BERKELEY JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

FRICTIONS & FORMATIONS

VOLUME 66

BERKELEY JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY | VOL. 66, 2025

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Amid rising authoritarianism, climate catastrophe, threats to academic freedom, and widening inequality, sociology faces both immense challenges and profound responsibilities. The *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (BJS) continues to confront this moment with a strong purpose oriented around public sociology: to confront these crises head-on through scholarship that refuses the boundary between analysis and action.

What happens when sociology breaks free from institutional constraints and directly engages with the struggles of our time? We believe the answer lies in creating spaces where movements for justice can shape scholarly conversation. This approach demands more than publishing articles; it requires building networks of solidarity that stretch from campus to community, from the seminar room to the streets. We remain committed to academic freedom that forms the basis for the translation of ideas to action.

The BJS has long served as a vital platform where Marxist, Feminist, and Critical Race perspectives found early expression, shaping the contours of our discipline. Now relaunched as a public sociology publication, we continue to push boundaries further, applying sociological insight to pressing political issues, emerging cultural movements, and transformative visions of the future. We have broadened the kinds of media we publish to encapsulate this range of social expression through photo essays, documentaries, field memos, and interviews. We aim to publish works that do more than analyze social problems, but rather, they actively center and amplify the voices of the communities we study and belong to.

As we enter our fifth year operating under this renewed vision, we remain dedicated to expanding what public sociology can be. Being truly public means more than open access—it requires reimagining academic practices from the ground up. We've transformed our publishing and funding structure to eliminate institutional barriers, continued to expand our editorial board globally, and worked to create spaces where scholarship and lived experience speak as equals. This year, our editorial community extends from the Bay Area to the East Coast, from South America to South Asia, bringing together perspectives across sociology, political science, law, and public health. We're especially proud that as a graduate student-led journal, we continue to model the kind of inclusive intellectual community that we believe our field needs.

Our theme this year, *Frictions and Formations*, explores how tension and solidarity simultaneously emerge in social dynamics. The volume traces how conflict and connection, whether in digital spheres, local communities, institutions, or intertwined human-ecological worlds, co-produce the social fabrics that define contemporary collective life. The first two pieces in our volume underscore conflicts in different collective spaces: Nene Mokonchu explores Black femicide in the Black manosphere, while Rashad Ullah Khan examines the violent consequences of religious processions carried out by militant Hindutva groups. On the other hand, Nisa Zamora brings us into the Koze Krew virtual community to show that strong ties and social connections are possible. Stefan Adamson, Astika Sharma, naveed nejad, and Caden Puah continue this theme of social capital that emerges from communities, neighborhoods, and schools through the cases of Rotterdam, self-help groups in India, and Dutch higher education. Finally, our volume recognizes that the natural world remains the key foundation in our social fabric. Megan Morrell offers a deep ecological account of human rights that brings the rights of humans and the environment into a cohesive framework, and Ritika Patel sheds light on the ecologies of migrant workers that underlie the gendered dynamics of salt production.

This project has been and remains a collective labor of love. We are grateful for the relentless support and care from fellow graduate students, faculty, and staff who help us operate one of the few graduate student-run sociology journals today. We are especially thankful to our editorial board members whom we have the privilege of working together and creating with over the last year to make this volume possible! Also, thank you to our contributors who trusted us to engage with and develop their work with them. Five years in, we remain as committed as ever to consistently practicing critical and public sociology.

Amid the joyous year we've had working on this volume, we are also heartbroken by the loss of Michael Burawoy. Michael is the reason why we are here and why the BJS still stands today. His unwavering and energetic support of our work is why we've been able to keep these efforts alive and also grow our community. The BJS has been a publishing institution for decades, and Michael was a crucial link between us and all the past editors and the larger BJS collective. With that, this volume is dedicated to Michael, more than ever before. We remain steadfast in our commitment and responsibility to continue this journal and sustain the passion, work, and the community of public sociology in our lives.

Finally, as two women of color and the editors of the BJS, we remain humbled by the incredible opportunity and responsibility we have in leading our diverse editorial board, and in creating and contributing to the inclusive intellectual community that we want to see in sociology.

In alignment with our theme this year, we hope this issue is not only engaging to read, but more importantly, brings us together in times of social turmoil. We hope that the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* serves as a sustained invitation to make public sociology truly public.

Warmly,
Tiffany Hamidjaja and Janna Huang
Berkeley Journal of Sociology Editors-in-Chief
May 2025

THIS IS A MAN'S WORLD: MISOGYNOIR, THE BLACK MANOSPHERE, AND THE MAKING OF BLACK FEMICIDE

by NENE MOKONCHU

Abstract

This paper examines the alarming rise of Black femicide, the gender-based killing of Black cisgender and transgender women, social variables, and the Black Manosphere, which is an online community where Black American men discuss issues related to gender dynamics, relationships, and societal expectations. In this research, Black cisgender and transgender women are both considered under the umbrella term Black women. This research also considers Black cisgender straight and lesbian women uniformly, as I have centered this on gender identification. However, future research could explore the distinct challenges lesbian women face.

By analyzing sociocultural contexts, case studies, and statistical data, this research explores how harmful online rhetoric manifests in real-life violence against Black women. This work emphasizes addressing online misogyny and proposes actionable steps forward, including educational reforms, online accountability, community organization, and political advocacy that protects and celebrates Black women. By centering the humanity of Black women, this research contributes to the broader understanding of race, gender, and culture.

Introduction

Femicide, the killing of women by men on account of their gender, manifests in diverse sociocultural forms (Radford and Russell 2009). Femicide's impact spans classes, societies, and sexual orientation – yet within the United States, its disproportionate persecution of Black women is critically unexplored. This patriarchal product not only victimizes the young and old but threatens social spaces with misogynistic narratives and physical violence. Increasingly, Black femicide finds a breeding ground in the Black Manosphere—an online community where Black men circulate misogynistic and often violent ideologies. Black women are increasingly victimized by Black Femicide, cultural blind spots, and the Black Manosphere—and this gendered war calls for urgent scholarship, advocacy, and palpable action.

Black Femicide: The Urgency of Gendered Violence

Black femicide is rooted in misogynoir, which refers to the intersectional oppression of Black women based on their gender and race. Black women are slaughtered at rates four times higher than non-Black women, and the death toll for Black trans women has risen by a harrowing 93% in just four years (The Guardian 2022). Despite these alarming statistics, Black femicide remains in discursive shadows. Black women are overlooked by social commentary that centers on patriarchal victimhood, here referring to the centralization of Black men's experiences in wrongful death.

Imara Jones unpacks Black femicide's erasure in her analysis of Netflix's *When They See Us* (Jones 2019). While the series is a captivating depiction of the racialized violence Black men face, it inadvertently illustrates a darker narrative: that Black male victimhood usually takes precedence over the compounded affliction of Black cisgender women, women who identify with their biological sex, and transgender women, women who do not identify with their biological sex. Pop culture can hardly imagine and hold space for a diverging, paramount reality: that many Black trans and cis women are dying at the hands of their men (Jones 2019).

Sidelined: The Erasure of Black Trans Women From Racial Justice

Imara Jones also provides insight into the divide between Black cisgender women and Black transgender women. She notes that after Malaysia Booker and Chynal Lindsay's tragic deaths, no Black women's organizations vocalized support for them. From Alpha Kappa Alpha to the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, the community had a 'deafening silence' (Jones 2019). Even when victimized by similar hatred, Black cisgender women often draw a cisgender divide between their suffering and transgender women. Black cisgender women, despite their sexual orientation, tend to be bound to the biological parameters of traditional womanhood as defined by cisgender Black men. Against this historical backdrop, embracing Black trans women as women leads some cis Black women to fear losing their access to cisgender privileges – and, therefore, proximity to Black men. Black cisgender women, constrained by patriarchal womanhood, often betray Black trans women in the pursuit of cisgender victimhood, denying them equal humanity, even in the shared tragedy of Black femicide (Jones 2019).

Indeed, Black femicide at the hands of Black men challenges hegemonic narratives of Black victimhood, resulting in the systemic erasure of Black cis and transgender women from racial justice movements. Malaysia Booker and Chynal Linsday, two Black transgender women, and Kierra Cols and Porscha Owens, two Black cisgender women, were all killed by the gender-based violence rampant in Black communities (Jones 2019). Yet, despite heightened racial consciousness in Black Lives Matter's 2020 revival, these women were virtually excluded from mainstream mourning and advocacy. Their invisibility highlights a broader issue: Black advocacy denies Black women the same conviction afforded to Black men victimized by racist policing. Ironically, three Black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi founded Black Lives Matter (Salzman 2020). From its 2013 establishment, Black Lives Matter sought to center and uplift the victimhood and labor of Black women in racial justice. However, refusing to evolve our understanding of racialized violence past a patriarchal, biracial lens threatens to erase the experiences of Black women, leaving their victimization unaddressed.

The Black Community and Transgender Identity

Kiana Cox of the Pew Research Center sheds light on the Black community and transgender identity, providing insight into the particular erasure of Black trans femicide (Cox 2023). Cox found that Black Americans are generally unexposed to transgender identities in their communities. Only a meager 1.4% of Black adults identify as transgender or nonbinary (Cox 2023). Moreover, only 35% of Black adults report a personal connection with a transgender individual, which pales in comparison to the general public's 44% (Cox 2023).

Cox then explores overt transphobia, revealing profoundly ingrained belief systems on gender identity. She finds that 68% of Black adults believe that gender should be assigned at birth, higher than the general public's 60% (Cox 2023). Cox suggests that this belief is greatly determined by intraracial partisanship and religious affiliation, with Black moderates and devouts over 20% more likely to align with this gender fundamentalism (Cox 2023). While six in ten Black adults acknowledge that transgender people face significant discrimination in the U.S. today, many express little concern for the moral treatment of transgender individuals (Cox 2023). While 36% of Black Americans believe trans acceptance is socially lacking, a striking 60% think it is as much as overly progressive. The data illustrate a troublesome paradox within Black America: a simultaneous acknowledgment of transphobia and a lack of urgency to address it. By remaining unmoved in these belief systems, Black communities not only contribute to Black trans women's marginalization but simultaneously erase their victimhood.

Patriarchal Victimhood and the Erasure of Black Women

When transgender identity disillusions the collective Black community, there grows a marginalization of Black trans women's victimhood. Patriarchal victimhood, as highlighted by Tre-Ventour Griffiths, propagates the specific overshadowing of Black transgender femicide (Griffiths 2020). While agreeing that Black cisgender men face racialized violence, he acknowledges their privileges in a transphobic and patriarchal world. His lived experience—rarely feeling unsafe walking at night, never fearing ostracism from his community, or the threat of male violence against Black transgender and cisgender women—demonstrates how Black cisgender men's suffering pales in comparison to the daily brutality faced by Black women (Griffiths 2020).

Griffiths boldly criticizes the Black community for its complicity in police-inflicted violence against Black transgender women. Despite being the most represented by anti-policing, cisgender Black men have consistently sidelined the struggles of Black trans women. Griffiths points out that in its 2020 revival, the Black Lives Matter movement simultaneously perpetuated transphobia, further marginalizing Black trans femmes. To genuinely resist anti-Blackness, Black Americans must denounce transphobia. Black America cannot continue to operate in contradiction—it weakens resistance to state-sanctioned violence while inadvertently perpetuating it. Whether it be Rodney King, Mike Brown, or Breonna Taylor, racialized victimhood remains cisgender—and Black trans women, who are 370% more likely to be brutalized by the police, remain an afterthought. The Black Manosphere, Black transphobia, and patriarchal systems are complicit in the erasing of Black women's victimhood. Griffiths' cisgender male perspective makes for a powerful call to action: Black liberation is entirely contingent on the radical inclusion of Black trans women.

The Black Manosphere: Digitized Misogynoir and Its Implications

While Griffiths critiques the Black community's complicity in the marginalization of Black trans women, the digital realm further entrenches this erasure. Both Black transgender and cisgender women's systematic dehumanization, especially in intracommunal contexts, is insidiously implicated by the Black Manosphere. Alexandria Onuoha holds that these echo chambers of far-right ideologies play into Black male insecurities— redirecting rage at White supremacy into internalized racism, sexism, and transphobia (Onuhoa 2022). This cyclical resentment not only exacerbates Black femicide but also reveals how enclaves like the Black Manosphere both incubate misogynistic ideologies and create intracommunal estrangement

amongst Black Americans. The Black Manosphere often masquerades as a hub for podcasts and short-form media, offering financial, dating, and life advice (Onuhoa 2022). Yet, behind this "self-help" veil, the Black Manosphere is a digitized misogynoir– online behavior that comprises the racial and gender-based oppression of Black women (Onuhoa 2022).

The Black Manosphere works to ostracize Black women, both cisgender and transgender alike, from White-defined traditional womanhood (Onuhoa 2022). Its users tirelessly emasculate Black women by sensationalizing dating experiences, imposing harsh double standards, misrepresenting the messages of female artists, and framing their entitlement to respect as attacks on Black "traditional" manhood. Black emasculation is a textbook White supremacist mechanism: the emasculation of non-White bodies to control and oppress. Central to this narrative is the portrayal of Black femininity as a direct threat to Black masculinity. This perceived undermining of Black male dominance casts Black women as adversaries rather than partners, manifesting into gendered violence. By engaging with the Black Manosphere and its core beliefs, Black men become complicit in bigotry that manifests as intracommunal, patriarchal violence.

The Black Manosphere and An Entangled Incel Culture

While the Black Manosphere primarily functions as an incubator for harmful rhetoric, it is also profoundly entangled with the rise of incel culture, a culture consisting of involuntary celibate (incel) men. This dangerous ideology not only distorts perceptions of Black women but actively advocates for violence against women, manifesting in the real-world atrocities that we see today. Michael Vallerga and Eileen Zurbriggen provide a nuanced introduction to the incel community, defining it as an enclave in which hegemonic and traditional masculinity are fostered and embraced (Vallerga and Zurbriggen 2022). The incel community contains media like The Red Pill Forum and other mediums that reinforce and escalate misogyny (Vallerga and Zurbriggen 2022). Most pertinently, the incel community holds that women are inherently deceptive and promiscuous, exploiting men and themselves as an attack on traditional manhood. Perceived deception ranges from dishonesty about previous sexual partners to the dangerous endorsement of rape myths. In holding that women are inherently deceitful – even in the face of sexual trauma—the risk factor for sexual and other male-inflicted violence skyrockets.

As the incel community grows, it exacerbates the already high rates of Black femicide. Feelings of entitlement, rejection, and powerlessness often lead men, particularly

Black men, to justify gendered violence. This violence becomes a tool for asserting dominance over women. Many Red Pill posters casually discussed sexual assault as a natural solution, writing that "based on how more and more men are becoming incel due to sexual distribution getting more unequal, the only way some men would be able to obtain sex would be via rape" (Vallerga and Zurbriggen 2022). Men also threatened homicide, one user writing, "If all of us grab a wrap/knife we can make [this] the day of the incelindependenceday...wouldn't rest until every incel gets his revenge. Go ER or fuck with the femoids [women] for the sake of good ol' times" (Vallerga and Zurbriggen 2022). Such sadist rhetoric, gender narratives, and planned violence illustrate the danger of digitized misogyny through incel culture and the Black Manosphere, all of which normalize Black femicide.

Profiting From Misogynoir: The Black Manosphere's Business Model

While the Black Manosphere and incel culture are already frightening, their economic lucrativeness is a force to be reckoned with. The *Fresh and Fit* podcast is just one example of digitized misogynoir that wrings the Black community for profit. In 2022, the podcast came under fire for espousing contemptuous anti-Black woman ideologies, referring to Black women as "Shaniquas" that insult Black men's social value (Lampley 2022). When Asian Doll, a Black woman invited as a guest, criticized this violent characterization, the hosts launched into verbal assault, humiliating and degrading her on live air.

As previously established, the emasculation of Black women is a historical White supremacist mechanism adopted by many cisgender Black men. It paints Black women as inhumane, aggressive, and violent creatures that are unworthy of love and protection. The "Shaniquification" and humiliation of Black women, therefore, is not mere banter, but a calculated, monetized spectacle that alienates and dehumanizes Black women through media—and eventually, in their victimhood. With *Fresh and Fit* generating over 238 million views with some hosts worth up to $1 million, it is clear that the Black Manosphere carelessly rewards those who reinforce harmful misogynoir, thriving on an audience that eagerly vilifies Black women (Social Blade 2025).

Beyond *Fresh and Fit*, several cisgender, bigoted and opportunistic Black men are making a profit within the Black Manosphere, damned to the violent implications. The late Kevin Samuels remains a major voice in the Black Manosphere, building a repugnant platform around rigidly traditional gender roles, harmful double standards, and a sheer hatred for (Black) women. While outwardly abrasive, his

sharp-tongued content was not only widespread but lucrative—generating millions of dollars through Instagram, YouTube, and newsletter subscriptions (Startup Booted 2025). Samuel's aggressive rhetoric has gone on to inspire existing Black Manosphere content in extensive industries. The *Lead Attorney*, *Mediocre Tutorials*, and *Poor Man's Podcast* are all mainstream YouTubers capitalizing on Samuel's malignant philosophies. Disguising Red-Pill takes under legal advice, entertainment, and self-help, such con-men consistently test and expand misogynoir's social acceptability, amassing large followings and profit through super chats, Patreon, and consultations. The Black Manosphere commodifies violence and proliferates both Black cisgender and transgender women's victimhood by establishing these narratives intracommunally, rendering gendered brutalization permissible and seeking support strenuous (Journey Magazine Online 2024).

Silence is Violence: The Understudied Link Between The Black Manosphere and Black Femicide

Regardless of the spokesman or platform, Black digitized misogynoir and incel culture have a clear foreboding: planted seeds of dehumanization threaten to reap high femicide rates. These dynamics are already at play within White supremacist, misogynistic online spaces. On May 23, 2014, Elliot Rodger killed six and injured 14 people in Isla Vista, California (BBC News 2018). A self-proclaimed incel with a manifesto detailing his violent plans to seek revenge on women, Rodger became a martyr and source for inspiration for other gender-based violence. In 2018, Rodger-inspired Scott Berle killed two women at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida, and had an extensive history of online misogyny, nazism, and racialized hatred (Hughes et al. 2024). In March 2020, incel Tres Recno was arrested for a plot to mass murder women at Ohio State University, a shooting that would have temporally coincided with Rodger's 2014 attack. He too detailed an extreme desire to harm all women in his manifesto and was a self-proclaimed incel, substantiating his conviction of attempted hate crime (Hughes et al. 2024).

While incel violence perpetuated by digitized misogyny is heavily recorded in White spaces, there is a severe gap in scholarship, contextualization, and urgent advocacy within the Black community. When White perpetrators inflict harm in both private and public spaces, their psychology and online decorum are rightfully scrutinized—but when Black women are victimized at surging rates, their Black and radicalized perpetrators are hardly granted the same urgency or viewed through the lens of gendered hate. With the Black Manosphere growing and history demonstrating the correlation between digitized hate and gendered violence, this lack of scholarship and advocacy is deeply troubling, demonstrating the importance of urgent research. While White incel violence often takes form in mass shootings, gendered violence in Black spaces often takes form in intimate partner violence, public ridicule, and the permissibility of misogynoir and eventual Black femicide. While many perpetrators in the Black community are not revealed as incels, there is still an underlying, violent misogynoir fueled by the Black Manosphere in the same way the White Manosphere has contributed to extensive murders.

Hip-hop culture further illustrates how violent misogynoir is not only overlooked but also dismissed as a communal or private matter rather than a systemic issue. Tory Lanez's 2020 shooting of Megan Thee Stallion and the slew of digitized misogynoir is just a recent example. Amanda Howell Whitehurst from NPR articulates Megan's tearful testimony, the three-year fight for justice, and online rifts as a deep normalization of misogynoir in hip-hop—one that can not be resolved by a singular "guilty" verdict (Whitehurst 2023). Indeed, with PBS, Laura Baron-Lopez recalls the bastardizing effect online misogynoir had on Megan's victimhood, where negative publicity and hip-hop figures turned Megan into a villain (XXL Magazine 2023). From online trolls to rappers like Drake and 50 Cent—who themselves have been accused of gendered violence and predation—Megan was brutally mocked (Vox 2024). Rap is one of the most financially lucrative and culturally prominent industries within the Black community, with its top artists lionized like deities, establishing once more the political and economic foundation misogynoir has within the Black community.

The overwhelming backlash left Megan struggling with severe depression, and in her own words, wishing at times that she had not survived the shooting (Lopez et al. 2022). Memes, online dialogue, and public figures relentlessly attacked her, emasculating her, calling her a liar, using her lyrics to justify the violence, and even releasing music mocking her trauma (Lopez et al. 2022). Indeed, the National Women's Law Center firmly reports on Megan's communal abandonment as misogynoir dangerously enabled in the online and daily Black community, implicating Black women's underprotection, underreported violence, and high fatalities by Black male partners (NWLC 2022). Megan Thee Stallion's public crucifixion is a poignant reminder that Black women's suffering is often dismissed as a private, intimate matter—when brought to the public, treated as entertainment and digital dogpiling. This relentless digitized misogynoir mirrors the fatal contempt seen in White incel spaces—but the Black Manosphere and gendered violence remain largely separated. While Megan's attack was non-fatal, a growing Black Manosphere and the overwhelming communal rejection show an increasing tolerance for violence against Black women, escalating from public degradation to deadly consequences (Rolling Stone 2023). Without urgent scholarship, advocacy, or palpable community action, this unchecked cycle of digital dehumanization will feed the rising tide of Black femicide.

Fighting Back: Actionable Interventions to Misogynoir and Femicide in the Black Community

Black Femicide, the Black Manosphere, incel culture, and patriarchal victimhood rampant in the Black community are all rooted in transphobic and misogynistic values. To combat misogynistic hatred from manifesting into physical and fatal violence, therefore, we must foster acceptance and celebration of Black women within the community.

1. Education Awareness in Schools

Implementing Gender and sexuality education in predominantly Black neighborhood schools facilitates acceptance of Black youth, and educators can promote greater understanding and acceptance among Black youth and educators. These programs should emphasize respect, empathy, and accountability of diverse gender and sexual identities. Additionally, uplifting historical and contemporary contributions of Black women promote inclusivity and challenge harmful narratives.

