhanced by platforms including Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which also help to clarify the fight for equal rights and inspire public support. Personal stories and viral campaigns' effectiveness has helped to close the difference between legal recognition and societal acceptability. This phenomenon shows the great influence of group effort in advancing society development.

Effects of Fair Marriage Laws

With far-reaching effects in economic, social, and regional arenas, the passage of the Marriage Equality Act in Thailand marks a significant advancement for the LGBTQIA+ community and the nation at large. From an economic standpoint, the law helps Thailand to be a tourism destination and, from a forward-looking and inclusive nation, a place. Thailand deliberately improves its appeal to LGBTQIA+ tourists and other progressively minded individuals who are choosing holiday locations that respect and protect their rights by legally recognizing same-sex weddings. While also energizing retail and local artisan markets, the influx of these visitors is expected to generate notable income in lodging, food, and entertainment sectors. Travel companies and hotels might also build tailored packages for LGBTQIA+ couples, therefore helping local businesses.

The Marriage Equality Act serves as a spur for local and foreign investments since firms generally favour investing in areas that are committed to diversity and inclusive practices, thus promoting a favourable economic climate. The Marriage Equality Act is a significant change in acknowledging and protecting the essential rights of all citizens in Thailand. This legislation confronts established societal conventions and biases about gender and sexuality, facilitating a more inclusive and respectful cultural environment. The legal acknowledgement of same-sex weddings not only validates the identities and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals but also facilitates greater progress in associated socioeconomic challenges. This legislation facilitates the advancement of comprehensive anti-discrimination regulations and the improvement of gender equality activities. Ultimately, promoting a culture of inclusiveness can create a fairer society, where

individuals of all genders and orientations can prosper without fear of prejudice or intolerance.

Thailand's dedication to acknowledge marital equality sets a significant precedent for surrounding nations who are still contending with LGBTQIA+ rights and societal acceptance. The execution of such progressive laws exemplifies how legal frameworks can harmonize with cultural acceptance. Thailand's readiness to acknowledge and honour its LGBTQIA+ community—via cultural acknowledgement and legal affirmation—establishes it as a prominent advocate of human rights in Asia. This innovative position may encourage adjacent countries to contemplate the implementation of comparable inclusive policies, thus enhancing human rights across the area. By implementing these strong measures for equality, Thailand not only advocates for the rights of its inhabitants but also elevates its position as a global leader in the continuous pursuit of justice and equality for all.

Conclusion

Thailand's progress towards LGBTQIA+ inclusivity is a noteworthy story defined by ongoing lobbying, relentless effort, and significant cultural growth. Affected by social factors and cultural dynamics, Thailand has grown to be a vital centre for LGBTQIA+ rights in Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding these achievements, many issues still exist for LGBTQIA+ people in Thailand with stigma and prejudice still present in many spheres of society. Lack of thorough anti-discrimination laws highlights the ongoing legal obstacles that some people face in their quest of legal protection and equitable treatment. These difficulties draw attention to the ongoing fight LGBTQIA+ people have daily for their legal and rights and wider social acceptance.

Thailand's path shows promise and motivation in the larger framework of LGBTQIA+ rights. It illustrates how a combination of enhanced media presence, unwavering activism, and political determination may produce significant and enduring change. As discourse surrounding LGBTQIA+ rights progresses, Thailand finds itself at a pivotal moment where sustained initiatives may significantly alter cultural perceptions and enhance legal safeguards for all individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community. Thailand's ongoing advancement in progressive achievements sends a compelling message to the

international community: love knows no borders, and the pursuit of equality demands steadfast dedication. The ongoing commitment to inclusivity reflects the notion that every person, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, merits acknowledgement and equal worth in society.

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Navigating Identity: The Evolution of LGBTQ+ and Perceptions in Turkey

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Abstract

This article explores the perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye through a historical analysis of evidence gathered from articles, news reports, and human rights documentation concerning various LGBTQ+ issues. The study indicates that contemporary societal views on LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye have become increasingly conservative, largely shaped by political figures who invoke Islamic principles and traditional gender roles. These interpretations frame LGBTQ+ identities as increasingly immoral, utilizing this rhetoric as a political strategy to solidify voter support. However, Turkish society displays a lack of uniformity in its attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues when compared to other Muslim societies. This divergence stems from the deeply rooted awareness and historical presence of LGBTQ+ expression among the Turkish populace since the Ottoman era. In today's society, expressions of LGBTQ+ identities and the activities of related organizations endure.

Introduction

Türkiye has had longstanding perceptions of gender diversity groups or LGBTQ+ individuals. Historical evidence indicates references to people whose gender expression or sexual orientation did not align with their birth sex as early as the Ottoman Empire. These references appear in various forms, such as documented records, artworks, paintings, and poetry. This contrasts sharply with the current stereotype associating Islamic societies with strong opposition to gender diversity. In many Muslim-majority countries, non-conforming gender expressions and sexual orientations are criminalized, with some imposing severe punishments, including capital punishment. However, Türkiye differs in that there are still some visible expressions of gender diversity

and, on a legal level, exhibits less intense discrimination or stigmatization of LGBTQ+ individuals compared to other predominantly Muslim countries.

Nonetheless, when examining Türkiye's current situation, discrimination and stigmatization against LGBTQ+ communities remain significant issues. This article seeks to explain these perceptions through a historical lens, focusing on the following aspects: (1) historical context, (2) references in Turkish customs and laws, (3) legal recognition or discrimination, (4) the role of religion, and (5) traditional gender roles in Turkish society. Following this discussion, the article will address the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals and highlight the roles of organizations and movements advocating for gender diversity in contemporary Turkish society.

The History of Sexual Diversity Among the Turkish People

Same-sex relationships or individuals who do not conform to heterosexual norms, referred to here as LGBTQ+, have existed across various cultures, each with its own historical context. In regions once governed by the Ottoman Empire, such as the Anatolian and Balkan Peninsulas, evidence of LGBTQ+ existence and acknowledgment can be found in historical documents and artwork. These references date back to the Ottoman period and include mentions in literature and poetry, demonstrating a societal awareness and recognition of LGBTQ+ individuals during that time.

In the Ottoman Empire, concepts of gender and sexual diversity were fluid and not rigidly confined to the binary notions of heterosexuality or even the contemporary understanding of LGBTQ+ identities. For example, gender was often categorized into three groups: men, women, and boys. Boys were not seen as female or substitutes for women but as a distinct category. Sexual behavior in the Ottoman context was divided into two primary roles: "penetrator" and "penetrated." Men with active roles in sexual activities were not assigned fixed sexual orientations, and their choice of sexual partners was regarded as a matter of personal preference.

Figure 1: Erotic scene (1743) ascribed to Abdullah Bukhari, Türkiye, probably Istanbul.



Source: <https://aeon.co/ideas/what-ottoman-erotica-teaches-us-about-sexual-pluralism>

In the culturally diverse territories of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Anatolia and the Balkans, this flexible understanding of sexuality was inherited from earlier civilizations, such as the Greeks, for whom male-male relationships were socially acceptable. When the Turkish people assumed control of these regions, they largely preserved the existing cultural and religious norms under the Ottoman interpretation of Islamic principles, particularly the concept of Dhimmi, which allowed non-Muslim communities to maintain their traditions (Schick, 2018; Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

However, significant changes began in the late 19th century, as Western cultural influences grew. The concept of "boy love," once accepted, gradually diminished, replaced by an emphasis on heterosexual relationships. This shift reflected the increasing adoption of heteronormative frameworks. While the acceptance of male-male relationships declined, female-female relationships gained more visibility and acceptance within Ottoman society. Compared to contemporary European, Asian, or Arab societies with similar religious frameworks, the Ottoman Empire demonstrated more progressive attitudes toward

homosexuality. Nonetheless, the level of acceptance varied by class, with higher social strata being more tolerant of sexual diversity.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye marked a turning point. Under President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, numerous reforms were implemented, profoundly influencing societal perceptions of homosexuality. These reforms, heavily influenced by Western conservative ideals, introduced a more restrictive view of sexual relationships, limiting acceptance to heterosexual norms. The process of "Europeanization" led to increased discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, as Christian societal norms - less accepting of non-heterosexual relationships - began to shape Turkish culture. However, from a legal perspective, the reforms and changes to Turkish law have encouraged LGBTQ+ individuals to express themselves more openly in public.

Customs and Laws of the Ottoman Era Related to LGBTQ+

To understand the historical context of Turkish customs and laws related to LGBTQ+, it is necessary to examine the societal structure prior to the establishment of modern legal systems. Türkiye, being a predominantly Muslim society, follows Islam as its primary religion. Islam has significantly influenced the customs and legal frameworks within Turkish society, shaping daily life from birth to death.

Homosexuality is not explicitly mentioned in the primary religious texts of Islam, such as the Quran, which is believed to be the word of God, or the Hadith, which are the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. However, under Sharia law - Islamic law - homosexuality is generally considered unlawful and forbidden. Islamic legal scholars base this prohibition on interpretations of specific Quranic verses. Furthermore, same-sex relationships are indirectly considered illicit due to their classification as extramarital sexual acts. In Islamic tradition, sexual relations are only permissible within the bounds of a religiously sanctioned marriage. Since same-sex marriages are not recognized under Islamic law, all sexual relationships between individuals of the same sex are deemed extramarital and, therefore, impermissible (McClain & Waite-Wright, 2016).

During the Ottoman Empire, the customs and laws regarding homosexuality differed from those in other Muslim-majority nations. The Ottoman Empire was notable for being one of the first states to decriminalize homosexuality. In 1858, as part of the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman Penal Code was modernized and ceased to explicitly penalize same-sex sexual acts. This decriminalization marked a significant shift in both societal and legal attitudes, fostering a more accepting and open environment for same-sex relationships compared to other Islamic societies of the time (Ozsoy, 2020; Affirmativesolutions, n.d.).

This legal reform during the Tanzimat period demonstrated a progressive stance relative to the norms of the era and reflected the Ottoman Empire's unique blend of Islamic tradition and openness to modernization. However, the influence of Islamic law and societal norms continued to play a role in shaping attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals, both during the Ottoman period and in modern Türkiye.

LGBTQ+ Recognition or Discrimination at the Legal Level in Türkiye

In modern day, Türkiye does not have specific legislation regarding LGBTQ+ individuals or laws that protect them from discrimination. Although same-sex relationships are not criminalized by laws, but there is no legal framework to safeguard LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination. This legal gap is evident despite attempts to improve human rights in the country. For instance, in January 2004, the Justice Commission of the Turkish Parliament proposed a draft law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, in July 2004, this provision was removed from the draft, disappointing LGBTQ+ rights advocates. They argued that while Türkiye has made progress in human rights, the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals have been neglected (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007).

Activists have also raised concerns about the Turkish authorities' use of morality-related laws to discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals. Organizations such as Amnesty International have highlighted the lack of specific legal protection for LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye. Despite advancements in other areas of human rights, many liberal-minded individuals in Türkiye remain unwilling to advocate for LGBTQ+ protections, reflecting societal reluctance to accept and safeguard LGBTQ+ rights. The document *Human Rights Violations of LGBT Individuals*

in Turkey (2014) elaborates on the rejection and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals concerning Turkish legislation. It emphasizes the lack of domestic legal protection for LGBTQ+ individuals, citing various laws that can be interpreted to bypass such protections.

One example of discriminatory legislation is Article 29 of the Turkish Penal Code, which reduces sentences for perpetrators of violent crimes committed in a fit of rage provoked by an “unjust act.” The problem lies in the law's failure to define what constitutes an “unjust act.” In cases of murder involving LGBTQ+ individuals, courts have interpreted the victims' LGBTQ+ identities as an “unjust act” that provoked the perpetrators, resulting in reduced sentences (Kaos GL, IGLHRC, & LGBTI News Turkey, 2014:4-5). Another example is the lack of protection for freedom of expression and association. For instance, Law No. 5651, which governs internet broadcasting and combating cybercrime, and Article 226 of the Penal Code, concerning “obscenity,” have been cited to ban the translation and publication of novels with LGBTQ+ themes. Additionally, the right to establish LGBTQ+ organizations or associations is hindered by Article 56 of the Turkish Civil Code, which states that “no association may be founded for purposes contrary to law and morality.” This allows authorities to interpret LGBTQ+ identities as immoral, making it challenging for such groups to operate. (Kaos GL, IGLHRC, & LGBTI News Turkey, 2014:5) Although Turkish law does not criminalize consensual adult same-sex activities, the absence of explicit legal protections for sexual orientation and gender identity has enabled state officials to interpret “morality” based on their perspectives. This has resulted in violations and restrictions on the fundamental rights of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The Role of Religion in Shaping Turkish Attitudes Toward LGBTQ+ Individuals

After 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Republic of Türkiye, focusing on modernization, nationalism, and secularism. These reforms aimed to transform Türkiye into a modern state capable of competing and thriving in the rapidly changing world of the 20th century. Influenced by Western ideas, these reforms encompassed various aspects of governance, education, law, and the economy. As a result, Türkiye became distinct from other countries in the Middle East, as religion did not play a role in politics and law, unlike during the Ottoman Empire, when Sharia law that rooted in the Quran was used to regulate personal

matters for Muslims. However, despite Türkiye's longstanding commitment to secularism, the role of religion, particularly Islam, continues to hold significant influence and remains deeply embedded in the cultural norms and mindset of the Turkish people today.

The LGBTQ+ community is a clear example of the impact of religion on negative attitudes among Turkish people. Türkiye abolished Sharia law, which was based on the Quran and deemed homosexuality as a sin against religious principles and adopted Western-influenced laws such as Switzerland's civil code which no longer refers to religion. This means that homosexuality in Türkiye is no longer considered a crime with severe penalties, unlike in other Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, where homosexuals are executed. However, religious beliefs continue to shape the perspectives of many Turks. The Quran recounts the story of Prophet Lut, who was sent by God to warn the people of Sodom against sinning homosexuality; when the people ignored and mocked his warnings, God sent angels to announce their punishment and instructed Prophet Lut and his family to leave the city. By dawn, the cities of Sodom - and Gomorrah - which were guilty of the same acts, were destroyed by fire and stones from the sky. This story has been interpreted as a punishment for sexual deviation and has become the foundation of religious views that are against LGBTQ+, causing Muslims to view homosexuality as immoral and sinful. (Karaman, Alagöz, & Fidan, 2022; Quran Majeed Blog, 2023; Sattar, Koma, & Plaipon, 2023; BBC News Thai, 2018)

As such, political actors often use religious beliefs as a tool to create hatred against LGBTQ+ people. A prominent example is Türkiye's current President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has explicitly expressed his anti-LGBTQ+ stance. During an election campaign rally with his supporters in Istanbul, Erdoğan stated, "So are we ready to bury these LGBT supporters in the ballot box?" This statement reflects his efforts to mobilize his supporters to use their votes as a weapon against those advocating for LGBTQ+. Additionally, Erdoğan supported the actions of Ali Erbaş, the head of the Turkish Religious Affairs Agency (Diyanet), the head of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Presidency of Religious Affairs), following a televised sermon in which Erbaş declared, "Evils such as homosexuality are the cause of diseases and moral decay." While Erbaş's comments sparked widespread criticism, Erdoğan publicly defended him, even promoting the hashtag "*Ali Erbaş*

is not alone” to reinforce his support for such rhetoric. This further solidified Erdoğan’s political stance on this issue. (Wilks, 2020; Poyrazlar & Oliver, 2023)

The Impact of Traditional Gender Roles on Turkish Attitudes Toward LGBTQ+ Individuals

Today, Turkish society continues to place significant emphasis on traditional gender roles rooted in patriarchy and a culture that strictly delineates the responsibilities of men and women. Men are generally expected to act as the heads of their households, assuming the primary responsibility of working to improve their family’s social and economic status. Although Turkish women today have greater access to education and increased opportunities to work outside the home compared to the past, their primary roles are still largely associated with family care, serving their husbands, and managing household duties. These traditional gender roles are not only deeply ingrained in Turkish cultural values but are also explicitly supported by the current government. For example, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly underscored the role of women as mothers. During a speech at the inauguration of a new building for the Women and Democracy Association of Türkiye (KADEM), he stated, “Rejecting motherhood means giving up on humanity.” Furthermore, he has encouraged women to have at least three children. Such perspectives highlight the government’s active role in reinforcing and preserving traditional gender roles within Turkish society. (The Guardian, 2016; Karaman, Alagöz, & Fidan, 2022).

The persistence of traditional gender roles in Turkish society has led to LGBTQ+ people being seen as deviating from social norms. This perspective leads to discrimination, lack of social acceptance, and both physical and psychological violence from family members or the wider community. Furthermore, Kocabiçak’s article (2023) highlights the influence of patriarchy at the state level, stating that Türkiye’s emphasis on the role of the family in a patriarchal system of relationships, where the patriarchal structure is central to the social structure, has facilitated the rise of an elite group of men called “men-of-the-regime” to gain significant influence over policymaking.

These men often not only restrict women’s rights but also put heavy pressure on LGBTQ+ individuals. This can be seen from the fact that these groups played a key role in pushing for Türkiye’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in

2021 which aimed at preventing violence against women. They argued that the convention conflicted with Turkish values and promoted LGBTQ+ rights, which they viewed as a threat to traditional gender structures. As a result, LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye continue to face ongoing discrimination and oppression in various forms. (Aksoy, 2021)

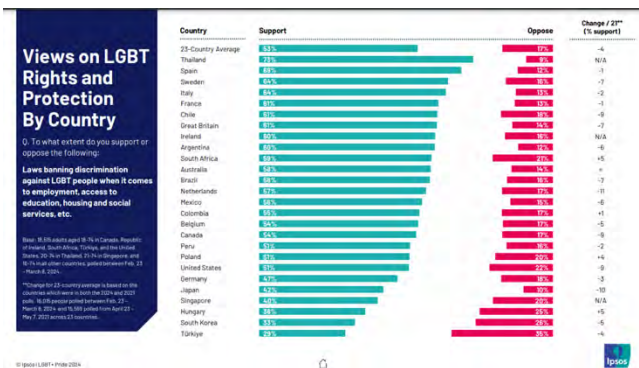
Challenges Faced by LGBTQ+ Individuals in Türkiye

In recent years, the LGBTQ+ community in Türkiye has continued to face numerous challenges stemming from societal attitudes, government policies, and even state legislation. According to the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe), Türkiye ranked 47th out of 49 European countries in terms of LGBTQ+ equality in 2015, surpassing only Azerbaijan and Russia. The situation remains concerning because in 2024, the Rainbow Index published by ILGA revealed that Türkiye scored just 4.75 out of 100 points. This score reflects the severe lack of rights and protections for LGBTQ+ individuals in the country. Additionally, a global survey conducted by Ipsos, which gathered responses from 18,515 participants, examined *Views on LGBT Rights and Protection by Country*. The survey focused on laws prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in areas such as employment, education, housing, and social services. In Türkiye, only 29% of respondents expressed support for such laws, while 35% opposed them (a proportion higher than any other country included in the study). Moreover, the level of support for LGBTQ+ rights in Türkiye has declined, with a 4% decrease compared to a similar survey conducted in 2021. These findings underscore the persistent barriers and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye. (Coalwell, 2023; Turkish Minute, 2024; Dunne, 2024)

Ipsos also collected data from respondents on the topic of *Views on Same-Sex Marriage by Country*, focusing on opinions regarding the rights of same-sex couples. In Türkiye, only 18% of respondents expressed support for same-sex marriage, while 19% supported granting some form of legal recognition, such as civil union registration but not marriage. Meanwhile, 25% of respondents were uncertain (Not Sure). However, a significant 38% opposed both same-sex marriage and any form of legal recognition, indicating a high level of opposition. Furthermore, support for granting same-sex couples the right to marry or receive

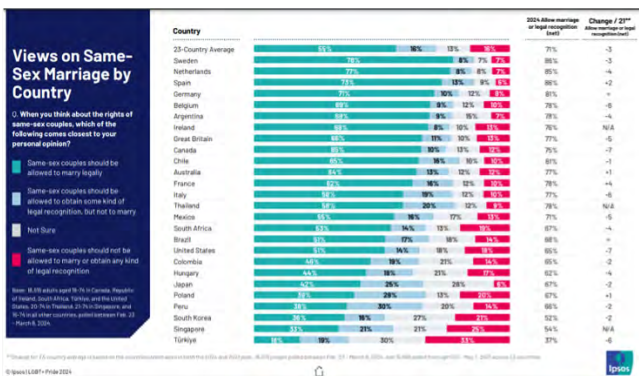
legal recognition in Türkiye decreased by 6% compared to the findings of the 2021 survey.

Figure 2: Views on LGBT Rights and Protection by Country



Source: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/Pride-Report-2024_2.pdf

Figure 3: Views on Same-Sex Marriage by Country



Source: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/Pride-Report-2024_2.pdf

The statistical reports highlight that Türkiye remains a country where individuals within the LGBTQ+ community face challenges ranging from personal relationships to broader societal dynamics, both historically and in the present. These challenges can be illustrated through four key examples of violations of LGBTQ+ rights, as follows:

Discrimination

Currently, Türkiye lacks laws that protect LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination in employment, education, healthcare, and access to public services. Coupled with the Turkish government's frequent use of hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community and its rejection of proposals to enact protective legislation, discrimination against this group has intensified and become normalized in daily life.

