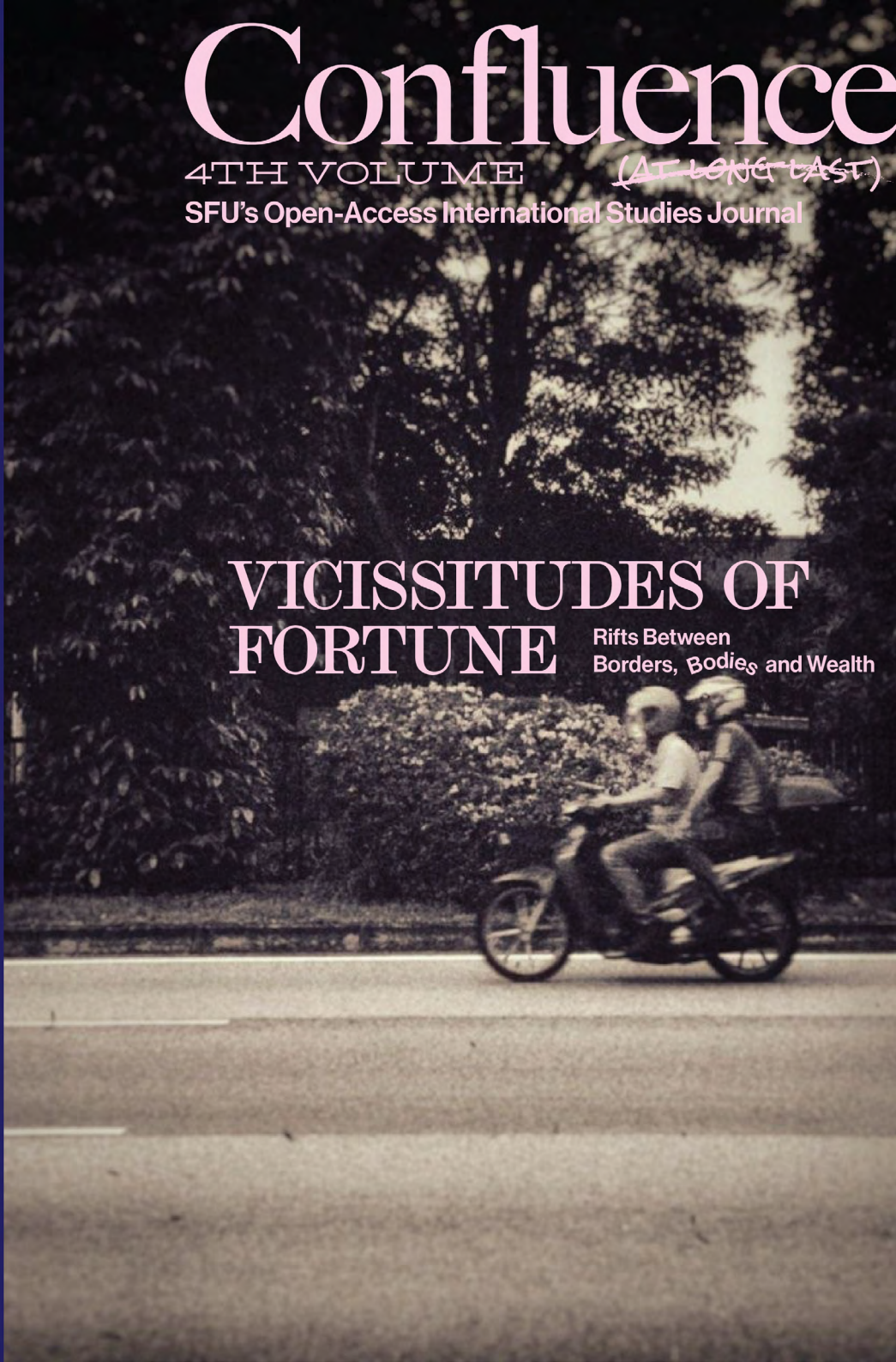
Confluence

4TH VOLUME (AT LONG LAST)

SFU's Open-Access International Studies Journal



VICISSITUDES OF FORTUNE

Rifts Between Borders, Bodies and Wealth

SPRING 2026

Confluence
Volume #4

Land Acknowledgement

As this project persists as an academic endeavour engaging with critical inquiry and discourse, it is imperative that we also acknowledge the spaces that we currently operate, work, and live on.

This place is the unceded and ancestral territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ and Sḵwx̱wú7mesh speaking peoples, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and has been stewarded by them since time immemorial.

Vancouver is located on territory that was never ceded, or given up to the Crown by the Musqueam, Squamish, or Tsleil-Waututh peoples. The term unceded acknowledges the dispossession of the land and the inherent rights that Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh hold to the territory. The term serves as a reminder that Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh have never left their territories and will always retain their jurisdiction and relationships with the territory.

“I remain less preoccupied with coming to voice because I know how quickly voice can be taken away. My concern now lies in finding effective ways to use the voice that I have claimed while I have it.”

Patricia Hill Collins

Black Feminist Thought:
Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment

THE EDITORIAL TEAM

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(cover art adopted from original photgraphy by Nigel Tan)

Letter from the Editors

We, the Confluence Team and the ISSA, first began to revive Confluence in the Fall of 2024 and were met by many challenges.

Finally, after a long-awaited and winding publishing journey, we are excited to share the 4th volume of Confluence, in partnership with the International Studies Student Association (ISSA) and the School of International Studies.

We chose to focus on the themes of inequalities and intersectionality as we consider these topics to be among the grounding principles of International Studies (IS). In returning from the Confluence hiatus, we wanted to highlight themes that link International Studies as an interdisciplinary field while also distinguishing the factors that set it apart from other disciplines.

Vicissitudes of Fortune: Rifts Between Borders, Bodies, and Wealth is a culmination of our understanding of IS as a discipline. The intention of the volume is to reflect the versatile nature of ideas and concepts developed through IS as a critical field of study. Everything from its title, design, layout and thematic approach has been done with the purpose of finding the balance between academic writing and storytelling. Here, every piece of work has its own identity and voice which is represented through the artistic visuals in the journal. We hoped that, through deconstructing the traditional standard of what a student journal typically looks and feels like, we would further our quest to push against the binaries that have been formed by the academic world.

Throughout our classes, we are constantly reminded of the different ways in which literature has often purposefully neglected to give the same standing to the voices of the periphery. In a world where scholarship has too often reproduced structures of exclusion, we hope Confluence stands out as a demonstration of the power of collaboration, immortalizing the nuanced perspectives that challenge, expand, and ultimately enrich academic thought. It is both our privilege and duty to persevere and celebrate the diverse works of the next generation of SFU scholars.

Furthermore, we are grateful for the opportunities this land has provided us with, including our education and work. We recognize the responsibility that comes with living and studying on colonized lands. As a group made up of both immigrant settlers and settlers, we remain committed to engaging with Indigenous scholarship, perspectives, and leadership; using our positions as creators of this journal to support conversations about justice, decolonization, accountability and more equitable futures.

Finally, we would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to our faculty support, Dr. Anushay Malik and Dr. Darren Byler. Their direction and counsel have guided us through the editorial process, helping us navigate both technical and artistic considerations as we worked to represent bright minds with intention and integrity. We also extend our sincere appreciation to Catalina Bobadilla Sandoval for her constant support, and kindness throughout every step of the process. In addition, we are grateful to Ioana Liuta for her guidance in navigating the publishing process.

Sincerely,

The Confluence Executive Team

Editors-in-Chief Valeria Santos Garcia
Mariah Yorke

Journal Manager Suma Pallapothu

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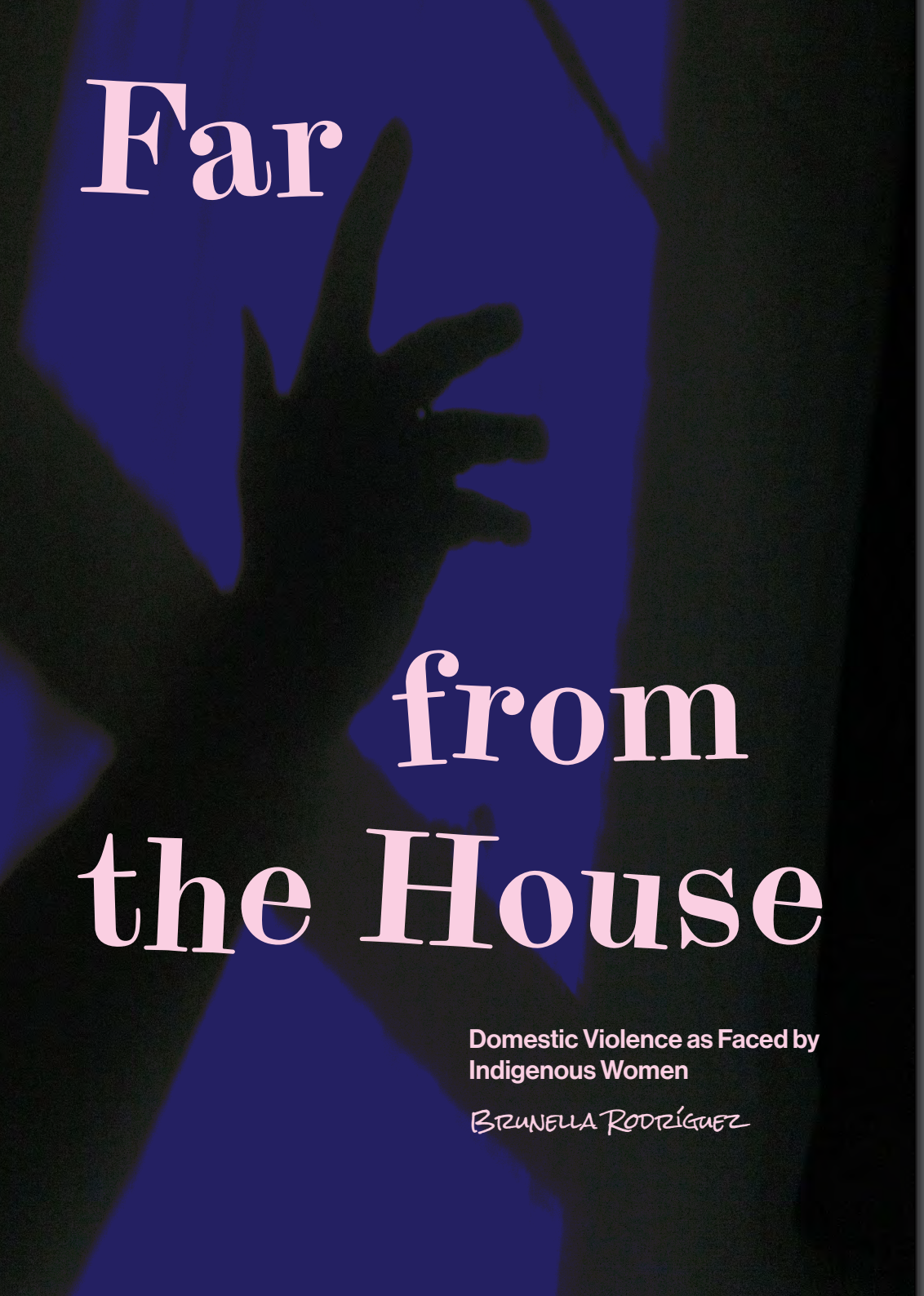