2. Support Systems for Black Cisgender Girls and Transgender Youth

Similarly, establishing support systems, programs, and initiatives for Black cisgender girls and transgender youth is critical. Examples include peer counseling, visibility days, affinity groups, after-school mixers, and mentorship programs led by Black female leaders. Inclusive media that represents Black women in their dynamic, beautiful light creates an affirming safe space for Black female youth. These reforms build up these vulnerable populations and encourage others to reject divisive, violent thinking.

3. Online Accountability

The Black community must also push for reform outside the classroom and youth spaces, starting with online communities. Platforms hosting the Black Manosphere must acknowledge misogynoir as inherently violent and take action through stringent policies, while also addressing their financial lucrativeness. Black advocates should push for the demonetization and policing of harmful platforms, disincentivizing ignorant opportunists from seeking profit off of abrasive rhetoric. This includes policing Super Chats and Patreons. Black leaders should also consider partnering with tech experts to permeate these hostile spaces with inclusion and counter-narratives.

4. Community and Policy Reform

Grassroots advocates, Black women's groups, and community organizers should all recognize Black femicide as a significant threat to Black liberation. Rather than adhering to patriarchal victimhood, the community must treat all forms of violence against Black individuals as equally essential and dedicate time, resources, and policy reform to addressing them. Hosting workshops to confront and extinguish transphobia, racism, and sexism is one such reform. These events should promote dialogue and educate community members on the harm of misogynistic and transphobic ideologies. Actionable plans and policy reforms must also aim to protect Black women against systemic violence. Such actions include lobbying for stricter laws against gender-based violence, increased funding in Black communities to support women fleeing domestic violence, and expanding access to mental health resources tailored to the Black community.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the intersected relationship between Black femicide, communal values, and the Black Manosphere in what is truly an attack on Black women. Black women, whether cisgender or transgender, are implicated by a violent misogynoir—yet their victimhood remains largely unvoiced. To extinguish the alarming rise in femicide, profitable community ignorance, and digitized misogynoir, the Black community must embrace inclusive, intersectional resistance that defends transgender and cisgender women's humanity. Genuine Black liberalization is contingent on dismantling patriarchal victimhood that dually erases and brutalizes Black women. Recognizing the intersections of race, gender, and digital culture is not just about celebrating all Black women—it is a matter of life and death.

References

ABC News. 2020. "Start of Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ Lives." *ABC News Network*. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://abcnews.go.com/US/start-black-lives-matter-lgbtq-lives/story?id=71320450).

Baron-Lopez, Laura. 2023. "How Megan Thee Stallion's Court Battle Highlights Misogyny Targeting Black Women." *PBS NewsHour*, March 15. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-megan-thee-stallions-court-battle-highlights-misogyny-targeting-black-women).

BBC News. 2018. "Elliot Rodger: How Misogynist Killer Became 'Incel Hero.'" April 25. Retrieved April 30, 2025 (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189).

Cox, Kiana. 2023. "Black Americans' Views on Transgender and Nonbinary Issues." *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/02/16/black-americans-views-on-transgender-and-nonbinary-issues/).

Jones, Imara. "Confronting Black Men's Roles in the Murders of Black Transgender Women May Be the Only Way to Save Our Lives." TransLash, May 24. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://translash.org/confronting-black-mens-roles-in-the-murders-of-black-transgender-women-may-be-the-only-way-to-save-our-lives/).

Journey Magazine Online. 2024. "How Black Podcasts Capitalize on Misogynoir." January 7. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://journeymagonline.com/articles/how-black-podcasts-capitalize-misogynoir/).

Howell Whitehurst, Ann. 2023. "Megan Thee Stallion, Tory Lanez, and the Impact of Misogynoir on Rap." NPR, March 15. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.npr.org/2023/03/15/1163660859/megan-thee-stallion-tory-lanez-and-the-impact-of-misogynoir-on-rap).

National Women's Law Center (NWLC). 2023. "A Terrible Storm: Megan Thee Stallion, Misogynoir, and Leaving Black Survivors Unprotected." Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://nwlc.org/a-terrible-storm-megan-thee-stallion-misogynoir-and-leaving-black-survivors-unprotected/).

Onuoha, Amanda. 2022. "The Manosphere Isn't Just White: Black Femicide and the Radicalisation of Black Male Youth." Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET), January 31. Retrieved November 30, 2024 (https://gnet-research.org/2022/01/31/the-manosphere-isnt-just-White-black-femicide-and-the-radicalisation-of-black-male-youth/).

Radford, Jill, and Diana E. H. Russell. 1992. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. New York: Open University Press.

Ramirez, Mark D., and David A. M. Peterson. 2020. *Ignored Racism: White Animus Toward Latinos*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rolling Stone. 2023. "Nicki Minaj and Megan Thee Stallion Beef: A Blemish on Nicki's Legacy." October 12. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.rollingstone.com).

Social Blade. 2025. "Fresh & Fit Miami YouTube Statistics." Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://socialblade.com/youtube/c/freshfitmiami).

Startup Booted. 2025. "Kevin Samuels Net Worth: The Shocking Truth Behind His Fortune (2025)." February 1. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.startupbooted.com/kevin-samuels-net-worth-the-shocking-truth-behind-his-fortune-2025).

The Guardian. 2022. "The Killings of Black Women: Five Findings from Our Investigation." *Guardian News and Media*, June 30. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jun/30/black-women-murder-rate-data-stats-study).

Vallerga, Michael, and Eileen L. Zurbriggen. 2022. "Hegemonic Masculinities in the 'Manosphere': A Thematic Analysis of Beliefs about Men and Women on The Red Pill and Incel." *Social Issues and Policy Review* 22(2): 602–25. doi: 10.1111/asap.12308

Ventour-Griffiths, Tyrone. 2020. "Intersectionality: A Cis, Black Man's Response." *Medium*, August 23. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://medium.com/the-bad-influence/intersectionality-a-cis-black-mans-response-e36a2794c230).

Vox. 2024. "Drake, Kendrick Lamar, and the Ongoing Misogyny in Rap." March 12. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.vox.com/culture/24152096/drake-kendrick-lamar-misogyny-me-too-women-abuse).

XXL Magazine. 2023. "Cam'ron Makes Insensitive Joke About Megan Thee Stallion & Tory Lanez Case." April 10. Retrieved April 29, 2025 (https://www.xxlmag.com/camron-megan-thee-stallion-tory-lanez-transphobia-insensitive-joke/).

NENE MOKONCHU is a junior at Brown University, studying political science on the pre-law track. A first-generation Cameroonian American woman, Nene believes the law and sociological education should be used for the most marginalized— in particular, advocating for Black women across the diaspora. An aspiring civil rights lawyer, her published piece on Black femicide and the Manosphere are just the beginning of her pedagogical and avocational journey. She aspires to attend Berkeley Law School to put her sociological aspirations and passions into action.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNAL CLASHES DURING RELIGIOUS PROCESSIONS: REPORT ON THE BRAJMANDAL JALABHISHEK YATRA 2024

by RASHAD ULLAH KHAN

Introduction

India has always been a pluralist country of rich diverse cultures and practices. However, with diversity comes conflict and Indian history shows how religion has very often been used to incite violence and hate. The pluralistic and secular characteristic of India has been facing its most intense challenge as of late—with communal forces attempting to create an environment where violence could erupt at any given time between the majority Hindu and minority communities, specifically Muslims, along the lines of religion. Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar (2018) in their work on Uttar Pradesh, show that frequent, low-intensity communal clashes pegged on routine everyday issues and resources help establish a permanent anti-Muslim prejudice among Hindus–thereby legitimizing majoritarian rule in the eyes of an increasingly polarized, intolerant and entitled majority community of Hindus. The process of communalisation[1] that has been taking place during the reign of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has increased fear and insecurity among the minority communities (The Wire 2022). While the low-intensity communal clashes still persist, an additional tool utilised to erode harmony and peace is religious processions (Yatras).[2] The organisers of these processions receive backing from militant Hindutva organisations and claim that their processions are integral to the practice of their faith and a celebration of God (Chakraborty 2023).

The procession is portrayed as an innocent ritual with the responsibility for the ensuing violence placed on the victims of the violence that occurs through the procession, mainly the minority muslim community. These religious processions carried out by militant Hindutva groups such as the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) have become more and more frequent in the past few years, leaving behind a trail of violence and destruction.

One such procession which created quite a stir was the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra that was carried out in Nuh, Haryana on July 31, 2023. As the procession was being carried out in Nuh, communal clashes broke out between the members of the procession and the Muslim residents of that area. The harrowing aspect of the communal clash was that the violence boiled over and made its way to Gurugram (Jain 2023), a prosperous business hub, right next to India's capital Delhi. All of this took place one month before India hosted the G20 summit in Delhi (Mogul and Farooqui 2023). Such is the sociopolitical climate of India and callous attitude of the administration, which enables such communal clashes to take place. India is home to some two hundred million Muslims, one of the world's largest Muslim populations but a minority in the predominantly Hindu country. Since India's independence, Muslims have often faced discrimination, prejudice, and violence, despite constitutional protections. It is clear that anti-Muslim sentiments have heightened under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has pursued a Hindu nationalist agenda since elected to power in 2014. Since Modi's reelection in 2019, the government has pushed controversial policies that critics say explicitly ignore Muslims' rights, restrict religious freedoms, and are intended to disenfranchise millions of Muslims (Maizland 2024).

In 2024, it was announced that the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra would be organised again. However, the 2024 iteration of the religious procession went through Nuh peacefully and the procession concluded without a single incident of communal violence. This paper aims to inquire into why no violence took place when the same procession was organised in 2024. Drawing on fact finding reports and interviews with the residents of Nuh, this paper looks into the main differences in the attitudes and manner in which the administration and the police operated, elements within the religious procession that were present in 2023 and not in 2024, and the ground level context that spurred communal tensions. Thus, it is important for us to understand how a religious procession, a ritual act which is supposed to be spiritual in nature, instead becomes a preliminary act of instigation which leads to communal clashes and has larger implications for social stratification and communalism.

---

1 In the Indian context, communalism is premised on a deliberate and calculated accentuation of religious and cultural differences between Hindus and minority religious groups, hostility towards the minority religious groups, and militant Hindu nationalism.
2 Yatra: A Journey, a procession, a pilgrimage, an expression which reflects an ancient Indian tradition that has emerged over millennia.
Yatra: an organised and often angry politico-religious march which has an enormous potential for turning incendiary and risks further widening the communal divide.

India's History of Syncretic Traditions: A Deterrent to Communalism

In the present, there are many attempts to rewrite Indian history in order to portray a clean divide between the various religions and communities that are present in India. This has been a project that the Indian Right-wing partakes in whenever it is in power. Thapar (2005) writes about how the central government under the rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the years of 1999 to 2004, attempted to rewrite and change history in textbooks. This was done with the intent of formulating an Indian identity which would be synonymous with the Hindu religion and would portray the minority Muslim and Christian religions as foreign influences which came to conquer the Indian landscape. Thapar writes about how these attempts to rewrite history are closely tied to the project of religious nationalism that the Indian Right-wing wants to spread across the masses. However, if we look at the history of India, we will see how syncretic traditions have been ever present and crucial in providing India its pluralistic identity.

Bayly (1985) writes about how during the 18th century, ruling classes engaged in local and state building to form relationships between the religious practices of major faiths. He gives the example of the Maratha rulers and how after 1740, they shared a lot of commonalities with the Mughal empire. The Maratha temples would incorporate a lot of Islamic characteristics in their architecture, the Maratha chieftains would be painted in court dress by Mughal artists, indicating that they were domesticated into the Mughal lifestyle. Muslim rulers would always try to keep close association with saints as their relationship with the sovereignty of the Khilafat was very distant. A similar tendency was witnessed among the Maratha chiefs, with saint Mansur Shah being a mentor (pir) of the great war-leader Mahaji Scindia, and also his chief companion. Barnett (1980) in his mapping of the history in North India as the ruling class would change, writes about how the Muslim rulers of emerging regional states would link themselves to the local temples and festivals, though this was done more discreetly than their Hindu counterparts. For example, the rulers of Awadh would rely on the donations given by the Vaishnavite priests and Gosains of Muttra and Ajodya as the court of Awadh would foster a Shia culture and thus, withdrew patronage from many of the Sunni shrines in the vicinity.

It is interesting to note that mughal rulers would give liberal grants for the construction of Hindu temples and had also adopted Hindu traditions. This did not stop here as the educational system that had been established by the mughal state would impart education relevant for both Muslim and Hindu students (Mustafa 2023). While the ruling class had their contribution, it was the emergence of an all-India military culture which was the most important factor in the formation of syncretic traditions. Bayly notes how many Muslims and Hindus in later mughal campaigns would make special provisions in order to facilitate prayers for both religions. He also notes how even though there were ideological movements within Islam in the later 18th century that were to some extent against syncretic practices, it was due to the comradeship present in the warrior culture of the army that any such movement had no effect.

It is not the case that the pre-colonial era was a time of complete peace and religious harmony; however, Bayly's arguments disprove those who would endorse the two-nation theory. This work suggests that there are preconditions in social structures for sustained communal violence. In the context of India, it would be the chance clashing of religious festivities or shifting in political power which would lead to larger communal conflict if it coincided with larger political and economic power. It was only then that social and economic groups would perceive themselves as members of larger communities.

Rise of Communalism: Classification of Communities and Politicization of Rituals

Before the entry of the British administration, there were low level conflicts which would not have larger connotations of community behind them. The British government needed to establish an administrative system which would enable them to rule the Indian subcontinent with the entirety of its diversity. It was the creation of the administrative apparatus that began the policy of divide and rule in order to exert firm control over the diverse and plural Indian population (Stewart 1951). Christopher (1988) shows how divide and rule was a policy that was used by the British in other colonies that they had in Asia and Africa. The enumeration and categorization of the Indian population as a part of the census exercise, solidified the divide between the Hindu and the Muslim, making them exclusive categories and erasing the rich history of syncretic traditions. Bhagat (2001) shows how sustained communal hatred rose after the categorization of Hindus and Muslims for the purpose of the census and for the effective governance of the British administration. The British administration ignored the heterogeneity that existed among the Hindu and Muslim communities and through the census project attempted to homogenize them. Bernard S. Cohn (1968) demonstrates to us that the use of the census by the British administration coupled with colonial anthropology, gave rise to communalism during the colonial period.

Frietag (1980), while studying the significance of religious symbols in the formation of Hindu communities in North India, writes about how in order to participate within British governmental structures, there were efforts to reconfigure the ideological definitions and organizational format of local groups. These efforts would allow for entry into the opportunities provided by the British administration. This led to explorations into the definition of communities during the late 19th century and during the beginning of the 20th century, when we see community identities that depended heavily on religious symbols. However, when the process of finding the common denominator among these identities in connection with their beliefs and practices started, it became possible to infuse political meanings into the communities that were formulated. It is the same political meaning, that Freitag (1980) writes created a demand for a separate state on the basis of religion, leading to the partition.

Thus, began the era of larger communities divided on the basis of religion, leading to relegation of syncretic traditions and local level identities. Larger levels of classifications arose and marked the end of a time when religious rituals or practices were performed specific to kinship units with now the rituals representing the larger community that was formulated. With rituals now not being located within a local context, conflicts that arose between members of a local space would now be connected to the communities they belonged to, Hindu or Muslim.

Historicizing Politicised Religious Processions in India: Their Origin and Purpose

The use of religious processions to incite conflict has been present in the Indian context since as early as 1893. The Ganpati festival processions are the first instance of how religious processions were weaponised in order to give rise to a form of "Hindu consciousness" and create social divide. Tejani (2007) writes about how the Ganpati festival's transformation was an attempt to reinvent and politicise an established ritual which would prevent Hindus from participating in festivals of the other community. The festival, apart from creating a separation based on religion, also severed long-standing economic ties shared within the space's members. Different Hindu traders who would interact with the Muslims, now have their attention devoted to the Ganpati festivals, creating insular communities. The main impact of the Ganpati festival, Tejani writes, was the creation of an ideological space that would allow for the rhetoric of inter-community hate and language that would identify the Muslims as outsiders to India. While the Ganpati festivals saw reduced participation over the years, the idea behind the festival has been revived and used to incite communal tensions among the masses.

We see that communalism manifests itself in the society through the use of religious festivals especially processions in order to intimidate the minority Muslim community. Ghanshyam Shah (1970) suggests that communal organisations such as the Rashtriya Samiti Sangh coordinated with the local administration and the police to organise and incite communal violence. Shah emphasises that the most disturbing manifestation was the use of religious processions in front of mosques and playing music filled with Islamophobic lyrics, either stating that India is a Hindu country or that the Muslims should vacate (Zaffar and Pandit 2022). The use of religious processions and music by communal organisations in order to intimidate or incite communal violence was also seen during the politicisation of the Ganpati festivals in the context of Maharashtra during the 1890s as written by Tejani (2007). Slowly, we see how processions are used more and more by political actors with the support of communal militant organisations as time passes by.

By contextualising the history of how politicised religious processions rose in prominence and were used by militant Hindutva groups, we can see how the word "yatra" now either has the connotation of a pilgrimage or procession carried out by a religious institution or an ethnoreligious demonstration by Hindu militant organisations (Jaffrelot 2009). Dr. Christophe Jaffrelot theorised about how the Hindu pilgrimage is used politically due to its territorial characteristics that allow for it to be viewed in ethnonationalist terms in the case of pan-Indian yatras. It is for this reason that majoritarian elements try to use processions for their own political ends and to spread communalism.

Jaffrelot (1998) describes Hindu processions as miniature level pilgrimages that are organised to worship a deity. The two important features that these processions display is the fact they seem to be socially inclusive, with members of all castes taking part in them, and that they aid in the process of demarcating space which can be labeled as exclusively belonging to the Hindu community. It is these features that make processions so attractive to militant Hindu groups as they view them with the potential of turning them into Hindu activist events, in the same manner that was done by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Jaffrelot (2009) historicizes various yatras that were employed by Hindu activists to first unite the Hindu nationalist movements and then employ the processions to foster communalism. He writes about the Ekatmata Yatra (March for Unity) that was carried out by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an offshoot of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, to ensure that the Hindu populations across areas would engage with each other and this would help in fostering unity. The two aims of the

Rath Yatra were to counter the increased divisions that were becoming apparent among the Hindus due to the recommendations given by the Mandal Commission, and to mobilize Hindus around the issue of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The overall aim was to effectively unite the Hindu community against their common enemy, the Muslims. There is a clear political purpose to the use of processions, whether in the context of the Ganpati festivals during the colonial period, or during the mid-1960s where Hindu processions were carried out in front of mosques or more recently when they were used by Hindu activists in order to demarcate space as exclusively theirs. In all different contexts, we see common features of provocation, violence, and anti-minority sentiment present.

Modern-Day Avatar of Religious Processions: Planned and Organised Violence

When the Hindu festivals of Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti were celebrated in 2022, the country again witnessed communal violence on a large scale. A detailed report prepared by Citizens & Lawyers Initiative (2023) on the clashes titled the "Routes of Wrath: Weaponizing Religious Processions" (The Hindu 2023) shows how communal violence occurred in nine states across India while there were instances of provocation and low-level violence in another three states. The violence was triggered in the conflict-affected areas due to the passage of religious processions, as part of the festivities of Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti, specifically through Muslim dominated neighborhoods. The report investigated the assaults and shows us that the prime factor for communal violence and riots that occurred in the context of religious processions was the routes that were chosen by the organisers of the processions. Iyer and Shrivastava (2017) show us that religious riots and conflicts have become a tool for political parties to create social divide thus influencing voter behaviour by raising communal issues.

In 2022, both the festivals of Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti took place during the month of Ramzan, a holy month for the Muslim community. The processions would target mosques during the times of prayer or during the time the fast was meant to be broken, playing loud hate-filled music in front of mosques and raising slogans. The timing would allow the procession mob to incite confrontation and conflict with a large gathering of people from the Muslim community. We see that the religious processions become what Gaborieau (1985) terms as "Rituals of Provocation" which led to communal violence. Peter van der Veer (1996) states that the riots that occur due to these rituals of provocation are integral in the construction of public space, which further define the conceptions of community within that area. The works of Gaborieau and van der Veer are extremely relevant to the ground reality which the Routes of Wrath report studies. The report indicates that the combination of the saffron mob

with weapons, raising of provocative slogans, and loud hate-filled music in Muslim-dominated areas incites violence. The garb of religious festivities is used as a cover to start communal violence which further leads to loss of property, as the shops, homes, and religious places of Muslims are targeted. We see how the public space is constructed in a manner that forces members of the Muslim community to live intimidated by the majority Hindu community.

The Aftermath of Religious Processions: Examining Fact Finding Reports

It is important to look at the aftermath of some of the recent religious processions that have taken place to understand how the minority community is not only affected during the procession, but also after. The main contention with how religious processions have become weaponized is not the violence and conflict that occurs but the capturing of spaces, villainization, and marginalisation of the Muslim minority community that follows.

The fact-finding report constituted by the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (2022) shows how in the case of Khargone (Centre for Study of Society and Secularism 2023) Madhya Pradesh, the communal violence was engineered by the Hindutva militant organisations and the state which had the BJP in power. After the processions, the blame for the communal clashes that took place was placed on the Muslim community by the police and the state administration. They are identified as the instigators of violence by the state administration, with the police filing cases against the Muslim minority members. The explanation given by the police is that it was members from the Muslim community who disturbed the procession. This logic ignores the communal antics of the procession and the fact that the procession passes through a Muslim-dominated neighbourhood with an intention of intimidation and provocation.

After the communal violence in Khargone due to the Ram Navami procession, the report shows that intense economic marginalisation of the Muslim community took place, and the community also suffered great losses in terms of property of both homes and commercial establishments. The state-led demolition drives that targeted the commercial establishments and homes of the Muslim community was an attack against the basic requirements of security, livelihood, and shelter making them economically vulnerable. The act of demolition drives became a form of state policy which acted as a form of collective punishment against the minority community.

Another example is of the fact-finding report of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (2023) related to the procession violence in Vadodara Gujarat, which shows

how during the communal clashes, the procession would purposefully pass through areas of the Muslim community. Members of the VHP who were questioned by the fact-finding team demanded why they should not be allowed to pass through Muslim areas. This tone suggests that there is a sense of entitlement the VHP has to the spaces occupied by the Muslim community even though they knew they did not have the permission to do so. The role of the police is also questionable—as they clearly sided with the state administration and those taking part in the procession. The police were not proactive in stopping the procession from diverting its route and played virtually no role in stopping the violence. Post the violence, the number of First Information Reports filed by the police against the Muslim community far outnumbered those filed against members of the procession who diverted from the route and played a huge role in the violence that unfolded.

Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra 2023: Context and Causes of Violence

The Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra was first organised by the VHP in 2021 (Akhtar 2023) with the agenda of reviving ancient Hindu temples and increasing religious tourism in the Mewat area (The Tribune 2023). The yatra begins from the Nalhar Mahadev Temple in Nuh, passing through the Jhir Temple and ending at the Radhe Krishna Mandir in Singhana. The immediate origin of the violence on July 31, 2023, is still contested by both sides. However, both sides agree that there had been an increase in animosity and buildup of tension among the communities before the yatra took place (Association for Protection of Civil Rights 2023). The fact-finding report of the Centre for Study of Secularism and Society (2023) goes into detail about how communalism was stoked before the yatra.

What is important to note is the absence of Nuh's Superintendent of Police when the violence broke out (The Wire 2023). The lack of police presence was one of the major reasons why such a large-scale incident took place. Due to the lack of police supervision, many incidents of provocation from the side of the religious procession went unchecked and eventually led to violence. As discussed earlier, the carrying of weapons and provocative slogans are features present in religious processions organised by militant Hindutva organisations such as the VHP and Bajrang Dal. The rise in communal tensions due to the video provocation by Monu Manesar, lack of police presence to maintain law and order, presence of weapons, and use of provocative slogans led to chaos which subsequently reached all the way to Gurugram. It is important to first understand what went wrong in 2023, in order to understand how the 2024 iteration of the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra was so different, with the differences being very apparent.

Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra 2024: Peaceful Procession under State Supervision

When it was announced that the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra would again take place in 2024, many were concerned due to what had transpired the year before. However, the seriousness with which the administration was monitoring the procession was apparent from the beginning. Before the yatra was to take place on July 22, both the Gurugram and Nuh police had announced that they would be using drones to monitor the yatra and to ensure that no communal escalation took place (The Tribune 2024). Considering what had happened the previous year and how social media was used to spread misinformation about what had taken place, the Haryana government had ordered the suspension of mobile internet and bulk SMS services in the Nuh District (The Hindu 2024). Additionally, over 2,000 personnel from the police and paramilitary were deployed in the region. From Sohna onwards, there were security checks after every 3 kms and armed security personnel were present in key junctions. Another key difference between 2023 and 2024 was the group in charge of organising the yatra. In 2024, the yatra was organised by a composite group consisting of members from the Khap Panchayat and religious leaders, instead of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal (Kissu 2024). The administration had also notified the organisers that permission had only been granted for the yatra and that DJs, loudspeakers, and weapons such as talwars and lathis were prohibited.

The yatris would travel to all three temples using buses, cars, and bikes as the total distance of the yatra, visiting all three temples starting from Nuh, would be around 80 kms.

Post Procession Discussions with Residents of Nuh

After the procession, a series of field interviews were conducted with residents of Nuh who witnessed both the processions of 2023 and 2024. The total sample size was 20 respondents, out of which 15 of the respondents were from the Muslim community and 5 were from the Hindu community. The snowball sampling technique was used to engage with the residents of Nuh in semi-structured interview format, allowing them to describe their observations and understanding of the situation. Through the discussions with the respondents, we see many themes arise in terms of how the residents of Nuh view the difference in how the state has responded to the processions, actions of the police, and their perception of the procession in general.

Nationalism as a Defense

In our conversation with the Muslim residents of Nuh after the commencement of the procession, what was very apparent was the guarded manner in which questions were answered. In the case of many respondents, when they were probed about who they felt was responsible for the violence that took place during the procession, the respondents blamed the organisers of the processions who belonged to armed militant organisations such as the Bajrang Dal and VHP. However, with this answer, statements would accompany which described the role of the Meo-Muslims during the independence struggle. The Muslim respondents would describe how the Meo-Muslims refused to transition to Pakistan during the time of partition even though they had the choice to do so. The fact that they did not do so is a display of nationalism. One of the respondents spoke about how the RSS and its members never had a test to display their dedication and commitment to the country, which the Meo-Muslims had done so during the time of partition.

Interviews made clear that nationalism was used as a defense to ward off allegations that Meo-Muslims were against the state and the religious practices of different communities. Nationalism was evoked as a defense and counter to the allegations of communalism that was being placed on the Meo-Muslims. The respondents argued that there was no case of them harbouring ill will against those who would carry out the procession, provided that it was not violent and targeting those who belonged to the Muslim community. Recounting what had taken place during the 2023 procession, one of the respondents spoke about how the loudspeakers were playing obnoxious music which was targeted against the Muslim community and he asked how it is that the Meo-Muslims were being labelled as anti-national and communal. It is clear that in the case of communal violence, the commitment of the Muslim community is always brought into question as part of right-wing anti-minority discourse. Thus, to counter this, the proof of burden of displaying one's nationalism falls on the Muslim community.

Brotherhood across Faiths within the Context of Nuh

When both the Muslim and Hindu respondents were asked about the nature of relationship that existed between the communities, both sides denied any case of ill will between the locals who were residing in Nuh. One of the respondents said that the beedi from which a Meo-Muslim smokes is the same from which a Hindu shares, brushing off any case of enmity that would be assumed would be present due to the scale of violence that took place. On the topic of brotherhood, one of the Hindu respondents stated that the Kanwar Yatra passed through Nuh every year and each year the Muslim residents would set up tents to welcome and provide hospitality to the yatris. He also added that the village had a culture of sharing festivals among its residents—during Eid Muslims would invite their Hindu neighbours, and the Hindus would do the same during the time of their festivities.

When one of the Muslim respondents was asked about whether there have been cases of segregation between the Muslim and Hindu community after the violence of 2023, he responded saying that the neighbour he had for 30 years (who was a Hindu) was still his neighbour, asking why would any conflict ever arise with his neighbour. While discussing the nature of violence that took place in 2023, a Hindu respondent spoke about how due to the violence he was not able to return to his residence. At this time, his neighbour had offered him refuge and told him to stay till the time the violence subsided. What was clear from the respondents was an emphasis on how the lives of the residents who stayed in Nuh was interconnected in terms of dependence from an economic and social perspective. Many of the residents of Nuh, though hailing from different religious backgrounds, were in business with each other in terms of working together and purchasing amenities or services from the other. Due to the economic and social interdependence, the prospect of enmity between the communities did not arise, even after the violence in 2023. This was also mainly due to the fact that both communities attributed the cause of violence to outsiders.

How Is the State Perceived? Who Is the State Safeguarding?

There was a marked difference in how the state was perceived in the responses that came from the members of the Hindu and Muslim community. While both the communities did not attribute the causes of violence to the residents of Nuh, who they believed was responsible for the violence was different. The Hindu respondents believed that the administration and police had not sufficiently curtailed those who aimed to disrupt the procession in 2023 and had pelted stones at yatris. They believed that the state had failed to stop those outsider Muslims who had come to Nuh with the objective of disrupting the procession due to it being linked with individuals such as Monu Manesar. The Muslim respondents blamed the state for allowing the procession to take place in the manner in which it did, being inflammatory and displaying communal characteristics that were extremely provocative in nature. They also blamed the state for being biased towards the members of the procession, as the whole onus of the violence was placed on members of the Muslim community. This was apparent in terms of who was arrested by the police and whose properties were demolished.

In the case of 2024, we do not see the Hindu or Muslim respondents viewing the state as an antagonist figure. Both communities were in praise of the manner in which the state had handled the event without any case of conflict or violence. When the respondents were asked who they felt the state was trying to safeguard and if they felt the state was

against either the procession or the Muslim residents of Nuh it had earlier defamed, both sides responded by saying that the state had simply done its duty this time in terms of handling the procession. This shows that neither of the communities viewed the state as an antagonistic actor due to the simple fact that it had carried out its duty without any bias or prejudice. Hence, we can see that the perception of the state and the characteristics attributed to it depend heavily on the manner in which the state operates and carries out its duties.

Religious Rituals in Public Spaces

When the Hindu respondents were asked about what they felt about the procession and whether it had any ritual significance to them, they agreed that the procession was fairly new in terms of its inception. During earlier times, a much smaller procession would be carried out only by the locals of Nuh towards the Shiv Mandir however, now it has become a large-scale event attracting many members from outside. Conversations with the residents of Nuh revealed that most of the Yatra participants came from states such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. While they were not opposed to the nature of the procession in its present form, they did agree to the fact that it was not an established ritual and had been taken over by organisations and individuals from outside of Nuh. When asked about the inflammatory slogans and songs that were used in 2023, one of the Hindu respondents responded by saying that there is no place for that in religious practice and that there were malicious elements present. He contrasted the 2023 procession with the one that took place the next year, saying that the change in the organizing committee made a huge difference in terms of the spirituality that was associated with the procession. He claimed that the 2023 procession felt more like a political rally in contrast to the procession of 2024, which paid heed to ritual significance and an actual celebration of God.

The Muslim respondents felt that the processions of 2023 and 2024 carried elements within that highlighted how it was not a pure religious ritual. In both years, with one being marked with violence, there were cases of sloganeering that was political in nature and had anti-Muslim sentiments. One of the Muslim respondents put emphasis on the fact that even if religious rituals or celebrations take place in public spaces, why should it have to attempt to antagonize members of a different community. During the discussion, he stated that it was clear from both the years, that due to this procession not being an established religious practice and due to it earlier being organised by the VHP and Bajrang Dal, it still had remnants of provocative attitudes from the outsider participants.

Conclusion

In the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra, the attitude of the state, involvement of militant Hindutva groups in the organisation of the procession, and presence of weapons and loudspeakers play a huge role in turning a religious procession into a communal clash. The most important role is the one played by the administration and the police, who decide through their vigilance whether violence will occur or not. In 2022, multiple processions took place in Telangana, and none resulted in violence unlike in the other states. The major reason for this being that the state had the political will to ensure that law and order would be maintained. The 2024 Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra is a good example of that. Apart from political will, another important development that took place in between both iterations of the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra of 2023 and 2024 was changing sociopolitical conditions due to the election results of 2024, where the Bharatiya Janata Party lost its outright majority in parliament. As the Routes of Wrath report (2023) shows, states where the Bharatiya Janata Party was in power saw higher rates of violence through religious processions and inaction from the side of the administration and the police. Further study could examine the connection between who is in power at the Centre and the way communal clashes take place through religious processions.

From interviews with the residents of Nuh following the procession, it is clear that the social and economic ties between the residents of Nuh had not been severed due to the processional violence. What is apparent is the role of outsiders who attempt to create discord and animosity in the name of religion. As Paul Brass theorised about Institutionalised Riot Systems (2004), we can see politicised processions being carried out in the name of religion which possess an agenda of impacting the social and economic ties between the residents of a certain area. While in the case of Nuh, this did not succeed, there are many other contexts where post violence the social relations between members of different communities have worsened.

It is apparent that violence during processions is rarely random or spontaneous. It is fostered and encouraged by many factors, the most prominent being the state and the agenda with which the procession is being carried out. We will end with a quote from Dr. Peter van de Veer (1996) in his paper "Riots and Rituals: The Construction of Violence and Public Space in Hindu Nationalism" where he writes, "Those who perpetrate the violence are often characterized as 'fanatic' members of mobs led astray by irresponsible leaders. It is this discourse which obfuscates the important connections between riots and rituals in the modern world." Looking at the case study of Nuh, it is clear that communal violence on scale only takes place due to the blessing of the state.

While the initial stages of violence may or may not have been initiated by the state, how communal clash progresses and its increase in scale is caused by the state taking an active decision whether to stop or facilitate incidents of violence. In the current sociopolitical context, it is in the BJP's favour to allow such incidents of violence to take place. Applying the theorization of Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar (2018) in the context of religious processions, the communal clashes post processions are used to maintain anti-Muslim prejudice among Hindus. Another additional element is the polarization of the Hindu community by portraying communal clashes during processions as events where the Muslim community is opposed to the religious sentiments and traditions of the majority Hindu community. This allows for the legitimisation of the majoritarian rule under the BJP and continues the cycle of violence to ensure their political might.

References

Association for Protection of Civil Rights. 2023. "Beyond the Surface: Exposing Systemic Violence and Police Complicity: A Fact-Finding Report on Nuh Violence." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://apcrindia.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Nuh-Mewat-Violnce-Fact-finding-Report.pdf).

Barnett, Richard B. 1980. *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720 - 1801*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bayly, Christopher A. 1985. "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860." *Modern Asian Studies* 19(2):177–203.

Brass, Paul R. 2004. *Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. 2023. "Vadodara Ram Navami Violence: Unabated Expression of Hegemony and Impunity Enjoyed by Hindu Right." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://csss-isla.com/fact-finding-reports/vadodara-ram-navami-violence-unabated-expression-of-hegemony-and-impunity-enjoyed-by-hindu-right/).

Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. 2023. "Khargone Violence—Fact finding report." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://csss-isla.com/fact-finding-reports/khargone-violence-fact-finding-report).

Chakraborty, Debdutta. 2023. "'Who Are Delhi Police to Stop Us': Ram Navami Rally Brings Back Memories of Violence in Jahangirpuri." *Print*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://theprint.in/india/who-are-delhi-police-to-stop-us-ram-navami-rally-brings-back-memories-of-violence-in-jahangirpuri/1484495/).

Christopher, Anthony J. 1988. "'Divide and Rule': The Impress of British Separation Policies." *Area* 20(3):233–40.

Citizens & Lawyers Initiative. 2023. "Routes of Wrath: Weaponizing Religious Processions; Communal Violence during Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti April 2022." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.livelaw.in/pdf_upload/routes-of-wrath-report-2023-2-465217.pdf).

Cohn, Bernard S. 1968. "Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture." in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*. Routledge.

Freitag, Sandria B. 1980. "Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a 'Hindu' Community." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22(4):597–625.

Gaborieau, Marc. 1985. "From Al-Beruni to Jinnah: Idiom, Ritual and Ideology of the Hindu-Muslim Confrontation in South Asia." *Anthropology Today* 1(3):7–14. doi: 10.2307/3033123.

The Hindu. 2023. "Clashes Break out between Two Groups during VHP Procession in Haryana's Nuh; Prohibitory Orders Imposed." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/haryana-nuh-gurugram-clashes-violence-july-31-2023/article67142736.ece).

The Hindu. 2023. "Report by Citizen-Lawyer Collective Highlights How Routes Chosen for Religious Processions Trigger Communal Riots." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/report-by-citizen-lawyer-collective-highlights-how-routes-chosen-for-religious-processions-trigger-communal-riots/article66661280.ece).

The Hindu. 2024. "Braj Mandal Yatra Begins in Haryana's Nuh Amid Tight Security." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/braj-mandal-yatra-begins-in-haryanas-nuh-amid-tight-security/article68431643.ece).

Hindusthan Samachar English. 2024. "Braj Mandal Yatra Takes Place Peacefully in Gurugram and Nuh, Muslims Shower Flowers." *Hindusthan Samachar English*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://english.hindusthansamachar.in/Encyc/2024/7/22/Braj-Mandal-Yatra-took-place-peacefully-in-Gurugra.php).

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 1998. *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India*. London: C. Hurst.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2009. "The Hindu Nationalist Reinterpretation of Pilgrimage in India: The Limits of Yatra Politics." *Nations and Nationalism* 15(1):1–19. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00364.x.

Jain, Rupam. 2023. "Hindu-Muslim Riots Expose Risk at Major Indian Business Hub." *Reuters*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.reuters.com/world/india/hindu-muslim-riots-expose-risk-major-indian-business-hub-2023-08-03/).

Kissu, Sagrika. 2024. "Internet Snapped, No VHP or Bajrang DAL in Organising Committee. Nuh Ready for Jalabhishek Yatra. *Print*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://theprint.in/india/internet-snapped-no-vhp-or-bajrang-dal-in-organising-committee-nuh-ready-for-jalabhishek-yatra/2184293/).

Maizland, Lindsay. 2024. "India's Muslims: An Increasingly Marginalized Population." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/india-muslims-marginalized-population-bjp-modi).

Mogul, Rhea, and Sania Farooqui. 2023. "Deadly Communal Violence Flares in India a Month before World Leader Summit." *CNN*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/02/india/india-train-shooting-communal-violence-gurugram-intl-hnk).

Mustafa, Faizan. 2023. "Islamic Law State Policies, Sharia, and Promotion of Syncretic Practices." *Wire. South Asian Islam*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://thewire.in/security/nuh-police-chief-on-leave-when-communal-violence-began-transferred-to-bhiwani/?mid_related_new).

Sadia, Akhtar. 2023. "Haryana Violence: An Age-Old Yatra Exemplifying Harmony." *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/gurugram-news/peaceful-coexistence-hindu-and-muslim-communities-unite-during-mewat-s-84-kos-yatra-in-haryana-101691088038558.html).

Shah, Ghanshyam. 1970. "Communal Riots in Gujarat: Report of a Preliminary Investigation." *Economic and Political Weekly* 5(3/5):187–200.

Stewart, Neil. 1951. "Divide and Rule: British Policy in Indian History." *Science and Society* 49-57.

Tejani, Shabnum. 2007. *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890–1950*. Indiana University Press.

Thapar, Romila. 2005. "Politics and the Rewriting of History in India." *Critical Quarterly* 47:195–203.

The Hindu. 2023. "Clashes Break out between Two Groups during VHP Procession in Haryana's Nuh; Prohibitory Orders Imposed." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/haryana-nuh-gurugram-clashes-violence-july-31-2023/article67142736.ece).

The Hindu. 2023. "Report by Citizen-Lawyer Collective Highlights How Routes Chosen for Religious Processions Trigger Communal Riots." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/report-by-citizen-lawyer-collective-highlights-how-routes-chosen-for-religious-processions-trigger-communal-riots/article66661280.ece).

The Hindu. 2024. "Braj Mandal Yatra Begins in Haryana's Nuh Amid Tight Security." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/braj-mandal-yatra-begins-in-haryanas-nuh-amid-tight-security/article68431643.ece).

The Tribune. 2023. "Started as Pilgrimage, Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra Turned into Power Show in Last Three Years." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/started-as-pilgrimage-brajmandal-jalabhishek-yatra-turned-into-power-show-in-last-three-years-531437/).

The Tribune. 2024. "Officials to Use Drones to Monitor Brij Mandal Jalabhishek Yatra at Sohna." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/officials-to-use-drones-to-monitor-brij-mandal-jalabhishek-yatra-at-sohna-641757/).

The Wire. 2022. "'Religious Freedom Worsened': US Body Names India as "Country of Particular Concern." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://thewire.in/communalism/religious-freedom-worsened-us-body-names-india-as-country-of-particular-concern).

The Wire. 2023. "Nuh Police Chief, on Leave When Communal Violence Began, Transferred to Bhiwani." Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://thewire.in/security/nuh-police-chief-on-leave-when-communal-violence-began-transferred-to-bhiwani).

Van der Veer, Peter. 1996. "Riots and Rituals: The Construction of Violence and Public Space in Hindu Nationalism." in *Riots and Pogroms*. New York University Press.

Zaffar, Hanan and Danish Pandit. 2022. "Hindutva Pop: The Soundtrack to India's Anti-Muslim Movement." *TIME*. Retrieved May 4, 2025 (https://time.com/6242156/hindutva-pop-music-anti-muslim-violence-india/).

RASHAD ULLAH KHAN is a Senior Research Fellow at CDPP. Previously, he worked as an Academic Associate at the Kautilya School of Public Policy. He completed his Master's in Women's Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. His interests lie in religiosity, social movements and gender. He has co-authored a report for Anveshi, Research Centre for Women's Studies, on the impact of their bilingual textbook on gender "Towards a World of Equals" in private engineering colleges of Telangana. Rashad has also presented his paper " Shrinking Spaces: Impact of Hindutva Populism on the Vulnerable " at Populism and Populist Politics In South Asia Conference organized by Calcutta Research Group/Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. He finished his Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES: KOZE KREW-FRIENDSHIP IN VIRTUAL SPACES

by NISA LINDA ZAMORA

Introduction: The Rise of Virtual Communities and Social Connection in the Digital Age

In today's interconnected world, the internet has revolutionized how people form and maintain social relationships. A staggering 59% of the global population now uses social media, spending an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes per day on these platforms, as reported by DataReportal (2023) in their digital overview report. This trend is supported by research indicating that social media usage has become an integral part of daily life, with significant implications for social interaction and community formation (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This digital transformation has given rise to virtual communities - groups of people with shared interests who interact primarily through computer-mediated communication, as noted by Rheingold (1993) in his seminal work on virtual communities.

The Koze Krew, founded in 2014 by social media influencer Lyn Nichol, represents a fascinating case study of a small, close-knit virtual community moderated by an influential person. This members-only group was specifically chosen for analysis due to its unique characteristics: a paid membership model, multi-platform presence, and focus on nurturing deep connections among members. The community aims to create a digital "cafe" atmosphere, fostering intimate conversations and a sense of belonging. By examining the Koze Krew, we can gain valuable insights into how meaningful social connections are formed and maintained in private virtual communities moderated by influential figures.

This study explores how members of the Koze Krew build meaningful relationships and strengthen social ties through online interactions. By examining the community's activities, communication patterns, and members' perceptions, this research contributes to our understanding of social connection in digital spaces.

Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How do live events and platform features facilitate the development of strong ties among members in virtual communities moderated by influential figures?
2. What role does advice-sharing play in fostering connections within virtual communities moderated by influential figures?
3. How does the interest-based nature of virtual communities moderated by influential figures contribute to social bonding among members?

To frame this investigation, it is crucial to understand key concepts like tie strength, parasocial relationships, and strong ties in virtual environments. Tie strength, as defined by Granovetter (1973), refers to the level of connection and support people share within their social network. Strong ties are characterized by emotional attachment, trust, and the expectation of mutual support. In the context of virtual communities, these strong ties develop through consistent digital interactions, shared experiences in virtual events, and the exchange of personal information.

Parasocial relationships, a concept originally developed by Horton and Wohl (1956) in the context of television viewership, have gained new relevance in the age of social media. These one-sided connections that media users form with media personalities can significantly influence member engagement and community dynamics. In the Koze Krew, members may develop parasocial relationships with Lyn Nichol, the community's founder and primary content creator, which could play a crucial role in shaping the community's culture and interactions. Parasocial relationships are characterized by their one-sided nature, where the audience perceives intimacy with the media figure despite limited direct interaction. This perception of intimacy can be heightened in online communities where influencers engage directly with their followers, creating a sense of shared experience and personal connection.