According to the European Commission's 2013 report, employment discrimination is a recurring issue in Türkiye, particularly after individuals reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity. For instance, Halil İbrahim Dinçdağ publicly disclosed his LGBTQ+ identity, leading to his suspension from the Turkish Football Federation. Similarly, in 2012 a police officer was dismissed due to expressing a gender identity that differed from societal norms. In this case, Article 125/E(g) of Türkiye's Civil Servants Law was applied, stating that civil servants can face disciplinary action for behavior deemed socially unacceptable. Moreover, Amnesty International reports that transgender women are particularly vulnerable to employment discrimination. Many are compelled to work in the sex industry, often as a last resort. Even more concerning is that Türkiye does not legally recognize transgender individuals' status, barring transgender women from participating in licensed sex work and exposing them to greater risks of violence and exploitation. (Amnesty International, 2012; Kaos GL, IGLHRC, & LGBTI News Turkey, 2014)

This widespread discrimination forces many LGBTQ+ individuals to conceal their identities and conform to societal expectations to avoid losing their jobs and livelihoods.

Violence

Violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Türkiye stems from deep-rooted social prejudices and beliefs held by certain segments of society. These biases have perpetuated hatred and discrimination, leading to ongoing violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. In many cases, victims of such violence do not receive adequate assistance or protection.

The case of Ahmet Yıldız serves as a striking example of how prejudice and societal beliefs can lead to violence. On July 16, 2008, Yıldız was shot and killed in front of a café in Istanbul. Prior to his death, he had received threats from his family after they discovered that he was gay and urged him to undergo medical treatment. These threats prompted him to seek protection from Turkish authorities, but no assistance was provided. Prosecutors later suggested that his father might have been responsible for the murder, motivated by a desire to "protect the family's honor."

Other forms of violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Türkiye are also prevalent. A survey conducted by Lambda Istanbul in 2010 revealed that 89% of transgender women reported being physically assaulted while in detention, and 77% experienced sexual abuse. Furthermore, some individuals had their homes set on fire or were tortured while in custody. Prosecution of such cases is rare. For instance, the police chief of Beyoğlu was acquitted in 2004 due to an amnesty law despite being accused of assaulting transgender women (McClain, M. & Waite-Wright, O. 2010).

These issues persist in modern Türkiye. According to Kaos GL's 2022 annual LGBTQ+ human rights report, there were 612 documented cases of violence against the LGBTQ+ community that year. This clearly demonstrates that Türkiye has yet to address this problem effectively. (Colak, Hacaloğlu, & Sahinkaya, 2023; McClain & Wright, 2010).

Military Conscription

Under Türkiye's military conscription law, all men aged between 20 and 41 are required to serve in the military for a period of six months. However, the law provides certain exemptions, including one that prohibits individuals who

identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community from serving. If a person is found to belong to this group, they are immediately discharged, as homosexuality is classified as a "disease" or "mental disorder" within the legal and social framework of the country. For those seeking exemption from military service on these grounds, they are required to prove their sexual orientation, often through invasive and humiliating methods, such as providing evidence of anal intercourse. This process can lead to severe consequences, as such disclosures put these individuals at heightened risk of physical and psychological abuse, violence, and societal discrimination. The long-term impact of this systemic discrimination is significant. LGBTQ+ individuals may face reduced opportunities in the job market, as many employers in Türkiye are reluctant to hire those who openly identify as LGBTQ+. This reflects the broader structural issues that continue to restrict the rights and freedoms of sexual and gender minorities in Türkiye. (BBC News Thai, 2025; Equaldex, n.d.; Amnesty International, 2012).

Limitation on Freedom of Expression

Türkiye continues to face significant limitations on freedom of expression, particularly regarding issues involving the LGBTQ+ community. Such restrictions are predominantly imposed and enforced by the state, resulting in minimal representation of LGBTQ+ content on television and the internet. A notable example is the decision by the Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTÜK) to ban the film *Sex and the City II* due to its depiction of same-sex marriage. Additionally, RTÜK imposed fines on television stations that broadcast a music video featuring a romantic relationship between two women, arguing that such content promotes homosexuality and is deemed "immoral." Another instance involves the Istanbul Court of Appeals, which ordered a publishing house to face trial under Article 226 of the Penal Code which addresses acts deemed morally inappropriate; the case concerned a novel depicting a same-sex romantic relationship, highlighting efforts to control such narratives in Turkish society.

These restrictions on LGBTQ+ expression in media and literature reflect the broader limitations on public discourse about sexual and gender diversity in Türkiye. This lack of representation significantly hinders efforts to raise awareness and foster understanding, leaving LGBTQ+ individuals vulnerable to

ongoing discrimination and social exclusion. (Amnesty International, 2012; Kaos GL, IGLHRC, & LGBTI News Turkey, 2014)

The Role of Organizations and Movements Advocating for LGBTQ+ Rights

The 1990s marked a period of significant progress for LGBTQ+ rights movements in Türkiye. In 1993, Lambda Istanbul was established with the primary aim of providing psychological counseling to LGBTQ+ individuals. The organization also played a key role in raising societal awareness about LGBTQ+ and initiated the Istanbul Gay Pride event, which became a milestone in the LGBTQ+ rights movement in Türkiye. In 1994, the Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association (KAOS GL) was founded, becoming the longest-running LGBTQ+ organization in the country.

KAOS GL contributed significantly to various aspects of LGBTQ+ advocacy, including the establishment of the KAOS Culture Center as a space for events and the dissemination of information about LGBTQ+ issues. The organization also organized seminars on anti-discrimination efforts and launched a monthly magazine in 1994 to facilitate communication and spread knowledge related to LGBTQ+ topics. In addition to Lambda Istanbul and KAOS GL, other organizations emerged in subsequent years, further advancing the LGBTQ+ rights movement. The Siyah Pembe Üçgen Foundation was founded in İzmir in 2001, focusing on supporting LGBTQ+ activism and education. In 2007, the Morel Foundation was established in Eskişehir, prioritizing seminars, protests, and the review of LGBTQ+ literature. Furthermore, in 2011, the Social Policies on Gender Discrimination (SPoD) organization was established with the primary goal of advocating for policies to combat sexual discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. Together, these organizations have played a pivotal role in promoting LGBTQ+ rights and awareness in Türkiye. (Sarı, 2017).

The rise of these organizations reflects the ongoing efforts to create spaces for expression and to promote LGBTQ+ rights in Türkiye. One significant milestone was the first Istanbul Pride March, held in 2003, which continued for several years. However, in 2015, the Turkish government officially banned Pride events, resulting in the authorities closing key venues such as Taksim Square and Istiklal Avenue traditionally used for Pride gatherings. Consequently, official

Pride marches were no longer permitted. Despite these restrictions, members of the LGBTQ+ community have continued to gather in these spaces annually, with the number of participants increasing over time. This has prompted authorities to respond with escalating violence to suppress the gatherings. For example, during the 2016 Istanbul Pride March, law enforcement used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse attendees. By 2022, the crackdowns became even more severe, with hundreds of participants being arrested. The number of arrests tripled compared to previous years. In 2023, similar incidents occurred, with approximately 224 individuals arbitrarily detained during the Pride gathering. Police reportedly used excessive force, including beating and kicking protesters, which constitutes a serious violation of human rights. These suppressions are believed to be part of a broader political strategy by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The government has sought to appeal to its conservative voter base and divert public attention from its governance failures by framing the LGBTQ+ community as a social threat that needs to be addressed. (Amnesty International, 2024; Turkish Minute, 2024; AP News, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Therefore, the challenges related to the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye do not solely stem from societal beliefs or attitudes. They are also fueled by the rhetoric and actions of the country's leaders, who deliberately incite hatred and division within society. These actions not only undermine the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals but also legitimize violence and discrimination against them.

Conclusion

The LGBTQ+ community in Turkey has perceptions for a long time. Historical evidence shows that this awareness dates to the Ottoman Empire. Generally, the concept of gender and sexual diversity was not limited to the binary gender system but was viewed as encompassing three genders: male, female, and boy, which can be interpreted as a heritage from Greek traditions that the Turks inherited, following the Dhimmi principle that respected other cultures and religions. However, in modern times, the legal framework is still linked to Islamic principles and rooted in a patriarchal system thus that expressions of non-heterosexuality are still considered illegal.

This changed after the Tanzimat reforms in the mid-19th century and the political transformations in the early 20th century. The Ottoman Empire's penal code was revised, making same-sex love no longer illegal. However, this change incorporated more Western values, which were more conservative on this issue, leading to increased discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community.

As Turkish society entered the modern era, with a resurgence of Islamic conservatism, politics began using this issue to gain votes by creating hate against the LGBTQ+ community, appealing to conservative factions for political support. When considering the legal texts in the early 21st century, there hasn't been much progress in advancing these laws. Instead, old laws have been interpreted to justify discrimination in society, such as reducing penalties for those who murder LGBTQ+ individuals, interpreting such actions as violent acts triggered by an "unjust act," with the court's ruling that the death of the LGBTQ+ person was the result of an unjust act. Currently, LGBTQ+ individuals face four main challenges, according to Ipsos reports: 1) Discrimination, 2) Violence, 3) Military Conscripting, and 4) Freedom of Expression. However, there has been an increasing role of organizations and movements for sexual diversity, such as Lambda Istanbul and KAOS GL. These organizations, active since the 1990s, reflect ongoing efforts to create spaces for expression and promote the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey, continuing to fight against the rise of conservative ideologies and discrimination.

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PART VI
CULTURAL STUDIES &
POST COLONIAL LEGACIES

18 |

Colonial Legacies on a Plate: The Evolution of Hybrid Cuisines in India and Vietnam

Maryam Khan

Abstract

This article explores how food serves as a channel for historical memory, cultural interaction, and identity building, therefore examining the major effects of colonialism on Indian and Vietnamese cuisine. Examining the rise of famous hybrid meals like Anglo-Indian cuisine in India and *bánh mì* in Vietnam via the prism of culinary hybridity—where indigenous and colonial food traditions entwine—it investigates These hybrid cuisines, moulded by foreign products and cooking techniques, mirror the complicated interaction in colonized countries between dominance, adaptation, and resistance. The study highlights how food became a weapon for survival and identity reclamation, therefore highlighting the sociopolitical and cultural changes started by colonial control. Through an analysis of the historical development and worldwide relevance of these hybrid traditions, this paper highlights their function in cultivating national pride and promoting intercultural communication in a world going more global. In the end, it emphasizes food's continuing ability to signify cultural legacy and a monument to the inventiveness and fortitude of postcolonial countries.

Introduction

Food is more than just a need; it's a great vehicle for cultural expression of histories, identities, and changes. Globally, cooking techniques have developed to not only feed but also to tell tales of human contact, migration, and adaptability. Food becomes a potent prism through which one may examine the complicated legacies of colonialism - legacies that still greatly

influence cultural identities and behaviours in the postcolonial setting. Colonial authorities controlled many facets of society, including culinary customs, so wielding their influence. Their hybrid cuisines, which frequently reflected unequal power dynamics, resulted from including foreign components and enforcing their culinary preferences. Still, these same hybrids turned became venues for cultural interaction, bargaining, even opposition. Culinary hybridity—the mingling of indigenous and colonial food traditions—captures in colonized countries the subtle interaction of dominance, adaptation, and resilience.

This study looks at how colonialism affected Indian and Vietnamese cuisine, two countries whose rich and varied culinary traditions were greatly influenced by protracted colonial control. Anglo-Indian cuisine, a blend of British tastes with Indian spices and techniques, emerged from British colonization in India bringing elements, techniques, and culinary preferences. French colonial control brought European cuisine including bread and coffee to Vietnam, which were modified into regional customs to produce famous meals like *bánh mì* and *cà phê sữa đá*. Far from being consequences of colonial interactions, these hybrid cuisines reflect the ways in which colonized cultures negotiated their identities under foreign control and have come to represent cultural resilience and creativity.

This paper investigates the more general sociopolitical and cultural changes resulting from colonialism by analyzing the historical development of hybrid cuisines in India and Vietnam. It explores how food evolved as a tool for resistance, adaptation, and identity building. It also takes into consideration the global effects of these hybrid traditions as postcolonial national identities were forming. Moreover, it emphasizes how these cuisines help to promote intercultural communication and reframing of cultural narratives. This study examines the ongoing relevance of food as a sign of both historical legacies and modern cultural pride.

Culinary Hybridity as a Marker of Power Dynamics

Cultural identities underwent significant changes in the postcolonial era, and food customs became an important site of hybridity. Food customs became an area of power dynamics in which resistance and integration combined over the

remnants of colonial interactions. The cuisines of colonized countries such as India and Vietnam show how that colonial influence produced hybrid customs that moulded national identities to represent a modern sociopolitical reality.

Colonial control brought foreign foods, cooking methods, and cultural traditions, therefore producing culinary hybrids that mirrored power disparities. British colonization in India, for example, produced Anglo-Indian cuisine by combining British tastes with Indian spices and techniques. Inspired by Indian pepper-water, iconic foods like kedgeree—derived from the Indian *khichdi*—and *mulligatawny* soup pay tribute to this blending. Likewise, bread, dairy, and coffee brought into Vietnam by French colonists were incorporated into the region's diet to produce delicacies like *bánh mì* and *cà phê sữa đá*. These changes sometimes reflected colonial power since European food was praised as refined and better than the indigenous cuisines. But the incorporation of colonial inspirations also emphasizes the colonized people's agency in changing and adapting these components. The addition of condensed milk in Vietnamese coffee or the way tea was turned into *masala chai* in India illustrate ways in which indigenous people reinterpreted colonial imports and included them into their cultural systems. Such adaptations were subtle acts of protest, enabling local people to proclaim their identities within the framework of colonial rule.

Culinary hybridity thus acts as both a sign of colonial imposition and supremacy and of its opposite: indigenous resilience and ingenuity. These hybrid cuisines show how food evolved to negotiate power dynamics and affirm cultural identity, hence narrating complicated histories of enslavement and adaptation. Hybrid cuisines represent not only the wounds of colonialism but also the ongoing spirit of resistance and invention among the colonized by combining foreign and local ingredients.

Culinary Hybridity and National Identity Formation

In the postcolonial context, hybrid cuisines have emerged as potent symbols of national identity, encapsulating the resilience and adaptability of formerly colonized societies. Food, as a medium of cultural expression, offers insights into how national identities are constructed, celebrated, and negotiated. Hybrid cuisines like India's *biryani* and Vietnam's *bánh mì* reflect the complex layering

of indigenous and colonial influences, illustrating how nations reclaim their culinary heritage while shaping new cultural narratives.

In India, biryani - a dish influenced by Persian, Mughal, and later colonial elements - serves as an emblem of the country's rich culinary diversity. Incorporating ingredients like potatoes and chilies, introduced by Portuguese and British colonizers, highlights how external influences were indigenized to create a dish that is now a cornerstone of Indian identity. Similarly, masala chai, initially a colonial construct to promote tea consumption, has been reclaimed and transformed into an essential part of Indian culture, representing daily life, hospitality, and community.

Vietnam's *bánh mì* offers a parallel narrative of culinary and cultural integration. The sandwich, born from the introduction of the French baguette, is now a global symbol of Vietnamese cuisine. By combining French bread with distinctly Vietnamese fillings such as pickled vegetables, cilantro, and chili sauce, *bánh mì* exemplifies the adaptive ingenuity of Vietnamese culture. This dish not only reflects historical encounters but also serves as a source of national pride in the global culinary landscape.

Further challenging oversimplified conceptions of national identity established by colonial narratives are hybrid cuisines. For instance, during colonial control, Indian cuisine was frequently reduced to the phrase "curry," therefore ignoring its geographical diversity and richness. Emphasizing the complex tapestry of regional tastes, techniques, and traditions defining Indian culinary history, postcolonial discourse has sought to reclaim this diversity. Likewise, Vietnam's cuisine highlights the multi-layered character of its national identity by showing how indigenous customs coexist with influences from French and past Chinese occupations. Moreover, the worldwide popularity of hybrid cuisines emphasizes how embedded postcolonial identities are in a society even as it goes more global. From their colonial roots, dishes like *phở* and chicken tikka masala have evolved into legendary icons of their individual countries, honoured for their own mix of tastes and histories. These worldwide paths not only question Western-centric cooking stories but also support the agency of postcolonial nations in forming world cultural trends.

Hybrid cuisines are essentially live archives of past interactions and cultural persistence. These dishes honour the dynamic and changing character of national identity by combining several inspirations into a coherent culinary expression. In this way, providing a strong prism through which to see the legacy of colonialism and the reclaiming of cultural heritage.

Resistance and Adaptation in Culinary Practices

Culinary hybridity in colonized areas was a means of resistance against cultural erasure and exploitation experience as a result of outside imposition. Adapting colonial dishes and including them into indigenous culinary traditions became a subtle but effective means for local people to express their agency and identity in the face of domination.

The Great Famine of 1945, brought on by French colonial policies giving export-oriented agriculture top priority, drove people in Vietnam to feed themselves with few means. Making meals like *cháo loãng*, or thin rice porridge, represented resiliency and ingenuity during a time of extreme need. Small amounts of rice were stretched by families to feed whole households, transforming need into a survival act against colonial exploitation. Likewise, the modification of coffee - brought by the French - into *cà phê sữa đá* (Vietnamese iced coffee with condensed milk) emphasizes the inventiveness of Vietnamese society. Born from a shortage of fresh milk, this drink turned a colonial import into a national identification trademark.

During India's fight for independence, the Swadeshi movement highlighted how food might fight colonial economic policies. The movement developed national pride and self-reliance by supporting local food production and rejecting foreign items. Simple meals like *khichdi* were honoured for their cultural value as markers of solidarity and resistance against colonial ideas of Indian inferiority. Likewise, *masala chai*, first embraced by the British to encourage tea drinking, was reclaimed and evolved into a staple of Indian daily life, therefore reflecting both cultural identity and opposition.

These efforts of culinary adaptation showed inventiveness and the reclaiming of cultural space inspired by need but evolving into something new and different. Combining colonial imports with native customs, once colonized nations

endowed hybrid cuisine with connotations beyond mere food. Food became a vehicle for cultural preservation, a narrative tool, and a subdued protest at colonial ideas of superiority.

Hybrid foods like *bánh mì* and chicken tikka masala have evolved from their beginnings to become worldwide emblems of their respective countries in the postcolonial age. Rooted in histories of resistance and adaptation, these recipes celebrate the inventiveness and resiliency of colonized nations, therefore subverting the dominance of Western culinary narratives. They act as reminders of how food, even under conditions of slavery, might become a potent weapon for cultural survival and identity building.

Global Implications of Culinary Hybridity

The global distribution of hybrid cuisines illustrates the far-reaching consequences of colonial history and the agency of postcolonial countries in rewriting their cultural narratives. Dishes like *bánh mì* and chicken tikka masala draw attention to the complexity of cultural interaction and the history of colonial encounters even as the dishes garner praise from around the world.

By including flavours, techniques, and histories from once colonized areas into worldwide food culture, hybrid cuisines question and resist the dominance of Western-centric culinary narratives. For example, the global character of Indian cuisine—often limited to the phrase “curry”—has developed into a celebration of regional diversity via the worldwide popularity of dishes including dosas, biryanis, and street food. Likewise, Vietnamese cuisine including *phở* and *bánh mì* has become statement images of Southeast Asian food, providing a counterbalance to Eurocentric ideas of culinary refinement.

Globalizing hybrid cuisines also promotes a greater respect of the resiliency and inventiveness of postcolonial countries as well as intercultural communication. These foods act as champions of cultural legacy, enabling countries to present their identities on the international scene and thereby highlight the richness of their pasts and customs. For instance, the reinventions of chicken tikka masala as a mainstay in British cuisine and *bánh mì* as a worldwide street snack show how hybrid meals can easily cross boundaries, mixing historical relevance with modern appeal. The popularity of these cuisines emphasizes food as a means of

reinterpretation of cultural links in societies ever more linked to each other through globalization. Reinterpretation and adaptation of hybrid cuisine by chefs and foodies help to create a dynamic gastronomic scene that both celebrates innovation and preserves legacy. These adaptations capture the changing character of world food culture, in which hybrid cuisines serve as creative inspiration and tools of reinvention.

The emergence of hybrid cuisines worldwide essentially shows not just the continuing impact of colonial legacies but also the ability of postcolonial countries to recover and reinterpret their own cultural narratives. These countries honour their histories of resiliency and adaptation by sharing their cooking customs with the globe, therefore turning food into a potent emblem of cultural identification and universal solidarity.

Case Studies: India and Vietnam

India: A History of Culinary Fusion and Resilience

India's gastronomic scene is a diverse tapestry of flavours and customs reflecting millennia of contact with foreign influences. Modern Indian cuisine was largely shaped by British colonization, incorporating foreign ingredients, techniques, and culinary preferences producing hybrid meals. Anglo-Indian cuisine is a distinctive culinary tradition born of British colonialism. Combining British culinary tastes with Indian spices and ingredients, dishes like kedgeree, mulligatawny soup, and pish-pash reflected the cultural interactions - and power relations - of the colonial age. These foods reflected the junction of two different civilizations and acted as gastronomic bridges.