Far from the House

Domestic Violence as Faced by Indigenous Women

BRUNELLA RODRÍGUEZ

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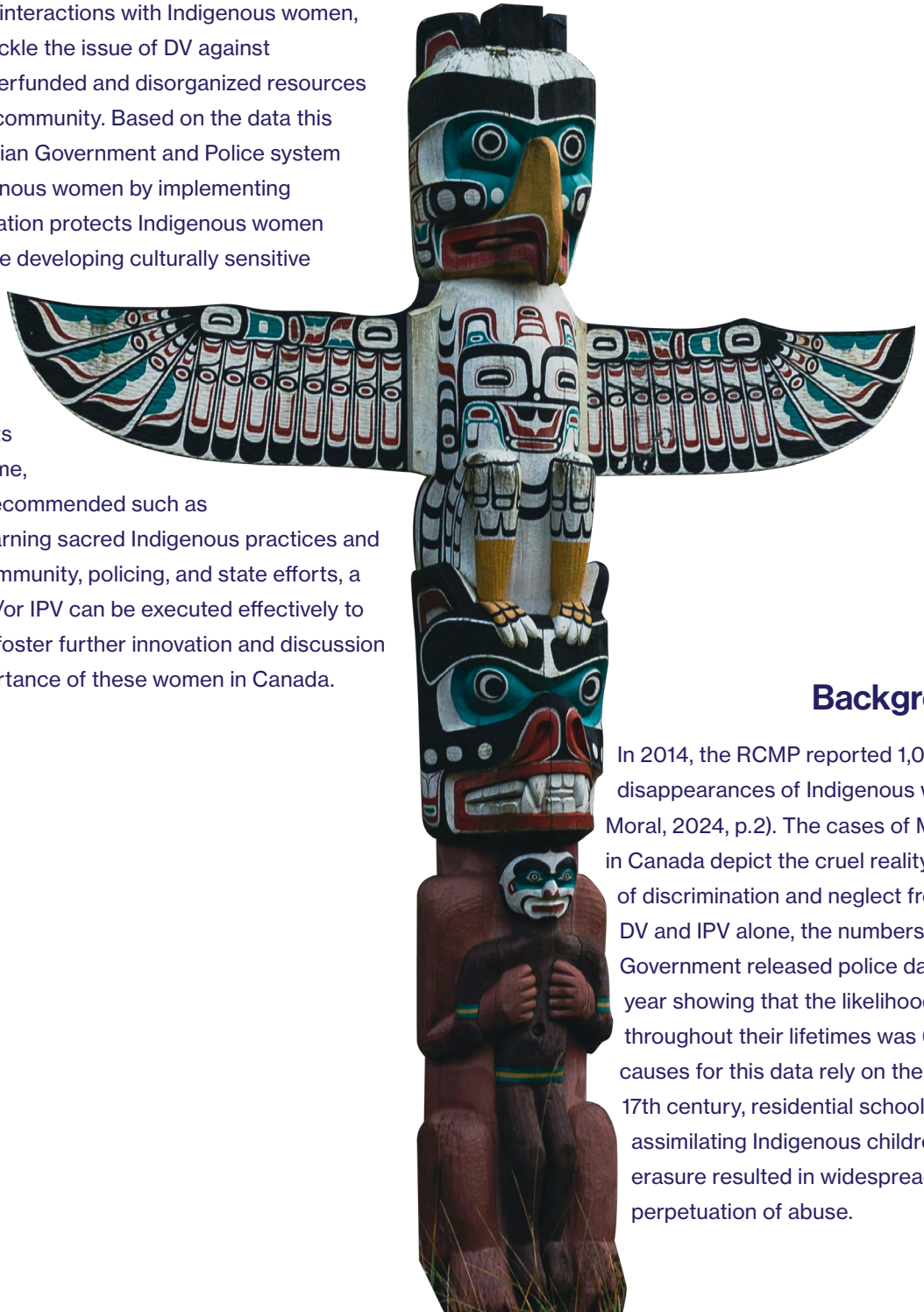
Brunella Rodriguez is a fourth-year International Studies major pursuing a certificate in French.

Her interests include security studies, democratic backsliding, and decolonization efforts. Her research focuses on Latin America's foreign policy and the ongoing power dynamics between the region and colonial soft power.

Executive Summary

Aboriginal women in Canada are at significantly higher risk than non-Aboriginal women for all forms of violence, including stranger-violence, spousal violence, and spousal homicide (Goulet et al., 2016). Multiple risk factors at individual, communal, and societal levels intersect to place these women in vulnerable situations that are only exacerbated by systemic state incompetence and neglect. Historical legacies of colonial control and oppression influence the way Indigenous women are treated and idealized. Despite multiple efforts to protect Indigenous women from Domestic Violence (DV) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), the current system in place lacks a multifaceted understanding of Indigenous culture and sovereignty which imposes non-Indigenous values and mainstream designed strategies that end up further traumatizing and hurting Indigenous women experiencing DV and/or IPV. Available data shows Indigenous women's disproportionate subjection to violence is a dated, ongoing issue, however, most of the information is fairly recent which proves the need to further examine and expand the strategies and situations of violence Indigenous women experience currently.

This brief analyses data regarding police interactions with Indigenous women, the lack of a strong legal framework to tackle the issue of DV against Indigenous women and girls, and the underfunded and disorganized resources and shelters assigned to the Indigenous community. Based on the data this paper recommends reforms in the Canadian Government and Police system assessment of DV and IPV against Indigenous women by implementing corrections to the way policing and legislation protects Indigenous women and girls. These recommendations include developing culturally sensitive interventions for Indigenous women in situations of DV and/or IPV, pushing for more representation of Indigenous women in police forces, and reforming court and legal procedures and judgments rooted in colonialist ideas. At the same time, personal and community tactics will be recommended such as promoting positive self identity and re-learning sacred Indigenous practices and ceremonies. Only with clear personal, community, policing, and state efforts, a cohesive system of prevention of DV and/or IPV can be executed effectively to protect Indigenous women and girls and foster further innovation and discussion surrounding the representation and importance of these women in Canada.



Background: A History of Oppression

In 2014, the RCMP reported 1,017 police recorded murders and 164 disappearances of Indigenous women between 1980 and 2012 (García-Del Moral, 2024, p.2). The cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada depict the cruel reality many Indigenous women live as a result of discrimination and neglect from the Canadian authorities. Focusing on DV and IPV alone, the numbers are no less worrying. In 2019, the Canadian Government released police data, registering self-reported data for the same year showing that the likelihood of Indigenous women experiencing IPV throughout their lifetimes was 6 out of 10 women, a 61% (Hallett, 2024). The causes for this data rely on the history of oppression in the country. Since the 17th century, residential schools existed in Canada with the sole purpose of assimilating Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture. This cultural erasure resulted in widespread trauma, intergenerational harm and the perpetuation of abuse.

Klingspohn gives a direct quote from The Manitoba Justice Institute (1999) which provides insight to this historic violence, "[r]esidential schools laid the foundation for the epidemic today of domestic abuse and violence against Aboriginal women and children" (Klingspohn, 2018, p.2). The residential schools acted as a base, but there are multiple other risk factors that target Indigenous women in cases of DV and IPV such as social background, situational characteristics, and patriarchal structures In terms of social backgrounds, Indigenous women can be young, have low education, and have previous marriages/common-law unions, all elements that have been associated with DV (Brownridge, 2008). Situational characteristics can be seen in the lack of state support of Indigenous communities, perpetuating high rates of poverty, insufficient access to services like clean water and healthcare, low education, and unemployment (García-Del Moral, 2024). Lastly, patriarchal structures of power are deeply rooted in the historic settler colonial order, and these get reflected as state violence against Indigenous women and girls through direct and indirect actions maintaining systemic racism and heterosexism (García-Del Moral, 2024). It is certainly crucial to take into consideration historical and present factors when discussing the securitization of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence against Indigenous women; if not, atrocities are to be repeated. The focus of this brief, then, is to analyse the available data regarding DV and IPV against Indigenous women and provide a sensible understanding of how Indigenous culture and spirituality play a role in implementing effective preventive methods for DV and IPV and improve the existing services for victims. The Canadian Government and Royal Canadian Mounted Police need to expand their understanding of the importance of implementing Indigenous women's voices in tackling DV and IPV and readjusting their strategies to better fit Indigenous culture and needs. The implementation of these measures could close the gap between the Indigenous community and law enforcement, fostering trust and understanding which can build a stronger foundation for Indigenous women to speak up confidently if ever exposed to DV and/or IPV. Aboriginal women need to be supported both by the government and law enforcement in order to stand their ground in a world that constantly diminishes their autonomy, these solutions aim to establish said ground.

Policy Issue: A non-Indigenous, Disorganized Imagining of the Issue

Prevention of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence against Indigenous women and girls is severely limited. The focus is on acting once the violence has already happened, completely misses assessing the core problem. Barriers such as systemic racism, cultural dissonance, lack of access to resources and support services, and mistrust in the legal, judicial, and policing institutions, all influence Indigenous women's doubts about seeking help after experiencing violent and traumatic situations (Heidinger, 2021). The disorganized nature of state-level efforts gives room to generalized strategies that are highly ineffective when applied to Indigenous communities and Indigenous women and girls in situations of DV and IPV. The available DV services are designed for the mainstream society, focusing on crisis intervention and stabilization rather than dedicating funding to prevention tied with the fact that these services embrace a feminist model that does not acknowledge nor align with the cultural, communal, and personal needs of Indigenous women, leaves women incapable of recovering from this trauma and condemns them to stay in a cycle of violence (Klingspohn, 2018). Thus, the need for preventive strategies that consider Indigenous approaches and needs is determinant to successfully manage DV and IPV rates against Indigenous women and girls. Recognizing the risk factors negatively influencing DV and IPV cases against Indigenous women, and actively reimagining action strategies at all levels of these women's lives (personal, communal, legal, state) will greatly help prevent these forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Key Research Findings

I. Statistics: Disproportionate Targeting of Indigenous Women

Indigenous women in Canada are targeted in DV and IPV cases. Statistics from Statistics Canada (2021) demonstrate that almost 6 in 10 Indigenous women have experienced some kind of physical violence by an intimate partner or other perpetrator in their lifetime compared with non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2021, Chart 2b). In the case of First Nations and Métis women, 58% and 57% experience these forms of violence respectively. The system of oppression dates back to colonial times and the colonists' intentions to control Indigenous people's lands, laws, and lives and impose racial superiority by "civilizing the savage natives" (Hallett, 2024, p.18). There are many instances of institutional violence against Indigenous people and communities, including the forcing of First Nations peoples and Inuit onto reserves and remote areas, the use of residential schools to separate Indigenous children from their cultural values, the large-scale removal of Indigenous children from their families and into mainly White families during the Sixties Scoop, and the prohibition of letting Indigenous people represent themselves in legal matters or practice traditional ceremonies (Hallett, 2024). Currently, Indigenous women still experience institutional violence, however, this violence is displayed in a more indirect way and is accompanied by other risk factors. For instance, the contemporary legal system's failure to provide protection effectively legitimizes violence against Indigenous women (García-Del Moral, 2024). Moreover, the indirect nature of this violence is seen in how survivors are systematically trapped by the institutions that historically enacted the Sixties Scoop; this creates a "protective paradox" where women fear that reporting IPV will result in the immediate apprehension of their children by child welfare services (Kaye & Glecia, 2025). Ultimately, as Bombay et al. (2009) argue, these modern experiences are not isolated incidents but a convergence of intergenerational trauma as a result of the state's long-standing colonial policies.

Available data on DV and IPV against Indigenous women have found recurrent risk factors that tend to make these women more susceptible to experience this type of violence. These factors can be divided into four main categories:

individual, interpersonal or relational, community, and societal/political factors. Some examples include gender, age, socio-economic status, residential school experience, discrimination, and substance abuse, amongst many others (Goulet et al., 2016, p.13-14, Table 2). Oftentimes, these risk factors act together like in the case of socio-economic status and unemployment, with data proving that while both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women can experience economic instability, higher rates of unemployment/underemployment are present for the latter, impacting their ability to leave abusive relationships and leading to economic dependency on their abusers (Brownridge, 2008).

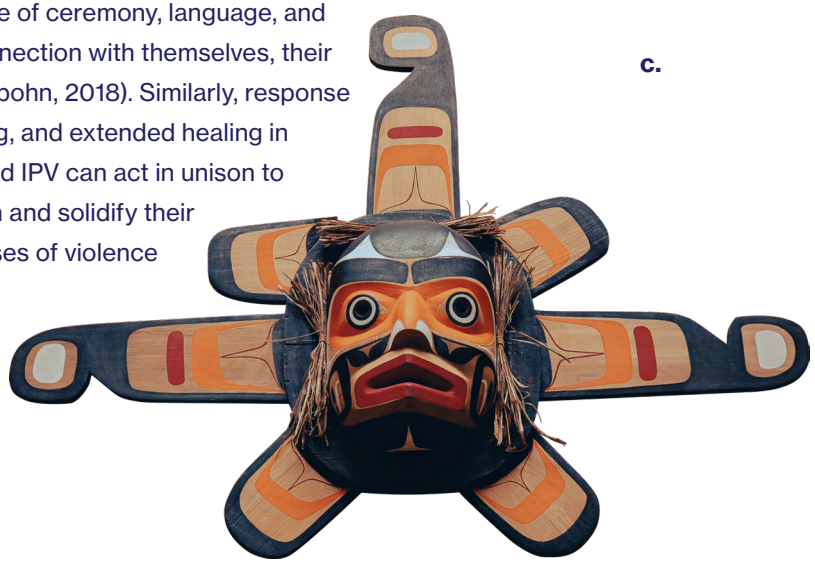
II. Lacking Response by Canadian Legal System and State

Apart from the risk factors, Indigenous women are overrepresented as victims by the State and its institutions and constantly experience an abusive relationship with Settler Colonial Canada by itself (Glecia (Demkiw), 2023, p.93). The Canadian Legal System (CLS) upholds the settler colonial state's authority by reproducing the oppression of Indigenous women and failing to address Indigenous women's victimization and the conditions leading to it (Demkiw, 2023). In 2000, out of seventeen distinct cases of individuals charged with physical or sexual abuse in a 30-day period, and nine such cases in the previous period, only 3 out of the 26 cases were taken to court. The legal system argued that because the remaining 23 complainants refused to testify there was nothing to be done (Bopp et al., 2003). This shows how important it is for Indigenous communities to have trust and hope in the CLS, and that State efforts to legally manage DV and IPV cases are ineffective and insufficient. A more focused revision of the data shows that policing activity by the RCMP and other police services also fail to address DV and IPV cases. Delayed police response time to DV calls, mistrust in community-oriented policing, major underfunding, and prejudices are aspects that influence the way police services impact DV and IPV cases in Indigenous communities (Bopp et al., 2003). The current programs created to target DV and IPV lack adequate understanding of Indigenous culture and do not incorporate efforts to support the uniqueness of Indigenous individuals and their communities (Bopp et al., 2003). The CLS is not designed to help Indigenous women, and in contrast, usually leaves them burdened by victimization, trauma, and distress, as they are not provided with the full protection of the law (Demkiw, 2023, p.94).