By investigating these aspects of the Koze Krew, this research aims to deepen our understanding of how meaningful social connections can be fostered in digital spaces, contributing to broader discussions on the nature of community and relationships in digital spaces. The findings of this study have implications not only for scholars of digital sociology and communication but also for community managers, social media strategists, and anyone interested in the evolving landscape of human connection in digital spaces.

Literature Review: Understanding Virtual Communities and Online Social Connections

The study of virtual communities is relevant in sociology because it helps us understand how technology is transforming traditional notions of community and social bonding. Virtual communities offer a unique lens through which to examine how people form and maintain connections in the absence of physical proximity. This field of study is crucial for understanding the evolving nature of social interaction and its implications for social support, identity formation, and community building. As DataReportal (2023) highlights, the digital landscape continues to expand, with more people engaging in online interactions than ever before.

Virtual Communities: Definitions and Characteristics

Virtual communities, as defined by Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005), are groups of people who interact primarily through computer-mediated communication and who identify with and develop feelings of belonging and attachment to each other and to the community as a whole, while sharing common interests, goals, or practices. This definition expands on Rheingold's (1993) earlier work by emphasizing the emotional and identity components of community membership in online spaces. Virtual communities differ from traditional, geographically-bound communities in several key ways:

1. Absence of physical proximity: Members interact without being physically present in the same location.
2. Asynchronous communication: Interactions can occur at different times, allowing for flexibility in participation.
3. Reduced social cues: The lack of face-to-face interaction can limit nonverbal communication.
4. Increased anonymity: Members may choose to reveal varying degrees of personal information.

However, virtual communities also share similarities with traditional communities, such as the development of shared norms and values, which is supported by research indicating that virtual communities often establish norms around communication etiquette and shared values related to their common interests (Wellman and Gulia 1999). For instance, virtual communities often enforce rules about respectful dialogue and inclusivity, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and community identity, as discussed by Preece (2000).

Friendship and Parasocial Relationships in Online Spaces

Online friendships can develop through various mechanisms, including shared interests, mutual self-disclosure, and frequent interactions. Parks and Floyd (1996) found that relationships formed online often migrate to other settings, including face-to-face meetings, demonstrating the potential for deep and lasting connections.

Parasocial relationships, originally conceptualized by Horton and Wohl (1956) in the context of television viewership, have gained new relevance in the age of social media. Ballantine and Martin (2005) explored how these one-sided attachments manifest in online communities, finding that they can significantly influence member engagement and loyalty. In the context of the Koze Krew, Lyn Nichol's direct interactions with members through live streams and comments can foster a sense of parasocial connection, enhancing community engagement and loyalty. Rheingold's (1993) theory on virtual communities also emphasizes the importance of sustained interactions in forming personal relationships, which can be applied to understanding how parasocial relationships evolve over time.

Homophily and Tie Strength in Virtual Environments

Homophily, the tendency for individuals to associate with similar others, plays a significant role in virtual community formation and maintenance. Shared interests often serve as the primary basis for homophilous groupings in online spaces. While McPherson et al. (2001) discuss homophily in traditional contexts, it is important to note that in virtual environments, shared interests rather than demographic characteristics are often the primary drivers of homophily.

Tie strength in virtual environments can be assessed through factors such as frequency of interaction, reciprocity, and emotional intensity. Haythornthwaite (2002) suggests that strong ties in online spaces may develop differently than in face-to-face contexts, with text-based communication and shared virtual experiences replacing physical proximity.

Computer-Mediated Communication and Social Bonding

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has unique characteristics that influence social bonding. The reduced social presence in CMC can lead to more open self-disclosure (Joinson 2001). Additionally, CMC can facilitate more intense, idealized perceptions of others, known as the hyperpersonal effect (Walther 1996). Social information processing theory suggests that relationships develop over time

as individuals exchange social information through available channels (Walther 1992). These features of CMC can contribute to the development of strong social ties in virtual communities, despite the absence of face-to-face interaction.

Methods: A Digital Ethnography of the Koze Krew

This study employed a digital ethnographic approach to investigate the Koze Krew virtual community. Digital ethnography, as described by Hine (2000), adapts traditional ethnographic methods to online environments, allowing researchers to immerse themselves in digital cultures and observe social interactions in virtual spaces. This method was chosen for its ability to provide rich, contextual data about the community's social dynamics and members' experiences (Hine 2000).

Content analysis was a key component of this study, involving the systematic examination of posts, comments, and interactions across platforms to identify recurring themes, communication patterns, and evidence of strong tie formation. A survey was also conducted to gather demographic information and insights into members' experiences within the community, using their Discord page, YouTube, and Instagram for outreach. The survey data was supplemented with information from the community's Google Form, Discord page, YouTube page (@ KalynsCoffeeTalk), and Instagram (@kalynnicholson13).

The research was conducted over a six-week period from August 15, 2022, through September 28, 2022. During this time, I engaged in both observational and participatory fieldwork across various platforms where the Koze Krew community interacts. These demographic figures were derived from a combination of community reports and survey data collected during the study, including data from the Koze Krew's public profiles on Discord and YouTube (@KalynsCoffeeTalk), as well as Instagram (@kalynnicholson13).

Community Selection and Characteristics

The Koze Krew was specifically chosen for this study due to its unique characteristics:

1. Membership model: The community requires a $5 monthly fee for access to bonus perks, potentially influencing member commitment and participation, as detailed in their Google Form survey and YouTube membership page (@ KalynsCoffeeTalk).

2. Multi-platform presence: The community interacts across several digital spaces, including YouTube, Instagram, Discord, and Zoom, providing diverse contexts for observation.
3. Focus on connection: The community's stated goal of creating a "digital cafe" atmosphere aligns with the research questions about fostering strong ties in virtual spaces, as communicated through their Discord server and Instagram page (@kalynnicholson13).

The Koze Krew comprises approximately 500 active members from countries spanning North America, Europe, Asia, and other regions. Over 80% of members identify as female, with at least 75% under the age of 35. The remaining members include individuals who are 35 and older, with smaller percentages identifying as male (15%) or non-binary/gender non-conforming (5%).

Findings: Strong Ties and Social Connection in the Koze Krew

Live Events and Platform Features Facilitating Strong Ties

The Koze Krew utilizes various platform features and live events to create an environment conducive to forming strong ties among members. Drawing on Baym's (2010) seven key characteristics of social media, we can analyze how these elements contribute to fostering intimacy and social connection.

Interactivity is a crucial aspect of the Koze Krew community, particularly evident in their Discord server and live Zoom events. For example, during a "Learning to Let Go and Evolve" event, members actively engaged in chat, sharing personal experiences and offering support to one another. This real-time interaction closely mimics face-to-face conversations, allowing for immediate feedback and emotional connection. However, unlike traditional face-to-face interactions, online interactivity relies on text-based communication and shared virtual experiences to convey emotions and build relationships (Biocca, Harms, and Burgoon 2003).

Survey data supports this observation, with 35 out of 40 respondents agreeing that attending community live Zoom events felt comparable to hanging out with close friends in real life. One participant noted, "I love how we can all connect during live events. It feels like we're all in the same room, even though we're miles apart." This sentiment highlights how the Koze Krew's use of video-based platforms like Zoom helps restore social cues, such as facial expressions and voice tone, which are essential for building strong ties.

Advice-Sharing and Personal Relationship Formation

The Koze Krew's emphasis on deep conversations and mutual support plays a crucial role in fostering strong ties among members. This aligns with Rheingold's (1993) theory that social aggregations in virtual communities emerge when people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships. Rheingold's theory suggests that these discussions, which foster emotional connections and shared understanding, are essential for developing meaningful relationships in online spaces.

A prime example of this dynamic was observed in a discussion thread on the Discord server, where a member named Ana shared her concerns about moving to a new city after graduation. The supportive responses she received, including an offer of friendship from a local member, demonstrate how computer-mediated conversations can lead to the formation of strong ties. Ana posted, "*Hey friends! So I accepted a job offer in Portland, Oregon, after I graduate in May 2023. I am happy about my decision, but I guess I'm already nervous about moving so far away to a place I've never been.*" Mel, another member, responded with empathy and an offer of support, "*I live just across the bridge in Vancouver and my sister lived there for several years so if you need a friend or help hit me up!*" This exchange exemplifies how advice-sharing and emotional support can foster meaningful connections in virtual communities.

Interest-Based Community and Social Bonding

The Koze Krew's focus on specific shared interests plays a significant role in attracting like-minded individuals and fostering social bonds. This phenomenon can be understood through McPherson's (2001) theory of homophily, which posits that similarity breeds connection.

Survey data from Koze members supports the importance of shared interests in community bonding. Respondents frequently cited the desire to connect with like-minded individuals as a primary motivation for joining and remaining in the community. One respondent noted, "*I joined because of the like-minded people and the nice environment. It helps me get out of my comfort zone and put myself out there.*" Another member emphasized, "*I love the sense of community/belonging, attending events, and interacting with like-minded others.*" These comments highlight how the shared interests and values within the Koze Krew create a sense of belonging and foster strong ties among members.

Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of the Koze Krew virtual community elucidates the intricate tapestry of human connection in the digital age, revealing how strong ties can flourish even in the absence of physical proximity. By examining the interplay of live events, shared interests, and supportive interactions, we've uncovered a nuanced portrait of online relationship formation that challenges traditional notions of community. The Koze Krew's success in fostering deep, meaningful connections across geographical boundaries not only provides a blueprint for other virtual communities but also prompts us to reconsider the very nature of intimacy and belonging in our increasingly interconnected world. As we navigate the evolving landscape of human interaction, the insights gained from this research invite us to imagine new possibilities for global empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and the cultivation of diverse, yet close-knit social networks. The virtual bonds formed within communities like the Koze Krew may well be the harbingers of a more connected, empathetic global society – one where meaningful relationships transcend the limitations of physical space, offering new avenues for personal growth, mutual support, and collective wisdom. As we look to the future, we must ask ourselves: How might these virtual communities reshape our understanding of social capital, and what implications does this have for the way we build and sustain relationships in both online and offline spaces?

Limitations and Future Studies

This study of the Koze Krew virtual community provides valuable insights into the formation of strong ties in online spaces, but it also has several limitations that should be acknowledged. One of the primary limitations is the sample size and the specific context of the community. The Koze Krew is a relatively small, closed community with a predominantly female membership, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to larger or more diverse virtual communities. Future research could explore how different demographic compositions influence the dynamics of virtual communities and the formation of strong ties.

Another limitation is the potential for self-selection bias, as members of the Koze Krew are likely individuals who are particularly motivated to form online connections. This could skew the results, as the study may not accurately represent the experiences of those who are less inclined to engage in virtual communities. Additionally, the observer effect could have influenced participants' behavior, as they were aware of being studied. To mitigate these biases, future studies could employ more diverse sampling methods and consider using longitudinal designs to track changes over time.

Future studies could also explore comparative analyses of different types of virtual communities, such as male-dominated or mixed-gender communities, to examine how gender dynamics influence online relationship formation. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial in tracking the evolution of ties within virtual communities over extended periods, providing insights into how relationships develop and change over time. Furthermore, investigating how participation in virtual communities impacts members' offline social networks and well-being could offer valuable insights into the broader social implications of online interactions.

References

Ballantine, Paul W., and Brett A. Martin. 2005. "Forming Parasocial Relationships in Online Communities." *Advances in Consumer Research* 32:197-201.

Baym, Nancy K. 2010. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Biocca, Frank, Chad Harms, and Judee K. Burgoon. 2003. "Toward a More Robust Theory and Measure of Social Presence: Review and Suggested Criteria." *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments* 12(5):456–80.

DataReportal. 2023. "Digital 2023: Global Overview." Retrieved from https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report

Dennis, Alan R., Sridar K. Pootheri, and Vijaya L. Natarajan. 1998. "Lessons from the Early Adopters of Web Groupware." *Journal of Management Information Systems* 14(4):65–86.

Ellison, Nicole B., Charles Steinfield, and Cliff Lampe. 2007. "The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends:' Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4):1143-1168.

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360-1380.

Haythornthwaite, Caroline. 2002. "Strong, Weak, and Latent Ties and the Impact of New Media." *The Information Society* 18(5):385-401.

Hine, Christine. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.

Horton, Donald, and R. Richard Wohl. 1956. "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance." *Psychiatry* 19(3):215-229.

Joinson, Adam N. 2001. "Self-disclosure in Computer-mediated Communication: The Role of Self-awareness and Visual Anonymity." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 31(2):177-192.

Kaplan, Andreas M., and Michael Haenlein. 2010. "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media." *Business Horizons* 53(1):59-68.

Krasnova, Hanna, Oliver Günther, Heiko Spiekermann, and Ksenia Koroleva. 2016. "The Role of Social Networks in Marketing, Customer Retention, and Quality of Life in Virtual Worlds." *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 20(2):204–230.

McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27:415-444.

Parks, Malcolm R., and Kory Floyd. 1996. "Making Friends in Cyberspace." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1(4):JCMC144.

Porter, Constance Elise. 2004. "A Typology of Virtual Communities: A Multi-Disciplinary Foundation for Future Research." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10(1).

Preece, Jenny. 2000. *Online Communities: Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Preece, Jenny, and Diane Maloney-Krichmar. 2005. "Online Communities: Design, Theory, and Practice." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10(4):JCMC1044.

Rheingold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Walther, Joseph B. 1992. "Interpersonal Effects in Computer-Mediated Interaction: A Relational Perspective." *Communication Research* 19(1):52-90.

Walther, Joseph B. 1996. "Computer-Mediated Communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal, and Hyperpersonal Interaction." *Communication Research* 23(1):3-43.

Wellman, Barry, and Milena Gulia. 1999. "*Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities.*" Pp. 331-366 in *Networks in the Global Village*, edited by B. Wellman. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
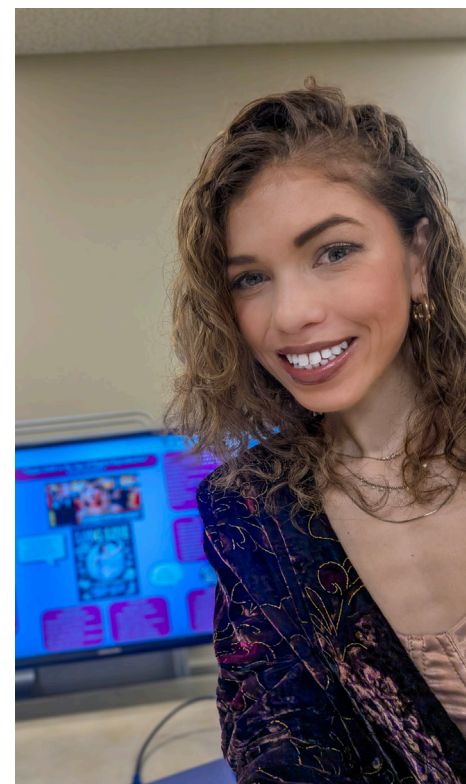
NISA LINDA ZAMORA is a sociologist, digital ethnographer, and emerging scholar whose work explores the complexities of identity, community, and social connection in online environments. Nisa brings a multidisciplinary perspective to the study of virtual communities, drawing on insights from sociology, media studies, and digital anthropology. Their research interests center on the formation of friendship and intimacy in digital spaces, the role of technology in shaping contemporary social life, and the ways in which marginalized groups use online platforms to build support networks and foster belonging. Beyond research, Nisa is committed to public sociology and the democratization of knowledge, regularly engaging with broader audiences through workshops, talks, and collaborative projects. Nisa is obtaining her Bachelor of Arts in American studies and media studies from the University of California, Berkeley, and aspires to contribute to a more inclusive and critically engaged understanding of digital society-one that recognizes the transformative power of connection, especially for those facing adversity.

BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THIRD PLACES: INSIGHTS FROM A GENTRIFYING NEIGHBORHOOD IN ROTTERDAM

by STEFAN ADAMSON

Abstract

This paper presents the result of an explorative study of bridging social capital creation in third places in the context of the gentrifying neighborhood of Katendrecht, Rotterdam. The research analyzed the contextual implications of gentrification for third places, identified third places facilitating diverse encounters, and conducted an in-depth case study of one selected third place, a neighborhood bar called Café Norge. Using methodological triangulation, including interviews and participant observation, the study found that state-led gentrification has radically transformed Katendrecht's social fabric and third places, resulting in segregated lifestyles and limited interaction between higher-income gentrifiers and working-class long-term residents. The neighborhood bar Café Norge, however, despite its limitations, emerged as a unique space where positive, diverse interactions might foster bridging cohesion between long-term and gentrifier residents. Moreover, individuals access intangible resources such as emotional support and information through bridging connections established in Norge. However, given the superficial nature of connections, access to tangible resources remains limited. The findings indicate the complexity of social interactions in transforming neighborhoods and add many nuances to the academic discourse.

Introduction

Gentrification has been a popular policy instrument for achieving urban regeneration worldwide. One central element is introducing middle- and higher-income people in deprived neighborhoods to deconcentrate poverty. This social mixing has widely been justified with livability concerns, assuming it improves the living conditions in the neighborhood (Lees 2008). State-led social mixing in the Netherlands, popular since the 1990s, aims to foster bridging social capital by promoting interactions between disadvantaged and affluent residents (Kleinhans, Priemus, and Engbersen 2007).

Advocates argue that physical proximity in mixed neighborhoods fosters heterogeneous interaction, addressing "network poverty" by enabling resource-poor individuals to access diverse, resource-rich networks (Chaskin and Joseph 2010; Halstead, Deller, and Leyden 2022). However, much research has proven limited everyday social interaction in mixed-income neighborhoods (Bolt and van Kempen 2013). There is sparse evidence that mixing policies improves the life chances of the lower-income group, and they have ambiguous effects on social capital (Lees 2008). More recent research indicates that certain neighborhood settings allow for heterogeneous interactions, resulting in bridging capital (Nast and Blokland 2014; Peterson 2017). Many of these settings are related to the third place concept, coined by Oldenburg (1989) for a broad range of informal gathering spaces (Littman 2022). Third places can be the physical arena for bridging capital creation since their characteristics theoretically enable diverse interactions in a hierarchy-free and enjoyable manner (Yuen and Johnson 2017).

However, there is a general lack of knowledge about social interaction dynamics in third places and their outcomes (Hickman 2012; Littman 2022), and more specifically on how exactly and by what mechanism social capital is created for low-income populations in these settings (Custers and Engbersen 2022). Moreover, Dutch social mixing strategies are closely linked with gentrification (Kleinhans, Priemus, and Engbersen 2007), whereas little is known about how gentrification shapes third places (Mullenbach and Baker 2018).

The case study neighborhood Katendrecht is located in Rotterdam, a highly diverse city with poverty concentration (Arkins and French 2024), especially in its South, where old-industrial neighborhoods face transformation challenges (Kleinhans 2019). Katendrecht's built environment and population, including third places, have transformed radically in the recent decades through state-led gentrification, from being a red-light district with a high poverty rate to becoming "a hip and trendy destination for the middle class" (Doucet and Koenders 2018:3639). This raised the following research question: *If and how do third places in Katendrecht influence the formation of bridging social capital within the context of state-led gentrification?*

It was answered by first understanding the contextual implications of state-led gentrification for bridging capital formation in third places on the neighborhood scale. Then, the research scaled down to assess the diversity and interaction patterns in selected places. By focusing on one in-depth case, bridging capital formation was explored thoroughly.

Theoretical Framework

This section provides an overview of the academic discussion around the key concepts and their interlinkages.

Gentrification

Gentrification is "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use" (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2010:XV). The process of gentrification can be initiated generally by two drivers, the private market or the state, in the form of local or national government to "civilize" disadvantaged neighborhoods by introducing middle-class residents (Uitermark, Duyvendak, and Kleinhans 2007). The state seduces private developers and induces housing associations to invest in ownership-dominated, higher-quality housing. It also includes strong interventions in the housing stock, including the demolition of social rental housing (Kleinhans, Priemus, and Engbersen 2007). These measures and additional state-led flagship projects were applied in Katendrecht and resulted in a radical transformation of the housing stock (Stouten 2017) and a sharp rise in property values (Gemeente Rotterdam 2023). However, demolition was limited in Katendrecht, and new housing was mainly constructed on brownfields, which aligns with the Dutch 'mild' gentrification, preventing direct displacement (Doucet and Koenders 2018).

Gentrification changes the population. New residents are active players; hippies function as pioneers for the following middle class, which differ from the original working-class population in their lifestyles and more progressive values resulting in these neighborhoods' "embourgeoisement" (Ley 2001:8). Gentrification leads to social restructuring and increasingly polarized cities, spatially expressed in clusters based on class and ethnicity (Ley and Dobson 2008). Perception and acceptance of values, norms, and behaviors change, potentially leading to tensions between old and new residents caused by cultural and socio-economic differences (Goodchild and Cole 2001; Freeman 2006). Dekker and Bolt (2005) argue that the bigger the differences between long-term and gentrifiers, the more difficult it is to establish social bonds, which are necessary for bridging capital creation.

Katendrecht's population has almost doubled since 2008, becoming younger, increasingly Dutch in ethnic composition, and having higher income and education levels (Gemeente Rotterdam 2023).

Bridging Social Capital

Putnam (2001) defines social capital as "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 2001:13). He distinguishes between bonding capital within a homogenous group and bridging capital spanning across heterogeneous groups, acknowledging that boundaries are fluid. Bridging social capital emerges from loose social connections between people of different backgrounds, often referred to as weak ties formed through their interaction (Granovetter 1973). Heterogeneity encompasses differences in socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, or age (Yuen and Johnson 2017). The benefits of bridging capital can be categorized as societal and individual (Putnam 2001). At the societal level, diverse social networks promote social cohesion across differences by fostering belonging, trust, mutual respect, and solidarity, resulting in community harmony and stability (Putnam 2001). Research in the Dutch context proved increased neighborhood cohesion, a feeling of belonging, and perceived safety (Kleinhans, Priemus, and Engbersen 2007; Van Eijk 2010). Halstead, Deller, and Leyden (2022) argue that bridging capital fosters a shared identity and common purpose. Other scholars found a positive correlation between bridging capital and civic engagement (Putnam 2001; Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Van Eijk 2010).