New Ingredients were brought to India by colonization—potatoes, chillies, and tomatoes—transform regional cuisines. Although these were foreign imports, they fitted perfectly into Indian cooking customs and became mainstays of classic dishes like aloo gobi and tamatar ka shorba. Originally brought by the British to set up farms, tea developed into masala chai, a spicy, aromatic beverage today a staple of culture.

Food came to represent opposition to British exploitation during the Swadeshi movement. Celebrated for their simplicity and cultural roots, traditional foods like khichdi reflected the rejection of imported items and the assertion of local identity. This gastronomic rebellion highlighted the significance of food in the more general fight for independence.

World Impact

Indian food has been well-known worldwide in the postcolonial era thanks to dishes like chicken tikka masala, which results from Indian-British fusion and is now a global icon in itself. These dishes reflect India's capacity to recover and modify its gastronomic tradition for a worldwide audience, therefore highlighting the ongoing legacy of colonial hybridity.

Vietnam: Culinary Innovation Under Colonial Rule

Vietnam's culinary identity has been profoundly shaped by French colonization, with hybrid dishes that combine European and indigenous elements becoming hallmarks of the nation's food culture. These include:

Bánh Mì: The introduction of the French baguette during colonial rule led to the creation of bánh mì, a sandwich that fuses French and Vietnamese ingredients. This dish incorporates traditional Vietnamese flavours—pickled vegetables, herbs, and chilli sauce—with French elements such as pâté and butter, creating a globally celebrated culinary icon.

Cà Phê Sữa Đá: Coffee, another colonial import, was adopted by the Vietnamese to suit local tastes and resource constraints. The use of sweetened condensed milk, due to the scarcity of fresh dairy, transformed this drink into cà phê sữa đá, a beverage synonymous with Vietnamese culture and ingenuity.

Culinary Resilience: During the Great Famine of 1945, Vietnamese communities relied on resourcefulness to survive. Dishes like cháo loãng exemplify this resilience, as families stretched limited resources to sustain themselves. Such adaptations became symbols of endurance in the face of adversity.

Global Recognition: In the postcolonial period, Vietnamese cuisine has gained international acclaim. Dishes like phở and bánh mì have become culinary ambassadors, showcasing Vietnam's ability to transform colonial influences into sources of national pride and identity. These foods highlight the creativity and adaptability of Vietnamese culture, resonating with audiences worldwide.

Comparative Insights

India and Vietnam both show how colonial interactions changed their gastronomic scenes to produce hybrid meals that capture cultural pride, adaptation, and resiliency. While British colonists in India provided tea and potatoes, French dominance in Vietnam supplied bread and coffee, both impacting the creation of famous meals. Food evolved in both settings from a tool for recovering cultural identity and a means of protest, finally turning into a worldwide emblem of legacy and creativity.

Conclusion

Examined through the case studies of India and Vietnam, culinary hybridity provides a potent prism through which one may view the resilience of postcolonial cultures and the ongoing legacies of colonialism. Far from a simple need, food becomes a channel of cultural interaction, resistance, and identity development reflecting the complex interaction of dominance and adaptation defining colonial interactions.

Anglo-Indian cuisine and famous dishes like masala chai and chicken tikka masala emerged in India from the blending of British and indigenous culinary ingredients. These dishes show not just the effect of colonial influence but also the agency of Indian people in recovering and redefining indigenous cooking customs. Likewise, Vietnam's bánh mì and cà phê demonstrate the nation's inventiveness in customizing French imports to become uniquely Vietnamese culinary symbols. Both countries turned colonial restrictions into icons of cultural identification and national pride.

Globally, hybrid cuisines expose the inventiveness and resiliency of postcolonial countries, therefore redefining cultural hierarchies and challenging Western-centric culinary myths. From their native roots, dishes like phở, bánh mì, and

chicken tikka masala have become famous worldwide symbols that promote intercultural communication and highlight the interdependence of food cultures. These cuisines are emissaries from their countries, showing how food customs could be a link between history of tyranny and goals for unification and creativity.

Furthermore, the spread of hybrid cuisines emphasizes how changing cultural identity is in a linked society. Postcolonial countries keep claiming their agency and honouring their legacy by keeping traditional aspects while welcoming invention. Rooted in histories of resistance and adaptation, hybrid dishes represent the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernism and provide a hopeful story of cultural survival and reinventions.

Finally, culinary hybridity exposes the resiliency and adaptation of once colonized nations in addition to exposing the historical influence of colonialism. Serving as cultural relics that chronicle resistance, ingenuity, and worldwide interaction, the hybrid cuisine of India and Vietnam is evidence of the transforming power of food. These cuisines inspire us to accept the diversity and connection of the modern world by means of their rich flavours and histories, therefore enabling us to consider the complex legacies of the past.

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PART **VII**
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
& WASTE MANAGEMENT

19 |

Does Sustainable Waste Management Address Environmental Questions? A Case Study of the University of Westminster

Afra Bhuiyan

Abstract

This paper explores the role of sustainable waste management in tackling environmental challenges, specifically focusing on the University of Westminster as a case study. Sustainable waste management aims to minimize reliance on landfills and incineration while conserving resources and reducing pollution. The University of Westminster has adopted several policies in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as a zero-waste-to-landfill policy, the implementation of source segregation bins, the transition to biodegradable materials, and the initiation of the Cavendish Living Lab. These initiatives support climate action, responsible consumption, and the development of sustainable communities. However, the analysis identifies notable challenges, including dependence on incineration, the necessity for comprehensive waste education, potential environmental trade-offs associated with the use of wood-based products, and the financial barriers to scaling innovative projects. While the university's initiatives reflect commendable progress, addressing these challenges is essential for achieving a stronger alignment with global environmental objectives. The report concludes that, with enhanced strategies and active stakeholder engagement, the University of Westminster has the potential to become a leading example of sustainable waste management and environmental stewardship.

Introduction

A key approach in tackling the increasing environmental problems of current consumption habits and trash generation seems to be sustainable waste management. Sustainable waste management, defined as the process of minimizing trash sent to landfills and incinerators while maximizing the reuse, recycling, and recovery of materials, aims to reduce pollution, save resources, and, therefore, foster climate resilience (Lettieri, 2020). Its importance results from

the negative effects of conventional waste disposal practices: landfills contaminate soil and water, release methane gas - a strong greenhouse gas - and occupy valuable land; incineration generates greenhouse gases and toxic pollutants, therefore aggravating climate change. The overproduction of commodities by the worldwide supply chain, which depletes natural resources and produces massive amounts of garbage, emphasizes the need to implement sustainable waste management techniques.

Since greenhouse gases can raise the levels of respiratory disorders, allergies, and other health issues connected with bad air quality, climate change can also aggravate the public health of a country. Another public health issue is the possibility of disease-carrying vectors, including rodents, flies, and mosquitoes, finding refuge in landfills, therefore contaminating water supplies, and causing pandemics. Ignored, these problems compromise the sustainability of next generations and the health of ecosystems. Sustainable waste management has been embraced by governments, businesses, and institutions all over to address these issues; educational institutions especially help to raise awareness and apply creative ideas. The efforts of the University of Westminster towards sustainable waste management are investigated in this paper, and whether its policies and procedures sufficiently answer environmental concerns are examined. Ranked among the top 15% of 1,400 worldwide universities helping the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the university is known, as a leader in sustainability (Westminster.ac.uk, 2023.). The SDGs also wish to include everyone in their goals without leaving anyone behind; they seek to transform the world by means of global cooperation, ending poverty and inequality, protecting the planet, and ensuring that everyone enjoys health, justice, and prosperity (United Nations, 2024). Three SDGs pertinent to waste management are the main focus of this study: Goal 13 (climate action), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), and Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities). Using an analysis of important projects, including the university's zero waste to landfill policy, source segregation systems, change to biodegradable materials, and Cavendish Living Lab, this paper explores the efficiency of these policies in reducing environmental damage. The study points up achievements, difficulties, and places for development, therefore helping to evaluate if the University of Westminster's sustainable waste management practices might be a model for handling world environmental problems. This paper seeks to add to the current conversation on the function of institutions in fostering sustainability

and environmental stewardship by pointing up weaknesses and suggesting remedies.

Evaluating the Effectiveness and Challenges of Zero Waste to Landfill Policies

A major project of the university is its zero waste to landfill policy. The university produced 637,775 kg of garbage during the 2022–23 academic year; this was handled as follows: None of the produced trash ended up in landfills, 327,131 kg was burned, 281,014 kg was recycled, and 29,630 kg underwent anaerobic digestion—the process of turning garbage into biofuel (University of Westminster Sustainability Report 2022–23). This success helps fight climate change and lowers pollution of soil and water. Leachate (Lowe, 2021), a poisonous material that contaminates soil and water, is produced by landfills and releases methane gas, 84 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in heat trapping capacity. Methane emissions accelerate glacier melting and sea level rise, exacerbating climate change. The university’s zero landfill policy directly aligns with Goal 13 of the SDGs (climate action). However, the reliance on incineration as the largest waste disposal method introduces various challenges to the world. Incineration releases greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and ammonia, contributing to climate change. Another word for the volume of greenhouse gases released by a person or an organisation is called a carbon footprint (Harkiolakis, 2013). Additionally, it produces toxic compounds like hydrogen cyanide (National Research Council, 2002), repeated exposure to which poses health risks including failure of the central nervous system or even death. This therefore undermines the university’s efforts toward Goal 13 and highlights the need for more sustainable waste disposal methods. Zero waste policies aim to significantly reduce the environmental impact of landfills by minimising the amount of waste that is sent to these sites. However, as highlighted by Zaman and Lehmann (2011), while these policies can be effective in reducing landfill usage, they sometimes transfer the burden of waste management onto other disposal methods, particularly incineration.

As discussed above, incineration can reduce the physical volume of waste; however, it also poses significant environmental risks by emitting harmful greenhouse gases and releasing toxic chemicals into the atmosphere. This situation emphasises the critical need for a more balanced approach to waste

management that prioritises environmentally friendly practices such as recycling and composting over potentially harmful disposal methods like incineration. Although the zero waste to landfill initiative is an important milestone in sustainability efforts, its dependence on alternative disposal methods can undermine the overall environmental benefits intended by such policies. MacArthur (2017) underscores the importance of aligning zero waste to landfill policies with the principles of the waste hierarchy, which advocates for the following sequence: reduce, reuse, recycle. Good use of this hierarchy calls for not only encouraging the recovery of resources by means of composting and recycling but also greatly lowering of waste generation at its source. This entails putting plans into action meant to stop waste from arising initially. Policies should give the creation of a circular economy—where materials are, wherever feasible, reused or repurposed—top priority, therefore completing the loop on manufacture and consumption. Zero waste programs' sustainability can be raised by concentrating on increased resource recovery, hence reducing reliance on incineration. Wilson et al. (2006) draws attention to the socioeconomic difficulties zero waste programs create in trying to be implemented.

Developing the required infrastructure, public awareness campaigns, and efficient waste segregation systems comes with a significant price, being the main obstacles. In underdeveloped areas, where resources can already be low, these expenses especially weigh heavily. Furthermore, effective trash segregation depends on public participation and thorough educational campaigns, which vary in impact depending on the particular society. Investing in waste education programs that increase awareness of the need of recycling and responsible waste disposal as well as offer incentives that inspire people and businesses to actively participate in these projects will help these policies to fulfil their goals. Pires et al. (2011) presents excellent case studies of facilities that have effectively reached zero waste to disposal targets. Strong recycling programs, active composting of organic waste, and involving many stakeholders all through the process helped to explain these accomplishments. For example, universities may be rather important in spearheading these projects since they can include waste management instruction into their courses and simultaneously implement sustainable practices across their campuses.

Zero waste to landfill targets can be achieved with thorough waste management plans including active community participation and support, as shown by

institutions including the University of Westminster. Murray (2002) looks critically at the language used around "zero waste," contending that it may be somewhat deceptive. The word suggests a thorough eradication of waste, a target hardly reachable in useful situations. Murray, on the other hand, supports a more open approach that not only recognises the objectives of waste minimisation but also solves the shortcomings in present waste management systems. Organisations should clearly and successfully convey their policies, emphasising on the development towards bettering waste management instead of supporting an unattainable perfection. Zero waste to landfill rules are therefore necessary to lower environmental damage, support sustainable waste management techniques, and match more general worldwide sustainability objectives. The efficacy of these measures can be hampered, though, by various factors including reliance on incineration, budgetary constraints, and problems with public involvement. Crucially, a strong emphasis on the waste hierarchy—which gives recycling and reduction top priority above any kind of disposal—is Fostering a culture of sustainability also depends critically on public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and creative waste processing technology (like waste-to-energy systems). To guarantee the long-term viability of waste reduction programs, governments, businesses, and communities must establish alliances with one another. In order to maximise the environmental, financial, and social advantages zero waste-to- landfill policies provide, they must ultimately be included into a larger, more comprehensive waste management plan even if they represent a notable progress towards sustainability already.

Circular Economy and the Environment

A circular economy is an innovative and sustainable economic model that emphasises the continuous use and regeneration of resources. Its primary goal is to minimise waste while maximising resource efficiency, addressing the urgent need for sustainable practices in our production and consumption processes. Unlike the traditional linear economy, which follows a straightforward "take, make, dispose" pattern, the circular economy aims to "close the loop." This is achieved by designing products and systems that inherently promote recycling, reuse, and regeneration. This includes creating a waste and pollution strategy focused on engineering products to minimise waste and prevent harmful byproducts during the manufacturing process. Achieving this requires a shift in the mindset of designers and manufacturers, who must consider the entire

lifecycle of a product, from material selection to end-of-life disposal. This means keeping products and materials in use, which involves implementing strategies like recycling, reusing, repairing, and refurbishing items. By extending the lifecycle of products, we can significantly reduce the demand for fresh resources and minimise waste. Various business models, such as product-as-a-service or leasing instead of ownership, can encourage these practices by providing consumers incentives to return products for refurbishment or recycling. The aim is to regenerate natural systems, emphasising the importance of restoring and enhancing ecosystems.

Practices such as composting biodegradable waste, using sustainable agricultural techniques, and promoting biodiversity are essential. By investing in regenerative practices, we can mitigate environmental harm and improve the health of our ecosystems, benefiting both nature and society. The relationship between a circular economy and environmental sustainability is profound, as this model directly addresses critical ecological challenges such as resource depletion, pollution, and climate change. If the circular economy is put into practice, it is expected to achieve positive outcomes, like reducing waste. By emphasising the design of products for reuse and recycling, the circular economy significantly decreases the volume of waste that ends up in landfills or is incinerated. This reduction in waste lessens pollution and conserves vital land resources that would otherwise be needed for waste management. Additionally, the circular economy can help mitigate climate change. Circular economy practices can play a vital role in lowering greenhouse gas emissions. By reducing the demand for raw material extraction - often energy-intensive - circular approaches can considerably decrease emissions.

Promoting recycling and reuse also lessens the need for energy-intensive manufacturing of new products, making a significant contribution to climate change mitigation. Moreover, it aids in conserving natural resources. Circular systems are designed to minimise the extraction of finite resources such as metals, minerals, and fossil fuels. By encouraging material recovery and regeneration, these systems provide a pathway for sustainable resource management. For example, companies that use recycled aluminium instead of newly-mined aluminium can achieve energy savings of up to 95% (International Aluminium Institute, 2024), greatly reducing their environmental impact. The circular economy also enhances biodiversity. The adoption of sustainable agricultural

practices and the avoidance of harmful extraction processes are critical for enhancing biodiversity. The circular economy seeks to create a balanced relationship between industry and nature by restoring degraded ecosystems and supporting diverse biological communities.

Preventing pollution is another central tenet of the circular economy. This involves designing products and packaging that avoid using single-use plastics and other materials contributing to land and ocean pollution. We can drastically reduce our environmental footprint by replacing traditional plastics with innovative solutions like bioplastics and reusable packaging systems. Additionally, the circular economy fosters renewable energy use. It encourages the utilisation of renewable energy sources across various industries. By minimising reliance on fossil fuels and integrating renewable energy into production processes, businesses can significantly lower their overall environmental impact while promoting sustainable energy practices. In conclusion, the circular economy offers a comprehensive framework for addressing some of our time's most pressing environmental issues. We can create a more resilient and equitable future for all by redesigning our economic systems to prioritise sustainability.

From Theory into Practice: Optimising Waste Management Through Source Segregation

By installing a thorough system of source segregation bins over its campuses—where recycling occurs at the site of generation—the institution has taken major actions to encourage recycling (www.urbanagendaplatform.org, n.d.). These colour-coded bins, which were created with user-friendliness in mind, let staff members and students quickly find where to toss their trash. Non-recyclable garbage, for instance, should be disposed of in black bins; cyan bins are meant for mixed recyclables, such as metal and plastic containers. Designed especially for paper and cardboard products, dark blue bins guarantee that these goods may be handled correctly. Apart from these main colours, the institution has placed specific dumpsters in some places to improve recycling initiatives. Strategically placed for the disposal of coffee cups, orange bins reflect the increasing use of single-use objects on university grounds. Green bins are also meant for food waste, therefore encouraging composting and lessening of organic waste sent into landfills.

This project seeks to promote the university's environmental sustainability commitment and minimise contamination so promoting sustainable waste management techniques. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 13 (Climate Action), the institution aims to contribute to the worldwide fight against climate change and produce a greener campus. But a big disparity in garbage education within the university community now compromises the efficiency of this waste separation system. Many people are not clear what can be recycled or where to correctly dispose of their trash, which results in lost objects and later pollution of recyclable materials. This contamination makes the whole contents of a bin unrecyclable, therefore negating the goal of the program. Comprehensive educational efforts informing the college community about appropriate garbage disposal methods are desperately needed to meet this issue. Looking to successful models in other nations, such as Japan, where rigid trash segregation rules are in place and generally accepted, the university might improve its recycling initiatives. Effective educational policies would help the institution to guarantee the success of its waste segregation project and enable the realisation of its alignment with the SDGs.

The Shift to Biodegradable Alternatives: Benefits and Environmental Trade-offs

The university has taken significant steps to promoting sustainability by replacing single-use plastics in its cafés with biodegradable alternatives. These alternatives include items such as paper lids and wooden cutlery, which are designed to decompose more easily than traditional plastic products. By making this transition, the university aims to reduce its contributions to landfill waste and promote Goal 12, which focuses on responsible consumption and production practices. However, while the shift to wood-based products offers environmental benefits, it also presents several challenges that must be carefully considered. Trees play a crucial role in the ecosystem as carbon sinks; they absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere throughout their lifespan, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change. When trees are harvested to produce wood products, the carbon that has been stored in their biomass is released back into the atmosphere. This release of carbon can potentially exacerbate climate change, as it increases greenhouse gas concentrations. Moreover, relying primarily on wood products may divert attention from the fundamental principles of sustainable

waste management: reducing, reusing, and recycling. A truly effective sustainable policy should prioritise these principles, emphasising the reduction of waste generation in the first place, the reuse of materials wherever possible, and the recycling of products to extend their lifecycle. As it stands, the university's current policy- while a step in the right direction - falls short of comprehensively addressing Goal 13, which focuses on climate action. To fully support both environmental sustainability and effective waste management, the university may need to explore additional strategies and practices that align more closely with these crucial goals.

Cavendish Living Lab

One shining example of sustainable ideas in action is the Quintin Hogg Trust-funded Cavendish Living Lab. Based on the Cavendish campus, the lab focuses on turning organic food waste into useful liquid fertiliser. Since waste is converted into biogas—that is, fertiliser—this is where the anaerobic digestion of waste disposal finds application. This method starts with gathering food waste created by other buildings including university cafeterias. After processing the waste, nutrient-dense liquid fertiliser is created and employed in modern hydroponics towers meant for different vegetable growth. These very effective hydroponics let year-round farming possible regardless of outside temperature conditions. The hydroponics operate with a reservoir of liquid fertiliser where a pump lies within. After the pump distributes the solution to the top of the tower, the liquid runs down into the reservoir feeding the plant roots. The liquid is much easier for plants to take the nutrients from than traditional compost since creating compost takes at least 6 months.

The vegetables produced are subsequently donated to local food banks, thereby not only providing fresh produce to those in need but also significantly minimising the amount of organic waste that would otherwise contribute to landfill accumulation (Cavendishlivinglab.com, 2018). This project not only solves important environmental issues with trash management and greenhouse gas emissions but also helps the nearby society. The Cavendish Living Lab project fits really nicely with Sustainable Development Goals 13 (Climate Action), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Its emphasis on creating a circular economy highlights the need for recycling and reusing material instead of choosing disposal. The project does

have certain difficulties though, especially in relation to scalability. The great expenses linked with research, development, and daily operations now restrict the capacity to extend this concept to other campuses. A significant financial commitment would be required to extend the reach of this advantageous initiative, which beg issues of its long-term sustainability and feasibility in a more general perspective.