III.

Effective Methods for Prevention

Research into the impact of Indigenous resources and practices as preventive methods of DV and IPV against Indigenous women shows that without involving Indigenous women into the planning and execution of strategies that embrace their sacred beliefs and culture, DV and IPV against Indigenous women can not be tackled effectively (Klingspohn, 2018). Culturally sensible protective factors at an individual, interpersonal, and community level can help Indigenous women build a safety network of strategies to counteract DV and IPV (Goulet et al., 2016, p. 18, Table 3). Acknowledging the importance of ceremony, language, and traditions aids Indigenous women to reconnection with themselves, their history, family, community and land (Klingspohn, 2018). Similarly, response systems that include prevention, monitoring, and extended healing in Indigenous communities exposed to DV and IPV can act in unison to expand the communities' courses of action and solidify their understanding of how to react towards cases of violence (Bopp et al., 2003, Figure 3).



Recommendations: What is next?

Strengthen and restore Indigenous self-identity and promote Indigenous healing practices

Guiding Indigenous communities and women towards reclaiming their cultural practices and identity is the most crucial element to consider moving forward. Traditional knowledge and engagement in practices and rituals through oral tradition have been found to effectively protect Indigenous women from DV (Goulet et al., 2016, p.18). Structuring a reliable response system in Indigenous communities should consider the following points:

a. **Educate Indigenous peoples in the communities on the responsibility to preserve their self-identity and values by implementing re-learning programs and oral tradition practices by the Elders;**

b. **De-colonize Indigenous community approaches to healing by promoting sacred cultural healing practices that enhance spirituality and connection to the land (i.e. smudging, healing circles, sweat lodges);**

c. **Develop bonds of trust with Canadian authorities by addressing intergenerational trauma and methods to institutionalize legislation influenced and approved by Elders and members of Indigenous communities.**

By adapting current approaches to DV and IPV in Indigenous communities to the suggested response system provided above, Indigenous women are placed in a more stable environment to start addressing their thoughts and emotions which leads to more understanding and trust in having the appropriate measures to prevent these types of violence from happening. Data shows that knowledge, active involvement in sacred ceremonies, and a strong sense of spirituality have been constant factors that create healing (Goulet et al., 2016, p.18). At the same time, it is incredibly important to include key members of Indigenous communities, such as Elders and Indigenous council members, in policies and program services planning and implementation (Klingspohn, 2018).

Reimagine policing in Indigenous communities and State legal management of DV and IPV against Indigenous women

To accompany community efforts, policing services should adapt their approaches to cases of DV and IPV against Indigenous women by developing culturally sensitive interventions. The RCMP is responsible for reimagining policing of DV and IPV cases towards Indigenous women, by establishing a protocol that can harmoniously work with community efforts and legal frameworks. The suggested protocol should include:

a. **Re-educate the police force on Indigenous culture and the history of colonial oppression in order to identify the key points lacking in the current protocols in place (i.e. discuss with Indigenous leaders and council members);**

b. **Promote Indigenous women representation in police services to improve trust and understanding of DV and IPV against Indigenous women in Indigenous communities and policing services;**

c. **Monitor and supervise abusers to prevent recidivism, and offer healing and rehabilitation services for both the victims and perpetrators.**

This protocol is expected to work in collaboration with state-level reforms which ultimately hold the most power in terms of legal action and long-lasting impact. The Government of Canada has to respond accordingly and focus on de-colonizing the CLS and law-making process to focus on Indigenous voices and implement changes systematically. This brief suggests the Canadian Government to:

a. **Allocate appropriate funding for police services to support police efforts and re-education on Indigenous-specific protocols;**

b. **Reform court procedures and sentences on cases of DV and IPV against Indigenous women to prevent any kind of discrimination on basis of re-victimization and skepticism, highlighting previously biased cases of legal incompetence;**

c. **Center Indigenous women's perspectives and accounts in law making and legal scenarios to diversify the sphere and de-stigmatize Indigenous women and their experiences;**

d. **Provide affordable and accessible legal resources to Indigenous communities, promoting trust and reliance onthe CLS and public service**

The role of the Canadian Government and RCMP is essential in expanding the safety net Indigenous communities should build for Indigenous women. DV and IPV is a national issue that should not rely solely on the Indigenous community. Healing the roots of trauma and violence in order to prevent the cycle from repeating is only possible if an adequate community response system works in cooperation with early interventions and monitoring efforts by police forces like the RCMP, and existing systems of legal discrimination are eliminated and reimagined to equally treat Indigenous women by the Canadian Government.

Conclusion

Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence affect Indigenous women in an overwhelmingly disproportionate way. Indigenous women are targeted as a result of colonial systematic legacies of oppression and current risk factors such as underemployment, socio-economic situation, and racism. The Canadian Government and RCMP lack understanding of Indigenous culture and values which results in generalized, mainstream responses towards DV and IPV. Because of these responses, there is increased trauma and mistrust on the state from Indigenous women. This brief proposed that Indigenous communities encourage positive self-identity, sacred practices for healing, and cooperation with authorities; that police services and the RCMP re-educate and curate a culturally sensible police force that include Indigenous women representation to foster trust; and that the Canadian Government reform legal structures to foster equality and just treatment of Indigenous women as members of courts and victims of DV and IPV. Only with total cooperation and organisation, can DV and IPV be prevented and Indigenous women protected.

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“The ability of anyone in
the culture to support
and honour gay kids may
depend on an ability
to name them as such,
notwithstanding that
many gay adults may
never have been gay kids
and some gay kids may
not turn into gay adults.”

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Epistemology of the Closet

DEFENDING QUEER DIGNITY

A Global Analysis of Conversion Therapy

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Introduction: A Harmful Practice

Despite growing support for LGBTQ+ individuals around the world, practices that aim to find a 'cure' to sexual and gender fluidity persist in many countries. Conversion therapy leads the attack against individuals who identify outside of the hegemony of heteronormativity (Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, 2020). This practice is used as an umbrella term that can describe a wide-range of operations which aim to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI) (Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, 2020). Perpetrators of this practice can range from family members, servants of faith, or agents of the state themselves (Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, 2020). Many practices include the use of physical abuse, electro-shock therapy, 'corrective' rapes, and pseudo-medical procedures (Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, 2020). Conversion therapy disproportionately targets youth inadolescence and childhood.

In an analysis centred on the practice in the United States, over 698,000 of LGBTQ+ adults received conversion therapy, in which 350,000 had gone through the 'treatment' when they were considered legally as youths (Williams Institute, 2019). This is because youths lack the personal autonomy to opt out of these treatments, mainly due to their legal, societal, and familial dependence on guardians which limits their ability to refuse or exit such interventions. Multiple studies confer that children who are subjected to these treatments are at a higher risk of suicide, substance abuse, and self-harm (Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, 2020). A study that examined over a 1,000 health surveys from midlife and older adult men that received conversion therapy earlier in their lives has discovered that the primary outcomes for the practice result in an increased disposition towards depression and internalized homophobia (Meanley et al., 2020). There is overwhelming evidence that details the negative effects of these treatments, with little research done to prove that these methods reduce same sex attraction or gender fluidity within an individual (Meanly et al., 2020).

As of March 2025, conversion therapy remains legal or unregulated in over 60 countries, reflecting the absence of a consistent international standard prohibiting the practice. By mobilizing organizations and states to action, the harms of the practice can be recognized as a human rights violation in need of international response. Ultimately, a global standard can be created to ensure that the livelihoods and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals around the world continue to be upheld (Outright International, 2019).

The Key Issue: A Lack of Consistency at the World Stage

Countries around the world have continued to allow the practice to persist despite the staggering amount of evidence on its harm (Outright International, 2019). The central problem revolves around consistency in instituting an international standard that protects all LGBTQ+ individuals from this practice (Davids, 2024). As a result, several concerns are raised from conversion therapy supporters that create difficulties in creating the aforementioned standard.

Within the medical aspect of the practice, scientists in support of the treatment have followed outdated methodology that still considers homosexuality as a disorder or disease that needs pathways for treatment (Davids, 2024). This has led supporters of the practice to cite practitioners and pseudo-scientists on the benefits of keeping the practice alive, despite the overwhelming data on the long-term psychological harm conversion therapy can inflict onto an individual (Outright International, 2019).

Additionally, many practitioners argue that conversion therapy has given individuals a sense of belonging in a specific faith or culture or argue that the administration of the practice is within their duty to their religion or culture (Przeworski et al., 2021). This has led to supporters arguing that banning the practice can infringe on their freedoms to practice religion, or that it goes against the nation's identity (Davids, 2024).

Backlash from conversion therapy supporters has shifted the conversation into battles of identity. Ultimately, this causes intense legal confusion from country to country, allowing the practice to continue flourishing states across the world.

Analysis/Key Research Findings:

Methodological Data

Outright International is an LGBTQ+ activist organization that has collected extensive methodological data that demonstrates the prevalence and impact the practice has on individuals in their 2022 report of harmful treatment (Outright International, 2019).

Qualitative Data

The report outlines results from in-depth interviews that captured the experience of individuals that have received conversion therapy at some point in their life. Key themes from the 19 interviews were that 16 individuals overall went through conversion therapy due to religious condemnation (Outright International, 2019). Various forms of 'therapy' were administered with threats of violence and familial/social rejection, and family members would encourage individuals to continue treatment despite the severe psychological harm (Outright International, 2019). Respondents also noted that failed attempts would lead to individuals identifying with suicidal ideation and feelings of self-hatred (Outright International, 2019). For example, an excerpt from an anonymous individual has been taken to fully envision the harms this practice can cause:

"He removed the alligator pepper and then he touched my feet, left foot (instep), right foot, left ankle, right ankle, left knee, right knee, left waist, right waist, left shoulder, right shoulder, and then circled around my head twice. So, the alligator pepper was meant to complete the ritual. However, the peak of the ritual was the slaughter of a spotless black chicken (a rooster) that was brought to the traditional healer. The traditional healer said that apart from peeing out the negativity, other spiritual elements were cast out of my body and into the rooster. The rooster was slaughtered after the ritual and thrown into the river the following morning. That was the end of that conversion ritual. It was supposed to "repair" or reverse what someone else had done in the spiritual realm. But it did not change anything..."
- M.A., gay/transgender man, Nigeria (Outright International, 2019, p. 52).

Quantitative Data

Within the same report, the organization conducted an in-depth online survey to encompass a holistic view of the situation in areas excluding North America and Europe. A survey in both English and Mandarin (mainly to target Mainland China respondents) reached 489 respondents from 80 different countries (Outright International, 2019). As a result, the survey had found that the frequency of conversion therapy remained very common within states in Africa, while numbers vary within Asian and Latin American regions (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Frequency of "conversion therapy" — Occurence by Region

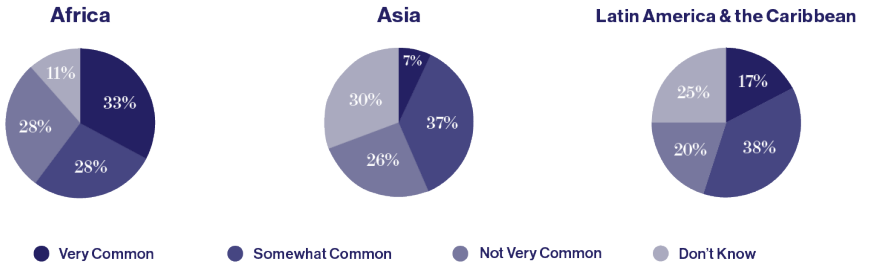

Figure 1. *Frequency of "conversion therapy occurrence by region."*

Additionally, reasons for why individuals were subjected to conversion therapy were also documented. Religious reasons or duty prevailed in Africa and Latin America, while family honour remained as a primary reason for individuals within Asia (Outright International, 2019).

Medical Status

Within psychological and medical fields, homosexuality and gender fluidity have had a long and tumultuous history (Davidson & Walden, 2024). When the first version of the Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-1) was published, homosexuality was regarded as a 'personality pattern disturbance' and listed under a subcategory of 'sexual deviation' (Davidson & Walden, 2024). At a sociological level, this meant that homosexuality was placed on the same rung as paedophilia

or antisocial behaviour (Przeworski, Peterson & Piedra, 2021). Now that the manual has reached its fifth edition, the DSM-5 has acknowledged the classification of sexuality as one that was influenced by social standards of the past (Meanley et al., 2020). The manual further states that there is no official nomenclature for sexual or gender fluidity, marking institutional progression (Meanley et al., 2020). Continual research on the effectiveness of conversion therapy has outlined the increased psychological stress put onto an individual once going through treatment (Przeworski, Peterson & Piedra, 2021). Experts also outlined that treatment can cause harm such as shame, anxiety, depression, and suicide, with no valid study outlining the long-term effectiveness of treatment or that it can even change one's sexuality at all. These outcomes and data presented by psychologists have aided in the eventual policy changes that have happened in countries such as Canada, Germany, or Spain (Davidson & Walden, 2024).