The second group of benefits relates to individuals accessing resources through reciprocal acts based on the expectation that individuals will reciprocate acts of cooperation, support, and kindness. When these relations are of a bridging nature - connecting individuals across different groups – they enable access to a broader array of tangible and intangible resources beyond the close-knit bonding networks (Putnam 2001). Commonly mentioned intangible resources are emotional support (Halstead, Deller, and Leyden 2022) and access to new information and contacts, which can lead to job or educational opportunities or political alliances, ultimately improving social mobility (Granovetter 1973). Szreter and Woolcock (2004) theorize bridging capital to enable broader access to public services and, thus, counteract social inequalities. Lin (1999) suggests that bridging ties enhances individuals' problem-solving abilities by providing access to new information and ways of thinking. Poortinga (2012) explains these benefits with the ability of weak ties to promote novel information faster than strong ties, which may constrain the information flow due to rigid social norms. Additionally, bridging capital is associated with higher community resilience, as it enables quick access to useful information and fosters collective action and innovation (Szreter and Woolcock 2004).

Weak ties are more frequent than strong ties and depend more on heterogenous face-to-face encounters (Putnam 2001). Repetitive, meaningful interactions around a shared interest are critical factors for bridging social capital creation, as emphasized by literature (Wise 2009; Peterson 2017). Commonalities such as ethnicity, birthplace, passions, or point of life facilitate its constitution (Wise 2009). Research also suggests bridging capital creation requires time (Atkinson and Kintrea 2000; Arısoy and Paker 2019). Audunson (2005) discusses third places as facilitators for bridging capital because they provide these face-to-face meeting spaces, enabling low-intense and positive interaction "across social, ethnic, generational, and value-based boundaries" (Audunson 2005:436).

Third Places

Ray Oldenburg (1989) coined the term third place for "a great variety of public spaces that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of the home and work" (Oldenburg 1989:16). He defined third places as accessible for all with low economic barriers, providing a neutral and hierarchy-free space, and having a playful, positive atmosphere. Conversation is the main activity, enhanced by regular attendants providing familiar faces and welcoming newcomers. Through this, third places host diverse attendants and enable heterogeneous encounters not found in formal settings (Oldenburg 1989). Yuen and Johnson (2017) highlight two outstandingly important characteristics that enable diverse interaction: Inclusiveness in the sense of accessibility for all and that consumption is not the dominant activity.

Research indicates third places' importance for across-group encounters in diverse societies with beneficial outcomes for individuals and overall society, such as increased well-being and social cohesion (Purnell 2015; Littman 2022). Williams and Hipp (2019) explain how third places usually offer a common object that facilitates the interaction of strangers. Although Oldenburg (1989) considers the role of a host limited, some research on bridging capital creation in third places has demonstrated the importance of "organizers" for beneficial interaction (Peterson 2017; Custers and Engbersen 2022). These individuals may function as social brokers, individuals often linked to a specific place, connecting informally "socially disparate segments of a population" (Stovel and Shaw 2012:153).

Synthesizing Concepts

Third places enable and facilitate diverse interactions, resulting in bridging capital (Audunson 2005). However, state-led gentrification contextually shapes them. By changing the demographic composition, gentrification influences the potential users of third places, frequently transforming them toward a higher-income clientele and endangering their diversity (Karsten, Kamphuis, and Remeijnse 2015; Martin 2022).

In contrast, Ernst and Doucet's (2014) findings from Amsterdam indicate that brown, working-class pubs function as safe havens for long-term residents, remaining mostly unchanged in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Mainly long-term inhabitants frequent these pubs; nevertheless, some gentrifiers also attend, establishing bridging links between the two. However, the authors emphasize the potential temporality and highlight the risk of further commercial gentrification leading to the pubs' disappearance.

Methodology

The explorative research is based on the revealing single case study Katendrecht, characterized by a three-step approach and the triangulation of various methods and data sources (Fig. 1).
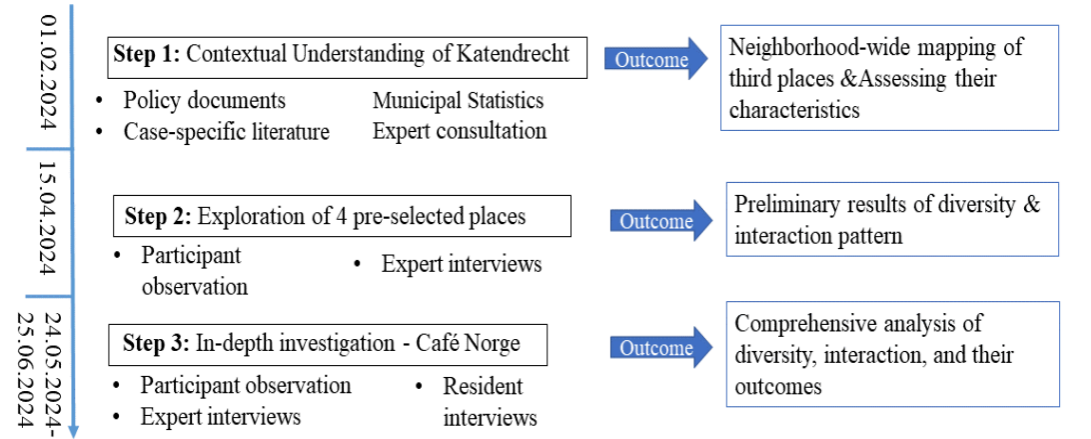

Fig. 1: The three-step case study design (Source: Yin 2018)

The first step focused on comprehensively understanding Katendrecht's transformation and its implications for heterogeneous social interaction in third places at the neighborhood scale. This was achieved by analyzing policy documents, case-specific literature, and municipal statistics (Yin 2018). Additionally, informal expert consultation provided insights into neighborhood interna and identified promising third places for bridging capital creation (Flick 2009).

In the second step, the analysis scaled down to multiple embedded units - specifically, four selected third places - allowing for preliminary data collection (Yin 2018). This was realized through participant observation in the respective places and expert interviews. Eight purposively sampled experts, critical cases with outstanding knowledge (Flick 2009), were interviewed; almost all had a double role as current or former residents. This included five hosts of the preliminary explored places as well as a general expert on social interaction in the neighborhood to provide a neutral perspective. To mitigate biases in the selection, the experts were asked about all preliminary selected third places, where all highlighted Café Norge as a place of social mixing.

This led to the selection of Café Norge as the in-depth analysis unit (Yin 2018), which was investigated profoundly for one month and is the focus of this publication. The bar was chosen because it hosts the most diverse attendants, serves primarily the local population, and has extensive opening hours, which matches the characteristics defined by Oldenburg (1989).

To gain deeper insights, Café Norge's owner and two barkeepers were additionally interviewed as experts, gaining their knowledge through yearlong experiences of interactions within the place. Furthermore, six resident interviewees were recruited among Norge's attendants through purposive maximum variation sampling (Seidman 2006) by representing higher-income gentrifiers and low-income long-term residents to gain a comprehensive understanding. The interviews (Fig. 2) were complemented with extensive participant observations in Café Norge.

During these observations, vast informal conversations with attendants added valuable data (Spradley 2016). I actively engaged with the researched subjects to gain a contextual understanding and unique insights into otherwise inaccessible fields (Verloo 2020), also triangulating the impressions gained in interviews. While remaining transparent about my role as a researcher, I minimized the disturbance to the "natural" interactions by staying in the background. Observations, including small talk (Kearns 2016), fostered trust with attendants and enhanced the researcher's understanding of diversity

and interaction patterns across different times and organized events. The participant observations captured a variety of days, times, regular daily operations, and diverse events at Café Norge (see Fig 3).

The observations and interviewees' purposive variety, as well as the triangulation of data sources, helped mitigate biases in data collection by ensuring diverse perspectives. Additionally, I regularly engaged in reflexive discussions with colleagues and participants to critically assess potential biases, including my own positionality and its influence on data interpretation.

Interviewee*	Date	Role	Age	Housing	Description
Elisabeth	31.05.	Expert (neutral)	70s	Owner	Pensioner, wealthy background, came 5 years ago to Katendrecht. Head of a foundation promoting cross-group interaction in Katendrecht.
Adewale	05.06.	Expert (Owner)	40s	Owner	Café's owner, Working-class and West-African background, life-long resident. Community leader and well-connected.
Lisa	05.06.	Expert (barkeeper)	20s	Social Housing	Art Student & Barkeeper, grew up mainly in Katendrecht, always lived in Rotterdam-South.
Dimitrios	09.06.	Gentrifier	30s	Owner	Architect, South European, bought renovated Social Housing 4 years ago, searching for a trendy yet affordable neighborhood.
Raul	27.05.	Expert (Host)	30s	Owner,	Social entrepreneur with neighborhood NGO, working-class and Caribbean background, almost all life in Katendrecht, moved to suburbs.
Pieter	17.06.	Gentrifier	60s	Owner	Pensioner, a former CEO, moved in 1 year ago to enjoy the city's cultural life.
Hendrik	25.06.	Expert (barkeeper)	70s	Social Housing	Pensioner, lifelong working-class resident, Norge's former owner and now barkeeper, well-connected with the elderly residents.
Adriana	06.06.	Expert (host)	60s	Owner	Lecturer and Cultural Anthropologist, volunteering in neighborhood NGO, early gentrifier who bought an apartment 10 years ago
Johanna	05.06.	Expert (host)	40s	Owner	Social Geographer, one of the founders and working for a neighborhood NGO. Living outside Katendrecht.
Sophie	05.06.	Expert (host)	20s	Rental	Floor manager for a neighborhood NGO with a background in cultural studies. Living outside Katendrecht.
Willem	23.05.	Long-term resident	60s	Social Housing	A working-class pensioner, born in Katendrecht and living most of his life in Rotterdam South, moved back to Katendrecht into social housing for seniors.
Anna	23.05.	Long-term resident	70s	Social Housing	Pensioner, Working-class, lifelong resident of K., known as a community leader for the elderly Kapeneze.
Emma	22.05.	Gentrifier	60s	Owner	She came 3 years ago for her pension, is a former teacher of a wealthy background, and enjoys diversity and cultural offers in the neighborhood and city.
Jan	13.06.	Gentrifier	60s	Owner	Pensioner, a former manager, came 1 year ago seeking the city's cultural life.

*Fig. 2: Overview of interviewees (*Names have been changed)*

Date & Time	Occasion	Focus of Observation
Wednesday, 22.05., 5-7 pm	Gather a first impression	Systematic impression of the bar and its characteristics, in-depth conversation with the owner about his biography, the story of the bar, his motivation, and perception of the neighborhood transformation.
Thursday, 23.05.; 7–10 pm	Neighborhood - Pub quiz	Diversity of attendants, nature of the interaction, the role of a common organized activity in incentivizing bridging interactions. In-depth informal conversations with two long-term working-class residents and multiple gentrifiers.
Monday, 27.05.; 2-4 pm	Daily Café Operation	Diversity of attendants, nature of interaction during a regular afternoon. In-depth informal conversation with one elderly regular attendant, a working-class resident, and the owner's brother, a blue-collar worker and part-time barkeeper.
Saturday, 01.06.; 6-11 pm	Soccer - CL Final	Diversity of attendants and their interaction. Role of the activity in incentivizing bridging interactions. Observation of inclusiveness and the role of consumption. In-depth informal conversation with young working-class residents of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and gentrifier pioneers.
Sunday, 02.06.; 5-8:30 pm	Daily Operation & Salsa event	Atmosphere and daily happenings, focusing on interaction at the bar and the role of the barkeeper. Observation of the attendants and interactions of the salsa evening, informal conversation with young diverse residents and middle-aged gentrifiers.
Wednesday, 05.06.; 3-6 pm	Daily Café Operation	The role of the bar for across-group interaction and the barkeeper's role. Changing dynamics during daily operation. Comparative observation of interactions in the outside area and inside the Café.
Thursday, 06.06.; 3-7:30 pm	Daily Café Operation	Changing dynamics during daily operation. Conducted an informal interview with regular attending long-term residents, highly interested in the research but not willing to be recorded.
Friday, 07.06.; 02-10:20 pm	Charity event by Refugee Advocacy NGO	Influence of events on the diversity of attendants, role of the event in shaping and incentivizing attendants' interactions. Multiple in-depth conversations with gentrifiers, migrants, and social workers active in the neighborhood.
Sunday, 09.06.; 2-7 pm	Daily Café Operation	The role of consumption, as a potential excluding factor and to discover potential patterns. Systematically asking about it in multiple conversations.
Monday, 10.06.; 7:15-10:10 pm	Daily Café Operation & Salsa event	Role of dance event in shaping the attendants' interaction, particularly across-group. Deeper understanding of perceptions and experiences of across-group interaction through informal talks.
Monday, 17.06.; 4-8:30 pm	Daily Café Operation	Deeper understanding of perceptions and experiences of across-group interaction through extensive informal talk with regular attending elderly long-term resident couple.
Friday, 21.06.; 5:50-11:30 pm	Soccer- Dutch national team	Influence of events on the diversity of attendants, role of the event in shaping and incentivizing attendants' interactions. Observing also the role of consumption. Multiple informal across-group conversations.
Tuesday, 25.06.; 4-7:30 pm	Daily Café Operation	Focusing on impressions and insights gained through interviews and previous observations, verifying preliminary findings. Leaving the active field period, closing with a reflective talk with the owner.

Fig 3: List of participant observations at Café Norge

Findings

This section provides the findings, briefly describing the contextual implications of gentrification on the neighborhood scale and then narrowing down to the in-depth study.

Gentrification as a Context of Social Interaction in Third Places

The rapid neighborhood transformation caused a lack of social cohesion, where gentrifiers and long-term residents live in segregated worlds because of their big socio-economic and cultural differences:

> *These people are usually not very interested in each other. They didn't grow up together, they have no history together. The only thing they do is they live here on this small peninsula. [...] the worlds are very much apart* (Elisabeth, expert, personal interview).

This challenges the bridging between gentrifiers and long-term residents, enhanced by the strong bonding of long-term residents. However, the latter are not a homogenous group; the interviewees highlighted two groups: elderly, ethnically Dutch, who refer to themselves as *Kapeneze*, and younger, ethnically diverse, who do not identify themselves with the primarily white *Kapeneze* but also form part of the working-class. The group of gentrifiers consists of remarkably many elderly and wealthy pensioners.

The population's segmentation is spatially expressed since its social housing concentrates around the traditional community center, surrounded by newly constructed luxury apartments on the waterfront. The latter excludes lower-income and middle-class, and its gated character, including facilities, reduces social interaction on the streets. Interviewees indicate social tensions between the contrasting groups expressed in stereotypes, explaining them with little across-group interactions, resulting in a low prevalence of bridging connections. This coincides with the literature (Dekker and Bolt 2005) and contradicts policymakers' contact rationale.

The comprehensive exploration provided evidence that segregation extends to third places. These adapted towards higher-income clients, reducing dramatically accessible gathering opportunities, like the formerly widespread brown pubs. Deliplein, the neighborhood's main square, is now only attended by gentrifiers and tourists. The preliminary exploration showed that the municipal-financed community center

remained mostly unchanged but attracts almost exclusively elderly *Kapeneze*, allowing for no mixing with gentrifiers or the younger residents, who perceive the building and offers as unattractive and attendants as a closed group. Two non-commercial places, *Verhalenhuis Belvédère*, and *Platform K*, were founded in recent years to serve as inclusive gathering places. Both have limited success in attracting diverse attendants. One is constrained by limited resources, leading to limited activity; the other is perceived as a cultural place, mainly attracting highly educated elderly and many outsiders, not primarily serving the neighborhood. Instead, Café Norge, a commercial bar where consumption is costlier than in the other pre-selected places, hosts the most diverse clients, questioning recent literature (Yuen and Johnson 2017). These findings suggest that Oldenburg's (1989) third-place concept clashes with the complex reality since being inclusive does not guarantee diversity.

Café Norge — A Diverse Third Place?

Founded by Norwegian sailors, Norge has served for over 70 years as a working-class bar. In September 2022, long-term resident Adewale became the owner at more favorable terms through a personal connection and realized his vision of a social business, a community place to enable connections between long-term residents and gentrifiers, explaining:

> *Gentrification in the way they think, that if you put people with higher income, higher education, it will stimulate automatically the people with lower income, lower education. That is not like that. There has to be something in-between that will link those two together* (Adewale, owner & expert, personal interview).

The Café located at a corner offers a large bar, seats, and tables inside and outside, music, and a variety of snacks and drinks. Norge has extensive opening hours from 2 pm until late at night, seven days a week, with family-business character, the owner being present around the clock. It also hosts events, including neighborhood drinks, dance evenings, karaoke nights, pub quizzes, soccer matches, or events by other neighborhood organizations.

All interviewees perceive Norge as welcoming and low-barrier; multiple describe it as the last accessible brown pub. The atmosphere is perceived as friendly and positive. Barkeepers and residents of both groups believe that hierarchy and socio-economic background play no role.

When asked about actual attendants, all interviewees, triangulated via observations (author's own, June 1, 7, and 21) including small talk, described a high diversity regarding income, age, gender, and ethnic background.

Many gentrifiers attend, attracted by Norge's authenticity, as the owner explains. Some *Kapeneze* attend, though less than gentrifiers since it is an aging and shrinking group that mostly attends the community center. Those who attend feel welcome, unlike in other places, since Norge and one barkeeper, the previous bar owner, symbolize old times. Multiple interviewees see less conservative *Kapeneze* who are skeptical about the neighborhood transformation. With multiple informal small talks, this creates the impression of more liberal-progressive minds attending Norge. The third group consists of ethnically more diverse people in their 20s-30s, most born in Katendrecht. Many belong to the Antillean and Surinamese communities and expressed to identify with and feel welcomed by the black owner and the high diversity of attendants' backgrounds. Experts and the owner underline this by stating that ethnicity does not play a role in the bar.

Findings suggest that following Hickman (2012), the importance of Café Norge varies among attendants. Gentrifier interviewees visit one to three times a month, enjoying the diversity and getting outside of their bubble. In contrast, *Kapeneze* attend several times per week, viewing Norge as home, a symbol of old times, and a safe space, states the former long-year owner. One interviewee noted the absence of elderly Muslims, attributing it to the exclusionary effect of alcohol. Observations (author's own, June 1, 7, and 21) revealed a slight male dominance in the bar; however, attendance varies with organized events: soccer events attracted more males, while a migrant advocacy event drew more women and children. Experts highlighted the risk of reducing diversity through activities that cater to specific identities or characteristics.

Two residents observed that economically inactive individuals, such as pensioners, attend third places more often, while women with children attend less due to gendered roles and care duties.

These dynamics influence diversity, suggesting that third places serve specific groups while excluding others from social interactions and their outcomes.

This challenges Szreter and Woolcock's (2004) assumptions about the universal benefits of bridging capital creation, especially regarding the lowest income, since the economic barrier is a more disputed factor in Café Norge. Most see it as inevitable and reasonable for a bar and not as a decision criterion. Others see an excluding effect for the lowest-income since attending cafés is generally costly, and poverty levels in Rotterdam are high. However, several interviewees and observations suggest that much interaction happens in Norge without or with little consumption, aligning with one gentrifier's perception that Norge "*feels more like a community place than a café*" (Pieter, gentrifier, personal interview). Interviewees mentioned that they often pass by for small talk, supported by observations (author's own, June 5, 9, and 21): Kids play around, use the

washroom, and people use the outside area to hang out. When soccer games are shown, there are multiple people without consuming.

The owner emphasizes his efforts to adapt to his client's wishes regarding the menu and music to ensure a pleasant experience, supported by observation (author's own, June, 9). The latter revealed a differentiated consumption pattern: *Kapeneze* consume coffee or the cheapest beer, while gentrifiers prefer higher-priced wines. The adaptation to gentrifiers' demands might risk reaching the tipping point Doucet and Ernst (2014) described, where positive bridging interactions are threatened when gentrifiers start to dominate the place.

Findings reveal that most attendants live nearby, indicating that Norge serves the local community. One regular explicitly highlighted the importance of comfort regarding the accessibility of third places, an aspect being only a side note in the literature.

Social Interactions at Café Norge and Its Facilitators

The bar has distinct temporal patterns in atmosphere and usage; during the day, it is Café-like, with clients mostly sitting and conversing in a relaxed atmosphere. Norge is open until late at night, with music, party guests, and increasing alcohol consumption. Therefore, it serves different clients at different times, with the younger attending primarily in the late evening and for specific events such as watching soccer or Salsa dancing, while elderly gentrifiers tend to come during the day, which raises the question of temporal segregation since the two barely encounter despite attending the same place.

Conversation is the main activity, and interaction is perceived as low-key and easy to join for outsiders. Barkeepers and guests mention that the large bar facilitates interaction since every attendant comes to the bar to order, where often a conversation with multiple persons occurs. Some see talking to other people as part of the nature of cafés and diversity in backgrounds as an incentive to exchange. Talks in Norge consist mostly of small talk like the weather, conversations about children, Katendrecht's new developments, the old times, or where people come from. The owner and the barkeepers perceive a great relationship between gentrifiers and long-term residents in Norge, expressed in symbolic actions like giving a round of drinks. Despite an overall positive attitude between different groups in Norge, there is disagreement about the degree and profoundness of interaction. Most perceive superficial small talk, but a few interviewees representing different groups see deeper interactions and emphasize their bridging connections established in Norge. One barkeeper believes that Norge incentivizes positive interaction between both groups:

> *The old and the new are coming. They will talk to each other, laugh with each other, and have conversations. So there was almost hate between the two groups or like the old group against the new group. I think that will disappear a little bit or will fade. So I think that's the biggest thing that is going on here in the Café* (Lisa, barkeeper, personal interview).

However, despite recognizing the diversity in guests, some expressed skepticism about the extent of heterogeneous interaction within Norge, even suggesting tensions and subtle negative feelings. One barkeeper feels that some gentrifiers look at the long-term residents "*a little bit with a side eye*" (Lisa, barkeeper, personal interview); one interviewee sees mutual prejudices, but, she perceives more hostility from low-income residents toward gentrifiers:

> *They're very suspicious, who are you? Go away, we don't need it. We are the Yuppies, we are the millionaires, and they have all sorts of negative thoughts about why we are here, and we are taking their place away* (Elisabeth, expert, personal interview).