Conclusion

The University of Westminster has made commendable strides in sustainable waste management through initiatives such as its zero waste to landfill policy, source segregation bins, transition to biodegradable materials, and the Cavendish Living Lab. The zero waste to landfill policy although completely removing waste from going to landfills, which causes various health and safety concerns to stop being problems only creates another issue through increasing the carbon footprint of the world. Recycling at the source of creation helps to mitigate the climate crisis by promoting healthy production and consumption efforts, although the issue for this sustainable waste management policy is that a lot of students lack the education to know that once contamination happens, the whole lot must be dumped. Even unintentionally, modern society has made the norm to care more about the economic side of things instead of the environmental side. Biodegradable materials although good and well in theory may just create more waste, since wooden lids are meant to be used once while unsanitary plastic lids can be used multiple times. Cutting down new trees for a one-time use product is not within the circular economy, and therefore not suitable for sustainable waste management.

The Cavendish Living Lab is a revolutionary project which demonstrates the circular economy perfectly since food waste is being turned into a new product instead of being discarded, the only issue with this project is the high maintenance cost. Before being implanted throughout, the university must find a way to commercially sell the project to be used throughout institutional buildings and enjoyed by the masses. These efforts align with the SDGs, particularly Goals 11, 12, and 13, and demonstrate the university's commitment to environmental stewardship. However, challenges remain. The reliance on incineration undermines climate action efforts, and the lack of waste education reduces the effectiveness of source segregation. Additionally, the environmental

trade-offs of using wooden materials and the high costs of scaling innovative projects like the Cavendish Living Lab highlight areas for improvement. To enhance its alignment with the SDGs and address global environmental challenges, the university should explore alternative waste disposal methods, invest in waste education, balance material choices for minimal environmental impact, and ensure the financial feasibility of its initiatives. By addressing these shortcomings, the University of Westminster can solidify its position as a global leader in sustainability and ensure its contributions benefit future generations.

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Advancing Sustainability: Waste Management Innovations at the University of Westminster

Salman Aziz

Abstract

Reducing the volume of garbage sent to landfills and incinerators while prioritizing recycling, reusing, and repurposing materials helps to minimize environmental damage by means of sustainable waste management. For example, recycling decreases the need for the procurement of raw materials, therefore preserving natural resources and energy. Reusing items such as glass containers or furniture also helps decrease emissions associated with production processes. Furthermore, composting organic waste not only improves soil but also helps to reduce dependency on chemical fertilizers, therefore supporting better ecosystems. Collectively, these practices contribute to lowering greenhouse gas emissions, mitigating pollution, and promoting the judicious use of finite resources, thus serving as essential components of environmental sustainability. This case study of the University of Westminster examines the implementation of sustainable waste management policies and their alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 11, 12, and 13. The study assesses the university's progress through various initiatives, including striving for zero waste to landfill, source segregation, the use of biodegradable materials, and the establishment of the Cavendish Living Lab. While the university showcases commendable efforts, the article also emphasizes ongoing challenges, such as continued reliance on incineration, insufficient waste education, and the high operational costs associated with sustainability projects. Recommendations for improving these initiatives are also discussed.

Introduction

Sustainable waste management is a critical approach that focuses on maximizing the use of materials to the fullest extent while minimizing the amount of waste that is ultimately sent to landfills or incinerated (Lettieri, 2020). Severe environmental problems include widespread pollution, major contributions to climate change, and the loss of essential natural resources follow from the inefficiencies in waste management throughout the worldwide supply

chain. By using techniques that lower pollutants, save resources, and improve resilience to climate-related effects, sustainable waste management solves current problems. Still, the effectiveness of these approaches mostly relies on the strict and continuous execution of encouraging policies.

The University of Westminster's sustainable waste management policies are investigated in this paper in order to underline their major importance for environmental sustainability. Among the top 15% of universities worldwide actively supporting the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the University of Westminster is clearly one (Westminster.ac.uk, 2023). By means of its several sustainability projects, the university models how educational institutions could efficiently solve environmental problems. The university's congruence with three fundamental SDGs—Goal 11, which emphasizes building sustainable cities and communities; Goal 12, which promotes responsible consumption and production practices; and Goal 13, which calls for immediate action to counteract climate change and its effects—is underlined in this paper. Examining the university's policies and results helps one to better understand the efficiency and possibilities of sustainable waste management practices in tackling more general environmental issues - not only in the university but also in the larger society.

Zero Waste to Landfill

With a thorough zero-waste-to- landfill policy in place, the University of Westminster has managed an amazing 637,775 kg of garbage overall for the 2022–23 academic year. Combining many important techniques— incineration, recycling, and anaerobic digestion—this effort uses a planned approach to waste disposal. Waste was specifically burned by incineration, accounting for 327,131 kg; recycling initiatives helped 281,014 kg; and anaerobic digestion accounted for 29,630 kg (University of Westminster Sustainability Report 2022-23). This method not only reduces the environmental effect of garbage disposal but also solves major issues related to landfill leachate, which can contaminate soil and water supplies with toxic substances. Studies show that such pollution may endanger public health as well as ecosystems. Furthermore, in line with more general environmental goals is the university's dedication to lowering methane emissions, a strong greenhouse gas emitted from decomposing organic waste.

Notwithstanding these encouraging results, the university's great reliance on incineration as the main waste disposal technique creates several environmental issues. More sustainable alternatives are being investigated worldwide from sophisticated mechanical-biological treatment to pyrolysed gasification. With less emissions than conventional incineration, these technologies turn trash into either valuable byproducts or energy source. Pyrolysis, for instance, can turn plastic waste into fuel, whereas gasification generates syngas fit for use in power generation. At the University of Westminster, the viability of these approaches would rely on elements including waste composition of the university, infrastructure availability, and financial commitment. By piloting these technologies or collaborating with research initiatives, the university could diversify its waste management strategies and further minimize its environmental impact. Although it helps to lower trash volume, incineration generates large greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide and sends hazardous substances including hydrogen cyanide into the environment (National Research Council, 2002). These emissions not only aggravate air pollution but also undermine the objectives stated in Sustainable Development Goal 13 of the United Nations, which stresses climate action.

This predicament emphasizes how urgently the University of Westminster has to investigate and apply alternative waste management techniques that give sustainability priority and hence reduce carbon footprints. Expanding recycling systems, improving composting efforts, and funding creative waste-to-energy technologies that lower emissions yet still efficiently handle waste could be among possible substitutes. The institution can better match its operations with its sustainability goals and help to create a better environment for next generations by using a more varied approach to trash management.

Source Segregation

By adding a system of colour-coded bins meant for efficient source separation, the institution has launched a thorough waste management project. This method seeks to greatly support campus community recycling initiatives and streamline waste disposal practices. Black bins have been set aside especially for non-recyclable garbage, which includes things that cannot be handled for recycling because of contamination or material makeup. Mixed recyclables—where things like plastics and metals can be gathered together—are housed in cyan containers,

so optimizing user convenience. Dark blue containers, meanwhile, are especially meant for gathering paper and cardboard products, thus making sure these recyclables are treated correctly. Further bins have been positioned deliberately across campus for food waste and coffee cups to help the university's environmental initiatives even further. These specialized bins seek to promote composting methods by diverting organic waste from landfills, therefore lessening the institution's whole environmental impact.

Although this program shows the university's dedication to sustainable waste management, the possibility for cross-contamination among the several garbage sources compromises its efficiency. Improper item disposal can make whole bins non-recyclable, reducing the recycling operation's general effectiveness. This situation emphasizes the great need of thorough waste education programs that guide and involve the university community on appropriate garbage sorting techniques.

Looking to successful models from all around the world, like Japan, we can see how crucial education is in enhancing waste separation methods. For example, Japan's strict waste separation rules mandate that homes separate their waste into many categories—burnable, non-burnable, recyclable, and hazardous. Comprehensive municipal rules and public education efforts, which have produced recycling rates in some regions above 80% (Ministry of the Environment, Japan, 2021) help to promote this. This kind of strategy shows how transforming well-crafted instructional programs can be on waste management systems. In Japan, households receive extensive training on how to sort their waste correctly, resulting in high recycling rates and effective waste management. This example emphasizes the need of awareness campaigns and educational initiatives, which can greatly enhance the impact and efficacy of the university's waste management policy, therefore guaranteeing that sustainability targets are satisfied and exceeded.

Biodegradable Materials

As described in Goal 12 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the shift away from single-use plastics towards biodegradable materials—such as bamboo coffee cup lids and wooden cutlery—is a significant step in encouraging responsible consumption and production. Naturally breaking down over time,

biodegradable materials not only help to reduce trash in landfills but also replenish the soil by reintroducing vital nutrients into the ecology. Though the move to bamboo and wooden goods is advantageous, it is not without difficulties. The sourcing of wood for cutlery and other products can lead to deforestation, which threatens biodiversity and disrupts ecosystems. Furthermore, the carbon dioxide held in trees is released back into the atmosphere when they are removed, therefore perhaps aggravating climate change.

This complicated scenario underlines the need of giving the environmental effects of our decisions great thought. Adopting sustainable alternatives and reducing the negative consequences on our planet call for a combined strategy including responsible sourcing, sustainable forestry methods, and continuous development in biodegradable materials. In the end, making wise decisions that help the environment while attending to society's demands depends on awareness and education.

Cavendish Living Lab

The Cavendish Living Lab, situated at the University of Westminster, is an integrated initiative that emphasizes co-creating sustainable solutions through applied research and meaningful learning experiences. Using the university campus as a living laboratory, this project involving students from many disciplines and academic levels addresses urgent real-world issues, including food waste, plastic waste, and wastewater management. This technique efficiently transforms food waste into specialized liquid fertilizer fit for hydroponics, therefore acting as a shining example of circular economy ideas in use. This creative solution tackles two major environmental issues: it dramatically lowers the volume of organic waste that would otherwise wind up in landfills and minimizes greenhouse gas emissions connected with the breakdown of organic materials. Processing food waste in this way helps the lab not just with waste management but also greatly reduces the negative environmental effects usually resulting from organic waste breakdown, such as methane emissions.

The Cavendish Living Lab is also helpful for nearby areas. Food banks benefit especially from this nutrient-rich fertilizer since these groups work to increase food security and support environmentally friendly farming methods. Through the distribution of this fertilizer, the lab aids in the strengthening of yields by

local food producers, so improving the supply of fresh vegetables to people in need. Nevertheless, the lab has great difficulties growing its activities even with its notable successes and positive effects on the surroundings and local businesses. High costs related to ongoing research and day-to-day operational expenses create financial hurdles that impede the broader implementation of similar initiatives. To achieve successful scaling, it is imperative to secure additional financial backing from public or private sources and to explore more cost-effective operational strategies. This will not only enhance the lab's sustainability but also amplify its positive contributions to environmental health and community welfare, making it possible to replicate its model in other regions facing similar challenges.

Global Context and Stakeholder Perspectives

The initiatives at the University of Westminster should be considered within the global framework of sustainable waste management. The shift towards a circular economy has gained recognition as a vital strategy for mitigating environmental impacts. By prioritizing waste reduction, resource efficiency, and sustainable production, models such as the Cavendish Living Lab provide scalable solutions to address pressing global challenges.

Engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders enriches this dialogue. Students and staff have underscored the necessity for clearer communication regarding recycling practices to reduce contamination. Policymakers emphasize the significance of incorporating advanced waste management technologies, while sustainability experts advocate for aligning initiatives with global best practices. By involving these stakeholders, the university can ensure its policies are both practical and impactful.

Challenges and Recommendations

The university's current dependence on incineration as a waste management solution has significant environmental repercussions. Incineration contributes to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, which ultimately undermines the university's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint and addressing climate change. This reliance not only affects local air quality but also contradicts the institution's goals of promoting sustainability and climate action.

Waste Education

The efficiency of the current waste source separation rules is much hampered by the large discrepancy in thorough waste education among university officials, teachers, and students themselves. Many people may not know how to correctly classify many kinds of waste, including general refuse, recyclables, and organics. Lack of information often leads to incorrect disposal practices wherein recyclable products wind up in landfills rather than being properly handled. This thus reduces recycling rates and helps to explain the growing garbage load in landfills.

Implementing a strong educational program that not only guides all members of the university community on appropriate trash disposal techniques but also stresses the environmental impact of waste management decisions if we are to properly handle this problem. This program need to feature seminars, workshops, and interesting content catered to several audiences. It might also include practical exercises showing the value of waste source separation and its part in sustainability. By closing this educational gap, we can promote responsible waste management that eventually helps the university community overall as well as the surroundings.

Materials Selection

Although admirable, the continuous move towards biodegradable materials presents difficult sustainability issues. Along with notable carbon emissions during their lifetime, the manufacturing of these materials can lead to deforestation. Certification initiatives like FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) can guarantee ethical raw material procurement and encourage the use of alternative biodegradable materials like agricultural waste-derived goods or mycelium-based packaging to help to offset these effects. The effectiveness of biodegradable materials in different environmental contexts is still under scrutiny, raising concerns about their actual impact on waste reduction and environmental health. A careful evaluation of these materials' sourcing and environmental implications is essential to ensure they align with the university's sustainability goals.

Financial Perspective

Implementing and scaling creative sustainability initiatives like the Cavendish Living Lab is greatly hampered by financial limitations. High upfront expenses for infrastructure, research, and development can discourage support of these projects. Overcoming these financial obstacles and allowing the effective spread of sustainable practices inside the university will depend critically on searches for grants, alliances, or alternate funding sources.

Advice

To help to create a more sustainable waste management system, we should fund creative technologies including enhanced recycling and composting. While advanced recycling uses modern techniques to break down plastics and other materials into their base components, generating new goods, composting turns organic waste into nutrient-rich soil. By concentrating on these substitutes, we may greatly cut our dependence on burning, which wastes possible resources and produces negative emissions.

Juggling Material Selection

We have to encourage the use of materials according with the ideas of cutting, reusing, and recycling as we work for sustainability. This entails carefully choosing goods created from sustainable resources, built for lifetime, and easily recyclable at the end of their use. Examining elements like carbon footprint, manufacturing energy usage, and toxicity helps one also assess the environmental impact of these materials. Through wise decisions, we help to create a circular economy that reduces waste.

Securing Funding for Sustainability Projects

Getting enough money for sustainability projects will help us to effectively carry out our plans. Sustainable financial solutions could come from creative ideas include building alliances with commercial sectors, using carbon credits, or chasing green bonds. While carbon credits can incentivize emissions reductions and create income to support sustainability projects, collaborations with companies interested in corporate social responsibility (CSR) could also present

financial options. Working with several stakeholders—governmental agencies, non-profit groups, and commercial companies—helps us to pool resources and match our objectives. Innovative initiatives' financial viability can be guaranteed in part by grant applications, cooperative ventures, and community fundraising events as well as partnerships. Strong alliances and proving our projects' long-term advantages will help us draw the required support to have a long-lasting effect. The projects of the university fit rather precisely the following SDGs:

- *Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities:* The university helps to build a more sustainable urban environment utilizing zero waste-to-landfill rules and source segregation. These initiatives help communities to be resilient and lower pollution.
- *Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production:* The Cavendish Living Lab's circular economy methods and switch to biodegradable materials best show responsible consumption. These programmes lower environmental impact and promote effective use of resources.
- *Target 13:* Through lower methane emissions from landfills, the university's waste management practices seek to slow down climate change.

However, reliance on incineration highlights the need for further innovation to minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusion

The University of Westminster has shown great development in sustainable waste management, therefore solving environmental problems. Policies such as "zero waste to landfill," source separation, and the Cavendish Living Lab help the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Their general success is hampered, though, by factors like dependency on incineration, inadequate garbage education, and expensive operating expenses.

The university should include particular, doable actions to improve these projects, such as:

- Working with outside companies and government agencies to provide both finance and knowledge needed to scale up environmental projects.
- Establish a sustainability committee including staff, students, and outside stakeholder involvement to encourage communication and creative ideas.
- Establish incentive programs will help departments or individuals with excellent waste management techniques to inspire responsibility and involvement.
- Starting focused educational initiatives like seminars and interactive events can help to increase trash segregation and lower contamination.

By addressing these areas for improvement and integrating the perspectives of stakeholders, the University of Westminster can further align its policies with global best practices in sustainable waste management. These actions will strengthen its role as a leader in sustainability and serve as a model for other institutions striving to balance environmental stewardship with operational feasibility.

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Advancing Sustainability:
Waste Management Innovations at the University of Westminster
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From Grounds to Green: Sustainable Waste Management of Coffee Residue in Hanoi and Westminster

Charlene Okai

Abstract

The important contribution of sustainable waste management in solving the environmental problems caused by coffee residue, a major byproduct of one of the most consumed beverages worldwide, is investigated in this paper. Based on case studies of the metropolitan areas of Hanoi, Vietnam, and Westminster, United Kingdom, the study emphasizes different approaches moulded by their various roles as consumers and coffee producers. Westminster models effective practices through community-driven projects, creative recycling programs, and strong public-private partnerships. On the other hand, Hanoi shows unrealized ability to apply sensible circular economy ideas using its status as a coffee producer. While highlighting chances for technology innovation, worldwide cooperation, and community involvement, the research notes important obstacles including regulatory inefficiency and low public knowledge. Emphasizing the need for adaptation, inclusion, and creativity in reducing environmental damage, the research offers practical lessons for worldwide sustainable waste management by contrasting these two cities.

Introduction

Sustainable waste management has emerged as a cornerstone in addressing pressing environmental challenges. Defined as "the process of collecting, transporting, processing, and disposal of waste materials" (DGB Group, no date), sustainable waste management spans a spectrum of creative ideas, including waste-to-energy projects, recycling, and composting. These methods seek to avoid environmental damage while so encouraging resource economy. Waste generation has become a major worldwide concern as urbanization and population increase keep accelerating, and the need for coordinated implementation of sustainable solutions.

Coffee residue, a waste product of one of the most consumed beverages worldwide, is among the most fascinating models of waste management. Though billions of people drink coffee worldwide, the manufacturing and consumption of this beverage cause major environmental hazards. If not properly controlled, these wastes—from wastewater and packaging to used coffee grounds—help contribute to pollution and greenhouse gases. Therefore, advancing sustainability targets depends on tackling the environmental issues related to coffee residue.

By means of two contrasting metropolitan centres—Hanoi, Vietnam, and Westminster, United Kingdom—this paper assesses the contribution of sustainable waste management in reducing the ecological impact of the coffee residue. It draws attention to important results including Westminster's success with recycling and community projects and Hanoi's possible leadership in the circular economy, and it provides practical advice for encouraging worldwide cooperation and innovation in waste management techniques. As a big producer of coffee, Hanoi presents one point of view; as a major consumer, Westminster presents another. Through an analysis of how these cities handle coffee waste, this paper assesses the effectiveness of present methods, points out areas for development, and notes problems. It offers relative analysis of Westminster's community-driven projects and Hanoi's potential for circular economy leadership, so synthesizing goals including lowering environmental damage and encouraging innovation. By use of comparative analysis, it seeks to offer practical recommendations for worldwide sustainable waste management.

The Environmental Challenge of Coffee Residue

Coffee usage worldwide produces almost 9 billion kg of coffee grounds annually. For every single cup of coffee consumed, this startling statistic leads to an estimated 11 grammes of trash produced (Melo, 2024). Still, this figure just considers the spent coffee grounds. Other sources of significant waste include packaging materials, and several industrial wastes produced during the brewing of coffee. Harmful tannins, pathogenic micro-organisms, and poisonous minerals (Saxena et al., 2024) are among the often hazardous elements found in these leftovers). Such compounds contribute significantly to environmental contamination, therefore affecting marine ecosystems, soil quality, public health in general, and even the state of the soil.

Coffee grounds improperly disposed of cause their anaerobic breakdown in landfills, which produces methane, a rather strong greenhouse gas. Because of its heat-trapping properties—about 25 times more effective than carbon dioxide over a 100-year period—methane is especially worrisome. This raises especially alarming methane emissions in light of global climate change. Apart from aggravating the repercussions of global warming, methane leakage seriously challenges worldwide projects meant to lower total carbon footprints and minimize the negative effects of climate change.

Apart from coffee grounds, another major environmental difficulty arises from the wastewater produced during coffee manufacturing. Usually packed with organic compounds and other pollutants, this effluent becomes especially harmful in areas where coffee berries are steeped for husk separation. Often leaching dangerous bacteria and chemicals, the effluent generated during this soaking process contaminates surrounding rivers, lakes, and other water sources. Such pollution not only harms aquatic ecosystems but also endangers local species and can make local water supplies dangerous for both human and animal consumption both equally (Lourenco, 2024). These concerning problems highlight the complex link between good coffee waste management and the more general environmental health risks resulting from it. Moreover, the growing worldwide demand for coffee aggravates the burden on supply chains covering every phase, from farming and manufacturing to disposal. Large-scale coffee cultivation calls for substantial agricultural inputs, which include fertilizer application and major water use. These methods might cause soil damage and a depletion of natural resources. Inappropriate management of the resultant garbage feeds a vicious circle of environmental damage compromising public health as well as ecological systems.

Sustainable techniques must be adopted all through the coffee lifetime, from the first stages of growing to end-user consumption, if we are to properly handle these several issues. This methodical technique calls attention to two aspects. First of all, it is imperative to use environmentally friendly farming techniques with little effect on surroundings. Second, strong waste management strategies have to be developed to manage the produced byproducts at every production and consumption level.