Legal Status

Despite immense medical data and articles supporting the erasure of conversion therapy, the legality of the practice remains prevalent (Fleck, 2023). It is important to note that while some countries have not outlined any legislation to cover the topic, other countries have actively supported institutionalizing conversion therapy (Fleck, 2023). For example, Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act that was passed in 2023 condemned homosexuality as a sin, outlawing gay marriage and allowing for active discrimination against members of LGBTQ+ (Madowo, 2023). The law also prescribed 'rehabilitation' for convicted LGBTQ+ individuals to change their sexual orientation, and understand the 'harms' homosexuality brings to their society (Madowo, 2023).

Recommendations:

Calling for the United Nations Convention Against Torture (CAT) to include conversion therapy as a form of torture either through amendment or general comment:

Given the central problem revolving around a lack of consistency with conversion therapy laws, the first step to increase bans on the practice worldwide is getting an international body such as the UN to recognize conversion therapy as a form of degradation and torture. While conversion therapy can be interpreted into the UN's definition of torture, interpretation leaves room for countries to distinguish whether this practice is inhumane or humane on their own. Two key paths can be taken to see this occur:

Formally amending UNCAT to explicitly include conversion therapy as a specified and targeted form of torture. Currently within article 1 of the UN torture convention, torture is listed as:

"any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions." (United Nations Convention Against Torture, 1994, pp. 1-2).

An amendment to this article (and thereby every following article mentioning torture) must include a clause that lists enumerated or analogous grounds to what discrimination can mean in the context of torture (United Nations Convention Against Torture, 1994). In this context, discrimination must include discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, as recognized by the UN's LGBTQI+ group (Paletta, 2020). While this method is preferable for long-term change, a formal amendment is difficult to achieve due to international standards (United Nations Convention Against Torture, 1994). Not only must there be a two-thirds majority of 174 states, but individual states must also ratify the amendment into their own laws.

Pushing for an 'Informal' Interpretation using General Comments:

This path would require the UNCAT committee to issue a general comment that constitutes conversion therapy as a method of torture used by groups and individuals to cause harm against a discriminated group (Lesch & Reiners, 2023).

General comments are legally non-binding clarifications to treaties that have shown influence over the development of international law (Lesch & Reiners, 2023). In practice, general comments have become the means in which UN experts and committees have distilled their views on issues within their purview (Lesch & Reiners, 2023). These comments require no authoritative state or council in approval of the comment, and the decision on when they are needed is ultimately left to the specified committee (Lesch & Reiners, 2023).

For example, general comment no. 15 made by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) began the pathway for water becoming a fundamental human right (Lesch & Reiners, 2023).While this pathway would avoid the political hurdles needed to amend a treaty in full, informal general comments can also be seen as a 'weak' form of regulation that policy and lawmakers pursue in desperate or time-sensitive situations (Lesch & Reiners, 2023).

These methods of legal advocacy must also be followed with recommendations to continue building political support and advocacy. LGBTQ+ activist organizations simply cannot stop at banning conversion therapy, however,

can use the opportunity of banning the practice to leverage advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in additional critical issues. Supplementary recommendations include but are not limited to:

Uplifting Regional Civil Societies and Human Rights Activists to Spread Awareness and Resources:

By supporting local organizations that aim to provide a voice and remedial resources to individuals affected by conversion therapy, LGBTQ+ communities can work to continue moving forward from this practice. Raising awareness can include mobilizing technology in order to spread awareness on the topic or putting pressure on regional bodies or officials to release a statement condemning or calling to ban the use of conversion therapy for its harmful effects (Outright International, 2022). Providing remedial resources can include building a network of recognized practitioners that specialize in affirmative care, supporting and facilitating survivor groups, and creating a strategy to reform medical education so that learning encompasses the dangerous harms of conversion therapy (Outright International, 2022).

Expansion of resources could also include establishing networks of affirmative care. A robust infrastructure of support is essential for supporting survivors of the practice and involves building the professional capacity of the community around them. Certified practitioners and clinics within a state may want to build quiet referral networks alongside international NGOs that can signal safety to LGBTQIA+ individuals. For example, before LGBTQ+ rights were decriminalized in Singapore in 2022, civil society organizations such as Pink Dot played a key role in increasing the socialization and social acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities. Substantial efforts from civil society groups aided in the greater acceptance of queer folk by the public, having been confirmed in a national survey launched by the government in 2022.

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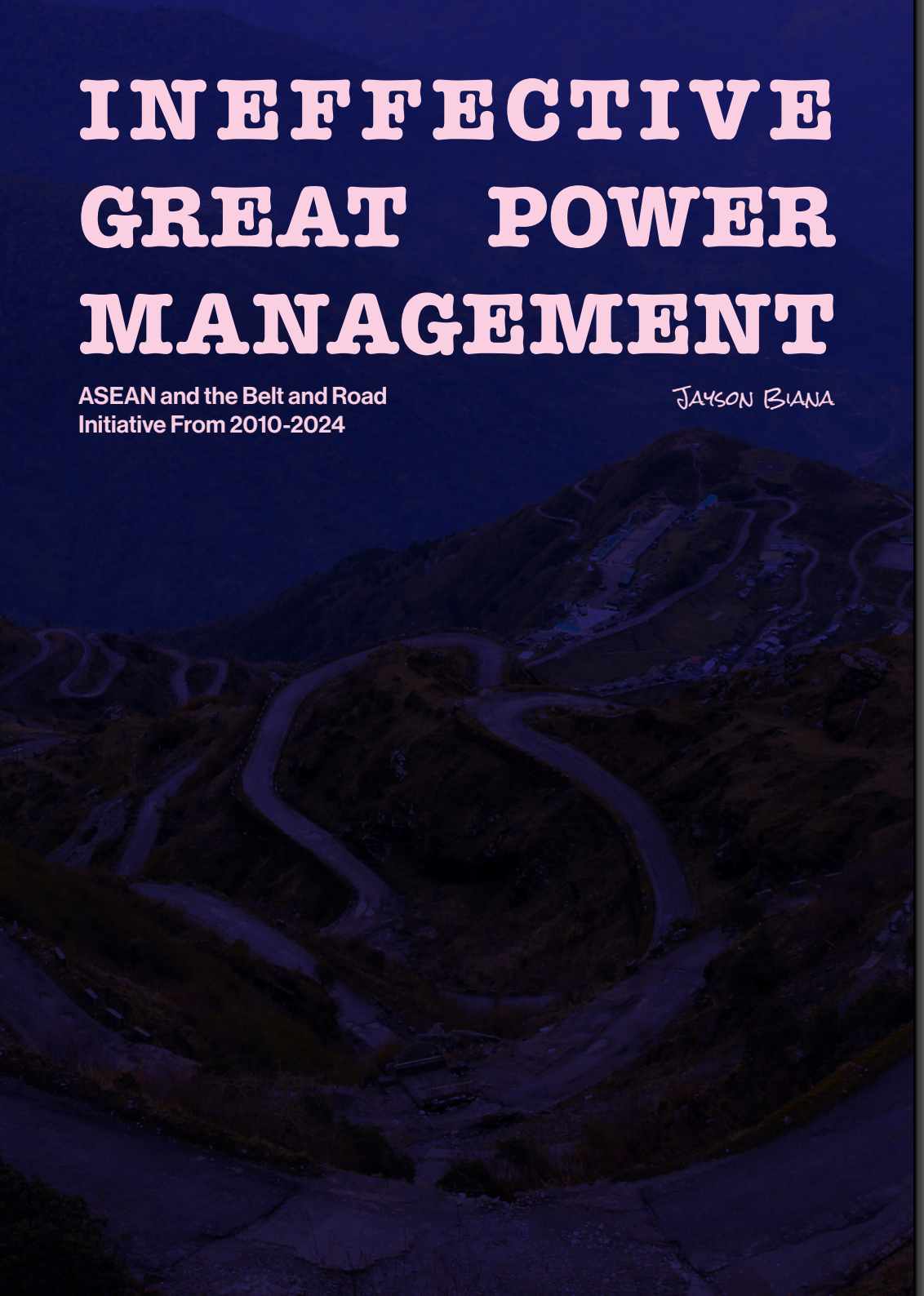
“The history of the distribution of wealth has always been deeply political, and it cannot be reduced to purely economic mechanisms.”

Thomas Piketty

Capital in the Twenty-First Century



INEFFECTIVE GREAT POWER MANAGEMENT

ASEAN and the Belt and Road Initiative From 2010-2024

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Abstract

To what extent has ASEAN effectively managed the great powers? This paper is situated in an ongoing debate on ASEAN's effectiveness. It specifically looks at three cases which challenge ASEAN's unity and central goals: **(1) China's Belt and Road Initiative; (2) the South China Sea territorial disputes; and (3) the emerging arena of cybersecurity.** Two indicators will guide the analysis, reflecting Cui and Buzan's (2016) definition of successful great power management: **(A) ASEAN's ability to exert international influence and (B) its capacity to maintain domestic autonomy.** It finds that while international influence was partially successful in BRI, all other indicators failed, ultimately proving that ASEAN's great power management has been ineffective in addressing the region's most pressing current issues.

1. Introduction

Great power management—the ability of a state or organization to navigate relations with dominant powers—has been a central challenge in Southeast Asia. Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established to collectively manage external influences, giving rise The Association of Southeast to various strategic approaches. Examples of this would include the following. 'Bamboo diplomacy' describes the flexible allegiance of states like Vietnam and Thailand (Chachavalpongpun, 2015; Hoang, 2017), while 'hedging' involves aligning with one power to counter another (Jones & Jenne, 2021). 'Soft balancing' relies on institutional cooperation to prevent conflicts (He, 2022; Yuzawa, 2022), and 'pragmatism' highlights ASEAN's cautious foreign policy (Nadalutti & Rüland, 2024).

While these approaches are foundational to understanding how ASEAN operates strategically, this paper evaluates ASEAN's great power management through Cui & Buzan's (2016) definition of successful great power management: maintaining international influence while limiting external control over domestic affairs. This definition aligns with ASEAN's principle of non-interference, sovereignty, and international cooperation (ASEAN, 2025). It specifically looks at three cases which challenge ASEAN's unity and central goals: **(1) China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and US counter-initiatives; (2) the South China Sea territorial disputes; and (3) the US-China rivalry in cybersecurity.** Two indicators will guide the analysis, reflecting Cui and Buzan's definition of successful great power management: **(A) ASEAN's ability to exert international influence and (B) its capacity to maintain domestic autonomy.** This study asks: To what extent have ASEAN's strategies effectively managed the great powers? To what extent have they enabled ASEAN to balance influence while protecting domestic autonomy? It concludes that ASEAN has not been effective in preserving international influence and resisting external influence on domestic affairs.

First, this paper will provide contextual background on the three phenomena used to evaluate ASEAN's great power management, including the BRI, the South China Sea, and cybersecurity. It will then review the literature on ASEAN's great power management, identifying two prevalent camps: the first believes that ASEAN has been effective at great power management by imposing its norms to influence the actions of great powers; the second believes that ASEAN has become ineffective in the face of rising geopolitical tensions. The following section expands on my research framework, case selection, and key success and failure indicators, before discussing results and addressing counter arguments. The conclusion will summarize the paper, discuss implications of the findings, and address where future scholarship should focus.

2. Contextual Background

2.1. Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an incredibly ambitious infrastructure initiative launched under Xi Jinping's leadership in 2013. Southeast Asia has been the primary site for BRI initiatives. Major infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia include the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway in Indonesia, the Nam Ngum hydropower plant in Laos, and a Myanmar-China pipeline, among many others (Dayant & Stanhope, 2024; Yang & Li, 2019). In the plans shared on BRI's ten-year anniversary in October 2023, a sixth of China's 349 planned BRI outcomes will be in Southeast Asia (Parameswaran, 2023). Though the wider motives behind this are contested, Xi Jinping expressed his hopes that BRI could carve out more space for China in the US-dominated international order (Yang & Li, 2019). This also pushed the US to launch the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) as a counter-initiative, one of several developments which have signaled a return to geopolitical and security-centered regional collaborations (Ji, 2024). There is substantial debate on whether ASEAN has handled BRI effectively. Many scholars laud BRI's ability to provide ASEAN nations with much-needed infrastructure and foster regional interdependence in the process (Busbarat et. al., 2023; Fitriani, 2024; Swaziland and Orix, 2020). Others argue that it has created reliance on China, not interdependence, through debt traps (Schneider, 2021).

2.2. South China Sea

Following the Cold War, the South China Sea soon became a flashpoint for regional conflict. China's territorial claims around the nine-dash-line conflict with several ASEAN states, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and most strongly,

the Philippines. This conflict would explode into its present-day precarity with the Scarborough Shoal Incident in 2012, which saw the Philippines and China have a maritime standoff which ASEAN, for the first time, was unable to establish communication around (Koga, 2022). The US would soon become active in this conflict, fearing Chinese expansionism and hegemony in the region (Koga, 2022). Since then, the South China Sea has been the site of multiple small-scale conflicts, often between the Chinese Coast Guard and Filipino fishermen, as well as naval demonstrations (Koga, 2022). This would escalate further with the election of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in 2022, who reversed the China-friendly approach of the previous president by aligning strongly with the US (Koga, 2022). ASEAN's ability to deal with the South China Sea disputes has been regarded as the 'litmus test' in the organization's effectiveness as it brings about several concerns regarding regional peace, ASEAN unity and centrality, and ASEAN-China relations (He, 2021).