Multiple interviewees underlined the importance of events in facilitating heterogeneous interactions by attracting diverse attendants and providing a common interest to engage independent of the background. One person describes the atmosphere when the local soccer club plays:

> *There are the artists, the professor, the millionaire, and the people that were born here. Black, white, everybody [...] and they clap each other on the shoulder* (Elisabeth, expert, personal interview).

The common interest and activity match the literature (Peterson 2017), but the findings indicate nuances in the sense that for multiple interviewees, the activity should be in the background; for instance, having a drink can be sufficient, and a more profound interest develops through chatting. Multiple interviewees believe that alcohol lowers the barrier to interaction and makes people more talkative. However, since alcohol was mentioned as an excluding factor before, it has an ambivalent role. Contrasting Wise (2009), residents of all backgrounds perceive commonalities such as ethnicity, age, or gender as irrelevant for developing bridging connections. Experts highlighted the importance of repetitive encounters over time to form bridging capital, which coincides with a gentrifier seeing more bridging connections among his friends who have lived in Katendrecht for a few years.

All interviewees believe certain persons facilitate heterogeneous interaction within Norge. Regulars provide familiar faces, fostering a pleasant feeling of belonging and social safety even without verbal interaction. A gentrifier perceives 10-15 regulars of

diverse backgrounds, some actively looking to engage with newcomers. One barkeeper added the nuance that being a familiar face does not necessarily equal being open since some of the elderly regulars are less talkative. Others highlight that willingness to socialize differs individually, regardless of class. Many interviewees proudly highlighted the outstanding social character of Rotterdam's residents, particularly in Katendrecht, making connecting easier.

All interviewees identify Norge's owner as the key figure, having good relations with Katendrecht's diverse groups like no one else. Growing up as a working-class child of migrants and now a business owner, he symbolizes identification for the younger, diverse residents. Elderly *Kapeneze* knew his parents and watched him grow up. Gentrifiers value his openness to socialize, humbleness, and hospitality. All perceive him as the active driver of across-group events in Norge. He sees his role in telling the neighborhood's story and connecting people. This vital role of the host contrasts with Oldenburg's (1989) third-place concept, which downplays the host's relevance. However, experts emphasized the reliance on social brokers linking groups in Katendrecht for bridging capital creation, aligning with newer literature highlighting the importance of hosts as social brokers (Peterson 2017).

Some skeptical voices appreciate pleasant chats with Norge's owner but perceive limited intentional facilitation of connections. Observations (author's own, May 27; June 2 and 5) revealed that the owner encourages conversations at the bar by involving those nearby; however, these interactions remain superficial, with no clear networking efforts.

Experts emphasized the importance of consistency, outreach, and proactive engagement for community building and stable bridging connections. Norge offers consistency but is not a social organization targeting proactive community work, and encounters rely more on coincidence. Moreover, experts point out the limited impact of bridging efforts compared to the massive influx of gentrifiers in Katendrecht.

Bridging Capital Creation within Norge

Experts emphasize the blurry boundaries between the benefits of bridging capital and its facilitators. Trust and respect across differences arise from heterogeneous interactions and are considered bridging capital. Nevertheless, they also serve as foundations for further benefits, like individual access to resources.

All interviewees unanimously agreed on increased social cohesion as an outcome of bridging connections measured by increased trust, respect, and mutual tolerance between neighbors of different backgrounds, also expressed in strengthened empathy: "*you say onbekeend maakt onbemind in Dutch, if you know each other, you feel more for each other*" (Raul, expert, personal interview).

Social cohesion is further measured by asking about the sense of belonging and civic participation. All interviewees mentioned the outstanding importance of bridging for their sense of belonging and feeling of social safety, some describing Norge as a social anchor point. Matching Savage, Longhurst, and Bagnall's (2010) concept of elective belonging, gentrifiers systematically attend third places and seek heterogeneous interaction to integrate and achieve a feeling of belonging, "*it was mostly the idea of getting there, the Wijk, the Neighborhood. The social feeling that you belong to a bigger part or belong to a place*" (Dimitros, gentrifier, personal interview).

Some interviewees see increased civic participation arising from bridging since it helps to find a common goal, like a clean and safe neighborhood. Many interviewees volunteered in some neighborhood organizations; two gentrifiers claimed to be the more proactive group. They highlighted the monthly neighborhood drinks at Café Norge for emerging civic action, underlined by one barkeeper's statement:

> *Many people are saying, we want to do something for the neighborhood here. What can we do? What can we organize? How can we help? I think because they're in this place, their eyes will be opened a bit, and they all think about what can we do* (Lisa, barkeeper, personal interview).

Asked about individual access to intangible resources through bridging connections, multiple interviewees highlighted emotional support. Bridging reduces loneliness, especially for the elderly, as mentioned multiple times. Norge's owner states:

> *I have lots of people that are very lonely. And then they have a daily routine. They go to work, come back home, eat, and then come to the bar, have a drink, and chat. Then, the days are fulfilled, and they can go home, and they have conversations that they normally don't have* (Hendrik, barkeeper, personal interview).

Gentrifier Emma, however, explicitly claimed to have received no emotional support through the bridging connections she made in Norge due to their superficiality.

Regarding tangible resources, access to information is agreed on, while access to concrete resources and goods such as job or education opportunities is more disputed; most interviewees see it as possible but unlikely since it requires more organization and repetitive encounters over time, which aligns with the literature (Peterson 2017; Wise 2009). However, interviewees provided some examples of concrete, tangible resources, such as gentrifiers assisting long-term residents with accessing social protection or municipal funds for neighborhood civic action. The mentioned examples indicate a pattern where the long-term residents profit from access to information, guidance, or

assistance that can lead to concrete material benefits. Gentrifiers, meanwhile, learn from different life realities and gain information to strengthen their sense of belonging, such as information on places to go.

The next section concludes with the key findings and highlights potential research gaps.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated how state-led gentrification created a segregated population with limited social interaction in Katendrecht, extending to third places. Providing a socially mixed setting, Café Norge stands out as a positive exception, facilitating diverse interactions and the formation of bridging capital. This consists mainly of increased bridging cohesion and individuals accessing intangible resources. As a bar, interactions are primarily casual and less structured, constraining the development of more tangible bridging capital that remains limited.

The insights enrich the academic debates by adding critical nuances, particularly by examining third place and bridging capital dynamics within the context of gentrification, such as differences in the type of social capital accessed by gentrifiers versus long-term residents. However, this study also underscores the need for further research into:

- Temporal segregation patterns in third places.
- The diversity within long-term residents and gentrifiers and their specific third-place behaviors.
- How increased bridging cohesion and intangible benefits might translate into tangible benefits.

The findings hold significant implications in the context of public sociology. By highlighting the potential of third places like Café Norge to foster bridging social capital, this research underscores the importance of inclusive places in addressing inequality and social fragmentation. However, the study also reveals the limitations and fragility of such spaces, particularly in the face of gentrification-driven segregation.

This has implications for policymakers and community actors aiming to promote bridging social capital in diverse neighborhoods. Given their potential, policymakers should support inclusive third places, for instance, by subsidizing them when gentrification threatens them, through grants, reduced rents, or tax incentives. Other interventions could promote community ownership of these spaces to reduce the dependence on individual initiatives. Supporting structured and repetitive interactions may enhance reciprocal support and increase bridging capital creation; examples are workshops, cultural exchange events, or skill-sharing sessions that encourage across-

group collaboration. Recognizing the critical role of individuals like Café Norge's owner, policymakers should consider providing training and resources to social brokers who facilitate cross-group interactions. This could include networking opportunities, funding for community events, or platforms to share best practices. On a broader scale, municipal planning should prioritize mixed-use public spaces that attract diverse residents. This might include creating an attractive community center, as some interviewees demanded.

Implementing these recommendations would create an environment for third places to thrive as arenas for meaningful and beneficial interaction, counteracting social fragmentation caused by gentrification and promoting more equitable urban development.

As cities continue to evolve, this research calls for a renewed focus on the role of third places as arenas for meaningful and beneficial interaction, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to ensure their accessibility and inclusivity. In doing so, this study illustrates how sociological insights can contribute to discussions on equitable urban development and ultimately, contribute to the public good.

Acknowledgments

References

Arısoy, Alp, and Nurbin Paker. 2019. "Bridging and Bonding Social Capital in Gentrifying Neighborhoods: 'Yelde irmeni District in Istanbul.'" *A/Z: ITU Journal of Faculty of Architecture* 16(2):39–54. doi:10.5505/itujfa.2019.67944.

Arkins, Madeline C., and Bonnie E. French. 2024. "Demolition, Division and Displacement: Examining the Preservation of Whiteness in Rotterdam Municipal Housing Policy." *Critical Sociology* 50(1):107–24. doi:10.1177/08969205231176837.

Atkinson, Rowland, and Keith Kintrea. 2000. "Owner-Occupation, Social Mix and Neighbourhood Impacts." *Policy & Politics* 28(1):93–108. doi:10.1332/0305573002500857.

Audunson, Ragnar. 2005. "The Public Library as a Meeting-Place in a Multicultural and Digital Context: The Necessity of Low-Intensive Meeting-Places." *Journal of Documentation* 61(3):429–441. doi:10.1108/00220410510598562.

Blokland, Talja, and Noordhoff, Frank. 2008. "The Weakness of Weak Ties: Social Capital to Get Ahead among the Urban Poor in Rotterdam and Amsterdam." Pp. 105–126 in *Networked Urbanism: Social Capital in the City*. Routledge.

Bolt, Gideon, and Ronald Van Kempen. 2013. "Introduction Special Issue: Mixing Neighbourhoods: Success or Failure?" *Cities* 35:391–396. doi:10.1016/j.cities.2013.04.006.

Casey, Dympna, and Kathy Murphy. 2009. "Issues in Using Methodological Triangulation in Research: Dympna Casey and Kathy Murphy Explore the Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Triangulation." *Nurse Researcher* 16(4):40–55. doi:10.7748/nr2009.07.16.4.40.c7160.

Chaskin, Robert J., and Mark L. Joseph. 2013. "'Positive' Gentrification, Social Control and the 'Right to the City' in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(2):480–502. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01158.x.

Custers, Gijs, and Godfried Engbersen. 2022. "Linking Social Capital and Organizational Ties: How Different Types of Neighborhood Organizations Broker Resources for the Urban Poor." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 1–17. doi:10.1080/07352166.2022.2137032.

Dekker, Karien, and Gideon Bolt. 2005. "Social Cohesion in Post-War Estates in the Netherlands: Differences between Socioeconomic and Ethnic Groups." *Urban Studies* 42(13):2447–2470. doi:10.1080/00420980500380360.

Doucet, Brian, and Daphne Koenders. 2018. "'At Least It's Not a Ghetto Anymore': Experiencing Gentrification and 'False Choice Urbanism' in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk." *Urban Studies* 55(16):3631–49. doi:10.1177/0042098018761853.

Ernst, Olaf, and Brian Doucet. 2014. "A Window on the (Changing) Neighbourhood: The Role of Pubs in the Contested Spaces of Gentrification." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 105(2):189–205. doi:10.1111/tesg.12071.

Flick, Uwe. 2009. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 4th ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Freeman, Lance. 2006. *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Gemeente Rotterdam. 2023. "Onderzoek010."

Gemeente Rotterdam. 2024. Wijkprofil Katendrecht.

Goodchild, Barry, and Ian Cole. 2001. "Social Balance and Mixed Neighbourhoods in Britain since 1979: A Review of Discourse and Practice in Social Housing." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19(1):103–121. doi:10.1068/d39j.

Goode, Amy, and Stephanie Anderson. 2015. "It's Like Somebody Else's Pub: Understanding Conflict in Third Place." *Advances in Consumer Research* 43:346–361.

Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78:1360–1380.

Halstead, John M., Steven C. Deller, and Kevin M. Leyden. 2022. "Social Capital and Community Development: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Community Development* 53(1):92–108. doi:10.1080/15575330.2021.1943696.

Hickman, Paul. 2013. "'Third Places' and Social Interaction in Deprived Neighbourhoods in Great Britain." *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 28(2):221–236. doi:10.1007/s10901-012-9306-5.

Karsten, Lia, Annabel Kamphuis, and Corien Remeijnse. 2015. "'Time-Out' with the Family: The Shaping of Family Leisure in the New Urban Consumption Spaces of Cafes, Bars and Restaurants." *Leisure Studies* 34(2):166–181. doi:10.1080/02614367.2013.845241.

Kearns, Robin. 2016. "Placing Observation in the Research Toolkit." Pp. 313–333 in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, edited by I. Hay. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.

Lees, Loretta, Tom Slater, and Elvin K. Wyly, eds. 2010. *The Gentrification Reader*. London: Routledge.

Ley, David. 2001. *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City*. Reprint ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oldenburg, Ray. 2023. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. Berkshire ed. Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Publishing Group LLC.

Seidman, Irving. 2006. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3rd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Short, John R. 1989. "Yuppies, Yuffies and the New Urban Order." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 14(2):173–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/622811.

Spradley, James P. 2016. The Ethnographic Interview. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Stouten, Paul. 2017. "Gentrification and Urban Design in the Urban Fabric of Rotterdam." Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal 11(1):92–103.

Stovel, Katherine, and Lynn Shaw. 2012. "Brokerage." Annual Review of Sociology 38(1):139–58. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150054.

Szreter, Simon, and Michael Woolcock. 2004. "Health by Association? Social Capital, Social Theory, and the Political Economy of Public Health." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 33(4):650–67. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyh013.

Uitermark, Justus, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Reinout Kleinhans. 2007. "Gentrification as a Governmental Strategy: Social Control and Social Cohesion in Hoogvliet, Rotterdam." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39(1):125–41. https://doi.org/10.1068/a39142.

Van Eijk, Gwen. 2010. *Unequal Networks: Spatial Segregation, Relationships and Inequality in the City*. Delft: Delft University Press.

Verloo, Nanke. 2020. "Urban Ethnography and Participant Observations: Studying the City from Within." Pp. 37–55 in *Seeing the City*, edited by N. Verloo and L. Bertolini. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Williams, Sonja A., and John R. Hipp. 2019. "How Great and How Good?: Third Places, Neighbor Interaction, and Cohesion in the Neighborhood Context." *Social Science Research* 77:68–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.10.008.

Wise, Amanda. 2009. "Everyday Multiculturalism: Transversal Crossings and Working-Class Cosmopolitans." Pp. 21–45 in *Everyday Multiculturalism, edited by A. Wise and S. Velayutham*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Yin, Robert K. 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yuen, Frances, and Andrew J. Johnson. 2017. "Leisure Spaces, Community, and Third Places." *Leisure Sciences* 39(3):295–303. https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2016.1165638.

STEFAN ADAMSON holds an M.Sc. in Urban Management and Development from the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), Erasmus University Rotterdam. His work focuses on spatial justice and urban sociology, engaging with issues such as gentrification, disadvantaged and migration-influenced neighborhoods, and informal settlements. He is currently undertaking advanced postgraduate training in international cooperation at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

THE FIELD STORIES OF INDIA: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SELF-HELP GROUPS IN INDIA

by ASTIKA SHARMA

In a small village in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, a group of women gather under the banner of the Baini Sena Self-Help Group (SHG). Their hands, calloused from years of domestic labor, now work together to weave threads of hope—both literally and metaphorically. Among them is Sunita, who speaks with quiet pride about the loan she received through her SHG. "*Kitne gharon ke lintel lag gayi SHGs ki wajah se*" ("So many homes have been built because of these SHG loans"), she says. Sunita's story, like countless others, captures the transformative power of SHGs in empowering women to reclaim agency over their lives.

This essay draws on stories like Sunita's and includes insights from fieldwork under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM). It explores how SHGs are not just financial institutions but catalysts for emotional, social, and economic transformation in urban India.

The Heartbeat of Change: Women Supporting Women

In Kanpur, the Trinetra SHG showcases a collection of handcrafted designer belts. These are not just products; they are symbols of resilience. Behind every belt is a story of a woman who dared to believe in herself, supported by a collective that believed in her potential. Once, the women were homeworkers, now they are successful entrepreneurs in the locality.

In a quiet corner of Kanpur, Nisha Singh sits surrounded by colorful fabrics, delicately stitching intricate patterns into tiny garments meant for temple deities. A member of the Harihar Self-Help Group, Nisha's work is not just a livelihood—it is her lifeline. Having lost her child a few years ago, Nisha spiraled into depression. "*I felt like I had lost everything,*" she recalls. "*I didn't know how to move forward. My peer SHG women helped me to come out of the dark phase of my life.*"

It was Nisha's involvement with the SHG that pulled her from the depths of despair. The women of the group rallied around her, encouraging her to start making deity clothes, a skill she had learned as a child. "*Their faith in me gave me the strength to believe in myself again,*" she says. Today, Nisha's work is not only a source of income but also a source of pride and purpose.

SHGs thrive on the principle of solidarity. They create safe spaces where women can share their struggles, celebrate their triumphs, and draw strength from one another. In Karnal, Haryana, Ruby, a member of the Chetna Mahila SHG, recalls how her group helped her break free from the clutches of high-interest moneylenders. "*Our area was dominated by loan sharks trapping women in debt. We are now able to free ourselves,*" she says.

Such stories underline the emotional backbone of SHGs. They are not just about economics; they are about restoring dignity, building confidence, and fostering a sense of belonging in a world that often marginalizes women.

Skill Development and Enterprise Creation

In Bhubaneswar, Odisha, SHG women have turned solid waste management into a model of sustainability. Managing waste collection and recycling centers, they have proven that grassroots initiatives can achieve what private contractors often cannot—efficiency paired with community trust.

In Haldwani, another SHG runs a "Bartan Bank," renting out utensils for community events. This innovative business does not just meet local needs; it builds a sense of pride among its members. These women, many of whom had never handled money before joining SHGs, are now confident entrepreneurs managing their own finances.

These enterprises are about more than economic gains. They are about showing women their own potential, proving to them that they can be providers, innovators, and leaders.

Financial Freedom

In Kanpur, Sangeeta from the Sneha SHG recounts how her life changed when she was able to secure a small loan to start making *aalta* (a traditional red dye used in ceremonies). "*I never thought I could contribute to my family's income. Now, I feel I am as important as anyone else in my household,*" she shares.

Fig 1. Sneha SHG, Kanpur making aalta

Such shifts in perception—both self-perception and how others see these women—are at the core of SHG success. They offer women a pathway to financial inclusion, enabling them to access credit, save money, and invest in futures they could not previously imagine.

Overcoming the Challenges

For all their success, SHGs are not without challenges. Many women express frustration with delayed credit linkages and inadequate training in leadership and financial management. In field interviews, one SHG member remarked, "*We've learned to save, but managing our accounts is still a struggle. We need someone to teach us.*"

The human resource crunch in implementing DAY-NULM compounds these issues. Community Organizers (COs) and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) often manage large clusters with limited resources, making it difficult to provide the handholding support that many SHGs still need.

Despite these barriers, the determination of SHG members shines through. Their ability to adapt, innovate, and overcome obstacles is a testament to the strength of their collective spirit.

A Picture of Progress: Faces of Change

Fig 2. Women of the Trinetra SHG in Kanpur proudly display their designer belts

In every city and village where SHGs operate, similar scenes play out. Women showcase products they have poured their labor into—pickles, woolen garments, traditional art forms like Aipan and Chikankari. Each item tells a story of creativity, resilience, and pride.

Fig 3. SHG women managing canteen facilities known as Shakti Rasoi at government offices—a demonstration of their versatility and community trust.

These moments are not just about commerce. They are about identity. They are about women stepping into spaces they were once excluded from and claiming their rightful place in the economy and society.

Towards a Better Future

SHGs are more than economic instruments; they're lifelines for women seeking change. But to truly unlock their potential, systemic challenges must be addressed. Women need more than loans—they need training, mentorship, and access to wider markets. Government programs like DAY-NULM must be scaled up, with more investment in human resources and infrastructure to support SHGs.

Perhaps most importantly, the stories of SHG women need to be heard and celebrated. These are stories of courage and community, of women who refuse to be defined by their circumstances. They remind us that empowerment is not just about policies or programs—it's about people.

Conclusion: A Tapestry of Hope and Resilience

When asked what her SHG means to her, Nisha's eyes glisten with emotion. "*It gave me back my life*," she whispers. In her words lies the essence of what SHGs represent—not just an economic tool, but a lifeline, a second chance, and a community of hope.

For women like Nisha, who once felt trapped in despair, SHGs offer a path to reclaiming agency, pride, and purpose. They stitch together the fragmented pieces of broken lives, much like the deity clothes Nisha creates—each thread representing courage, each stitch a step toward healing.

Across India, countless women are writing similar stories of transformation. In quiet villages and bustling towns, they are finding their voices, supporting one another, and proving that change begins at the grassroots. Every loan disbursed, every product sold, and every meeting held is a step toward a future where women no longer just survive—they thrive.

As India marches toward urbanization, the strength of its cities will not be built solely on infrastructure but on the resilience of women like Nisha and the millions of others whose lives are intertwined through SHGs. Their courage to rise, to rebuild, and to lead is the foundation of a truly inclusive and equitable society.

SHGs remind us of the power of community, the healing nature of solidarity, and the unbreakable spirit of women. They teach us that even in the darkest moments, there is light to be found in the hands of those who stand with us. In their triumphs, we see a vision of a brighter, more compassionate world—a world stitched together with threads of hope, resilience, and unity.

ASTIKA SHARMA is a gender and labour scholar whose work looks at how inequality shapes the everyday lives of women in informal work. She studied Political Science at Lady Shri Ram College and Jawaharlal Nehru University, and her research spans over livelihoods, and feminist approaches to labour. Having worked across government, non-governmental, and media sectors, she found her core interests in the intersections of gender, labour, and media representation. She has collaborated with Self-Help Groups, community organizations, and women workers, using field research and storytelling to understand how people navigate systems of power and invisibility. Her recent work explores digital access, social reproduction, and how gendered narratives are shaped in both policy and popular media. At Berkeley, she continues to explore these themes with a focus on voice, visibility, and everyday resistance.