The environmental effects of coffee waste emphasize the urgent requirement of combined waste management techniques. Such approaches have to cover the whole coffee production process, thus cooperation among many different stakeholders—including governments, players in the coffee business, and consumers—is absolutely necessary. Moreover, there is a great need to inspire creativity in the reuse of coffee waste. Turning discarded coffee grounds into biofuels, using them to enrich compost, or creating other value-added goods can provide interesting ways to help to solve environmental problems presented by coffee waste. We can greatly advance towards sustainable coffee methods that protect our environment and public health for next generations by encouraging such innovations and cooperative efforts.

Sustainable Waste Management Practices: Westminster and Hanoi

Westminster: A Model for Recycling and Innovation

The London borough, the City of Westminster serves as a prime example of a consumer-centric coffee culture, with the United Kingdom consuming an astonishing 98 million cups of coffee each day, according to the British Coffee Association (no date). This vibrant coffee scene reflects not only the popularity of coffee in daily life but also the increasing awareness of sustainability issues associated with coffee consumption.

In response to the significant challenge of coffee waste management, Westminster has adopted a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy. This approach includes initiatives such as encouraging local cafes and businesses to implement recycling programs for coffee cups and grounds, promoting the use of biodegradable materials, and facilitating community engagement in sustainable practices. By prioritizing waste reduction and promoting eco-friendly alternatives, Westminster aims to minimize its environmental impact while continuing to support the thriving coffee culture enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

1. Recycling Initiatives: The city employs a comprehensive coffee cup recycling program, utilizing specially designed bins placed in key locations to ensure easy disposal. These bins are regularly emptied, and the materials are processed in facilities that separate the paper and plastic layers of hybrid

coffee cups. The paper is repurposed into high-quality products, while the plastic is reused in industrial applications (City of Westminster Commercial Waste, no date).

2. *Partnerships with Private Firms:* Collaborations with private companies, such as Bio Bean, highlight Westminster's innovative approach. Bio Bean processes used coffee grounds into biofuels, which are then utilized for heating homes and fuelling public transportation. These partnerships demonstrate how sustainable practices can simultaneously address waste management and energy efficiency (Okai, 2024).¹

3. *Community Engagement:* Westminster leverages community-driven initiatives to promote sustainable practices. The University of Westminster's Cavendish Living Lab collects coffee waste across its campuses to produce compost. This compost supports urban agriculture projects, fostering a culture of sustainability while addressing food insecurity. Expanding these efforts citywide could further enhance community participation and environmental outcomes (Okai, 2024).

Hanoi: Navigating Challenges as a Coffee Producer

Vietnam, the world's second-largest coffee producer, faces unique challenges in managing coffee waste. Hanoi, the capital, serves as a microcosm of these complexities, highlighting both the potential and obstacles in implementing sustainable practices:

1. *Regulatory Frameworks:* Vietnam's 2020 Law on Environmental Protection provides a solid foundation for waste management by mandating classification, collection, and recycling. However, enforcement remains inconsistent due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and limited resources. Hazardous waste, including coffee residue, must be managed by licensed facilities, but delays in permitting and compliance issues hinder progress (Dat, 2024).

¹ This was part of the research conducted during my field trip in Hanoi

2. *Circular Economy Strategies:* Efforts to transition to a circular economy are gaining momentum in Hanoi. The National Strategy on Integrated Solid Waste Management envisions comprehensive recycling systems, while the Circular Economy Development Strategy promotes the reuse of waste as raw materials. Coffee residues can be repurposed into biofuels, organic fertilizers, or even building materials, reducing reliance on landfills and lowering environmental impact (Nguyen, 2023).

3. *Public Awareness and Education:* One of the biggest barriers to effective waste management in Hanoi is the lack of public awareness. Citizens often dispose of coffee waste alongside general household waste, reducing its potential for recycling. Public education campaigns, combined with incentives for proper waste segregation, could significantly improve recycling rates and reduce landfill dependency (Nguyen, 2023).

4. *Technological Innovations:* Hanoi has an opportunity to adopt technological solutions, such as anaerobic digestion systems for converting coffee waste into biogas. These technologies not only address waste management but also contribute to renewable energy production, aligning with Vietnam's broader sustainability goals.

By addressing these challenges through enhanced legislation, technological advancements, and public education, Hanoi can position itself as a leader in sustainable coffee waste management.

Comparative Analysis

While providing many chances for cooperative learning and innovation, the waste management policies of Westminster and Hanoi clearly differ.

1. *Waste Management:* Westminster's sophisticated waste management system, which comprises of a network of innovative facilities and well-organized public-private partnerships, defines the city. These joint projects greatly improve the effectiveness of waste collecting and recycling initiatives, therefore smoothing out the process. By contrast,

Hanoi is struggling with significant logistical difficulties and legal roadblocks. Lack of specialized waste management facilities in the city causes delays and ineffective treatment of waste. Westminster's approach is a shining illustration of how effective waste management results from simplified systems and corporate collaboration.

2. Innovation Potential: Hanoi has a special chance to lead in the creation of circular economy projects given its major coffee producing capacity. Coffee grounds and husks, among other waste products of manufacture, could be turned into valuable goods including organic fertilisers and biofuels. Westminster, for instance, has effectively put similar ideas into action—best shown by Bio Bean's project to turn coffee waste into biofuel. This offers a replicable structure that Hanoi may adjust for its situation, so motivating local businesses to be creative. Furthermore, Hanoi might investigate other waste management strategies such as vermicomposting, which breaks down organic waste using worms, and using hydropower from wastewater, therefore expanding its waste management options and improving environmental sustainability.

3. Cultural Engagement: Westminster's waste management initiatives' efficacy is much enhanced by community participation. Universities, neighbourhood businesses, and residents have worked on a range of projects including awareness campaigns aiming at supporting sustainable practices and urban farming projects. This thorough involvement helps to develop community ownership and responsibility for garbage management. By contrast, Hanoi struggles greatly to teach its people appropriate methods of trash classification and handling. Improving public awareness is incredibly essential for raising involvement in environmentally friendly living. Westminster's experience in organizing local projects provides insightful lessons for Hanoi, implying that more public involvement can result in more practical trash management solutions.

4. Policy and Legislation: The strength of Westminster's waste management system is supported by clear, enforceable policies that encourage compliance from corporations and drive innovation in waste

handling. These regulatory frameworks such as the separation of recyclable waste to ensure efficiency and the fining of uncooperative businesses provide a solid foundation for sustainability initiatives. Conversely, Hanoi's ambitious regulatory framework is often undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies and inconsistent enforcement, which create obstacles for both public and private sector involvement. By streamlining these processes and creating incentives for private-sector partnerships, Hanoi could significantly enhance the effectiveness of its waste management efforts and create a more conducive environment for innovation.

Through careful analysis of these differences, it becomes evident that Hanoi could glean valuable insights from Westminster's innovative practices to effectively address its unique waste management challenges. Meanwhile, Westminster could benefit from understanding Hanoi's strategies for leveraging industrial coffee waste, particularly due to its geographic proximity to sources of coffee production. This reciprocal learning could foster enhanced waste management practices in both cities, ultimately contributing to more sustainable urban environments.

Opportunities for Improvement

- 1. Regulation and enforcement:* Governments should enhance the enforcement of waste management laws by establishing strict penalties for non-compliance and providing financial incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices. Collaboration between local governments and private enterprises could further streamline the implementation of these policies.
- 2. Technological Innovation:* Investment in cutting-edge recycling technologies, such as anaerobic digestion and pyrolysis, can transform coffee waste into renewable energy sources like biogas and bio-oil. Additionally, developing infrastructure for these technologies can create employment opportunities and foster economic growth while addressing environmental challenges.

3. *Global Collaboration*: Establishing partnerships between cities and international organizations can facilitate knowledge sharing and resource exchange. For example, Hanoi and Westminster could collaborate on pilot projects to test innovative waste management solutions, benefiting from shared expertise and financial support.

4. *Education and Advocacy*: Raising public awareness about the environmental impact of coffee waste through targeted campaigns can inspire behavioural change. Workshops, social media outreach, and collaborations with educational institutions can empower citizens to actively participate in waste segregation and recycling initiatives.

5. *Community-Led Initiatives*: Promoting grassroots movements, such as community composting programs and urban gardening projects, can enhance local engagement in sustainability efforts. These initiatives not only reduce waste but also foster a sense of collective responsibility and environmental stewardship.

6. *Financial Incentives for Innovation*: Governments and private institutions can introduce grants, subsidies, and low-interest loans to encourage businesses to develop and adopt innovative waste management technologies. This financial support can catalyze the growth of startups focused on sustainability solutions.

Conclusion

There is a moral need to promote a better world and a workable way to minimize environmental damage is sustainable waste management. While local circumstances affect the difficulties of coffee residue management, the case studies of Hanoi and Westminster show that great opportunities for useful intervention. From strong laws and community-driven projects to private-sector alliances and technology innovation, both metropolitan areas show the value of group action.

Westminster is a shining example of how metropolitan areas may use existing infrastructure and teamwork to turn trash into resources. Its alliances with businesses, focus on community involvement, and creative recycling initiatives

highlight the possibilities of a whole strategy for sustainability. Conversely, Hanoi, a top producer of coffee, has great potential to promote circular economy ideas by using the waste products of coffee making. Its waste management scene will be transformed mostly by addressing legislative inefficiencies, raising public awareness, and embracing technology.

Achieving sustainability in coffee waste management calls for international cooperation since lessons gained from Hanoi and Westminster can guide methods used elsewhere. Governments, companies, and people must cooperate to provide scalable solutions including community outreach projects which can expand to become major sustainable solutions like the use of hydroponics systems in local communities, invest in sustainable technologies, and give education top priority to drive behavioural change. Cities all over may help to create a more sustainable future by seeing garbage as a resource rather than a liability. All things considered, inclusiveness, creativity, and adaptation define the road towards efficient waste management. Hanoi and Westminster offer insightful models that highlight the important part local settings play in forming strategies. The whole community can change the environmental story of coffee residue from one of waste to one of possibility and resilience by adopting these lessons and strengthening common experiences. Sustainable waste management can solve urgent environmental issues with combined effort, therefore promoting a cleaner, greener, and fairer planet.

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22 |

Harnessing CRISPR for a Greener Future: Advancing Environmental Sustainability Through Genetic Innovation

Norin Khatun

Abstract

CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) technology has emerged as a groundbreaking tool for precise genetic editing, presenting immense potential to tackle global challenges in environmental sustainability. This paper delves into CRISPR's applications in fostering biodiversity conservation, enhancing agricultural resilience, mitigating pollution, and addressing climate change, all in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, alongside its promise, CRISPR also brings forth significant challenges and controversies. These encompass unintended ecological consequences, off-target effects, ethical dilemmas, regulatory inconsistencies, and socioeconomic disruptions. Additionally, the possible misuse of CRISPR, including risks related to weaponization or destabilization of ecosystems, raises further concerns. This paper critically examines these issues and underscores the necessity of robust international regulatory frameworks, equitable access, and interdisciplinary collaboration to harness CRISPR responsibly. The analysis highlights the imperative for cautious innovation to ensure that CRISPR effectively contributes to a sustainable and equitable future while addressing its transformative potential and associated risks.

Introduction

CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of genetic engineering and modification by providing highly precise tools for altering DNA sequences. This groundbreaking technology allows scientists to edit genes with remarkable accuracy, which has significant implications for addressing some of the most pressing global challenges related to environmental stability.

One of the major areas where CRISPR can make a substantial impact is in biodiversity preservation. The ability to edit genetic materials can help in the conservation of endangered species by enhancing their resilience to diseases and environmental changes. Additionally, CRISPR can be utilized to restore the genetic diversity of populations that have suffered due to habitat loss or climate change, ultimately contributing to the health of entire ecosystems. In the realm of food security, CRISPR technology offers the potential to develop crops that are more resistant to pests, diseases, and extreme weather conditions. By enhancing the nutritional value of staple crops and increasing their yield, CRISPR can play a crucial role in feeding the growing global population, especially in regions vulnerable to food shortages. The quick and efficient modification of agricultural products can significantly reduce reliance on chemical pesticides and fertilizers, leading to more sustainable farming practices.

Pollution control is another critical area where CRISPR can be leveraged. For instance, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can be engineered to break down pollutants in soil and water, contributing to cleaner environments. Furthermore, CRISPR can aid in the development of biofuels made from engineered microorganisms that have a significantly lower environmental footprint.

Climate change mitigation is a major priority outlined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and CRISPR technology can assist in developing crops that emit less greenhouse gas or can sequester carbon more effectively. Through precise modifications, researchers can create plants that require less water and fewer resources while thriving in increasingly changing climates.

However, alongside these promising applications of CRISPR, it is important to address the ethical considerations and concerns that arise from its use. Issues such as genetic equity, the potential for unintended consequences in ecosystems, and the moral implications of editing the genetic makeup of living organisms must be scrutinized. As such, public discourse and ethical guidelines will be crucial in guiding the responsible development and implementation of CRISPR technology.

CRISPR technology has the potential to make significant contributions to achieving several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by

promoting agricultural sustainability, reducing pollution, and mitigating the effects of climate change. Nevertheless, it is imperative to navigate the ethical dimensions of this powerful tool to ensure its benefits are maximized while minimizing potential risks. (Uddin, Rudin, and Sen, 2020).

This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the applications of CRISPR technology in promoting biodiversity conservation, enhancing the resilience of agricultural systems, mitigating pollution, and addressing the challenges posed by climate change. It highlights how these efforts align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, the paper discusses how CRISPR can be utilized to protect endangered species and restore ecosystems by enabling precise genetic modifications that enhance survival and adaptability. It also explores the role of CRISPR in developing crops that are more resistant to pests and diseases, thereby improving food security and agricultural sustainability.

Furthermore, the paper addresses the potential of CRISPR in reducing pollution through genetic interventions that can lead to cleaner production processes and the development of microorganisms capable of breaking down pollutants. Finally, it outlines how CRISPR can help mitigate climate change effects by facilitating the development of plants and crops that require less water and can thrive in adverse environmental conditions. Overall, this paper underscores the importance of integrating innovative biotechnological approaches, such as CRISPR, into global strategies for achieving sustainable development.

Overview of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 objectives established by the UN to tackle global challenges, including poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability. Launched in 2015, these goals aim to create a sustainable future by balancing social, economic, and ecological needs. Several of the SDGs emphasize the significance of environmental sustainability, such as:

- SDG 2: Zero Hunger – ensuring food security through sustainable agriculture.

- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation – ensuring access to clean water and reducing pollution.
- SDG 13: Climate Action – combating climate change through reduced emissions and conservation efforts.
- SDG 14: Life Below Water – conserving oceanic health and marine biodiversity.
- SDG 15: Life on Land – protecting terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. (United Nations, 2024)

CRISPR has great potential to further goals by enabling precise genetic editing that creates substances and organisms, ultimately reducing harm and promoting sustainable practices.

CRISPR Technology: Mechanism and Potential

CRISPR is a groundbreaking gene editing technology that uses the natural defence mechanism in bacteria to protect themselves from viral infections and viruses. It uses the Cas9 protein, which acts as a molecular scissor, and a guide RNA (gRNA), which directs the Cas9 protein to a specific DNA sequence. Once the gRNA attaches to the target, it creates a precise cut at that location, triggering the Cell's natural repair mechanisms. This then allows scientists to add, edit or remove genes to get the desired outcome with the gene. (BiologyInsights, 2024)

The potential of CRISPR for Environmental Sustainability Includes:

- Creating crops resistant to pests and diseases involves using CRISPR to edit plant genes, enabling them to produce natural defences and chemicals against pests, reducing reliance on chemical pesticides. (Matinvafa et al., 2023)
- Engineering microbes and microorganisms to reduce pollutants in air and water. Genetically modifying bacteria and organisms that can break down pollutants like oil spills, heavy metals, and toxic gases. (Bahl et al., 2024)

- Enhancing and enriching biodiversity conservation efforts. Gene editing could increase biodiversity among endangered and nearly extinct species. (Bahl et al., 2024)

CRISPR is a perfect tool for investigating sustainable ideas because of its ease of use, low cost, and efficiency. Its accuracy minimizes off-target impacts and accessibility, reducing technical obstacles and resulting in safer environmental applications. (Bahl et al., 2024)

Applications of CRISPR for Environmental Sustainability

The CRISPR tool has become essential for promoting an environmentally sustainable future, aligning with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The applications of CRISPR span various core areas, including climate action, marine health, biodiversity, and agricultural support. Below are some explorations of these applications.

A. Agriculture and Food Security (SDG 2: Zero Hunger)

1. Developing drought-resistant and pest-resistant crops: CRISPR technology facilitates the creation of crops that can endure environmental stressors. For example, it has been utilized to edit rice genomes, enhancing its ability to survive drought conditions. This advancement addresses the critical issue of maintaining yield in a changing climate. (Zhu, Li and Gao, 2020)
2. Reducing the requirement of Fertilizers and Pesticides through Gene-Edited Plants. Creating pest-resistant crops reduces the need for more chemicals and pesticides. Furthermore, research is being done to develop nitrogen-fixing cereal, potentially decreasing the reliance on synthetic fertilizers. (Phillips, 2024)
3. Enhancing crop yield and nutritional value is crucial for sustainable agriculture. CRISPR technology is being utilized to improve the nutritional content of crops, which allows for a higher overall intake of essential nutrients, leading to long-term benefits. For instance, gene editing has been employed to develop rice plants with increased levels

of vital nutrients, helping to address the issue of malnutrition in vulnerable populations. (Zhu, Li and Gao, 2020)

B. *Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration (SDG 15: Life on Land)*

1. Protecting Endangered Species through Genetic Interventions offers the potential to conserve endangered species by increasing genetic diversity. For example, CRISPR has been proposed as a tool for addressing genetic issues in declining populations, aiding in their recovery (Kerlin, 2020)
2. Controlling Invasive Species and Preserving Native Ecosystems. CRISPR technology can be used to control or altogether remove invasive and dangerous species that pose a threat to native biodiversity. This approach has been considered for managing invasive rodents in remote areas to protect native wildlife. (Kerlin, 2020)

C. *Clean Water and Pollution Reduction (SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation)*

1. Engineering Bacteria for Water Purification and Bioremediation. CRISPR allows scientists to modify microbial genomes to enhance their abilities to degrade pollutants and harmful substances. Modified and engineered bacteria have been developed to break down contaminants and oil spills in water sources, improving water quality (Shah et al., 2024).
2. Reducing Pollutants through CRISPR-Modified Plants and Organisms: Plants can be genetically modified and edited to absorb pollutants from the air, soil and water, a process known as phytoremediation. The modification of these plants has allowed the enhancement of these capabilities. (Shah et al., 2024).

D. *Climate Action and Carbon Reduction (SDG 13: Climate Action)*

1. **Developing Carbon-Capturing Plants and Algae:** CRISPR has been researched to enhance plants' and algae's natural carbon sequestration abilities. By increasing the efficiency of photosynthesis and biomass production, these organisms can be modified to absorb more CO₂ from the air. (Lee et al., 2023)
2. **Modifying Livestock to Reduce Methane Emissions:** Future research is still ongoing to use CRISPR on microbes in the guts of livestock to reduce methane emissions during digestion. This could have the potential to significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector (Lee et al., 2023)

E. *Marine Conservation and Ocean Health (SDG 14: Life Below Water)*

1. **Gene-Editing Solutions for Coral Reef Preservation:** Corals' resistance to climate change-related stresses, such as warming sea temperatures, has been strengthened using CRISPR. Researchers hope to maintain and revitalise vital coral reef ecosystems by altering genes linked to heat tolerance. (Kerlin, 2020)
2. **Addressing Overfishing through CRISPR-Modified Species Management:** Gene editing can control the reproduction of fish species, supporting sustainable fisheries management. This aims to balance the marine population and help support ecosystem health. (Kerlin, 2020).

A versatile and effective method for addressing a wide range of environmental problems, CRISPR technology greatly contributes to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its potential to support a more resilient and sustainable world is demonstrated by its applications in water treatment, agriculture, biodiversity preservation, climate change mitigation, and marine ecosystem health.

Ethical and Regulatory Considerations

One main ethical concern involving CRISPR is the potential for unintended sequences to create lasting consequences and ecological risks. While CRISPR is precise in its procedure, there remains a risk of off-targeted effects, which could harm non-target species or disrupt ecosystems. Furthermore, the long-term impacts of introducing genetically modified organisms into the wild have not been thoroughly studied or understood, which raises concerns about the ethical responsibilities associated with such actions (Rani, 2024).

Unintended Ecological Consequences

CRISPR's ability to accurately alter genetic material raises significant concerns regarding potential unintended ecological effects, especially when modified organisms are released back into their natural environment. Altering an organism's genetic material could result in unexpected and dangerous interactions within ecosystems, including disturbances in the food chain structure, shifts in competition dynamics, and unintended transfer of the modified genes into organisms that were not intended to be modified. Such repercussions could lead to more serious consequences for biodiversity and the overall stability of ecosystems. A particularly controversial use of CRISPR involves gene drives, which are engineered to quickly disseminate certain traits throughout a population, bypassing standard inheritance mechanisms. Although gene drives offer potential solutions for managing invasive species or eliminating disease-carrying organisms, there is a considerable risk of causing irreversible ecological harm. For instance, implementing a gene drive to target mosquitoes that spread malaria could inadvertently impact non-target species that rely on mosquitoes for nourishment, thereby disrupting entire ecosystems (Esvelt et al., 2014).