2.3. Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is a novel yet pressing concern both globally, and especially in Southeast Asia. The EU has stated that cyber threats could severely undermine stability and cohesiveness if left unattended to (European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2012). A cyberattack is defined as an act that seeks to undermine the security of an information system (Lee and Iskandar, 2024). This has mainly included hacking to breach data, steal important information, or disrupt government proceedings. These threats are particularly concerning to ASEAN as the number of internet users in Southeast Asia are rapidly increasing and ASEAN's digital economy is projected to grow exponentially (Ramadhan, 2023). From 2021 to 2022, cyber threats became 80 percent more prevalent, showing how critical this issue is becoming (Lee and Iskandar, 2024).

China has had particular interest in ASEAN's digital capabilities, with one of the BRI's goals being to increase internet access and connectivity in the region (Bharti and Kumari, 2024). ASEAN and China have expressed a desire to collaborate in creating a cybersecurity framework for the region (Ramadhan, 2023; Center for Eurasia Development Policy Research [CEDPR], 2025). Despite this, China has been involved in cyberattacks against the Philippines, a claimant in the South China Sea (Lee and Iskandar 2024). Great power rivalry is evident in the US and cyber espionage China's competition over digital infrastructure in the region, as well as in the and attacks by China (Ramadhan, 2023). The majority of ASEAN's cybersecurity approach is found in the Cybersecurity Cooperation Document for 2021–2025, which commits to coordinating cyber policy in the region (ASEAN, 2021). ASEAN has created an ASEAN Cybersecurity Coordinating Committee which comprises representatives from several other ASEAN sectors to oversee emerging cybersecurity issues (ASEAN, 2021). ASEAN has also set up the informal ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity, where in 2018 member-states agreed to the eleven non-binding norms of state behaviour in cyberspace as outlined by the UN Group of Governmental Experts in 2015, making them the first region to do so (ASEAN, 2021).

3. Literature Review: ASEAN's Great Power Management

This paper identifies two prevailing perspectives on ASEAN's great power management: that ASEAN's multilateral institutions effectively influence and 'socialize' the behaviours of great powers, China especially; and, contrastingly, that ASEAN's cohesion and strength have been lost as geopolitical tensions escalate in the region. While both camps provide a nuanced perspective on the merits and shortcomings of ASEAN, one side of these arguments always takes centre stage. This paper will begin by surveying the logic of both arguments before concluding that describing ASEAN's great power management as inadequate is most convincing when considering current economic, geopolitical, and security tensions in the region.

3.1. ASEAN is Effective at Great Power Management

Scholars of the first camp often place their analyses of ASEAN great power management in the organization's multilateral institutions. Indeed, ASEAN owes much of its inception to the great power rivalries which created a need among newly sovereign Southeast Asian nations for a cohesive organization capable of dealing with much larger actors (Ciorciari, 2017; Dayley, 2024; Tan, 2018). The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), established in 1994, was considered incredibly successful at facilitating dialogue with the great powers competing for influence at the time (He, 2022; Yuzawa, 2022). The ASEAN Plus series and the East Asia Summit from 2003–2007 would serve to address the Sino-Japanese tension for regional leadership (Yuzawa, 2022). ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) is another institution which addresses regional security and territorial concerns, along with the ASEAN Political-Security Community (Dayley, 2024; Rymarenko, 2021). Koga (2022) argues that this institutional robustness has allowed ASEAN to prevent an escalation of great power rivalry in the South China Sea, an issue of major concern in contemporary affairs. Other scholars have made non-institutional arguments. ASEAN's extensive participation in China's Belt and and Road Initiative (BRI) has improved ASEAN's bargaining power and autonomy by creating interdependence with China while attracting retaliatory investments from the US (Bharti & Kumari, 2024; Fitriani, 2024). Wicaksana & Karim (2022) argue that ASEAN's hedging strategies have allowed it to appease opposing great powers while still representing Southeast Asian interests. These arguments suggest that ASEAN can successfully influence great power behaviour by centring, and consequently imposing, the ASEAN norms of deliberative consensus-building and peaceful conflict management in their foreign relations.

3.2. ASEAN is Ineffective at Great Power Management

In contrast, several scholars argue that ASEAN's strategies have become inadequate in the face of rising tension between great powers, namely the USA and China in the new era of great power politics. While recognizing the merits of ASEAN multilateral institutions, like ARF and ASEAN Plus, Goh (2011) predicted the unsustainability of ASEAN's 'brokerage' role with the great powers. It is argued that the success of these institutions was largely due to the willingness of great powers to cooperate, and the compulsion of ASEAN centrality has since waned with recent developments (Goh, 2011; Kraft, 2017; Yuniarti, 2024). ASEAN's ideal of cohesiveness has been muddled as member-states are becoming increasingly polarized, mirroring the polarization of the US and China (Hartono & Cooray, 2024). Additionally, it is impossible to look past the failure of ASEAN to uniformly address the most pressing security crisis in the region, which include the South China Sea disputes and the civil war in Myanmar (Ciorcasi, 2017; Dayley, 2024; Tan, 2018). Additionally, while China's BRI has indeed provided much-needed infrastructure to ASEAN countries, it has also raised valid concerns over indebtedness and dependency to China, exemplified most clearly by Cambodia (Ujvari, 2019). What these scholars call for is a strengthening of ASEAN's great power management by implementing mechanisms by which member-states can be held accountable to uphold consistent norms.

4. Research Strategy

4.1. Research Framework

This paper evaluates ASEAN's ability to manage great power rivalry by using Cui & Buzan's (2016) standard of successful great power management: a state's ability to have legitimate international influence while minimizing the influence of great powers on domestic affairs. This definition aligns with ASEAN's fundamental belief in "the right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion" (ASEAN 2025). It will use this definition to critically engage with both camps. If it is the case that ASEAN has been unable to maintain international influence nor maintain control of domestic affairs, this paper will conclude that ASEAN's great power management has been inadequate. Conversely, if it is found that ASEAN's multilateral institutions have in fact aided ASEAN in preserving its international influence and domestic affairs, this paper will conclude that ASEAN's great power management has been effective.

4.2. Case Selection

This paper will apply this definition to three cases of great power rivalry involving ASEAN, as detailed in section 2. These cases are the following: **(1) China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the USA's counter-initiatives; (2) the continuing**

territorial disputes in the South China Sea; and (3) novel rivalry in technology and cybersecurity. A case was chosen if it met the following criteria: it is a currently relevant and substantive issue; several or all states are affected by it; ASEAN is required to address it; and there is significant involvement with a great power, whether that is the US, China, or both. Other potential cases were climate change and security architecture. Climate change was excluded because while it poses a severe threat to all ASEAN states, it does not have the same contested nature as the other cases. Security architecture was excluded due to the relatively bilateral nature of defence in the region and the lack of a coherent collective security or military agreement.

4.3. Success and Failure Indicators

This section outlines the success and failure indicators that will be used to assess ASEAN's great power management as defined by Cui and Buzan. Indicator A will measure *international influence* and Indicator B will measure *domestic autonomy.*

4.3.1. *Belt & Road Initiative*

A ASEAN states have negotiating power in BRI initiatives **OR** ASEAN states do not have negotiating power and may be dominated by decisions by China or the US.

B Such projects provide domestic benefits which do not tie the state to a great power **OR** ASEAN states become economically reliant on a great power resulting in less control over domestic affairs.

4.3.2. *South China Sea Disputes*

A ASEAN states are able to impose regional security norms and offer collective bargaining **OR** great powers act unilaterally without consultation of ASEAN.

B ASEAN states can maintain territorial claims for their own interests **OR** ASEAN states undergo coercion by China or the US.

4.3.3. *Cybersecurity and Technology*

A ASEAN determines its own cybersecurity and can influence cybersecurity norms **OR** ASEAN's cybersecurity is determined by the US or China.

B ASEAN states are able to make technological decisions **OR** ASEAN states must follow US or Chinese models.

4.4. Scope and Limitations

This paper will focus on ASEAN as an organization when considering *international influence.* This is because the ASEAN principle of 'ASEAN centrality' encourages multilateral dialogue with external powers through ASEAN, rather than through bilateral negotiations. When considering domestic autonomy, this paper mainly evaluates country-specific issues to measure ASEAN's ability to promote sovereignty. Additionally, this paper will focus on ASEAN after 2010. As such, it will only consider ASEAN's performance in this period, with special consideration for the current events and situations discussed above. Some may argue that it is important to consider ASEAN's earlier years when its norms and processes were initially established. However, this timeframe is specifically chosen as it represents the new era of great power politics and Sino-American rivalry in the region and is thus most relevant to current literature (Yuzawa, 2022).

5. Analysis

5.1. Belt and Road Initiative

5.1.1. *International Influence* – PARTIAL SUCCESS

ASEAN's engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative has been characterized by both strategic negotiations and significant challenges. Some ASEAN states, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have demonstrated negotiating power by renegotiating BRI terms to secure better financial conditions and local economic benefits (Yang and Li, 2019). Through this, they have been able to obtain critical infrastructure, particularly through state-of-the-art high-speed rail networks

(Fitriani, 2024). Additionally, ASEAN's collective economic stance has led to competition between China and the US, with the US introducing counter-initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (Ji, 2024). These factors suggest ASEAN has had some influence over investment dynamics rather than being entirely dictated by China's economic strategy. However, there is also evidence of ASEAN's limited influence. Some states, particularly Cambodia and Laos, have accepted BRI projects with minimal leverage, leading to significant economic dependence on China (Schneider, 2021). Additionally, ASEAN has not established a unified regulatory framework for BRI engagement, allowing China to pursue bilateral rather than ASEAN-led agreements, reducing ASEAN's collective negotiating power. As such, the *international influence* indicator fails.

5.1.2. *Domestic Autonomy* – FAIL

In many ways, BRI has allowed many ASEAN states to acquire major infrastructure projects which they otherwise could not have achieved alone. High-speed rail in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos have been a key contribution of BRI to the region (Fitriani, 2024). Less wealthy ASEAN states, like Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar have benefitted the most from BRI (Fitriani, 2024). However, these ASEAN states have had to borrow money from Chinese banks and face debt they are unlikely to pay back, creating a reliance and indebtedness to China (Basbarut et. al., 2023). Countries like Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar have expressed disdain for the high-interest rates of China's loans for its BRI initiatives, raising a concern over 'debt-diplomacy' in which China leverages this debt to influence these countries (Gong, 2019) In Cambodia this has also encouraged illegal gambling and speculation in the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone where China has been quite involved (Schneider, 2021). As such, the domestic autonomy indicator for BRI fails.

5.2. South China Sea

5.2.1. *International Influence* – FAIL

When the South China Sea issue first surfaced following the Cold War, ASEAN released the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). This non-binding document urged ASEAN countries to maintain its longstanding friendship with China while also upholding the norms of ASEAN and the international community, specifically the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (ASEAN, 2012). Since then, China has become increasingly aggressive in the South China Sea in the post-2010 period, demonstrating ASEAN's inability to influence the security norms of China. In 2012, ASEAN arrived at a gridlock in approaching the Scarborough Shoal Incident as Cambodia, Brunei, and Myanmar were concerned that a strongly worded statement would affect their close ties with China. Philippines' strong alliance with the US, who recently approved four F16 fighter jets to the Philippines, further demonstrates ASEAN's internal divisions (Nikolov, 2025). Meanwhile, China has had an increasing presence in the South China Sea despite committing to do otherwise in ASEAN meetings, ultimately undermining ASEAN multilateralism and influence. As such, the international influence indicator fails.

5.2.2. *Domestic Autonomy* – FAIL

China's sweeping claims over the South China Sea clearly violates ASEAN's norms of sovereignty. But while Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei have all opposed China's aggression in the South China Sea, these states have resorted to careful and limited language when discussing the South China Sea issue. This is due to China's strong use of economic, military, and political coercion over ASEAN states. For example, China has conducted several naval demonstrations in the South China Sea while building artificial islands which collude with claimant countries' exclusive economic zones as outlined by UNCLOS (Koga, 2022). Additionally, ASEAN states have all expressed a desire to resolve the conflict in South China, even Cambodia, yet the issue persists and is even escalating. This indicates that ASEAN has not been able to properly fulfil its domestic wishes due to the threat of China, thus domestic autonomy fails.