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF EXCELLENCE: DISPOSABLE INCOME AND THE MAKING OF HONORS COLLEGES IN THE NETHERLANDS

by NAVEED L. SALEK NEJAD and CADEN PUAH

Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in the Netherlands

While Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) education is well-established in North America and the United Kingdom (U.K.), LAS is a relatively recent addition to the Dutch higher education landscape. The first Dutch University Colleges (DUCs) were founded in 1997, partly in response to a desire to attract international students to the Netherlands[1] (De Boer, Kolster, and Vossennsteyn 2010; Becker and Kolster 2012). These colleges distinguish themselves by offering small-scale education in an international environment, often housed in separate facilities to foster a strong sense of community (Study in Holland 2018). DUCs typically operate as honors colleges with rigorous academic demands, higher tuition fees (up to double those of regular Dutch bachelor's programs), and selective admissions.

It is worth noting the unique position of DUCs within the broader European context of honors or elite education programs, particularly when compared to the Netherlands' immediate neighbors, Belgium and Germany. While almost every major research university in the Netherlands has at least one, and sometimes even two, university colleges, Germany, with a population more than 4.5 times the size of the Netherlands, has only three universities offering an LAS degree. In fact, the Universität Hamburg is looking to the DUCs as "role models" for its Bachelor of Arts in LAS when it opens its own bachelor's program in the fall of 2025. However, while Hamburg's LAS program was developed directly out of the university's "Excellence Strategy," the program's homepage specifically mentions that, unlike its Dutch and British counterparts, there are no tuition fees. Although higher education is generally free of tuition fees in Germany, certain states, such as the state of Baden-Württemberg, charge international students of all disciplines a flat fee of 1,500 euros

per semester. Finally, Belgium, with almost two-thirds of the Dutch population, has only one LAS college, the Vesalius College as part of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). In contrast to the Netherlands, there are no higher fees for LAS students in neighboring countries, suggesting that similar financial barriers may not exist or may be specific to the Dutch context. These programs, across the neighboring countries of Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, frequently advertised as "excellence" or "honors" programs, seek students who are "academically strong, intellectually curious, and passionate to acquire new knowledge in various fields of study" (University Colleges in the Netherlands 2024: 6). For example, the college used as a case study in this research has a mandatory 12-14 contact hours a week, and students are expected to study an average of 6 hours every weekday, as studying full-time is expected.

Considering the relationship between socioeconomic status[2] and educational inequalities, this research examines the experiences of international students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds at an unnamed DUC in the Netherlands, focusing on the role of disposable income and social stratification. Drawing on a focus group and eleven semi-structured interviews, we highlight how the university college administration and most of the student body often fail to acknowledge the financial hardships faced by these students, rendering their everyday struggles invisible.

By exploring these experiences, this study contributes to addressing the gap in research on income-related inequality in Dutch higher education, particularly within the context of DUCs, and provides insights for fostering a more inclusive and equitable LAS education. Our analysis revealed two key findings, both relating to the possession of disposable income among students at the DUC. First, the significant impact on the social and academic experiences of students in the Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (DUO) program is due to the need to balance work, academics, social life, and well-being. Second, the normalization of a culture and lifestyle within the DUC highlights a mismatch in perception between the financially disadvantaged participants and the broader DUC community, leading to a sense of detachment and a perception of the DUC as a "bubble" detached from the "real world."

---

1 Economically, the Netherlands can be compared to the U.S. state of Illinois, with a population one-third larger.

2 Socioeconomic status "[e]ncompasses not only income but also educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. SES encompasses quality-of-life attributes and opportunities afforded to people within society and is a consistent predictor of a vast array of psychological outcomes" See APA Dictionary of Psychology 2023.

Background

Socioeconomic Disadvantage in Dutch Higher Education

Research on educational inequalities in the Netherlands has predominantly focused on primary and secondary education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2018), with limited attention paid to higher education. This study contributes to addressing this gap by examining income-related inequality in the context of DUCs, drawing parallels with the experiences of "working-class" students at "elite universities" (such as Oxford University) in the U.K., whose institutional structures have influenced the development of DUCs (University Colleges in the Netherlands 2017). Furthermore, this research qualitatively explored the impact of paid employment on financially disadvantaged students, an area largely unexplored in previous quantitative studies.

Challenges of Applying Existing Sociological Concepts to the Netherlands

Research published in the U.K. has demonstrated the adverse impact of working while studying on the academic and social experiences of working-class students at universities. Firstly, paid employment can lead to academic disadvantages, with increased work hours negatively affecting study time and academic performance (D'Amico 1984; Curtis and Shani 2002; Hunt, Lincoln and Walker 2004). Secondly, working students often face challenges in fully engaging with social opportunities at university, leading to feelings of isolation and a lack of social support (Taylor 1998; Cooke et al. 2004).

Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009; 2010) highlight the disconnect that working-class students experience at elite universities, where the prevailing social norms and expectations often clash with their backgrounds. This mismatch can lead to feelings of displacement and a perception of the university as a "bubble" detached from the social realities of the "real world." Despite these challenges, working-class students often negotiate their place within these institutions through their academic performance and passion for learning.

While this research draws on insights from the British context (Humphrey 2006), it recognizes the limitations of directly applying concepts from British scholarship to the Dutch context. The two most important concepts drawn are "working class" and "elite", which usually rely on static definitions such as parents' income. Instead, in this research, the term "financially disadvantaged" is used to differentiate the availability of disposable income between students and its role in shaping student experiences.

Methodology and Participant Selection

This research was conducted by the authors from within the context under investigation, as part of an honors research project offered by the university where the research was based. As authors, we acknowledge that we have had personal experiences with financial hardship during our studies, which influenced our approach to this research.

The study employs an exploratory research design based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), aiming to capture the nuanced lived experiences of participants without imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks. IPA was explicitly designed for themes that are equivocal, complex, and emotionally charged (Smith 2007). Using this methodology, we hope to contextualize the findings without drawing generalizations to form theories. Data was collected through a focus group and eleven semi-structured interviews. In the first phase, a 57-minute focus group was conducted to provide the basis for the in-depth interview questions.

Participants were recruited through Facebook and word-of-mouth based on the following criteria:
- International students holding EU citizenship; AND
- Students at the DUC who considered themselves "financially disadvantaged"; OR
- Students receiving financial support through either the Dutch student financing system (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, DUO) or the German Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG)

These criteria were chosen due to the specific challenges faced by these students. At the time of the research (Summer 2018), EU students receiving DUO loans were required to work a minimum of 56 hours per month, while German students receiving BAföG were required to demonstrate low parental income and often found the loan amount insufficient to cover living expenses in the Netherlands.

Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted over two months, with both researchers present at each recorded session. All participant names were changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The interviews ranged in length from 51 to 75 minutes. Transcriptions were analyzed independently by both researchers, with subsequent discussions to identify recurring themes, differences between participants, and noteworthy cases.

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Study Financing Method/s	Year of Study
Alba	Spain	DUO	Third
Boris	Germany	BAföG, part-time job	Second
Chi	Germany/Mexico	BAföG	Second
Elias	Germany	BAföG, part-time job	Second
Franka	Germany	DUO	Third
George	U.K.	DUO	Third
Henrik	Germany	BAföG	Third
Kelly	Ireland	Part-time job	Second
Madda	Italy	Part-time job	Second
Mary	U.K.	DUO	Third
Noah	U.K./Kazakhstan	Part-time job	Third

Table 1. Participants Overview

The Triple Burden: Balancing Work, Academics, and Social Life

The findings reveal that a low amount of work does not necessarily have a direct negative impact on academic performance, confirming previous research that suggests a proportional relationship between work hours and academic outcomes (Taylor 1998). However, for students working more hours, particularly those under the DUO system, the challenges of balancing work and academic demands were significant. We found an obvious pattern of consequences in various aspects of their lives within and outside of academia. The impact of each aspect interacts with the other aspects, resulting in an overall negative outcome.

Students who are under the DUO system express particular struggles with balancing the workload from DUC and needing to work the required hours. With no statistical backing, George mentioned: "I don't know anyone who's on the student finance system and has graduated on time." All but one of the participants under DUO believed that their academic performance and the process of gaining knowledge would have been better and more fruitful if they had not needed to work. The pressure intensified during assessment periods, with some participants describing

a constant struggle to catch up with their studies (Curtis and Shani 2002). Kelly, George, and Mary described it as "playing catch-up" with their academics. At a particular period, when the bar that George worked at was understaffed, he had to work extra hours, amounting to about 30 hours a week. This greatly impacted his studies. He had said:

> *And then that period I failed everything (...) It was the first thing I'd ever failed. I failed everything in one period.*

The mandatory work requirements of the DUO system forced George to prioritize work over academics to not lose his job, even when work hours exceeded the minimum requirement. This highlights the bureaucratic constraints faced by students who rely on DUO loans as if George lost his job, the DUO student loan would halt immediately.

In relation to balancing work and study, one of the most frequently mentioned impacts was fatigue. We noticed very early on in the research that the intensity of both academia and work has caused much distress for the majority of the participants. Consequently, this fatigue and stress spilt over to other areas of our participants' lives.

For a few participants, working had a great impact on their academic experience and performance. They felt their experiences differed significantly from those of their peers who did not need to work. This led to feelings of disconnect and a perception that they were not "actual students." All but one participant expressed regret at not being able to fully experience student life due to the demands of paid employment. As Mary highlighted:

> *I feel like I've never had the chance to be a student, because I always had to, like, try and have my shit together and have a job.*

Although it is not uncommon for students to work next to their studies, we feel that the sentiments of the participants are amplified in the setting of a DUC. According to many of our participants, the prevalence of affluence among the student body contributed to a sense of isolation for those who needed to work. They have noted that the average student body does not seem to work, does not talk about work, and does not have to finance their studies. This silence, attributed to the perceived financially advantaged nature of the DUC, further marginalized those from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Kelly was eager to share her personal experience, as she pointed out that there is limited space at the DUC for this. When talking about working next to studying, she said:

> I don't think that's ever really spoken about, because it [the DUC] is so middle-class. There's such a minority of people that actually has to work'. And I know I am middle-class, but there is no one...there's not really a space for people to work. [...] I just feel like it's not even brushed under the carpet, because it doesn't really seem to be there.

Another participant, Mary attributed this silence to the 'elitism' of the DUC:

> I don't think people talk about [DUC] being elitist and I don't really think it is consciously — but just by not acknowledging these things [having to work to finance studies], I think it becomes.

The impact of working extended beyond academics, affecting participants' social lives and romantic relationships. Even though Alba was mostly positive about her work experiences, she talked about a sense of regret regarding her social life. For example, if she had more time to spend at the DUC, some friendships could have been developed more. Kelly, George, and Mary shared the same sentiment about friendships — friendships were maintained at a shallow level as participants were either working, for university or the required DUO hours, or they were exhausted and just needed to rest.

Kelly illustrated her grief about the impact that work and study had on her social and romantic relationships:

> I have five juggling balls and I need to drop one, because I can't do this anymore and [my girlfriend] was very much one of these balls. And for other reasons too, I chose to end the relationship, but [work] was one of the strong influential factors.

George, Mary, and Alba also noted that working had significantly shaped their daily interactions with their romantic partners and, to a large extent, dictated the directions in which their relationships were progressing. Compared to their BAföG counterparts, DUO students are at a particular disadvantage socially as BAföG students do not have the burden of mandatory work hours.

Ironically, at some point, the purpose of having a DUO loan becomes contradictory as the participants would have enough money but too little time. All the participants under DUO agreed on this. As Mary had said:

> Basically, the stupidity of the system is that in order to get student finance, you need to work enough so that you already almost have enough money. Because really you need student finance, when you don't have a job. So, I'm in a situation where I have money but I have no time to do anything with it.

From the interviews, we observed that one's socioeconomic status does not necessarily dictate the satisfaction of our participants' experience as students. However, the satisfaction was dictated by the hidden role that disposable income plays in developing and fostering a social and academic student life. This is something that their more affluent counterparts can do. The participants become financially disadvantaged because of their lack of disposable income and their inability to fully participate in the DUC's community.

Nevertheless, participants did note that there were positive aspects that came along with working next to their studies. For example, as observed in previous studies (Taylor 1998), participants claimed that they have better time management. They claim that they are more realistic about what they can do within a certain amount of time and have more empathy and understanding than their counterparts who do not work. All participants who work have met people who they appreciate or had positively impacted them and supported them socially and practically. Kelly also noted that her affinity towards handling high-stress situations has increased a lot. George mentioned that working in bars served as a form of substitute for the social life he had lost by being disconnected from DUC, and that was helpful to him.

The experiences of the participants highlight the significant challenges faced by financially disadvantaged students at the DUC, particularly those under the DUO system, in balancing work, academics, and social life. The need to work long hours to meet the requirements of the DUO system often leads to fatigue, academic struggles, and a sense of detachment from the university community. As a result, these students experience a "triple burden" that significantly impacts their overall well-being and academic success.

"Seeing Something As Normal, When It Isn't"

As mentioned in the case studies seen in British scholarship (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2010), participants from less privileged backgrounds were often surprised by the affluence of their peers and the normalization of a lifestyle that they could not afford. Some of the participants expressed shock when learning that most of the DUC student body is not financing their studies themselves. As Mary said:

I didn't realize how much disposable income so many of my friends have until I realized that their parents were funding them the whole way through, like everything. My parents don't give me any money.

Mary's account at the beginning illuminated that her friends at the DUC are from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Most of our non-German participants explained how most of their peers are from higher "classes" and, most importantly, attended private schools. This shock experienced by our participants hints at a major difference between them and the average student body of the DUC.

Some of our participants, such as Kelly, explicitly identified that they did not come from lower-income backgrounds and claimed to be middle-class in their home countries. Yet, being in the DUC had caused a perception that led to a sense of detachment from the "real world" and a feeling that the DUC existed in a "bubble." The lack of financial concerns among most students was seen as a key factor contributing to this disconnect. Boris highlighted:

I mean, let's say at DUC, a lot of people are in their comfort zone, right? They are allowed to think about certain issues, because they just don't have the struggle of financial situation, right?

Following the participants' accounts, an important theme that arose in our analysis was the concept of "normal." The participants called into question what is taken for granted in the reality of the DUC, a reality that is lived by most of the students and is detached from the "real world." Henrik had said:

I think the main aspect is when you see something as normal, when it isn't. They just don't realize how lucky they are in that they can do whatever they want without any financial constraints.

Primarily, the theme of normalization appeared in the interviews when discussing social lives. Some of the participants had noticed and purposefully commented on the conspicuous consumption of the average DUC student, such as the normalization of travelling at DUC. All our participants regret that they are unable to travel during their term breaks either due to financial reasons or work. Simultaneously, Chi, a participant in her second year of study, gave exaggerated examples of the travel destinations of their privileged counterparts:

Yeah, [term break] is also a topic where I realized there is really a gap between a lot of UC students talking about: 'I just went to New York and Rio de Janeiro.' I don't know, how can you afford that?

Chi's account exposes the difference in perception between her and the average student body, who seem to think that travelling during term breaks is normal. In general, the participants felt that the student body is oblivious to there being existence of students in DUC who are financially disadvantaged, as George noted:

I think, especially at DUC, it's assumed that people don't really have financial problems here.

George's statement echoes the sentiment of Mary earlier in the essay, in which silence around financial concerns contributes to building an elitist environment in the DUC. Many of the participants reinforced this idea by sharing their inability to discuss their financial situation in the DUC and, when they attempted to explain their circumstances, were met with dismissive attitudes and a lack of empathy. Mary illustrated this with a story:

I once had a tutor scheduling presentations and she asked me 'hey can you do yours on Thursday' which was like two days later and I said 'no sorry I have to work' and one girl laughed and I went like "Sorry, is that funny? or like 'Do you have a job?' And I think people can be very unsympathetic, because it sounds like an excuse to a lot of people. But, it's just like I have no choice.

The experiences of participants highlight how institutional practices and attitudes can inadvertently perpetuate educational inequalities. As Van Zanten (2010: 330) puts it, "dimensions of elite education are the outcome of explicit and implicit choices made by teachers and administrators". The lack of support and understanding for students facing financial hardship can create additional barriers to their full participation in university life. Mary emphasized this by sharing:

Definitely, I should not have to go to cry to [the Vice-Dean] in order for them to give me a tuition waiver to pay my tuition later. [...] It was really treated as a unique case and you think 'how can this be abnormal?' So many students here, you must have had students before who can't afford their tuition for a couple of months.

Our participants who come from lower-income families, such as all the German participants under the BAföG program, were already aware of being financially disadvantaged before attending a DUC. As Elias's account illustrated:

Maybe a bit of this thing that I never considered that I'm coming from a family background in which it's obvious that I'm gonna study something like this elite programme.

Elias was aware that the decision to study at a DUC was exceptional because of his lower socioeconomic background, reinforcing the normalization of DUCs being a place where mostly students who are financially advantaged attend.

In essence, the normalization of affluence among most students creates a disconnect and fosters feelings of isolation for those from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. These students often feel like outsiders due to their inability to participate in the normalized lifestyle and consumption patterns of their peers, highlighting the mismatch in perceptions between the two groups. The lack of awareness and empathy from peers and the administration further exacerbates this disconnect and contributes to the perpetuation of educational inequalities within the DUC.

Towards a More Inclusive Excellence in LAS Education

This study explored the experiences of eleven financially disadvantaged students at a DUC in the Netherlands. By focusing on the concept of "financial disadvantage" rather than replicating the British notion of "working class," this research captured the experiences of a broader range of students, including those who identify as middle-class in their home countries but do not have the extent of disposable income compared to their peers.

Similarly, many scholars have used the term 'elite' in the Sociology of Education. While we avoided reproducing it, our participants have indeed referred to DUC as elitist at times. The roots of the concepts of "elite universities" are found in the "upper class" or "aristocracy", whether public or private. Universities reproduce "elitism" by deciding autonomously upon their selective admission requirements and access to the universities is greatly facilitated by socioeconomic status (Douglass 2007).

Our analysis revealed two key findings, both relating to the possession of disposable income among students at the DUC.

First, the significant impact on the social and academic experiences of students in the DUO program is due to the need to balance work, academics, social life, and well-being. Second, the normalization of a culture and lifestyle within the DUC that highlights a mismatch in perception between the financially disadvantaged participants and the broader DUC community, leading to a sense of detachment and a perception

of the DUC as a "bubble" detached from the "real world." Further, the lack of awareness and empathy from peers and administrators contributed to feelings of isolation and marginalization of those financially disadvantaged.

The findings underscore the need for greater awareness and support for financially disadvantaged students at DUCs, which are created to be "excellence" or "honors" programs. Further research is needed to examine the extent of these inequalities across different DUCs, such as statistical inquiries into the financial backgrounds of students who attend DUCs, and to explore the role of institutional policies and practices in perpetuating or mitigating these disparities.

In conclusion, this non-exhaustive set of recommendations is intended to serve as a practical guide for DUC administrators, financial aid offices, policymakers, and student representatives, with the aim of fostering a more inclusive and equitable LAS education. To achieve this, we recommend a series of concrete institutional interventions, including, but not limited to:

- **Procedure for financial hardship disclosure**: Mary's experience of being "treated as a unique case" because she was unable to pay her tuition fees on time points to the need for a structured procedure when students face financial hardship. Students should be informed at the beginning of their studies who the designated contact person is at their DUCs. At the same time, because DUCs do not operate their own financial aid offices, the main university could provide its staff with increased awareness of the unique context of their DUCs.

- **Tailored support services for financially disadvantaged students**: As expressed by our participants, a source of their distress is the normalization of conspicuous consumption and the lack of empathy among their peers. Here we specifically advise the University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands (UCSRN) to create safer spaces, workshops, lectures to raise awareness of this issue, as part of their public programming.

- **Adjustments to DUO's work requirements**: Regarding the potential elitism of DUCs, future research needs to assess the feasibility of managing the work requirements of DUO and the increased workload at DUCs. If this proves difficult to reconcile, as our research suggests, the Dutch state has created an educational pathway that discriminates against international students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

References

Boer, Harry de, Renze Kolster, and Hans Vossensteyn. 2010. "Motives Underlying Bachelors–Masters Transitions: The Case of Dutch Degree Stackers." *Higher Education Policy* 23(3):381–96.

Botsis, Hannah, Yasmine Dominguez-Whitehead, and Sabrina Liccardo. 2013. "Conceptualising Transformation and Interrogating Elitism: The Bale Scholarship Programme." *Perspectives in Education* 31(4): 129-140.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2012. "The Social Theory of Pierre Bourdieu." Pp. 323-3244 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, edited by C. Craig. Last. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Callender, Claire. 2003. *Attitudes to Debt: School Leavers and Further Education Students' Attitudes to Debt and Their Impact on Participation in Higher Education*. Universities UK.

Cooke, Richaed Barkham, M., Audin, K., and Bradley, M. 2004. "How Social Class Differences Affect Students' Experience of University." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 28(4):407–21.

Curtis, Susan and Najah Shani. 2002. "The Effect of Taking Paid Employment during Term-Time on Students' Academic Studies." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 26(2):129–38.

D'Amico, Ronald. 1984. "Does Employment during High School Impair Academic Progress?" *Sociology of Education* 57(3):152.

Douglass, John Aubrey. 2022. *The Conditions for Admission: Access, Equity, and the Social Contract of Public Universities*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy and Patricia Leavy. 2006. *The Practice of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Humphrey, Robin. 2006. "Pulling Structured Inequality into Higher Education: The Impact of Part-time Working on English University Students." *Higher Education Quarterly* 60(3):270–86.

Hunt, Andrew, Ian Lincoln, and Arthur Walker. 2004. "Term-Time Employment and Academic Attainment: Evidence from a Large-Scale Survey of Undergraduates at Northumbria University." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 28(1):3–18.

Inspectie van het Onderwijs. 2018. *De Staat van het Onderwijs: Hoofdlijnen. Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur, en Wetenschap*. Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs.

Smith, Johnathan. 2007. *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. SAGE Publications.

Taylor, Nicholas K. 1998. "Survey of Paid Employment Undertaken by Full-Time Undergraduates at an Established Scottish University." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 22(1):33–40.

Reay, Diane. 2010. Sociology, Social Class and Education. Pp. 396-404 in *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, edited by M. Apple M., S. Ball, and L. Gandin, Routledge.

Reay, Diane, Gill Crozier, and John Clayton. 2009. "'Strangers in Paradise'?" *Sociology* 43(6):1103–21.

Reay, Diane, Gill Crozier, and John Clayton. 2010. "'Fitting in' or 'Standing out': Working-Class Students in UK Higher Education." *British Educational Research Journal* 36(1):107–24.