The difficulties in containment and reversibility exacerbate the risks associated with gene drives. Once released, these gene drives could be challenging or impossible to retract, highlighting the need for effective containment strategies. Examples include threshold-dependent gene drives that help limit their spread or self-limiting approaches that naturally diminish over generations. (Burt, 2014) Furthermore, because ecosystems are complex and still not well known and understood, unexpected interactions may occur, and the long-term ecological

effects of such interventions remain largely unknown. Risk assessments, comprehensive modelling, and controlled field trials should be conducted before the deployment of gene-edited organisms to address these risks. Collaborative international agreements, like the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, stress the need for precautionary measures in biotechnology (Sendashonga, Hill and Petrini, 2005). Furthermore, it is essential to involve the public and keep decision-making procedures transparent to guarantee that the benefits of CRISPR-based innovations surpass any possible ecological disadvantages, preserving environmental stability and biodiversity in the process.

International Regulations and Bioethical Frameworks

International regulations and bioethical frameworks have been established to tackle these concerns and issues. A global agreement known as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was created to ensure the safe handling, transportation, and use of living-modified organisms (LMOs) created using contemporary biotechnology. It draws attention to the need for risk assessments and raises public understanding of the ethical application of biotechnology. (Unit, 2021) Furthermore, the rapid growth of research on using CRISPR for gene editing presents significant ethical and societal challenges, especially concerning ecological effects, human germline editing, and accessibility and equity. This emphasizes how crucial strong legal frameworks and ethical scientific methods are to navigate the complicated ethical terrain of CRISPR technology.

Challenges and Future Prospects

CRISPR technology is promising for advancing and enhancing agricultural practices, sustainability, and food security. However, several challenges must be addressed to understand its fully potential.

Technological and Financial Barriers

Despite its accuracy, CRISPR has several technical problems, including off-target consequences and delivery mechanism issues that require additional development to ensure safety and efficacy. Furthermore, its widespread acceptance may be impeded by the high expenses associated with research, development, and implementation, particularly in regions with little funding. These issues must be

resolved to guarantee that CRISPR-based solutions are implemented fairly. (Thorne, 2024)

Global Collaboration and Policy Alignment

International cooperation and collaboration are crucial for establishing standardized regulations and ethics governing the use of CRISPR. Collaborative efforts amongst countries can aid in sharing knowledge, harmonizing policies and ensuring responsible use of the CRISPR technology. As previously discussed, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is an example of an international framework for regulating biotechnology to safeguard biodiversity. (UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2019). Looking forward, CRISPR holds immense potential for tackling global challenges. In the agricultural sector, it can improve crop resilience and productivity, essential for ensuring food security. Additionally, CRISPR can be utilized to create organisms that are effective in bioremediation and carbon capture, supporting efforts to combat climate change. Continued progress and responsible management will be crucial in leveraging CRISPR's capabilities for a sustainable future. (Matinvafa et al., 2023)

Conclusion

CRISPR technology is a transformative tool for advancing environmental sustainability, aligning seamlessly with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its applications range from improving and enhancing agricultural resilience to supporting biodiversity and the climate, showing its versatility in addressing pressing global challenges. By facilitating targeted genetic alterations, CRISPR can pave the way for innovations such as creating drought- and pest-resistant crops, engineering organisms for bioremediation, and enhancing carbon sequestration abilities. These developments significantly advance the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopting CRISPR requires careful attention to ethical and regulatory concerns, including potential ecological impacts, off-target effects, and socioeconomic disparities that may limit access. Frameworks like the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety emphasize balancing innovation with safety. Collaboration and effective policies are essential for ensuring CRISPR is applied responsibly, promoting equity while minimizing risks.

Looking ahead, CRISPR's promise to propel sustainable development improvements depends on ongoing research funding, strong regulatory frameworks, and interdisciplinary cooperation. As we face urgent problems like food shortages, biodiversity loss, and climate change, CRISPR shows promise as a solution that could change how humans interact with the environment. Scientists and policymakers can spearhead the transition to a more environmentally friendly and sustainable future by carefully utilizing this technology, ensuring our planet's and its people's well-being for future generations.

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PART **VIII**
FASHION & HERITAGE

23

Sustainable Fashion in Hanoi: Bridging Cultural Heritage and SDGs

Layla Abdulle

Abstract

This article investigates the connection between sustainable fashion and cultural heritage in Hanoi, Vietnam, underscoring how the city efficiently combines traditional artisanal techniques with international sustainability frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through highlighting case studies such as Kilomet109 and the Van Phuc Silk Village, the article underlines the transforming power of sustainable fashion in tackling social and environmental issues while maintaining cultural identity. Alongside the ideas of a circular economy, the study looks at other theoretical perspectives, including modernisation and dependency theories, to evaluate how Hanoi manages the dual challenges of globalisation and local customs. Sustainable fashion has persistent difficulties like greenwashing, exploitative labour practices, and infrastructure constraints, even while it offers notable opportunities for innovation and justice. Ultimately, the article emphasises Hanoi's potential as a model city where the harmonic blending of tradition and innovation can foster a more fair, sustainable, and culturally vibrant fashion industry.

Introduction

Globally and locally, sustainable fashion has a strong potential to solve many environmental challenges. “Slow fashion represents a vision of sustainability in the fashion sector based on different values and goals to the present day,” Fletcher (2010:262) argued. This perspective emphasises sustainability's importance by critically contrasting fast fashion's mass-production strategy. Sustainable fashion drastically lowers waste by stressing environmentally friendly materials, ethical manufacturing techniques, and responsible consumption, which helps to preserve natural resources. This strategy seeks not only to minimise the harmful effects of the fashion industry on the environment but also to encourage social responsibility and the well-being of

workers throughout the fashion supply chain. Sustainable fashion aims to produce a more equitable and ecologically conscious sector that benefits both practices and individuals involved.

Over the past two decades, Hanoi, a thriving city with an emerging economy, has progressively combined traditional practices with international solutions, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its vibrant culture and rich artisanal heritage are actively pursuing innovative, sustainable solutions. In Hanoi, where tradition intersects with modernity, sustainable fashion is a lens to examine environmental degradation and social inequality issues.

This article investigates whether sustainable fashion effectively addresses these inequities by exploring sustainability principles and circular economy practices in Hanoi while considering how global frameworks like the UN SDGs align with the local economy. It examines the city's transformative potential and the constraints of sustainable fashion. Moreover, this article explores how traditional practices, particularly those of Kilomet109 and Van Phuc Silk Village, intersect with global sustainability goals to foster innovation, preserve cultural identity, and address systemic inequities. By examining the relationship between local traditions and global frameworks, the analysis underscores both the opportunities and challenges sustainable fashion presents in creating a more equitable and environmentally responsible future.

Theoretical Framework

According to the United Nations Environment Program, sustainable fashion is a textile sector, “resource-efficient and renewable resources-based, producing non-toxic, high-quality and affordable clothing services and products, while providing safe and safe livelihoods” (Notten, 2020:45). This definition catches the essence of sustainable fashion, which aims to decrease environmental damage while advocating for social equity. These concepts directly support my analysis since they help to solve social and environmental inequalities in the textile industry of Hanoi. Analysing these ideas requires an awareness of the theoretical frameworks supporting sustainable fashion, such as the circular economy.

Fashion's sustainability notion derives from multidisciplinary research combining social justice, economics, and environmental science. Theories of ecological modernism are fundamental since they propose that regulatory systems and technical developments might balance environmental protection with economic development. Scholars such as Mol and Spaargaren (2000:32) contend that this approach is "sustained by cleaner technology and producing cleaner affluence." Intersectionality in sustainability also emphasises how gender, class, and ethnicity interact to create the realities of those touched by the policies of the textile sector. Including these aspects helps individuals to understand how sustainable fashion tackles societal issues in Hanoi.

Lifecycle evaluations (LCAs), which track garment environmental impact from manufacture to disposal, supplement this paradigm. All in line with sustainable fashion ideas, LCAs stress the need for renewable resources, waste reduction, and ethical labour practices. "LCA plays a pivotal role in pinpointing areas for potential enhancements to lessen environmental impacts" (Mousavi, K et al., 2024:7). By applying these theoretical points of view, the study investigates how local practices of Hanoi interact with global sustainability goals, therefore revealing the transforming possibilities of sustainable fashion.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Sustainable Fashion

The textile industry drives global industrialisation, trade, and development by connecting producers, brands, retailers, and consumers (Petrie, 2023:12). Sustainable development focuses on preserving the environment, promoting equality, and maintaining a viable economy. The United Nations' SDGs provide a framework for guiding sustainable practices across various industries, including fashion. SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 13, Climate Action, are all essential for shaping sustainable fashion practices. SDG 12 promotes responsible consumption by encouraging enterprises to decrease waste and increase resource efficiency in production. Petrie (2023:18) highlights that this approach aligns under circularity, a vital pathway to sustainable development and key to accomplishing numerous SDGs.

SDG 8 centres around improving labour conditions, which aligns with the ethical aspects of sustainable fashion by pushing for equal pay and safe working

environments. Meanwhile, SDG 13 asks for a reduction in carbon emissions, which is a significant aim sustainably because the textile sector contributes significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, “every year, the textile sector emits 2-8% of the world’s greenhouse gases” (Petrie, 2023:7). This underscores the critical need for sustainable practices. These aims address environmental issues but fail to address sociopolitical challenges in global fashion supply chains. Several development theories, including Modernisation and Dependency theories, exacerbate these challenges.

Modernisation and Dependency Theories in Sustainable Fashion

Proposed by academics like Rostow, modernisation theory holds that countries progress by absorbing industrial techniques and ideas from the Global North, therefore following a straight-line path. Previously referred to as “becoming modern,” this idea of “modernisation,” conceptualises growth as a uniform trend (Willis, 2023:34). Dependency Theory, on the other hand, clarifies the exploitative dynamics existing in worldwide supply chains, especially those influencing the Global South. To set his viewpoint apart from André Gunder Frank’s concept of the “development of underdevelopment, which he criticised as a portrayal of stagnation and inequality,” Fernando Henrique Cardoso used the phrase “associated-dependent development” (Cardoso 1972:94, quoted in Kay, 2011:528). Dependency theorists argue that smaller countries’ economic development usually results at the price of their labour and resources, with wealthier countries profiting from these countries through great economic inequalities. These two theoretical models offer different points of view on global development, which are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of sustainable fashion in Hanoi.

Modernisation theory posits that Vietnam’s industrialisation represents a viable pathway to economic progress. Conversely, Dependency Theory emphasises how global supply chains frequently perpetuate exploitation, resulting in low wages and poor working conditions for textile workers in Hanoi. This dichotomy underscores the complexities of achieving sustainable growth within the fashion industry. An examination of circular economy principles further indicates that authentic sustainability necessitates the implementation of equitable practices in global production systems, harmonising with local traditions and overarching sustainability objectives.

Moreover, Dependency Theory reveals the structural imbalances ingrained within global fashion supply chains. Profits generated from garment sales accrue to multinational corporations headquartered in the Global North. At the same time, the environmental and social costs are disproportionately borne by producers and workers situated in the Global South. This disparity accentuates the urgent need for systemic reform prioritising equity and sustainability in global production networks.

Synthesising these two theories unveils the dual challenges confronting Hanoi's fashion industry. While modernisation offers opportunities for technological advancements and economic development, Dependency Theory is a cautionary lens regarding the risks of unequal power dynamics and exploitative practices. Achieving sustainability within Vietnam's textile sector necessitates careful navigation of these tensions through promoting local innovation, establishing fair labour practices, and reducing reliance on exploitative global supply chains. By addressing these systemic issues, Hanoi's fashion industry can contribute to a more equitable and sustainable global fashion ecosystem.

Modernisation and dependency theories offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on sustainable development in Hanoi's fashion industry. Modernisation theory aligns with SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, which advocates for fostering resilient infrastructure and promoting inclusive industrialisation. By adopting modern technologies and practices, Hanoi's textile sector can enhance productivity and efficiency, paving the way for economic growth aligned with SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Proponents of modernisation theory view these advancements as critical to achieving sustainable development by improving labour conditions, increasing incomes, and creating economic opportunities.

On the other hand, dependency theory underscores the challenges associated with achieving SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, particularly in global supply chains. It highlights how exploitative relationships between the Global North and South hinder equitable development. In Hanoi's fashion industry, dependency theory draws attention to the need for systemic changes that address labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and economic disparities. This aligns with SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production goals and SDG 13:

Climate Action, which calls for sustainable practices that mitigate environmental harm and promote social equity.

By synthesising these theories, Hanoi's approach to sustainable development can be both aspirational and critical. Modernisation provides a roadmap for adopting innovative practices and improving economic infrastructure, while dependency theory ensures these advancements are not achieved at the expense of social and environmental justice. For example, adopting circular economy principles can reduce reliance on exploitative global supply chains, supporting modernisation's innovation goals and dependency theory's call for equitable practices. Additionally, promoting local production and fair-trade initiatives can bridge the gap between these theoretical frameworks and the practical objectives of the SDGs.

Linking modernisation and dependency theories to sustainable development highlights the importance of a balanced approach that leverages technological progress while addressing systemic inequities. By aligning these theoretical insights with the SDGs, Hanoi's fashion industry can adopt a transformative model that fosters economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

Circular Economy and Sustainable Fashion

Kenneth Boulding's circular economy concept envisions the Earth as a single spaceship with finite resources, emphasising the need to rethink economic systems to ensure resource efficiency and sustainability. This vision is particularly pertinent to the fashion industry, which has historically operated on a linear model of production and consumption (Boulding, 1972:22-23, cited in Savy and Sarkar, 2024:3). In Hanoi, transitioning to circular economy principles offers a pathway to reducing waste, conserving resources, and addressing the environmental challenges posed by the textile sector.

Central to the circular economy is the idea of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems. Hanoi's fashion industry can align with these principles by adopting practices such as recycling, upcycling, and sustainable material sourcing. For example, local brands like Kilomet109 have embraced circular economy concepts by "promoting

sustainable living through cooperation with Indigenous artists” (Titton, 2024:346) by using natural dyes and eco-friendly fabrics. This approach reduces environmental impact, preserves cultural heritage, and supports local communities.

Another critical aspect of the circular economy is extending the lifecycle of garments. This can be achieved through repair, resale, and rental models, encouraging consumers to view clothing as an investment rather than a disposable commodity. In Hanoi, initiatives such as community repair workshops and second-hand markets are gaining attraction, reflecting a shift toward more sustainable consumption patterns. These practices also align with SDG 12, which advocates for responsible consumption and production.

However, implementing a circular economy in Hanoi’s fashion industry is challenging. Overconsumption remains a significant barrier, as the demand for fast fashion drives unsustainable production practices. Additionally, the lack of recycling and waste management infrastructure hampers efforts to close the loop on textile production. Addressing these issues requires coordinated action from government agencies, businesses, and consumers. For instance, policymakers can introduce incentives for sustainable practices, such as tax breaks for companies that adopt circular economy models. At the same time, businesses can invest in innovative technologies to improve resource efficiency.

Education and awareness are also crucial for fostering a cultural shift toward sustainability. By promoting the benefits of circular fashion through campaigns and educational programs, stakeholders can encourage consumers to adopt more environmentally friendly habits. This includes understanding their purchasing decisions’ environmental and social impacts and prioritising quality over quantity.

The circular economy offers a transformative framework for reimagining Hanoi’s fashion industry. By prioritising sustainability, innovation, and collaboration, the sector can address pressing environmental challenges while fostering economic resilience and social equity. However, achieving this vision requires overcoming systemic barriers and engaging all stakeholders in the transition to a more sustainable and circular future.

Modernisation and dependency theories provide critical insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing circular economy principles in a sustainable fashion. modernisation theory aligns with the push for technological advancements and infrastructure improvements that can support circular practices. For example, adopting advanced recycling technologies or integrating renewable energy sources into Hanoi's textile sector reflects the modernisation perspective's emphasis on progress through innovation. This aligns with SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production by creating a resource-efficient production framework.

Conversely, dependency theory highlights the systemic inequities that may undermine the circular economy's implementation. While circular principles advocate for reducing waste and reusing materials, dependency theory critiques the global supply chain's reliance on low-cost labour and raw materials from the Global South, including Hanoi. This reliance often perpetuates exploitative practices, undermining the equitable distribution of benefits from circular initiatives. For instance, multinational corporations might adopt circular models while continuing to extract resources and labour from Hanoi without adequately investing in local infrastructure or fair wages. These practices conflict with the goals of SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.

By synthesising these theoretical perspectives, a balanced approach to circular economy implementation in Hanoi's fashion industry can be developed. Modernisation theory provides a roadmap for innovation and technological progress, while dependency theory ensures that these advancements address systemic inequities. For example, fostering local production capabilities and reducing reliance on global supply chains can support both innovation and equity. Additionally, integrating circular economy principles with fair trade practices and local artisan collaborations, such as those demonstrated by Kilomet109, bridges the gap between technological progress and social justice.

Ultimately, linking modernisation and dependency theories to the circular economy in sustainable fashion highlights the importance of addressing both the opportunities for innovation and the systemic barriers to equitable development. By grounding circular initiatives in these theoretical insights, Hanoi's fashion

industry can align technological advancements with environmental sustainability and social equity, creating a transformative model for global fashion practices.

Challenges in the Sustainable Fashion Industry

Greenwashing

Greenwashing has become a significant issue in Hanoi's fashion sector, where companies often mislead consumers about the environmental impact of their products. This misleading practice not only confuses customers but also serves to undermine genuinely sustainable initiatives by allowing firms to escape accountability for exploitative and harmful practices (Delmas and Burbano, 2011:66). Companies frequently exaggerate or falsely advertise their products as environmentally friendly without implementing meaningful changes to their manufacturing processes. This raises critical questions about the authenticity of those businesses that claim to be committed to sustainability. For example, many fast-fashion brands highlight their use of sustainable materials and ethical manufacturing practices in their marketing campaigns. However, they often neglect to address significant structural issues such as overproduction—the excessive creation of goods that exceeds demand—and the exploitative labour practices rooted in their supply chains. As noted by Yang et al. (2020:1496), “Many firms use greenwashing to project an environmentally friendly reputation or image,” leading consumers to believe they are making responsible choices. Nonetheless, these tactics erode consumer trust and make it increasingly challenging to distinguish genuine sustainability efforts from superficial marketing strategies.

Exploitative Labour Practices

In addition to the challenges of greenwashing, it is essential to critically evaluate the fashion industry's role in perpetuating transnational economic imbalances through exploitative labour practices within global supply chains. Data from 2009 reveals that manufacturing workers in Vietnam, particularly those employed in the textile and garment industries located in export processing zones (EPZs) and industrial zones (IZs), receive alarmingly low wages, averaging less than US\$100 per month (Tran, 2011:60). This stark figure

illustrates the severe economic hardships that these workers endure, which are exacerbated by the global fashion industry's relentless pursuit of low-cost production to maximise profits.

Such inadequate wages illustrate the systemic inequities present in the fashion industry, where labour exploitation thrives. These conditions characterise exploitative labour practices, wherein workers are paid insufficiently to meet even their basic living expenses, thereby entrenching poverty and increasing their vulnerability. The drive for cheap labour affects the lives of those employed in manufacturing and has broader implications for economic inequality and human rights on a global scale. To address these issues, it is crucial for consumers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to foster greater transparency and ethical standards within fashion supply chains, moving towards a truly sustainable and equitable fashion industry.

Sustainable Fashion Practices in Hanoi

The fast economic development of Vietnam over the past three decades has been mostly driven by the country's rising second-largest export-oriented clothing maker (Khan, 2023:66). This success has increased the demand for creativity in the local fashion industry, therefore stressing the need to move from mass production to more valuable, environmentally friendly methods. Established in 2012 by Thao Vu, Kilomet109 uses naturally occurring materials such as sustainable dyeing procedures and stone-polished hemp to combine eco-conscious design with traditional artisan practices. The brand's innovative strategies, supported by long-term cross-cultural collaborations with local artisans, demonstrate a robust commitment to environmental sustainability and the preservation of local artisanry. (Gasparin et al. 2020; Ives 2017; Khôi 2021; Phuc 2018, cited in Almila and Delice, 2023:71).

The historical significance of Van Phuc Village in the Ha Dong district of Hanoi is substantial, as its residents have been weaving silk into a variety of products for over a thousand years (Son, 2023:120). This significance extends beyond silk production; following the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945, President Ho Chi Minh resided in the village and issued a proclamation urging the nation to resist the French invasion in December 1946.

But the preservation of the village's customs suffers from growing competition from Chinese silk goods. Notwithstanding these challenges, Van Phuc is a shining example of the tenacity of traditional workmanship, overcoming impediments to keep its cultural value.

Local customs and imperial legacies have shaped notable changes in Vietnamese markets as they have developed. French colonial officials sought to transform indigenous trade by building contemporary, hygienic market venues in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For example, Dong Xuan Market is still a major retail centre in Hanoi even with modern issues, including urbanisation and globalisation, under the influence.