5.3. Cybersecurity

5.3.1. *International Influence* – FAIL

As described in section 2.3, ASEAN has recently begun substantive work on coordinating cyber policy. However, China and the US have undoubtedly entered this new realm of competition, and China has been in the lead in terms of influence. China dominates as a leading provider of 5G, the fifth generation of mobile

technology which provides faster internet connection, lower latency, and overall higher efficiency when coordinated with government information systems (Anuar, 2020). Chinese companies, like Huawei and ZTE, are the main providers of 5G technology to ASEAN countries due to the comparative advantage they have in 5G (Baark, 2024; CEDPR, 2025). Additionally, China has invested millions in artificial intelligence in Southeast Asia, including $2.4 billion in AI development in Singapore and $38 million in Indonesia (Ramadhan, 2023). As such, there have been widespread concerns, especially from the US, that this makes ASEAN more vulnerable to cyberattack from China, or that China will have influence in ASEAN's cyber policy (CEDPR, 2025). Indeed, the Philippines has been particularly targeted by cyberattacks, most of which are traced back to China (Lee and Iskandar 2024). While ASEAN has adopted UN norms with how to behave in cyberspace, it has been unable to influence China to adopt similar norms. Finally, while Chinese cyberattacks have persisted in the Philippines, ASEAN has refrained from making any statements on this due to the geopolitical fragility of the situation. As such, ASEAN fails in having international influence in cybersecurity.

5.3.2. *Domestic Autonomy – FAIL*

ASEAN is increasingly dependent on technology from external powers, especially China. There are disparities in cybersecurity capability among ASEAN countries despite ASEAN's framework for cybersecurity cooperation. While Singapore has a high cybersecurity capability and has sufficiently responded to cyberthreats, less developed countries like the Philippines have struggled to combat increasingly frequent data breaches (Lee & Iskandar, 2024). Similarly, Vietnam and Indonesia's reliance on Chinese digital infrastructure have hindered their development of a domestic cybersecurity industry (Wicaksana and Karim, 2022). As a result, these states are vulnerable to geopolitical leverage as powerful countries advocate for the ban of Chinese technology despite it being crucial for many ASEAN countries. Indeed, while ASEAN members formally retain the right to make their own technology choices, the strategic and economic benefits offered by both the U.S. and China often limit their ability to act with full independence in digital policymaking. As such, the domestic autonomy indicator fails.

5.4. Findings

The findings are summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1. *Summary of Research Findings*

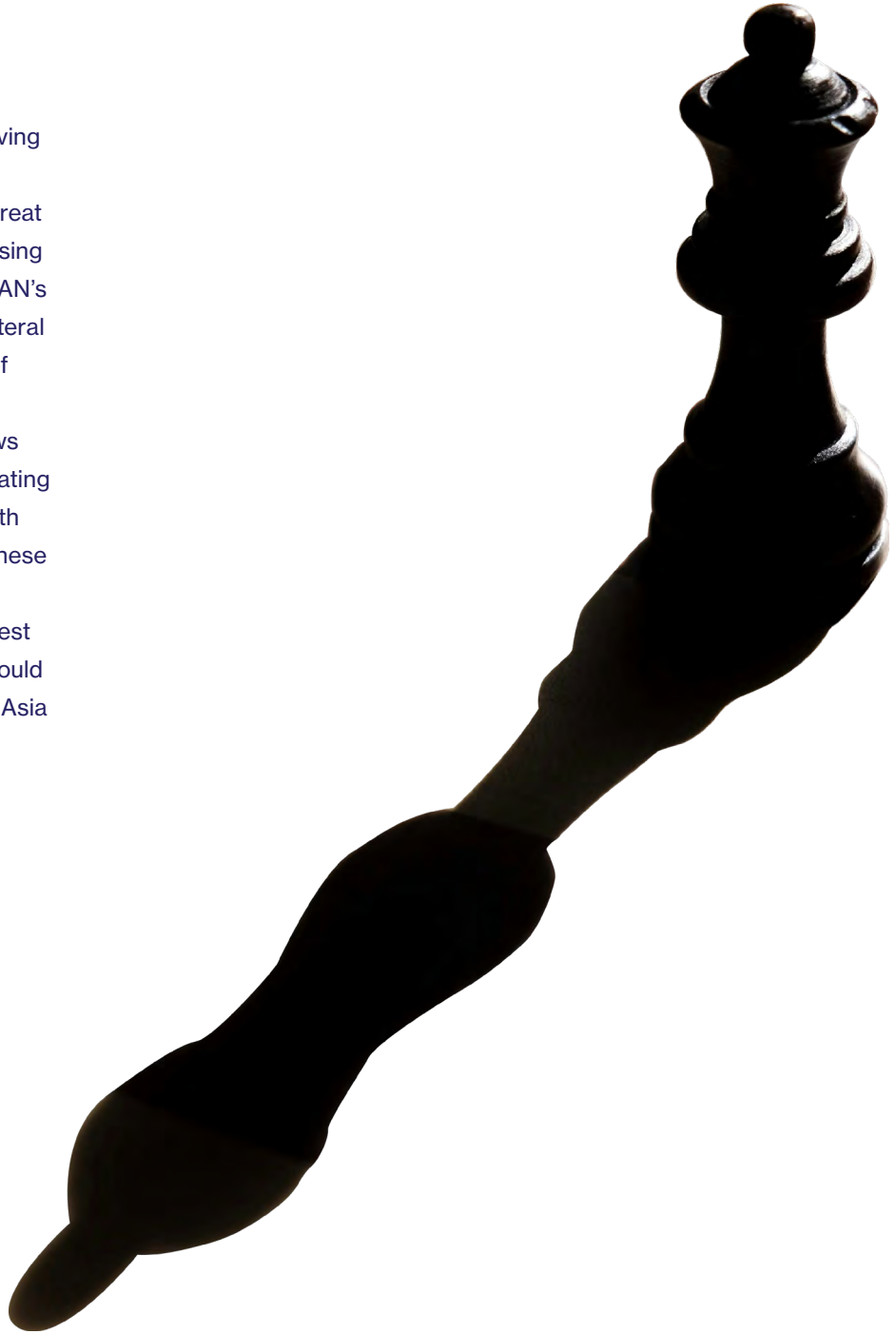
	International Influence	Domestic Autonomy
BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE	PARTIAL SUCCESS	FAIL
SOUTH CHINA SEA	FAIL	FAIL
CYBERSECURITY AND TECHNOLOGY	FAIL	FAIL

5.5. Addressing Counter Arguments

Ultimately this paper argues that ASEAN has been ineffective at great power management as it is unable to have international influence while maintaining domestic autonomy pertaining to BRI, the South China Sea, and cybersecurity. There are several potential counterarguments to this. First, it may be said that while ASEAN has been unsatisfactory in these three dimensions, the region would in fact be worse off had ASEAN not existed. Indeed, ASEAN has been central to fostering regional dialogue, both among its member-states and with external powers, coordinating regional goals, and providing a larger collective voice for its smaller member-states. However, this is a strawman argument as there is no current reality in which ASEAN does not exist, and while ASEAN has allowed much conflict to be avoided, it should not be exempt from scrutiny. This paper has evaluated ASEAN based on a definition which reflects ASEAN's self-proclaimed goals of self-determination, regional stability, and international cooperation (ASEAN, 2025). On these metrics, this paper has proven that ASEAN has failed to 15 manage great powers. Other critics may argue that ASEAN has indeed been successful as it has managed to preserve regional peace and prevent war in the region. However, it can be argued that non-traditional security threats, like those analysed in this paper, have taken centre stage in today's international context (Prayuda et. al., 2023).

6. Conclusion

This paper has evaluated ASEAN's great power management using Cui and Buzan's definition: a state's ability to exert international influence while preserving domestic autonomy. It has found that international influence was partially successful in BRI, all other indicators failed, ultimately proving that ASEAN's great power management has been ineffective in addressing the region's most pressing current issues. The implications of this are twofold. First, this means that ASEAN's centrality in external negotiation is weakening. While it is still used as a multilateral forum, it has been unable to impose its norms and interests onto the actions of external powers, particularly China. Second, this means that Southeast Asian sovereignty is being undermined as China's influence on domestic affairs grows stronger. ASEAN will have to adapt to these growing issues, potentially by creating more mechanisms through which member states can settle disagreements with one another to ensure cohesiveness. Future scholarship could tackle one of these three dimensions with more depth and rigour, considering that this paper has prioritized breadth and diversity of issues. Additionally, future scholars could test the indicators used in this paper on other arenas of great power rivalry. This could provide comparative insights to determine what makes the case of Southeast Asia and ASEAN a unique one.



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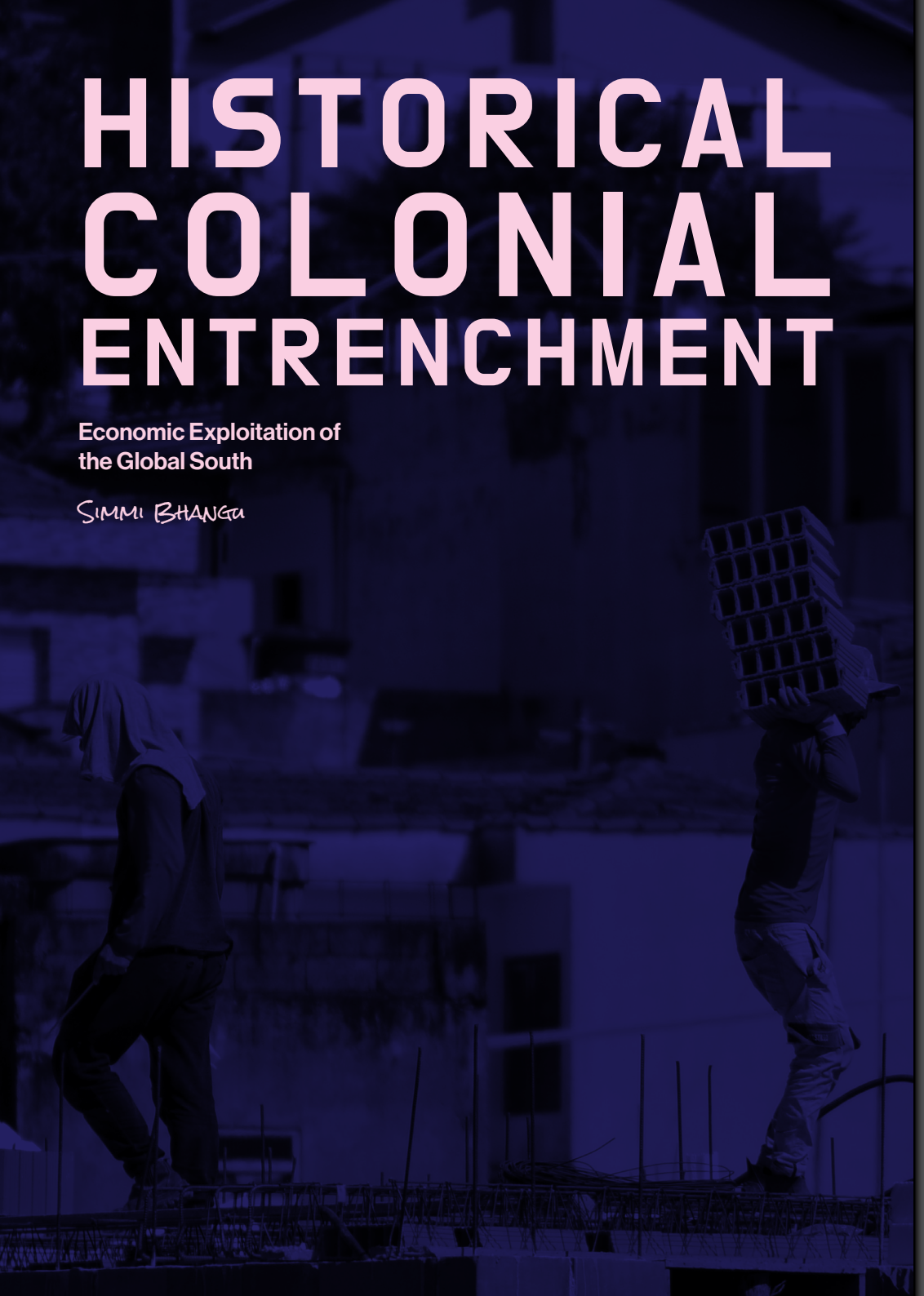
“...race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in spendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like the armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways.”

Anne McClintock

Imperial Leather



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Introduction

The twentieth century marked the formal end of colonialism, ushering in widespread independence and autonomy for many colonial states. However, the aftermath of colonization has proven to be so long standing and globally dominant that it is frequently recognized to be a major contributing factor in the formation of an economically unequal global system. Developed countries maintain economically dominant positions over underdeveloped nations, with the use of systems and policies that are rooted in hierarchies and dependencies of the colonial period. That said, developed nations continue to exploit underdeveloped nations through modern economic systems which perpetuate a cycle of dependency and inequality that resembles colonial-era power structures. Instrumental mechanisms of this exploitation include the notions of foreign aid and neocolonial frameworks, which continue to uphold the foundation of an imbalanced global order and system. Masked under the pretence of development assistance, these systems institutionalise underdevelopment while benefiting developed economies. To exemplify this, the paper will provide contextual

information on the historical roots of colonialism, drawing connections and examples as to how residual effects of colonial institutions persist today in the form of neocolonialism, and evaluating foreign aid as both a means of support and control. Data and case studies from Africa and the Pacific Islands, will be drawn upon in order to underscore the argument. Furthermore, these entrenched mechanisms of control cannot be fully understood without an examination of colonial history. The current economic world order is a continuation of economically exploitative systems set in place by European powers.

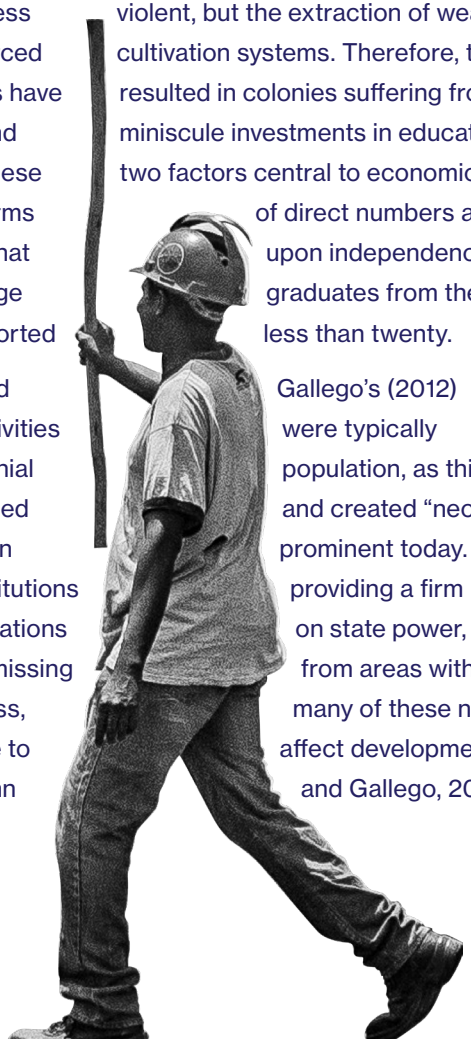
Colonial Foundations of Economic Inequality: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.

Colonialism has led to an international system which continues to be rooted in extraction and exploitation. European powers brought upon extractive regimes and institutions within their colonies, often turning to Indigenous populations as sources of labour in order to foster their own economic and industrial growth (Bruhn & Gallego, 2012). As outlined by Kaniyathu (2008) in the form of a counterfactual analysis, the economic and developmental trajectories of present-day underdeveloped nations would have had a stronger likelihood of being positive had they not been colonized and if they were allowed to embark on their own independent paths. Furthermore, Kainyathu's (2008) analysis of empirical data presented the idea that perhaps colonialism did not completely hinder economic potential but instead acted as a barrier towards long-term autonomous growth due to the establishment of various structures, such as export oriented economies, and weak domestic institutions.

Colonial powers were economically motivated to gain sustained control over various nations in an attempt to access the market of raw materials (Eneasato, 2020). An analysis by Bruhn and Gallego (2012) put forth three differing types of economic activities undertaken by colonizers, all which resulted in different trajectories of growth. They outlined that activities reliant on labour exploitation (mining, sugar production, etc) are referred to as 'bad', whilst 'good' activities are those which occurred in areas with low pre-colonial populations (crop cultivation, manufacturing), and 'ugly' activities encompass any act which exploited native populations. This colonial system of varying activities continues to correlate with present economic development. Therefore, their research indicated that regions that had undergone 'bad' activities reported 27.7% lower Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and a 13% higher poverty rate compared to regions that were used for 'good' activities.

A comparative study conducted by Frankema and Buelens (2013) delved into the interconnectedness of colonial policies, present-day underinvestment, and extractive economic systems in the Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies. This study highlighted how rubber extraction in the Congo under Leopold II's rule resulted in various widespread atrocities which obstructed any surrounding local economies. Furthermore, their research located that Dutch colonization of Indonesia had been seemingly less violent, but the extraction of wealth was still present with the use of forced cultivation systems. Therefore, these extractive and exploitative systems have resulted in colonies suffering from deficient industrial development and miniscule investments in education, or human capital in general, with these two factors central to economic advancement and prosperity. In terms of direct numbers and data, their research underscored that upon independence Indonesia had a few hundred college graduates from the entire population, while Congo reported less than twenty.

This exemplifies Bruhn and Gallego's (2012) argument that areas with good activities were typically those with lower levels of pre-colonial population, as this is where colonizers eventually settled and created "neo-European" institutions which remain prominent today. As great importance was given to institutions providing a firm priority on property rights and limitations on state power, these are the elements they indicate as missing from areas with ugly and bad activities. Nevertheless, many of these norms remain in place today and continue to affect development in the form of neocolonialism (Bruhn and Gallego, 2012; Eneasato, 2020).



The Evolution of Colonialism into Neocolonialism

Neocolonialism is a term widely attributed to political scientist Kwame Nkrumah in his book published in 1965, Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism. Defined as the practice of leveraging capitalism, globalisation, and cultural forces to exert control over a nation as a substitute for direct military and political control, Nkrumah asserts that the paradigm is mostly economically motivated (Eneasato, 2020; Nkrumah, 1965). Industrialized and developed countries impose certain neocolonial tools upon underdeveloped states to achieve favourable outcomes for themselves, leaving others vulnerable to the dependency principle (Eneasato, 2020). Post-colonial underdeveloped nations continue to seek external support to uphold their own domestic interests and systems, perpetuating the system of "debt and dependency syndrome" established during colonial times (Eneasato, 2020, pg 102). With such an exploitative and continuous cycle in place, neocolonialism can be viewed as a mere excuse for continued economic domination as developed countries rely on colonial ideals to maintain their dominance (Eneasato, 2020).

Despite colonial rule having officially ended years ago, it set up a system of global powers which continue to persist through several neocolonial structures. According to Nkrumah (1965), the final stage of imperialism is neocolonialism which leverages economic tools over political domination. The basis of modern colonialism is primarily regarded to be the transmission of Western capitalist ideals, the regulation of national policies through multilateral institutions and the paradigm of foreign aid (Eneasato, 2020). By shaping developmental policies, budget allocations, and national governance, these mechanisms promote dependency and tend to favour developed nations.

Rao (2000) in his critical analysis on postcolonial theory's neglect of political economy, posits that the overarching notion of "global integration" can often be a veiled form of neocolonial dependency. Although generally seen to be a mutually beneficial process, Rao asserts that neocolonialism has sustained imbalanced global power structures originating in colonial rule. Within this framework, developing nations are encouraged, if not pressured, to conform to Western economic and political models maintaining skewed power structures which includes the setup of foreign aid as a prominent application.

Foreign Aid or Modern Exploitation?

One of the most visible neocolonial instruments is foreign aid as it perpetuates economic control and global inequality. It forces us to question: how is something which has been put in place to seemingly eradicate inequality, in turn, contributing to it further? Although foreign aid is presented to global onlookers in the form of generosity or reparative justice, specific parameters are frequently imposed on recipient countries which minimises their sovereignty over domestic policy. With these conditionalities, foreign aid has rather evolved into a method of "capital emasculation" serving as a means to push deregulation, privatisation, and trade liberalization – often touted as pillars of Western neoliberal ideologies (Eneasato, 2020). That said, these ideals tend to prioritize global markets over domestic needs. Drawing from real world situations, the case of the Pacific Islands provides a clear example of how current structures of foreign aid deepen the global economic divide. Dornan and Pryke (2017) describe the Pacific Islands to be one of the world's most donor-dependent regions, as it has some of the highest global amounts of Official Development Assistance (ODA) per capita. In terms of gross national income (GNI), they report how the ODA accounts for approximately 20% of the GNI in ten Pacific Island nations. On one hand, this research indicates that these contributions have led to some infrastructure being developed in the Pacific Islands, while on the other, aid volatility and donor-driven priorities have given way to unstable investments and institutional inefficacy. Thus, this highlights how the presence of aid volatility is seen in other regions apart from the Pacific Islands and is a strong factor in creating a dependency which inhibits long term planning, amplifying the withstanding power imbalance between donor and recipient states[8].

A widely recognized branch of conditional aid is the World Bank and IMF imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Heidhues and Obare (2011) examined the adverse effects of conditional aid, particularly the SAPs' role in weakening the economies of various African nations. They indicate that these nations were forced to reduce government spending, eliminate subsidies, and privatize public services to be eligible for the SAP funding. Their research demonstrates how the imposition of these conditions led to diminished agricultural sectors, increased unemployment, and destabilized state institutions. For example, Ghana and Zambia have witnessed increased rates of poverty and food insecurity

since adoption of the SAPs, despite seeing temporary enhanced macroeconomic performance. Western-focused conditionalities were set in place as a way to improve the regularity of debt repayments, proving that Western benefits hold prominence. This serves as a further indication that foreign aid, specifically conditional aid driven by donor-benefitting motivations, often fails to yield the desirable long-term effects for recipient economies. At best their work demonstrates that a short-lived macroeconomic boom can emerge, but true mitigation of poverty and lasting progress in addressing power disparities require more substantial and structural shifts. As previously mentioned, Ghana provides a critical insight into the notion of foreign aid as a power tool and adjustment failures. Multiple SAPs were adopted by the nation during the 1980s and 1990s, leaving the country crippled with inflation, unemployment, and declining wages. Variant support systems were not put in place when agricultural subsidies were removed, as conditioned by the SAPs, leaving rural Ghanaian communities even more economically insecure. A similar fate was seen in Zambia, in which a copper-dependent economic reform led to significant jobs losses and increased inequality. It is worth noting that Robert et.al (2025) highlight how the copper dependency of Zambia has been established since its British colonization. Their research articulates how British colonizers recognized Zambia's abundance in copper, a promising raw material, and enforced extraction of the mineral, rendering Zambia to be a commodity-reliant economy in present times. This reinforces the argument that colonial systems are still deeply rooted and have led previous colonies to succumb to the dependent cycle of foreign assistance.

Statistically, Heidhues and Obare (2011) specify that Africa's GDP per capita saw an annual increase of a marginal 0.5% during the SAP era, while pre-SAP growth was stated to be over 2.5% annually. Importantly, their research indicates that GDP per capita was not the only metric declining during the period of SAPs as infant mortality, literacy rates, and food security also declined during this time.

William Easterly's chapter in the 2003 edition of Managing Currency Crises in Emerging Markets and the aforementioned case studies support the argument that foreign aid is an exploitation mechanism. Easterly (2003) emphasizes that the core of SAPs revolves around fiscal discipline rather than human development, facilitating structural inequalities while undermining the state's role in public service delivery. Such conditionalities further entrench pre-established political dependencies by reinforcing the idea that development needs to follow a Western-oriented and controlled path (Eneasato, 2020). Though often criticized as exploitative and neocolonial, some opposing views contend that foreign aid can, in fact, be beneficial for public sector reforms.

Counterarguments and Rebuttals

While a significant portion of current literature focuses on the criticisms for neocolonial methods of equal development, certain scholars put forth a differing perspective. Sumner and Glennie (2015) note that when foreign aid is targeted towards reforming public sector systems such as education, health, and infrastructure, both a reduction in poverty and increase in economic development can become apparent. However, they also emphasize that efficacy of foreign aid is highly contingent on three interconnected factors; the strength of domestic institutions, political stability, and the strategic alignment of donor objectives with domestic development goals.

A considerable example of these factors can be demonstrated by the sub-Saharan African country of Botswana. Calleja and Prizzon (2016) recount that following independence in 1965, after almost 80 years as a British protectorate, large diamond deposits were discovered which ushered in a period of great economic growth for Botswana. Prior to this discovery, they explain how Botswana was labelled as a "donor darling," another low-income country dependent on financial aid from countries, with about 2.5% of the country's GNI from 1966 to 1969 coming from ODA. In current times, Botswana is on track to become a high-income country by 2036 and is one of few middle-income countries in the Sub-Saharan region. However, financial aid and donor support are not to be credited for Botswana's upward economic trajectory as the way aid was used, and the presence of robust national institutions is a differentiating factor between Botswana and the other countries receiving aid. With their effective aid management model, Botswana was able to ensure that the country remained independent of financial aid by turning down any funding which did not align with its economic growth plans. This controlled acceptance of aid was able to mitigate any negative repercussions, such as those observed in Ghana. Furthermore, and

perhaps the most substantial point, Botswana heavily invested in its infrastructure and society with most of the investments coming from the country's diamond revenues. Such investments were able to strengthen the country's health and education systems, as well as promote considerably low rates of corruption. Thus, Botswana's significant growth is to be attributed to the lower levels of corruption and strong societal investments that allowed for the additional revenue received, in the form of financial aid, to be channelled towards economically prosperous avenues. It is also important to note that Botswana was never a direct colony but a British protectorate where colonialism was unable to fully disrupt or exploit the country, indicating that colonialism does indeed set a country up for modern exploitation. Furthermore, when a country lacks the institutions and aid management systems observed in Botswana, and accepts all and any financial assistance, it can lead to detrimental consequences.

When the amount of assistance received exceeds the recipient's implementation capacity, it can prove to be counterproductive by driving macroeconomic imbalances instead of growth (Sumner and Glennie, 2015). A sudden influx of monetary aid can give way to a ripple effect known as "Dutch disease," resulting in currency appreciation, thereby making exports less competitive and ultimately negatively impacting domestic industries (International Monetary Fund, 2017). Current critical constraints coupled with foreign aid also act as a rebuttal to foreign aid being beneficial. As discussed, Sumner and Glennie (2015) showcase that there are fluctuations in the amount of aid received each year (aid volatility) due to shifting donor interest or political conditions, and this leaves recipient governments susceptible to unsustainable infrastructure projects and funding programs. Their research further articulates how the Solomon Islands have been subject to disruptions in local initiatives as their per capita aid received dropped by approximately 30% between 2014 and 2015, thus exposing the true fragility of aid-dependent systems.