The implementation of the Doi Moi Reforms in 1986 marked a pivotal shift in Vietnam's economic structure as the country transitioned to a market-oriented economy. These reforms have spurred industrialisation and economic growth, yet they have also intensified environmental degradation and social inequality, particularly within the fashion industry.

Conclusion

This study explores the idea of sustainable fashion in Hanoi with an eye on how the city combines its rich local customs with general global sustainability ideas. It emphasizes certain case studies as Kilomet 109 and Van Phuc Silk Village, which are very important for this movement. These projects not only encourage the application of age-old handicapping methods but also seek to solve urgent social and environmental issues that afflict the fashion business. Notwithstanding these encouraging developments, some obstacles hinder the advancement in sustainable fashion. These include the widespread problem of greenwashing, whereby companies misleadingly present their activities as ecologically benign, as well as exploitative labour practices that frequently lead to bad working conditions and unjust remuneration for craftsmen. Moreover, as quick fashion rules the market and mass production dominates it, competition seriously jeopardizes the profitability of sustainable alternatives.

This paper examined modernism and dependency theory, which challenge the effects of globalization on local businesses, with frameworks including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), establishing worldwide aims for

encouraging sustainability. The circular economy was also covered, focusing on the need to cut waste and advance material reuse in fashion manufacturing. By means of sustainable fashion, Hanoi reveals a special chance to combine environmental consciousness with cultural legacy. By tackling the highlighted issues, the Hanoi fashion industry has the chance to not only maintain local character but also match itself with global sustainability concepts. This strategy will help Hanoi to be a striking illustration of how social and environmental growth can coexist and flourish inside the fashion sector.

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PART **IX**

**ECHOES OF THE WORLD:
POETRY, PAINT, AND PATHWAYS**

24 |

Between the Lines: Poetry, Perception, Reflections and Inspirations

Interview with Amaan Minhas

Suheyla Coskun

The art of poetry has been an integral facet of human expression for thousands of years. From the tales of the Babylonians to the epic narratives crafted by Homer and Virgil, storytelling has firmly established itself as a crucial element of oral tradition, uniting nations in ways that few other art forms can. Poetry enables individuals to articulate their despair, navigate their emotions, or celebrate the beauty of nature; it conveys the full spectrum of human feelings.

In this interview with Amaan Minhas, we explore the personal dimensions of poetry, probing the meanings embedded within his stanzas. Amaan finds inspiration in Ancient Greek mythology, frequently referencing figures such as Hecate, the goddess of sorcery. For him, poetry serves as a means of escapism, allowing him to embrace vulnerability, particularly when he finds it challenging to express his emotions. This creative outlet starkly contrasts with his primary pursuits as a Chemical Engineering student.

Through poetry, Amaan not only gains insights into himself but also enhances his understanding of the ecosystem on a more spiritual level. As our conversation drew to a close, it became evident that Amaan's journey through poetry is both transformative and profound. His poetic voice acts as a bridge connecting his inner world with the broader external environment.

What inspired you to start writing poetry?

I am usually at a loss for words, I struggle greatly to communicate emotions; unfortunately, my emotions run a little complex and sometimes ominous, so

poetry has been a way for me to address the specifics of human emotion that no language can capture, and I am able to be vulnerable in a vague way, which is great for my shy demeanour.

Do you remember the first poem you wrote? What was it about?

I am unsure about the first poem I wrote, although I think it was in primary school, and we had to write about the soldiers in World War 2.

How has your personal background influenced your poetry?

I grew up mostly alone and isolated, as we moved a lot when we were young and I did not have many stable relationships and friendships. I spent a lot of time alone and in my head. This can complicate things to the point where standard language isn't able to express the emotional jungles I would lose myself in. You can navigate through a jungle using a standard machete. However, if the jungle is filled with complex elements like fruits, vines, or dense woods, you might need to use different tools - like pairing knives or swords - and rely on the precision of your words to cut through it. It's essential to use very specific words to address particular emotions.

Are there specific experiences or events that have shaped your voice as a poet?

My voice as a poet, mainly as a human, because I believe we are all poets, is constantly changing: the same way our voices deepen over our years of living, our choice of words and their meaning run deeper. Our voices are constantly being shaped, so long as we follow the meandering of the river, our lives will take turns, and we must follow them, so our voices will change, too. It's a constant process of growing and changing.

How do you mix your study with writing poems?

Engineering and Maths is a poem that can be objectified in a strange way. I don't mix them in a way that would be obvious. Although human emotion can be so complex, and so can numbers, it shapes how my mind sees the universe, and emotion can be objectified. As we are all beings with hearts that are as complex

as the numbers of Pi. It's human nature to make sense of the unknown; I feel that poetry and math are both the same.”

Can you walk us through your process of writing a poem?

The process would usually include music, as I struggled with where to begin; I would let a beat start for me, then words would flood into my head, and an unresolved emotion would surface that reflected the music. Many paces of emotions, fast ones and slow ones, would come out depending on the tempo, the vibration, the pitch, and the lyrics, at times, would make an easier guide for the beat to land a couple of words. Now, the beat that falls in my brain paints a landscape; I perceive colors, objects, and sometimes people, expressed through visions and symbols that emerge from the vibrations that create the world. Now the process of explaining emotion is easier: describe what you see in reference to how you feel.

How do you deal with writer's block?

Urgh, I have had writer's block a lot recently, and I deal with it by not dealing with it. I need to trust that there are times to absorb, produce, wait, and go. When the time comes, I will follow; until then, I will remain patient and let nature take its course.

How do you decide when a poem is “finished”?

Sometimes a poem will never finish. I can constantly go back and change it depending on my emotional growth and journey at the time. I sometime have to tell myself to stop because it's a time capsule that shouldn't be changed constantly: rather, it should be looked back on, and I can reflect on my growth since. So, I suppose it's finished when I feel I have said everything I needed to say in the most concise and understandable way.

What themes do you explore most often in your poetry?

A big influence of the themes that I explore comes from mythology. I think mythology can be an amazing tool to help explore poems. Greek mythology has always interested me. I think it's a poem in itself, to personify aspects of life and

emotion and to label them as divine and give them shape and form, a voice. It is essentially poetry in itself. Nyx is a figure I feel I connect with a lot.

Do music, visual art, and nature inspire your work

Music definitely influences poetry, 1000%. It's what shapes the landscape that I describe. The vibration of my emotions with the plucking of a string gives form, shape, and colour that I see in pictures. And so does nature; EVERYTHING is connected – from history, politics, maths, poetry, music, emotion, human nature, physics, the soul, relationships, journeys, life, and death. It is all the same. Nature has been a massive touching point for me; I look outwards to see my own nature; I look at the mycelium, the sky, the rivers, mist, woods, colours, grass, to understand my own path and my nature and the universe.

How do you approach writing about personal or difficult subjects?

Most poetry is difficult or personal; that's why I must write. How else would I understand my mind? It's the standard. I currently feel that there are no difficult or personal subjects: they are just subjects, it is just life.

What role does poetry play in your life?

It helps me to understand myself and the universe better. Sometimes, I write a poem, and then after I understand what it means, I just need to get the picture out there. They say a picture says a thousand words; a poem can reduce that to a couple sentences.

Do you believe poetry has the power to create change? How?

Definitely, as human emotion is vastly complex but not unique, we are all earth and water at the end of the day. A poet would create a scenario and a field of words that would guide others to their own meanings. It can most definitely be a guide for people to personalize for themselves. A poet just holds your hands through it instead.

How do you see poetry fitting into today's world, especially for young people?

People are becoming increasingly aware of the need for spirituality, guidance and the vastness of the soul. This dimension cannot be explained in normal words, so this is where poetry comes in. It will help us guide our hearts to what the modern age has stripped from us; it has reduced nth dimensional beings to 2D plastic energy and money farms. However, the cry and strength of the soul seeking deeper meaning cannot be silenced. It is truly uplifting to see more of us becoming poets

What's it like to share your poetry with others?

It definitely has a sense of vulnerability. Previously, I feared judgement, but now I feel nothing. Read; it is not personal to me how you feel about it. They are just words on paper, they reflect what is in your mind, not mine. I feel nothing about sharing it on a personal level. On an outward level, I feel a sense of responsibility as I am not a perfect guide to this jungle myself. I cannot be the reason why others have lost themselves in words that I may not be too sure of myself sometimes.

Do you prefer live performances, written publications, or both? Why?

Anything live will ultimately be better; paper will be better, and natural settings will be better. We are physical beings; we emit our energies in person. Love and emotion can transcend the physical plane, and they can be felt wherever and however they are read. At this point, any and every way to express these things should be encouraged.

Have you faced any criticism, and how do you handle it?

I am a young and quiet person; I have only exposed my poetry to a small, trusted audience of people who have an interest in the arts. And again, criticism is not something I take personally. It is a subjective experience: if people feel offended by it, that has more to say about them than it does me. But even then, that is an exploration of their feelings; I guess it will always provoke in some way.

Do you think social media has changed how poetry is written or consumed?

It has created more engagement. Society has stripped us of things that our soul needs through media, such as social media but people are also connecting emotions through it. So, it is being consumed more.

What advice would you give to other young poets?

Start anywhere: just write, read, be inspired, take walks in nature, speak to people, open your heart, do not fear your emotions, and embrace them. Have empathy.

How do you see your poetry evolving in the future?

I am unsure of my future. I don't have any expectations of what is to come in my life, so I have no expectations of what my poetry will become. I shall let the river flow as it pleases, and I will move with pure intentions so long as I live, and whatever it becomes, it will be.

Do you have any goals or dreams for your work as a poet?

To encourage people to be more in touch with the hearts of others.

Fun & Personal Insights

If your poetry could have one effect on readers, what would it be?

Breathe, feel, love, explore, understand yourself. Love others.

Amaan Minhas:

Gift from God

*Fell any beast that swallowed your gaze,
Fell it did to the name of a celestial - body*

“Lucky” I name any man to have threaded a heart string to twine in your braid.

*The fates had made it so, should they not have favourites and
if life is balance,
how harrowed must be the souls you encounter?
How sharp is your whip of indifference, the very same whip that heals a mind
by flaying a patient alive of subterranean sins.*

*Gifted bodies and mind, save your soul, to save souls.
Hecate. Carnal.
Virago. Choice.
Muliebrity. Incarnate.
Power. Demanded.*

*The druids speak of a woman divine, wise to the marrow.
Man, we hear of you through the grapevine, that emperors should fall to lower
fruit to your virtuous lips.
Et tu Brute?
My Roman Empire.*

*Wisdom to measure heaven, your instruments of choice? Grace and glory.
A funny thing to be perplexed, rooted in the ground because the sight of limitless
divinity is too much to fathom.
A paradox.
I gather rumours that man pray to be drowned and destroyed by the earth, for
it's the very same womb, the very same ground that gave you your colours.
You confuse and silence because you are not earthly fire, you sweet, blind girl.*

*Look on the dark side of the moon, back to the sun, betwixt eclipses, never to
know the face you show the earth.
Just as the sun is oblivious to hues of its rise and fall.
Such that even Gaia would sheepishly avert her gaze.*

*Lethal face cards and figures of 8,
Deck stacked with aces, though this a game you choose not to play,
humble woman with your winning hand.
Save for the jokers, you save for us a joker.*

Whimsied woman.

What's a name but the truth?

*(An artist could never see you in a mirror,
even they could never find you, you are the mirror itself.
You are what they could never paint, could never write, you are the canvas in
their chest that no brush nor pen, no pain nor light could unravel.
you nightmare.
Ah how sweet this fortuitous serendipity that I may I write this for you).*

Beautifully consistent. Persistent in your beauty.

Arrogantly Enlightened

*Slipped notes stretched beneath thought,
A melody lost to madness.*

*Arrogance voices mindless echo chambers
take the shape of rabbit holes.
There is no cake, only the fall.*

*Water preaches the waves of balance
are restored.
Soul full of pride, snapped wits and
an obsolete piece of hardware,
Pray for heavy knees on bones in the now oval gardens of bliss lived and buried
Call for your mother,
only her love will reach you now.*

*And I say, "remember lamb, child of the Earth, eat sweet grass and suckle sweet
love, for
divine rungs say forgiveness calls for mercy."*

Stars, I have spoken

Stars, never move. For I have spoken now, I have named you.

*I will not beg quietly and hope you will remain when the lights fade.
I trust you will stay.
So, I ask you... to guide me on the darkest of nights.*

*Both of us, under mother moon, virgins to the touch of my sound.
Clean me of my vernix, and hear my cry for the first time as I part with the
womb of my surrender.
I want you to hear this first.*

*Some of your names I have already come to learn:
Orion, I see you, hunter of the night.
Cassiopeia, I welcome you, even in your arrogance.
Andromeda, I recognise your beauty.*

How do you feel? Now that I have spoken after so many years.

*Names to faces I have looked upon over and over. Not saying a word.
Did you expect my voice to sound the way that it did?
Or my smile to be as bright the way my eclipses were as dark.
Take me to your heavens I have voice now to ask you for such.*

And among you, I have named a few.

*I have named you, S and H.
I have named you, A.
I have named you, P.
And I have named you, K.*

*I trust you, I trust in your position, and I trust you will guide me out of the
nights.*

*Most of all, I accept the existence of the stardust birthed from broken egos and
slivers of shattered soul.
You are beautiful in your broken glitter – now be welcomed to the vault of
heaven, until I call on you.*

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Between the Lines: Poetry, Perception, Reflections and Inspirations

Interview with Affaan Minhas

Anjali Pandya

There are numerous approaches to writing, each shaped by the author's unique style of expression. While some writers share stories about their lives and experiences, others prefer to convey their emotions through language and literature, particularly in the form of poetry. Affaan's work exemplifies this latter approach, as he employs poetry to explore the depths of his emotions and experiences, inviting readers to forge a connection with his writing.

Poetry offers readers the opportunity to interpret meanings in their own ways, and this is particularly evident in Affaan's poems. His use of figurative language, symbolism, and open-ended themes creates a rich tapestry of meanings that can resonate with a diverse audience.

Affaan's journey into poetry began spontaneously, serving as an essential outlet for his emotions and enabling him to reflect on and preserve his personal experiences. He examines various themes in his poetry, including resilience, sorrow, love, spirituality, and struggle. Through vulnerability and honesty, Affaan draws from his own experiences to enhance the impact of his work and connect more deeply with his readers.

What inspired you to start writing poetry?

The need to be heard and hopefully to try and communicate a greater depth and breadth of my emotion. Also to improve on my general skills of symbolic reference, creating/identifying their relationships and articulating myself precisely through their abstractions to convey a deeper meaning, with the hopes that conveying consistent imagery justifies my opinions and emotions, in the sense

that if they symbolism remains consistent enough to paint a whole picture, it can be felt and validated by others exactly as I have felt it.

Do you remember the first poem you wrote? What was it about?

I wrote it about my friend who was lying down in her bed with her make-up on. We got into heavy discussions about the past, and the poem talked about the mental burdens she experienced under her pretty face makeup.

How has your personal background influenced your poetry?

Not being properly socialized as a young kid and having had OCD and vicious magical thinking as a symptom, meant that I explored deeper aspects of the world outside of being caught up in the fluff of what society imposes. Having no real gossip or learning about conventional conversations meant, in some senses, I was brought up free from thinking within the realms of “face-value” interpersonal societal relationships, instead having to explore deeper within myself.

Are there specific experiences or events that have shaped your voice as a poet?

Learnig about symbolism and waking up to the full extent of its web of knowledge changed my way of thinking into more abstract, and sometimes spiritual senses.

How do you mix your study with writing poems?

If talking about how I juggle the two, it's not an issue at all, my university studying doesn't take up enough time that I have none left to write. But sometimes I am influenced by studies. I study computer science and one of the disciplines is computational thinking, and constructing a logical process, these can influence my poems, and I may just refer to computer science knowledge within my poems.

Can you walk us through your process of writing a poem?

Sometimes I begin writing because of a thought that might come to me in trying to understand the world. It may have a nice ring or rhyme to it and the emotion I may be feeling behind that could be large enough to push that into a flowing rhythm or expand on it. So, I'll sit down and get the first line or two on paper. I might close my eyes and feel the rhythm and flow of the emotion within me to form the cadence of the poem. I'll try and abstract from longer sentences of words into a single symbol that could suggest the entire sentence instead, e.g. if I am talking about how something may feed into something else, I may use the word wheat. It conveys the themes of sustenance, being dry and unpalatable if not cooked properly, hot, its gold, common. If these are consistent with the way in which something feeds into something, for example OCD thoughts (if that's what one can describe them as then wheat is what I might use. This is all just as an example.

Do you have any rituals or habits when it comes to writing poetry?

I might listen to music, run down a train of thought to feel out its rhythm, close my eyes and try and perceive colours. Or I'll read famous poems and get inspiration, again reading along and feeling out a particular rhythm that identifies with me at the time, and try and internalize that rhythm in the hopes that they can somewhat direct me to the next word instinctively.

How do you deal with writer's block?

I put the pen down and live some life.

How do you decide when a poem is "finished"?

If it rings like the end of a signature. If every theme I needed to include has been written. I try and keep a length of 4 stanzas as a standard length so that can give me some reference, however it doesn't mean 4 is the length of all of them, and it shouldn't necessarily be. If I'm experiencing writers block or if it feels like I'm desperate to put myself on the paper like an upset child might when crying again and again about the same thing in different ways, if it loses sophistication and precision that is.

What themes do you explore most often in your poetry?

That of love, spirituality, anxiety, struggle, the balance of light and dark, the balance of most things, friendships, connections to this world and the metaphysical.

Is there anyone who may influence you, and why?

Everyone influences me always, I learn about life through everyone around me, my inspiration is the journey I have had so far and most of it would not have been without people. I learn about letting go and non-attachment from acquaintances, ephemeral beauty and a burn of emotion from strangers – the non-judgement of it and being anonymous in a train. What the purpose of family is, what friends can teach you about yourself, who you are in reference to the different kinds of people you meet and are around, I might not realize that I wasn't the least reserved person if maybe I had met someone very briefly who I couldn't deny was more reserved than I. In ways like this everyone influences me.

Do music, visual art, and nature inspire your work?

Yes, the same way a musician may select a mode of music, e.g. Ionian, Dorian, aeolian etc. might be the same way a visual artist might select their colour palette, or the texture of their paint: oil, acrylic, pastel, neon. I can read into these attributes and find the shape of a song, use its rhythm to inspire my own. Use the imagery present in a picture.

And nature absolutely. Nature is perfect, everything can be learned from nature, it demonstrates a more natural progression of things.

How do you approach writing about personal or difficult subjects?

Sometimes I avoid it, but most of the times I will just write it out as I do a normal poem. Feeling that if I can articulate myself on the paper, I might have a better understanding of the difficult subject I am facing and maybe find some release in analyzing the poem and finding a symbolic balance that I can consume myself to ease the struggle.

What role does poetry play in your life?

Poetry serves as the language I use to explore the self and understand more abstract aspects of life and spirituality; it can be a devastating language that you can lose yourself in. Its potency can do equally as good as bad. I find myself thinking poetically when I'm ruminating and in deep introspection.

Do you believe poetry has the power to create change? How?

Yes absolutely. Poetry is dense emotion on paper, can reflect personal struggles, societal, contextual struggles people can relate to and feel valid. Right now there is a poem called "Boots" going around that social media is using to indicate they are talking about a tough and possibly inflammatory subject without being censored. A poem written about the world war decades ago is being used today as a tool to platform struggle.

How do you see poetry fitting into today's world, especially for young people?

Young people sometimes write or read poems because they can be fun, entertaining, offer a deeper outlook on things for people who are searching for more.

What challenges have you faced as a young poet?

Being overwhelmed by poetry, especially when reading great, well-constructed poems. It's the burden of visceral emotion and seeing the unseen. Taking on others' emotions just for inspiration isn't easy work. Not feeling crazy when sometimes it feels like I'm writing a word salad.

How have you grown as a writer since you began?

Yes, I've noticed when trying to express a thought or opinion, I can do it more concisely and precisely without extensively trying to explain my feelings as then it just ends up with sounding like I'm trying to justify myself. If I want to justify myself in a poem I would, but if it sounds like I'm doing it involuntarily then I

try to avoid that as in some senses it seeks validation and I'm trying to grow out of people pleasing habits.

Are there any poems or pieces of writing you regret or feel differently about now?

Yes, earlier poems where imagery wasn't consistent and when the subject matter was about things I should have let go of a long time ago.

What's it like to share your poetry with others?

Intimidating and very vulnerable, most of my agemates don't have as extensive of a vocabulary so there's a lot of words that they do not understand which I think ruins the flow of the poem.

Have you faced any criticism, and how do you handle it?

I have, I use it constructively, if someone struggles to understand, maybe the poem has gotten convoluted. I use the criticism to see how I can improve the poem.

Do you think social media has changed how poetry is written or consumed?

Definitely how its consumed. But poetry will always just be poetry.

What advice would you give to other young poets?

Take the time to feel out yourself, imagine the world in which you are in, what it looks like, try and engage your 5 senses and feel them together to see the world in your head and heart. Manifesting them into almost physical constructs and having a good grasp of yourself means that you might be able to rearrange them in a beautiful and delicate way. Kind of like cooking. The use of analogies very much helps, if you can find analogies that are consistent and parallel with your own situation, then you'll have access to a new set of imageries, where the imagery sort of serves as a phenotype and symbolic references sort of as a genotype. A

poem can abstract these analogies together so people with similar but not the same experience can also relate.

How do you see your poetry evolving in the future?

Hopefully becoming more refined and consistent, making better use of linguistic tools and learning rhymes better.

Are there any goals or dreams you have for your work as a poet?

To become a great poet.

If you could collaborate with any poet, living or dead, who would it be and why?

Sylvia Plath was an influential American poet, novelist, and short-story writer known for her confessional style of writing. Her work delves deeply into her personal life, emotions, and struggles with mental health, offering raw, unfiltered insight into her inner world. At the age of 13, she attempted to take her own life. While this might lead some to dismiss her as "insane," her poetry suggests otherwise. Plath possessed a profound sense of reason and extraordinary depth in her thinking and feeling, far beyond conventional notions of madness. Her pure artistry is a testament to her brilliance. Writing with the precision and emotional intelligence she demonstrated requires not only skill but also a sharp, discerning mind. In my view, Plath embodies a fascinating juxtaposition: someone who appeared to wrestle with chaos yet mastered the ability to create order and beauty through her words. Her work inspires me to reflect on self-trust and confidence, teaching us that even in the depths of personal struggle, there is bravery in vulnerability. Plath's courage in embracing confessional poetry is both admirable and transformative

If your poetry could have one effect on readers, what would it be?

To open them up to a world of symbolic and emotional thinking, if it can invoke empathy then I am happy.

Affaan Minhas:

'The Welder'

*Sweet shadows munch forward,
They dance like artists do,
And form is condemned*

*Swim in feline fractures,
Spickle spattered words
Like a soft spray of
Sshrill welder whiskers,*

*Your passion has sublimed,
And I have form,
Pewter trickles under white lights,
On the hot seat,*

*Eyes like lasers,
You cut your cloth,
Our glory - your token breath,
I am alive,*

*And to my own torture,
I dance alone with the shadows on the wall.*

Dance of the shadows

*Head-beat animals,
A lions shroud,
Dragonscale gleam,
You are the void,*

*I am the wink of flight,
A brimming dance of courage,
Dream away
From here,*

*A gruelling back,
From the courage bed,
To the silk of your
Parrys edge,*

*A psychic movement,
Toils of waist,
Hips - the murder
Of union*

*Skill flipped you consumate,
The foam of sleep,
The hue of heat,
Of slake on our skin,*

*We slip in silver linings,
Arcane dances,
Arcane betrothals,
A gold you,*

*And nothing between us,
A wet edge,
A dream to rust,
And we to dust.*

'Cocaine'

*It weaves quick like winter,
Drumming pill crushes of static,
Overdone and frozen this was not the chosen state but she chose it,
And turns on so like a mannequin,*

*Black characters and one of albino red vinyl,
Her form fitting mantle of snow white terror on the eye of the bunny,
A cracked open vessel for demonstrative purposes,
It is not black,*

*Not like the space between the stars,
But nova white primadonna,
A statutory Blank poised,
Her fingers hook up her heads in mirage,*

*Draped through the silence of the altar,
What she loves is the rising of the moon and, to rise with the moon,
And fears the psychoguard birds of the early dawn,*

*Through the night she is gazelle morticia,
Knee-drive soft steps,
She is stowaway clandestina,
As the eye warms the snow,*

*It has gone before the very drink,
Embalmed scopes of second chances,
And coke drives blue distances,
In all regards as pure as her poison to the man,*

*Barbed wire legacies,
She is violence where the dust rises*

Make-Up

*Her psyche,
Damp and heavy,
She tries to sift the poison through her mind,
But it sticks,
Like the pulling of wet clothes on skin,
Trying to wring them out in her skull,
But she's underwater,
We don't suppose she's tired under heavy clothes,
But there she lies in her bed-ready grave,
Face beat,
Like a pall ready for her open casket.*

Untitled

*Clamour knocks me in my lips,
I am struck from this place,
Tranquilliser dreams are drawn,
The man is a stranger,
There is more wheat on his harness
Than he can carry,*

*The rivers' kissed my hands and feet,
The shadows arrange
For me to turn every stone,
And my insanity runs to me,
His gallop on the cobbles,
And I am taken with a lycanthrope lick,
Down the river,*

*My clutch is held,
I am myself,
Undone and done to warlord mysteries,
Dream kissed,
Insanity is the pure-fuel,
And my love is a demons red,*

A cherry's blood.

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Creative Journeys: Art, Adaptability, and Entrepreneurship *Interview with Devika Nambiar*

Edward Dean

This interview features Devika Nambiar, a graduate of the University of Westminster. Her journey began with earning a degree in Development Studies and International Relations in 2017 and culminated in the founding of her own design studio, Malabar Press, in 2023. Over the course of seven years, she explored various creative roles, seamlessly integrating her artistic passion with the critical thinking and research skills she cultivated during her studies, ultimately establishing a significant presence in the arts and culture sector.

Based in India, Devika's work is deeply influenced by traditional artistic techniques and is inspired by South Indian wildlife and nature. Her journey offers invaluable insights for both students and artists, illustrating how a university education can pave the way for diverse career opportunities and how interdisciplinary skills can enable entry into new creative domains.

In this conversation, she discusses the challenges of balancing her artistic vision with client expectations, highlights the importance of sustainability in design, and shares valuable lessons that creatives can learn from navigating artistic differences.

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

My name is Devika Nambiar. I am a designer based in India, and I run a print design studio called Malabar Press. My interest in visual art and design developed as early as primary school. Although I built on my artistic skills and experience throughout my school years, I was not sure if I wanted to pursue the same in

college. I therefore decided to pursue international relations, another field of study about which I was curious.

After graduating with a social science degree from the University of Westminster in 2017, I wanted to gain work experiences that could do justice both to the critical thinking and research skills built through my undergraduate education and to my childhood fascination for the arts. I was able to work for diverse organizations in the arts and culture sector, including digital magazines, auction houses, art galleries, and charitable organizations, in the following years.

After almost 7 years of working in different creative roles, I decided to set up my own design studio and store called Malabar Press in 2023. Setting up my own business has provided me with a stimulating and fulfilling work environment that caters to both my creative skills and my interest in the work of various public and private organizations.

How did you discover your passion for design?

My current design practice is rooted in reimagining traditional artistic techniques and objects. I use historic art processes worldwide, such as oil painting, pen and ink drawing, printmaking, and embroidery, to create functional and purposeful objects that fit the modern person and their needs. Most of my work touches on nature, nostalgia, and cultural themes.

Have you faced any challenges as a young artist? How did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge I have faced, and I am still facing, in my creative journey is finding a balance between what I like and what my clients or customers want. When providing design as a service, most often you are working with clients who may not have the same vision as you do. Considering that I am still in an early stage of my design career, I have been dealing with this obstacle by being flexible and learning to adapt my designs and styles without losing their essence and originality.

What advice would you give to young people who want to pursue art but might feel discouraged?

One of the best principles I've followed throughout my creative journey has been to allow myself to get involved in and learn from various industries. Although I graduated with a degree in International Relations, both during and after college I collected work experiences that gave me exposure to fields beyond the scope of my studies. I was able to apply the analytical skills gained through my social science degree to the work of organizations in the arts and culture and private sectors. This allowed my work to be more informed, multifaceted, and interesting.

Where do you see yourself as an artist in the next few years?

Currently, I'm in the process of incorporating more sustainable and regenerative design practices into my work. I'm also curious about more complex fields of design and hope to engage and experiment with new materials and techniques. Considering the advancements in environment-conscious technology, it is important to adapt your creative practices to the needs and concerns of the current world.

Please tell us about the artwork you submitted to this book.

In the artwork 1 and 2 my designs feature hand-drawn depictions of South India's wildlife and natural world. These designs include stationery adorned with original artworks showcasing the distinct flora and fauna of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve. These are handmade gouache paintings of the Great Indian Hornbill and the Malabar Trogon, two rare birds in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve.

Kerala's distinct and stunning natural world has always inspired me greatly. Since I grew up hearing stories and fables about the local wildlife, I was keen on including them in my art and design practice. Hence, much of my current work includes hand-drawn renditions of birds and animals native to South India. Although my initial goal was to celebrate the unique and visually pleasing local wildlife, over time my works have also brought curiosity and awareness to the environmental risks and endangerment experienced in this ecologically sensitive area.

The artwork features a detailed botanical illustration of leaves and flowers in white against a deep blue background. The style uses a pen and ink technique inspired by traditional botanical drawings.

Artwork 1



*“Great Indian Hornbill”, 2023
Gouache on recycled kraft paper*

Artwork 2



*“Malabar Trogon”, 2024
Gouache on recycled kraft paper*

Artwork 3



For more of Devika's work, visit her on Instagram: [instagram.com/malabarpress](https://www.instagram.com/malabarpress)

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Exploring the Legacy of Art Behind the Paintbrush

Interview with Nguyen Dieu Dieu

Mohammad Saif Tanvir

Art transcends mere colours applied to a canvas; it represents a complex language of emotion, a pathway of self-discovery, and a sanctuary during periods of adversity. This interview features Nguyen Dieu Dieu, an artist whose enduring passion for painting commenced in her childhood and has since matured into a significant medium for expression and healing. Growing up in an environment where creativity was integral to daily life, she found profound inspiration in her father, an architect and artist, who played a crucial role in cultivating her artistic development.

In the course of this dialogue, Dieu articulates her profound connection to art, the personal challenges that have informed her body of work, and the insights she has gleaned from her exploration of still-life painting. Her narrative illustrates a journey marked by resilience, inspiration, and an unwavering commitment to creativity, encompassing both the struggle against self-doubt and the capacity to recognize beauty in life's simplest moments. Dieu elucidates the thematic elements that resonate with her, the emotions that underpin her artworks, and the messages she aims to communicate to her audience.

Through her nuanced manipulation of light and shadow, color and form, and, most critically, emotion and experience, Dieu provides a distinctive lens through which to understand the world—inviting observers to delve beyond superficial interpretations and engage deeply with the essence of her artistic vision.

Can you tell us a little about yourself? What was it like growing up?

The relationship between art and I traces back many years. Growing up in a family in which art was a primary purpose of educating, I consider myself lucky.

My dad is an architect and an artist, so from a very young age, I was exposed to architecture/ art magazines, and books about famous artists and their paintings. I was a quiet child and often misunderstood as an introvert, but, in reality, I was just socially awkward. Making friends wasn't always an easy thing for me as a kid, but I never felt lonely because I had art and my dad, who was always there to guide and support me. I spent most of my childhood reading, playing with paintbrushes, and experimenting with different colors. Art was my way of having fun, expressing myself, and staying engaged with the world around me.

How long have you been painting, and what inspired you to start?

My dad has been my biggest inspiration. Watching him paint and work on architectural projects nurtured my love for art. He never pushed me to follow in his footsteps but always supported my creativity, allowing me to develop my own artistic voice. I've been painting since I was a toddler. It started naturally because of my surroundings - watching my dad paint, seeing him work on designs, and having access to different art materials at home. Art became second nature to me. As I got older, I became more serious about improving my skills, and I started practicing more intentionally. Over time, painting evolved from just a fun childhood activity into a deep passion and an essential part of my life.

How did you discover your passion for painting?

My passion for painting has always been there, but I truly realized its significance in my life during my early teenage years, especially when I faced one of my biggest personal struggles -failing to get into my favorite high school. In Vietnam, the public school system is extremely competitive, and students face immense pressure to perform well in entrance exams. I had put in so much effort and had high hopes, so when I didn't make it, it felt like a huge personal failure.

At that time, I started seeing myself in a very negative light. I questioned my worth and doubted my abilities. I felt like I wasn't good enough, and those thoughts became overwhelming. It wasn't just about school; it was about my self-esteem and the fear of not living up to expectations - whether they were from society, my family, or even myself. It was a difficult period, filled with self-doubt, frustration, and the pressure of trying to figure out what was next.

That's when painting became more than just something I enjoyed - it became a form of healing, a refuge. I found that when I painted, all the noise in my head quieted down. Instead of overthinking and spiraling into negativity, I focused on every brushstroke, every color, and every detail of my artwork. It was one of the few things that made me feel at peace and gave me a sense of control when everything else felt like a mess of uncertainty.

Slowly, art became my way of coping with hardships in life as a young adult. It helped me navigate negative emotions and see myself in a kinder light. Every painting was like a reminder that I was growing, learning, and improving, both as an artist and as a person. Over time, my love for painting deepened, and I realized that it wasn't just a hobby - it was a part of who I am.

What have you learned from painting still life, and how has it shaped your approach to art and life?

When I decided to approach art more professionally, still-life painting was one of my first choices. Painting simple objects helps me realize that there is always more than just "simple" For example, a simple brown-looking vase can be intricate in detail. More specifically, there are more shades to a vase than just light brown and dark brown. If you sat long enough to stare at the vase, you would start to notice that the vase actually has more shades and colors than it seems, there could be other colors reflecting on a non-reflective material (which artists often call it environment colors).

What I have just shared is one of the lessons I learned throughout my journey with art. Figuring out "rules of art" like these also guides me through the most surprising way possible. Which is why painting to me is like a way of meditation, I would have more space in my head and more time with myself to actually look into problems in the most unsophisticated way but also consider that there are different perspectives and more "details" to a "simple" problem that I would make it a big deal in a moment of heat or panic.

What are some recurring themes or subjects in your art? Can you describe your favorite painting?

Flowers and lighting have become my greatest muses so far. There is something about their delicate yet powerful presence that fascinates me. Each type of flower carries its own personality- some are bold and vibrant, while others are soft and understated. I love the way they bloom with confidence, embracing their beauty without any hesitation. Lighting, on the other hand, is a paid actor. It brings them to life, the way light interacts with petals, casts shadows and changes a scene's mood fascinates me. I often save up to buy fresh flowers, not just to paint but to admire how they transform under different lighting. In portrait 1, one of my most recent paintings, which I call *Embracing*. I painted this at the end of 2024, just a few days before the new year, to wrap up my journey of being a young adult stepping into life. *Embracing* reminds me of the challenges and every single mental breakdown and all the moments of realization and growth I had in the past year. This painting is so special to me that I take it as thank you letter I wrote to myself. The vibrant colors of the vase, the background and the flowers stand for each emotion I experienced, which could get chaotic and overwhelming sometimes but they all deserve to be appreciated and embraced.

Do you aim to convey or provoke certain emotions through your paintings? And what do you hope people take away from your paintings when they view them?

The aim of provoking emotions is not really my goal when I pick up my brushes. I let art and creativity come to me in the most natural way possible. Each painting is a journey of emotions and a trail of thoughts in my head, like a journal of colors that records my feelings and emotions throughout the process of creating in a pretty raw way. I often frame my paintings and hang them on the wall around my house, every time I look at them, I realize how much thought and meaning I put behind each brushstroke. In some way, my own paintings act as a reminder for me to slow down on how I get through my days, to take a moment to appreciate the opportunities and the time I had to create these paintings.

In our society nowadays, the struggle of mental issues and illnesses has been more vocal than ever, we often have to fight to stay afloat in the ocean of expectations and goals that society or even we created for ourselves. Therefore, I want my art

to remind other people to slow down and to “breathe” as well. They don’t need to understand the meaning I put behind them. I just hope that when looking at something nice I created, if they realize that they are taking a moment to enjoy something pleasant during their hustle and bustle life, then my art has served its purpose.

A side story of my father of how he became an artist

In Vietnamese culture, parents often remind their kids with the adage: “*ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây*”, meaning gratitude is the sign of noble souls. In school and at home, I had always been taught that gratitude is one of the greatest purposes of education; opportunities in life are never random; they are the result of the hard work and sacrifices of previous generations whose efforts should never be forgotten but always honored. That is why I want to include the story of my father here, whom I am eternally grateful for and whose story deserves to be seen more than ever.

My father was born in the year 1973, when the Paris Peace Accords was signed – an official agreement to end the war and peace restoration in Vietnam. Life was full of struggles back then, everyone tried to pick up the pieces after the huge dreadful mess that the American War had created. Being born in the countryside, far away from the lights of the city, my father did not have as much access to good quality education, he had developed a great love for art early in his childhood but never had any opportunities to take this love further. Later on, he dropped out of school in 6th grade to find a job in order to help my grandparents make ends meet. He had been wandering around, going from one low-paid job to another until he was in his late 20s. My father decided that he was supposed to live life to its fullest and started to live his life again – dreaming.

He continued to practice sketching tirelessly, dreaming of becoming an architect one day (many of these sketches are still kept at my house). However, in the Vietnamese education system, admission to colleges and universities requires passing a rigorous entrance exam. With only a sixth-grade education, my father knew he had to start from scratch. Determined, he picked up a fifth-grade math textbook and began teaching himself everything he had missed.

At the age of 25, he made the bold decision to return to high school. Surrounded by classmates nearly a decade younger than him, he never let embarrassment or self-doubt get in the way. He studied relentlessly, driven by the dream that had once seemed impossible. At 27, he finally completed high school - a milestone that, for many in his situation, would have been unthinkable. He continued pouring his heart and soul into the preparation for the entrance exam. Eventually, he achieved the highest score and was accepted into both Hanoi Architecture University and Hanoi University of Civil Engineering.

What makes his story truly extraordinary is that my father was the first person in his family to attend university. At a time when higher education felt unattainable for many, this man has proven that passion and relentless effort could turn even the most distant dreams into reality.

I also want to put his story here as a tribute to my father for never giving up on himself in his younger years and for encouraging me throughout my journey with art, from the moment I first picked up a crayon and scribbled doodles on the wall to the moment I am able to put all the love and passion into my paintings.

How do you encourage and inspire students like yourself to take up painting?

I believe the best way to encourage others to take up painting is to show them that art is not just about talent - it is about seeing the world differently and enjoying the process. Scrolling through social media nowadays, it is not rare to come across many talented artists and we often find ourselves comparing to others. Many people hesitate to start because they think they're not "good enough, talent enough" or sometimes "too late to start" but painting isn't about perfection and talent.

I want to share my own journey - the struggles, the small victories, and the lessons I have learned along the way—to maybe help others who also share a great love for art, to be more confident in themselves. Most importantly, I encourage them to paint for themselves. Art is a personal journey, a way to express emotions, tell stories, and find clarity. Let go of comparison, embrace curiosity, and allow yourself to enjoy the act of creating.

For those already on their artistic journey and those who are considering it, may this message get to you:

“Make art a safe place for yourself, make it a place where you can bathe yourself with the purest form of love. In a world where it’s easy to feel lost, having a space to anchor yourself is a true blessing.”

Please describe Portraits 1 and 2 and what inspired you to paint them

Portrait 1. This painting came after a long pause due to deadlines and assignments from my university. I struggled to find time for myself, making it hard to complete any artwork. Now, as a second-year student, I’ve learned to manage my time and emotions better, which allowed me to return to painting with a fresh perspective.

Portrait 2 is one of my favorite paintings, which was created during the pandemic. Online classes were dull, and I couldn’t go out to buy fresh flowers, so I set up random objects to paint instead. Surprisingly, it turned out great, reminding me that creativity can thrive even in limitations.

Please describe Portraits 3 and 4 and explain why you created them

Portrait 3. I usually need time to mentally prepare before painting—gathering supplies, setting up, and sometimes buying flowers—but this time was different. My dad surprised me with a bouquet of cosmos flowers he bought from the local market, their vibrant colors and lively presence immediately inspired me to pick up my brush. This piece took longer than usual since it was my first time painting glass, but the challenge made it even more rewarding.

Portrait 4. My first attempt at painting flowers with watercolor. The flowers were freshly picked from my grandparents’ garden, and I completed this piece in just a few hours. I still remember that slow, peaceful afternoon during my summer break - it was a moment of pure calm.

For Portraits 5 and 6, what are they, and what motivated you to create them?

Portrait 5. Unlike my usual paintings on canvas, I created this piece in my A3 sketchbook. My favorite part is the intricate details of the incense burner box, which was my first time painting an object with intricate details. I felt so much more confident with my skills after painting this.

Portrait 6. I created this in the late afternoon as the sun was setting, with limited source of light. I usually prefer painting in bright daylight, but there was something both glorious and regretful about that fading shade of sunlight. To capture that feeling, I used a bright orange to enhance the warmth of the light hiding behind the flowers.

Lastly, please tell us about Portrait 7. What is it, and what inspired you to draw it?

Portrait 7. I painted this during a difficult time, which made me truly realize that art could be an escape for my mind. As I worked through each brushstroke, I found comfort in the process. The lighting in the left corner of the painting represents a light of hope—a reminder t<nhat things would eventually get better.

Portrait 1



Portrait 2



Portrait 3



Portrait 4



Portrait 5



Portrait 6



Portrait 7



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SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSIVITY & EDUCATION

Rooted in a global vision and driven by local energy, the Democratic Education Network (DEN) empowers students of all backgrounds to become creators of knowledge and agents of change. This collection celebrates their bold, multidisciplinary work—challenging the status quo and shaping a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

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IJOPEC
PUBLICATION
London ijopec.co.uk Istanbul



EDITED BY
FARHANG MORADY

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