Although foreign aid can be potentially beneficial within a comprehensive development framework, is not a direct substitute for true structural change or public sector development (Sumner & Glennie, 2015). Foreign aid needs to be directly paired with strong initiatives towards dismantling the economic hierarchies inherited from colonialism and promote national public reform in order to be sustainable and result in significant growth. The current objective of foreign aid to serve and maintain a neocolonial power system also needs to be transformed to assist in response to the recipient's needs rather than purely providing profits for the donor nations. Hence, Sumner and Glennie's original counter arguments on the benefits of foreign aid can be refuted, as the existing framework of aid programs has proven to be inconsequential in promoting consistent economic growth, as seen by the previous discussions pertaining to aid volatility, Dutch disease and the case of Botswana.

Conclusion

Colonialism did not end with offering nations independence, instead, it evolved. Currently, neocolonial frameworks such as foreign aid and conditionality continue to uphold systems of dependency and economic subordination. Exploitative systems and structures established during the colonial era have set the stage for present day inequality, masking power imbalances in the name of developmental aid and assistance. Through the interrogation and analysis on the legacies of colonial institutions, prevalence of neocolonial paradigms, and the true function of foreign aid, this paper has demonstrated that robust structural amendments in the global political sphere are needed to ensure progress towards genuine developmental equality.

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“Dominance reified becomes difference. Coercion legitimated becomes consent. Reality objectified becomes ideas; ideas objectified become reality. Politics neutralized and naturalized becomes morality. Discrimination in society becomes nondiscrimination in law.”

Catherine A. MacKinnon

Toward a Feminist Theory of the State

Women in Palestine:

Mothers, Workers, or Security Threats?

LAILY INGLESON

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Abstract

This paper investigates the securitization of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, analyzing how and why they are portrayed as security threats and subjected to marginalization through various legal, political, and social mechanisms. This lens of securitization is important for understanding the treatment of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, as it frames them as inherent security threats within the context of an ongoing conflict. This paper also explores the impact of these portrayals on their rights and daily lives, considering the intersecting forms of oppression that shape their experiences. It concludes by examining the diverse displays of resistance employed by Palestinian women and the broader implications of their resilience under occupation.

The securitization process involves the portrayal of Palestinian women as potential supporters of resistance activities, which justifies extensive legal, political, and social measures against them.

This narrative of supposed threat is deeply embedded in state policies and media representations, leading to invasive surveillance, movement restrictions, and legal discrimination. The portrayal of Palestinian women as security risks not only legitimizes these oppressive measures but also perpetuates a cycle of control and marginalization. Intersectionality further shows the complexity of Palestinian women's experiences, demonstrating how their identities, shaped by gender, sexuality, nationality, and socio-economic status, intersect to impact their lived experiences.

Palestinian women are often shown in contradictory ways, as victims of oppressive Islamic customs needing Western rescue, and as active threats due to their roles in resistance. This dual narrative does not acknowledge the nuanced ways in which these women experience and resist oppression. Their roles as mothers, workers, and community leaders are politicized and exploited, illustrating how intersecting forms of oppression affect their daily lives. In response to these challenges, Palestinian women demonstrate strength, resilience, and agency through various forms of resistance. Despite the securitization and complex forms of oppression they face, Palestinian women continuously assert their rights and resist marginalization, showcasing their enduring strength and commitment to their cultural and national identity. Intersectionality provides a crucial framework for understanding the layered identities of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation, revealing how their gender, sexuality, national identity, and socio-economic roles intersect to shape their lived experiences. Palestinian women are often portrayed in conflicting depictions, being both victims of oppressive Islamic customs and security threats due to their potential involvement in resistance activities. Hudson critiques this this dual narrative by pointing out that it hides meaningful differences among women, especially in relation to security, where the experiences of women in the West differ greatly from those in developing regions (Hudson 2005).

This simple view does not consider the specific ways in which Palestinian women experience and resist oppression, whether as mothers, wives, workers, or community leaders. For example, the intersection of national identity and motherhood creates problems for women in Palestine, "due to their role in the reproduction of social and political orders, Indigenous women are signifiers of Indigenous sovereignty and as such threaten the settler colonial regime" (Dorries and Harjo, p.211, 2020). Their roles as mothers and caregivers are politicized, seen both as reproducers of Palestinian culture and as potential enablers of future resistance fighters. At the same time, these women go through economic hardships and labour exploitation, as the Israeli occupation creates more burdens on them as workers. Sharoni describes this as a "triple oppression," where Palestinian women "were forced to simultaneously struggle against this (...) and at the same time explore new ways of coping with the overwhelming pressures and responsibilities imposed by the occupation" (Sharoni, p.79, 1995).

Furthermore, the narrative that portrays Palestinian women as victims needing rescue by progressive forces, particularly from the West, further complicates their situation as "colonial-savior mentality disguises the reproduction of racist settler colonialism. It reiterates a rhetoric of 'progressive' Israel and 'backward' Palestine" (Maikey and Stelder 2015, p.94). Important figures like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have used these stereotypes, as in his 2011 address to the U.S. Congress, where he argued that "in a region where women are stoned, and gays are hanged, Christians are persecuted, Israel stands out. It is different" (Maikey and Stelder, 2015, p.93). This use of women's rights and queer rights to further political agendas, known as "pinkwashing," not only exploits the struggles of Palestinian women but also reinforces harmful stereotypes. "Pinkwashing is a continuation of a familiar colonial discourse and logic, comparable to women-saving narratives, that uses the colonizer's 'development' and 'progress' to measure the colonized Palestinian society" (Maikey and Stelder, 2015, p.85). Thus, the intersectionality of Palestinian women's identities; encompassing their roles as mothers, wives, economic actors, and bearers of cultural and religious traditions needs a nuanced understanding that recognizes their agency and resilience in the face of multifaceted oppression.

The securitization of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation is deeply rooted in a process that frames them as security threats through a combination of stereotypes, political rhetoric, and state policies. As Balzacq explains, “securitization theory elaborates the insight that no issue is essentially a menace. Something becomes a security problem through discursive politics” (Balzacq, 2011, p.1). The framing of these women as threats is part of a broader narrative that associates Palestinian identity with terrorism and unrest. In this context, Palestinian women are often depicted as raising the next generation of resistance fighters or directly participating in protests and other forms of resistance. This stereotype is reinforced by media representations that focus on women involved in resistance activities, while ignoring the vast majority who are engaged in peaceful or non-political activities. This selective representation contributes to the idea that Palestinian women are inherently part of the conflict, reinforcing the idea that Palestinian women are security threats in the eyes of Israel.

State policies and security practices show this stereotyping. Palestinian women are subjected to “extensive security checks at checkpoints, invasive surveillance, and arbitrary detentions” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015, p.39). These measures are often justified by Israel as necessary to prevent potential security threats. In reality, these practices are there to control and marginalize the Palestinian population, with women being victimized by these measures.

The impact of these measures on Palestinian women is extremely damaging. In a documentary by Al Jazeera, a Hebron resident explains, “the Israeli Military turned her roof into a surveillance post, which is able to see into the windows of her home”. She describes how this constant surveillance has stripped her of any sense of privacy, making her feel like she lives “on the street and not in a home” (Al Jazeera, 2023). Another woman from the same community describes how “even when I’m asleep, I see those red laser points, and I know someone is holding a camera and tracking our movements...in the bedroom”. She goes on to say, “The house looks like a prison – no light, no voice, no breathing space” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, p.37, 2018). These personal accounts show the dehumanizing effects of the securitization process, where Palestinian women are stripped of their privacy and subjected to a constant state of fear. This will not only affect these women’s lives in the present but will follow them for the rest of their lives in the form of PTSD, or other mental health challenges. The portrayal of these women as security threats not only legitimizes the use of such invasive measures but also perpetuates a cycle of control and marginalization that serves the broader strategy of maintaining dominance over the occupied territories.

Palestinian women have played an important role in resisting the Israeli occupation and asserting their rights, demonstrating remarkable agency and resilience in the face of systemic oppression. Their resistance takes many forms, from political activism and community organization to cultural preservation and economic self-sufficiency. For example, during the first Intifada (1987-1993), women joined demonstrations and marches organized by the women’s committees. Women of all ages and social classes threw stones, burned tires, raised Palestinian flags and prevented Israeli soldiers from arresting people (Sharoni, 1995). These actions were not only a form of resistance against the Israeli occupation but also a way of asserting their agency within Palestinian society. The women’s committees was founded in the late 1970s and is considered the backbone to the new Palestinian women’s movement and played a significant role in this mobilization (Sharoni, 1995).

Palestinian women also resist through cultural preservation and education, teaching Palestinian history, language, and traditions to younger generations to counter the erasure of their cultural identity (Sharoni, 1995). This form of resistance is particularly important in maintaining the community's sense of identity and continuity in the face of ongoing occupation. For example, organizations like Addameer work to support Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are women, by providing legal aid and advocating for their rights. Resistance also manifests within Palestinian and Islamic culture, where women fight for agency in a society that often imposes traditional roles on them. During the first Intifada, there was a significant debate within the Palestinian women's movement about whether to treat the hijab as a problem in itself or rather as a broader discussion of women's social issues during the Intifada. This was a strategic decision, reflecting the rich experience, maturity, and level of sophistication of the Palestinian women's movement. This internal resistance is important for understanding the complexity of Palestinian women's experiences under occupation, as they navigate the challenges posed by both external oppression and internal pressures.

The Israeli military has used national security discourse to justify massive arrests of Palestinian women and their forceful interrogation. Sharoni notes, "Threats and actual sexual assaults happen during interrogations to pressure women to get incriminating evidence against family members and force the families to turn Palestinian fugitives to the Israeli authorities, as well as to deter women from resisting the occupation" (Sharoni, p.55, 1995). Yet, Palestinian women remain firm in their resistance, as shown in Um al-Asirah's assertion: "I know that my daughter might be sexually harassed or even raped, but your threats will not deter her or other women from political activism" (Sharoni, p.55, 1995).

The securitization of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation represents an important aspect of the broader conflict. By framing Palestinian women as security threats, Israeli policies justify invasive surveillance, legal discrimination, and social control. This portrayal not only reinforces oppressive measures but also perpetuates a cycle of marginalization that affects various parts of Palestinian women's lives. Intersectionality offers another lens for understanding the complexity of these experiences. Palestinian women's identities, shaped by gender, national identity, socio-economic status, and other factors, intersect in ways that shape their daily lives and experiences of oppression. The dual narrative of portraying these women both as victims of an oppressive culture and as security threats does not show the nuanced reality of their struggles. Their roles as mothers, workers, and sharing culture are politicized forms of oppression intersect and impact their lives. Additionally, it shows the importance of recognizing and supporting the agency and resistance to those affected by such systemic issues. By examining the multifaceted nature of Palestinian women's experiences and resistance, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ongoing conflict and the complex dynamics of power and identity in occupied territories.

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“It’s not about supplication it’s about power. It’s not about asking, it’s about demanding. It’s not about convincing those who are currently in power, it’s about changing the very face of power itself.”

KIMBERLY CRENSHAW

Stratified injustice, institutionalized inequality, and engineered (un)belonging seem to be these wicked problems that persist through our collective realities; an ever-present societal thorn in our side we just can't seem to shake, an invader that breaches all manner of barricade—be it temporal, spatial, or otherwise.

So much so that we have become acquainted with such, intimately. The ubiquity of these disparate hierarchies have become but a fact of life, the natural system within which the contemporary being must flow through and adapt to, or perish. And such an ontology hasn't been without challenge: as we've seen firsthand for ourselves reading through this journal, just as we have adapted to combat these vile transgressions of human lives, they have just as equally morphed into different forms, wearing different masks, transposing across and between variegated scales and levels. This uphill battle often seems to be one without end, claiming immense casualties every step of the way on both sides of this war into oblivion.

But so what if it is? It is, perhaps, the resignation to this strategically installed and reinforced fatalistic worldview that brings true death. We see this cunning shadow of ruin intruding Indigenous homes in Brunella's article, distorting queer minds and bodies in Lisa's piece, coercive transnational state action in Jayson's research, enduring economic legacies in Summit's writing, and pervasive surveillance networks in Laily's work. And through close study of these case studies, a common thread is revealed, that of the multitudinal means of enduring through resistance—challenging the status quo in ways that serve to declare and secure existence.

We have much to learn from these acts, and in engaging such discourse we keep our heads above the water, so to speak. Much like the confluence of two watersheds, this journal exists as a merging of streams of knowledges, a celebration of life, a necessary act of foregrounding the abundance that has never been absent and has been fought for generation after generation. It has been immensely humbling to be able to gifted the opportunity to utilize my skillset outside of academia in giving to this, that I may be able to contribute a little bit of my being to organizing this sacred knowledge visually.

Surreal, it has been, working on a project such as this. And I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as we had working on it. Thank you for being a part of this great resisting, as it is all we know to do, for it is what we must. With joy.

♥ Nigel

“Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground.”

Sara Ahmed

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