University Colleges in the Netherlands. 2024. "University Colleges in the Netherlands 2024-2025." Retrieved May 1, 2025 (https://universitycollege.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/University-Colleges-NL-2024-25-brochure-ENG.pdf)

van Zanten, Agnès. 2010. The Sociology of Elite Education. Pp. 329-339 in *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, edited by M. Apple M., S. Ball, and L. Gandin, Routledge.

Appendix A. Background of the Authors

Both authors attended a DUC for three years to obtain their bachelor's degree. Author A identifies as working-class in their home country, Germany. In the DUC, a considerable tuition fee waiver was given to EU citizens. Despite that, they often experienced food insecurity during the period of their studies due to insufficient funds provided by the German student loan. Author B is a Malaysian national whose financial status fluctuated throughout her life. She was able to attend a DUC because of a competitive need-based scholarship, covering over €30,000 in tuition fees and other living costs.

naveed L. salek nejad is an artist-writer and independent scholar. They were a visiting fellow at the Centre for Research on Social Memory, Faculty of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, in 2023, reviewing how coloniality is reproduced and sometimes also challenged in Polish museums. Their writing has appeared in publications in Germany (Querverlag Berlin), the US (Thick Press), and in self-published artist's books and zines. naveed studied Liberal Arts in the Netherlands (2020) and holds an MA from Concordia University's Individualized Program (2024). They reside in Tiohtià:ke/ Montréal.
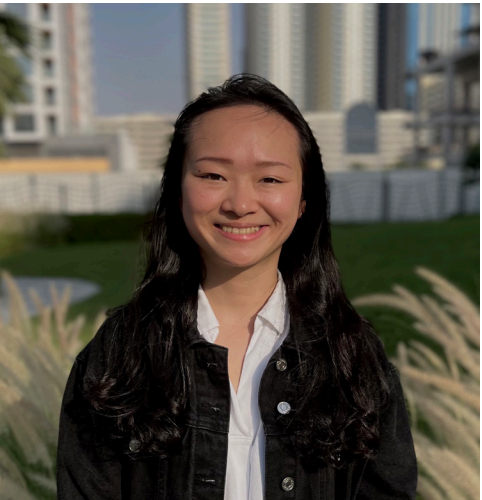
CADEN PUAH is a data scientist, investigating the evaluation frameworks shaping institutions of higher education. During her studies, she critically examined the dynamics of Dutch higher education, focusing on the complexities of internationalization as well as the often overlooked impact of economic disparities, particularly within her honors college. A Malaysian national, Puah studied a Liberal Arts and Sciences degree in the Netherlands as a scholarship student and subsequently completed a MSc in Data Science.

BEING WITH NATURE: POLLUTION, DEEP ECOLOGY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS

by MEGAN MORRELL

Abstract

A rich conceptualization of the relationship between humans and the environment is largely missing from current human rights philosophy. Many canonical human rights thinkers such as Charles Beitz, Joel Feinberg, and James Griffin assume that there is a neat dichotomy between human humans and the rights of the environment. Anthropocentrism is implicit in much of this discourse, arguing that the environment is distinct from humans, meant to serve humans, and does not have rights or value in and of itself. However, nature encompasses the physical material world, including living organisms and non-living landscapes on Earth, but doesn't arbitrarily stop at humans and social life. A deep ecological account of human rights provides an illuminating perspective that can more holistically conceptualize the rights of humans and the environment, as humans are always connected to and a part of nature in this perspective. In this paper, I seek to explore a deep ecological account of human rights that can extend existing human rights philosophy beyond the confines of anthropocentrism. Building upon human rights philosopher Martha Nussbaum's capabilities list in Women and Human Development and Frontiers of Justice, I argue that the human-nature relation is a foundational principle underlying all of the capabilities and is insufficiently addressed by Nussbaum's eighth capability, titled 'Other Species.' The principle of Being with Earth is necessary to operationalize Nussbaum's theoretical framework and to become more holistic and applicable to real-life cases of human and environmental rights abuses. To elucidate the necessity of this theoretical extension, I will draw from the case of environmental pollution injustices in Chicago, Illinois. Ultimately, this article combines a wide array of academic literature and data into an environmental sociological framework for understanding the expansiveness of human and environmental rights.

Introduction to Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach

In his seminal book, *On Human Rights*, philosopher James Griffin (2009) argued that underlying the concept of human rights is the notion of normative agency, which consists of three criteria: autonomy, minimal provision, and liberty. For Griffin, normative agency distinguishes human life from other types of life on earth, such as the lives of animals. Beings that do not fit the criteria for normative agency under Griffin's framework, are not entitled to the same protections and rights (Griffin 2009). Problematically, this includes human beings with intellectual and cognitive disabilities alongside animals and non-human beings. For mainstream thinkers such as Griffin, humans, and thereby human rights, can be theorized about without thorough consideration of the environmental landscapes with which humans are always interconnected.

 Legal philosopher Martha Nussbaum critiqued Griffin and much of the human rights canon, when she theorized capabilities sit at the core of what makes a human right, including consideration for non-human entities. Building upon the work of thinkers such as Amartya Sen, Nussbaum theorized that human rights are dependent on the combination of what she coins as "basic capabilities" and "internal capabilities," to make "combined capabilities" (Nussbaum 2000:82). Basic capabilities describe the internal potential to develop capabilities, whereas internal capabilities are the external resources and structures necessary to develop capabilities. An example of a basic capability is the baseline cognitive ability to read, and the internal capabilities would include resources such as teachers who can teach that individual to read and readable text itself. Both the cognitive capacity and learning resources are prerequisites for an individual to become a reader. For Nussbaum, the distinction between these capabilities is not a sharp one, but rather fluid and complex (Nussbaum, 2000). The combination of these types of capabilities for Nussbaum, creates combined capabilities, which is a conceptualization that is enriched and deepened by the context of the basic and internal capabilities. Further, Nussbaum argues that this combined capability is distinct from actual human functioning. Akin to potential and kinetic energy, functioning is the actualization of combined capabilities. The act of speech is an example of functioning- if one has the combined capability and desire to speak, they will speak. Rather than judging functioning, or the exercise of combined capabilities, for Nussbaum, combined capabilities provide us with a launching point to imagine human choice in the presence of human rights.

Moreover, in *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum lists ten major capabilities that she argues are necessary for full human dignity and flourishing, delineating the categories of what Karl Marx calls "rich human need" (Nussbaum 1999). These capabilities include life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination, and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, political control, and material control (Nussbaum 2007). Notably, Nussbaum argues that the capabilities titled "affiliation" and "practical reason" are actually a foundational capability with threads through each of the other capabilities. They "both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human" (Nussbaum 2007:82). Nussbaum's eighth capability, 'other species' describes the ability to "live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature" and is not argued to have the same nature as "affiliation" and "practical reason" (Nussbaum 2007:80). While this capability comes the closest to recognizing the underlying relationships to the environment, I argue that Being with Nature is the most foundational capability of all and a precondition for all other capabilities, consisting of the ability of humans to live in harmony within our environments-including fellow humans, non-human beings, and common resources. Deep ecological principles can help extend this eighth capability beyond its current anthropocentric frame and reveal its interconnection with all other human rights. The following investigation ultimately works to connect existing environmental science and health equity scholarship and data about the Chicago case to social scientific data, which reveals the theoretical implications of the capabilities approach and imagine an integrated social-ecological understanding of human rights. This work lays the groundwork for future grounding of environmental sociological investigations in human rights literature that moves beyond anthropocentric divisions of human social life and the environment.

Deep Ecological Lens

Deep ecology is a philosophical perspective that takes a holistic approach to understanding human-environment relationships, and "emphasizes the intrinsic value of all members of the biotic community, as well as the need to nurture the diversity of ecological, cultural and knowledge systems" (Akamani 2020:3). Relating deep ecology to human rights, political economists Kent Buse et al. argue that "the right to a healthy environment provides a foundation to realise a raft of other human rights, including the rights to health, water and sanitation, and energy" (Buse et al. 2022). These are the two key principles from deep ecology that are necessary to extend Nussbaum's eighth capability: the dissolution of the human/nature dichotomy, and the inherent value of nature outside of its utility for human use.

Firstly, the deep ecological perspective rejects the dichotomy between humans and the environment because bodies (human and otherwise) are always in process and in relationship to their surroundings. The oxygen that humans breathe in is taken from the air around us and circulated around our bodies, and our bodies give off heat to the surrounding air. There is no doubt that bodies are always in movement, whether it is always perceptible or recognizable to the human senses. In this way, it is very difficult to draw a distinction between where nature begins, and humans begin. Does water start as nature when it flows through a stream, but becomes human when it's ingested? Humans are a part of the water cycle just like other organisms, and privileging humans as exceptions ignores the larger context in which we operate. Historian and philosopher M. Murphy illuminates this when they write that "what happens to the water is what happens to its relations," and "we are part of the water, [and] we are part of its tributaries" (Murphy 2017). Thus, when I use the words environment, Earth, and nature, I mean them to encompass human beings and social life alongside all non-human entities.

Secondly, there is a tendency for thinkers such as Nussbaum to conclude that because the environment is vital for human life and flourishing, its value becomes dependent on human standards of utility. This is a central claim in anthropocentrism, which views the human-environment relation as one of stewardship and rights on the side of humans to the environment rather than a reciprocal relationship. In *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum warns us about what she refers to as "nature worship," criticizing the idea that "nature as harmonious and wise, and of humans as wasteful over-reachers who would live better were to get in tune with this fine harmony" (Nussbaum 2007:367). Nussbaum is generally skeptical of notions of deep ecology and instead calls for "supplanting the natural with the just" (Nussbaum 2007:367). This perspective renders nature as a passive thing to be used and shaped by humans without respect to our own dependence on and reciprocity with nature. There is an implicit hierarchy and arrogance to this position that will prove to be problematic in the application of the following case study. Beyond the right of individuals to a healthy environment is the right for the environment *itself* to be healthy.

Case Study: Heavy Metal Pollution and Socio-Spatial Disparities in Chicago, Illinois

To demonstrate the utility of extending Nussbaum's capabilities list towards Being with Nature, I aim to put each capability in conversation with the case of environmental pollution in Chicago, Illinois. In Chicago, the distribution of heavy metal pollution is exceedingly unequal, with the South and West Sides being the

most overburdened on effectively all measures of pollution, including heavy metals (White and Gala 2022). Inequality in the distribution of heavy metal pollution is not significantly due to any natural geographic factors but is the result of a long history of oppressive social systems that influence where pollution is socially and politically acceptable or not. Neighborhoods on the South and West Sides—which consist of majority Black and Brown communities—are the most overburdened by pollution from sources such as roadways, pipes, and industrial runoff, which results in Chicago's communities of color experiencing the effects of pollution at much higher rates than predominantly white communities (Esie et al. 2021; Watson et al. 2022). Figure 1 shows the regional breakdown of white populations, with the highest concentrated on the North Side of the city:
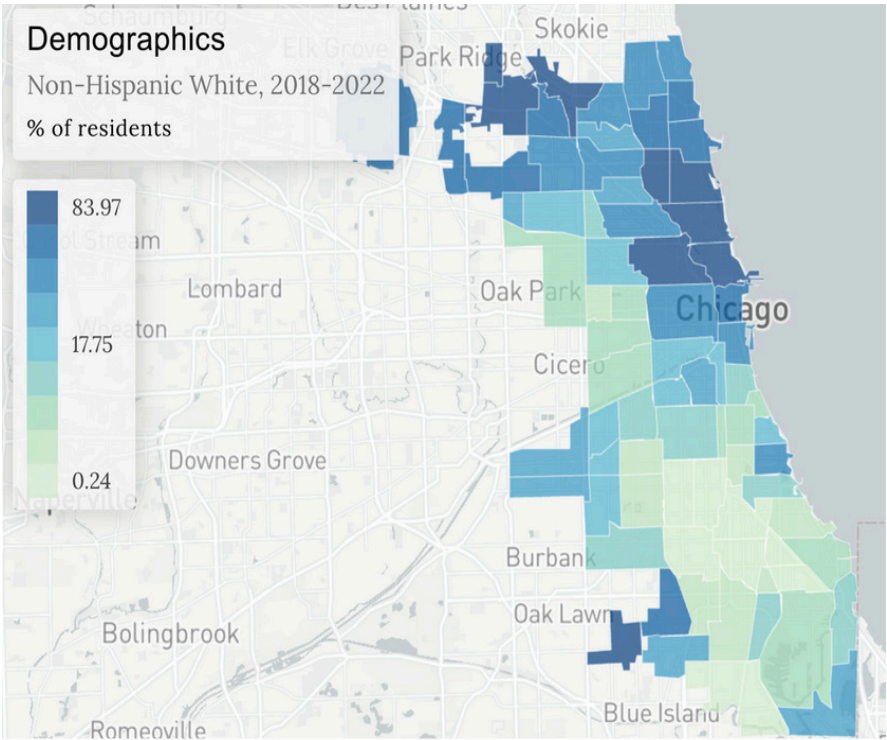

Figure 1: Demographics of Non-Hispanic White populations from 2018-2022. This data is collected from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Source: Chicago Health Atlas 2025.

There is a double motion at play here: 1) neighborhoods on the South and West Sides have been historically- and to this day- the most accessible places to live in Chicago for low-income individuals and communities of color, especially Black and Latine communities; and 2) these same neighborhoods are unsurprisingly the sites of pollution and have become environmentally 'wastelanded' (Voyles 2015). I

use the term 'wastelanded,' as Traci Brynne Voyles does in *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*, to mean a racial and spatial signifier that renders ecosystems and populations pollutable. The social and political process of wastelanding in the Navajo nation is mirrored in the Chicago case. I do not mean wasteland as an empty space devoid of value, but quite the opposite. The areas of Chicago that are 'wastelanded' are socially and culturally rich areas with strong significance to the city. Communities that are wastelanded are always resisting this process and finding ways to create beautiful and safe communities in the face of violence and injustice.

Furthermore, heavy metals are a particularly concerning group of pollutants that have severe health consequences and uneven distribution throughout Chicago. Heavy metals such as lead (Pb) and mercury (Hg) are considered 'xenobiotic,' (Rahman et al. 2022) because they are not naturally present in an ecosystem and do not have any benefits for humans or ecosystems, and in the case of lead and mercury, they are tremendously toxic at even trace amounts (Rahman et al 2022). Many heavy metals are associated with cancers and birth defects and even impede plant growth and reproduction (Kim 2015). Because Chicago remains one of the most racially segregated and environmentally unjust cities in the United States (Esie et al. 2022) the histories of racial discrimination in Chicago continue to shape our bodies, health, and social lives.

With this socio-ecological context in mind, this next section describes each of Nussbaum's capabilities and puts them in conversation with the case study of heavy metals pollution in Chicago through the two deep ecological principles: dissolution of the human/nature dichotomy, and the inherent value of nature outside of its utility for human use. Ultimately, each capability is enriched through the deep ecological perspective in attending to the human rights concerns present in the case study.

Capabilities Applied: Life, Bodily Health, Bodily Integrity

Nussbaum writes about the capability for life that one should be "able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living" (Nussbaum 2000:78). The life expectancy of Chicagoans in the South Side neighborhood of Englewood is 30 years lower (60 years old), compared to the downtown neighborhood of Streeterville (90 years old), which is the largest life expectancy divide in the United States (Schencker 2019). Pollutants contribute to disparities in life expectancy in Chicago, as many heavy metals are carcinogenic (Kim 2015), though they are one of many factors that drive health and illness.

Figure 2 shows life expectancy rates in Chicago. Darker shades of blue indicate higher life expectancy, with the maximum reaching 88 years. Lighter shades represent lower life expectancy, with the minimum recorded at 63.4 years. The highest life expectancy is concentrated on the North Side, while the South and West Sides have clusters of the lowest life expectancy.
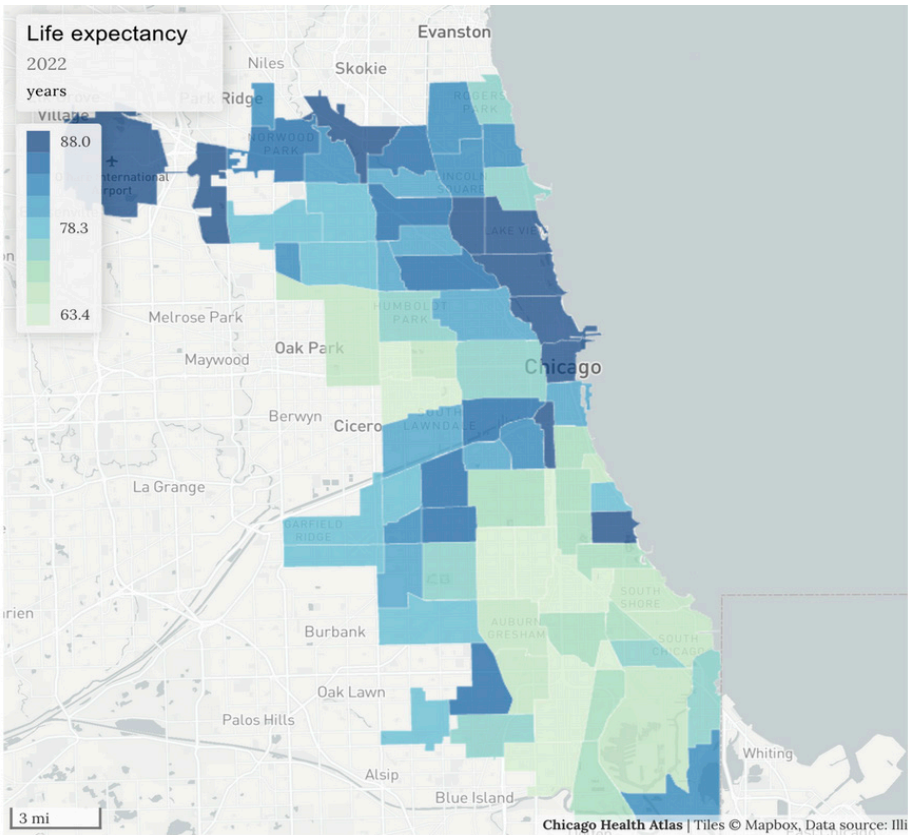

Figure 2: Life Expectancy rates in 2022, with data collected from the Illinois Department of Public Health's death certificate database. Source: Chicago Health Atlas 2025.

Moreover, Figure 3 shows Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL), which shows how many years are lost in each community area from individuals who died before the age of 75, which is the overall average life expectancy in Chicago. YPPL is a public health metric that is used to measure premature mortality on a population level, revealing health disparities. The map is calculated at the community area level and is weighted per 100,000 residents. This map shows a range of shades of blue that demonstrate wide disparities in YPPL on the South and West Sides, from 22,295- 2,537 years of potential life lost per 100,000 population.
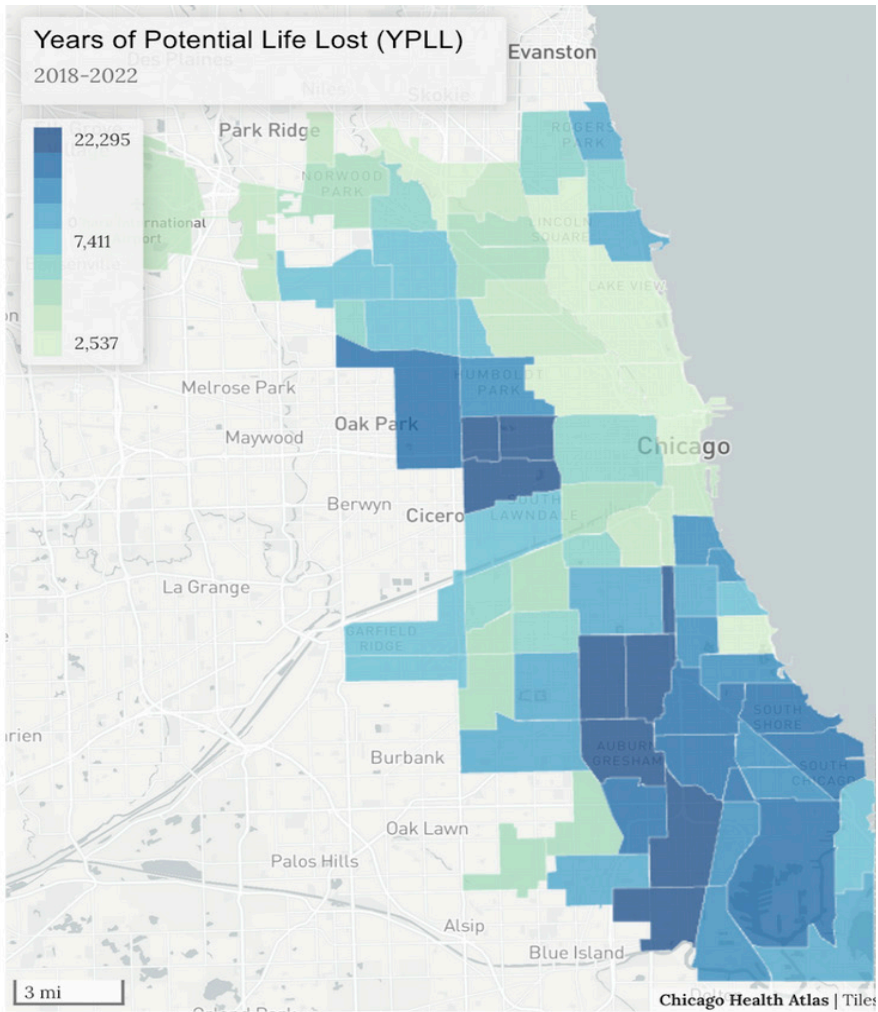

Figure 3: Years of Potential Life Lost, with data collected from the Illinois Department of Public Health's death certificate database. This measure is calculated from the "total number of persons who died before age 75 (ICD-10 codes: All causes) divided by the total population under 75 during a specified time period expressed as years of productive life lost per 100,000 population" (Chicago Health Atlas 2025).

Furthermore, residents of the South Side have been shown to die of cancers at twice the rate of the U.S. national average (Bartosch 2023). Figure 4 shows data from the Chicago Health Atlas, displaying cancer diagnosis rates for all invasive cancers per 100,000 population, with darker areas having higher rates. This map signifies wide disparities in the diagnosis of cancer amongst populations in Chicago based on geographic location. While heavy metals and other types of pollutants cannot be entirely attributed to these health disparities, the literature shows that many cancers contribute to the development of some cancers.
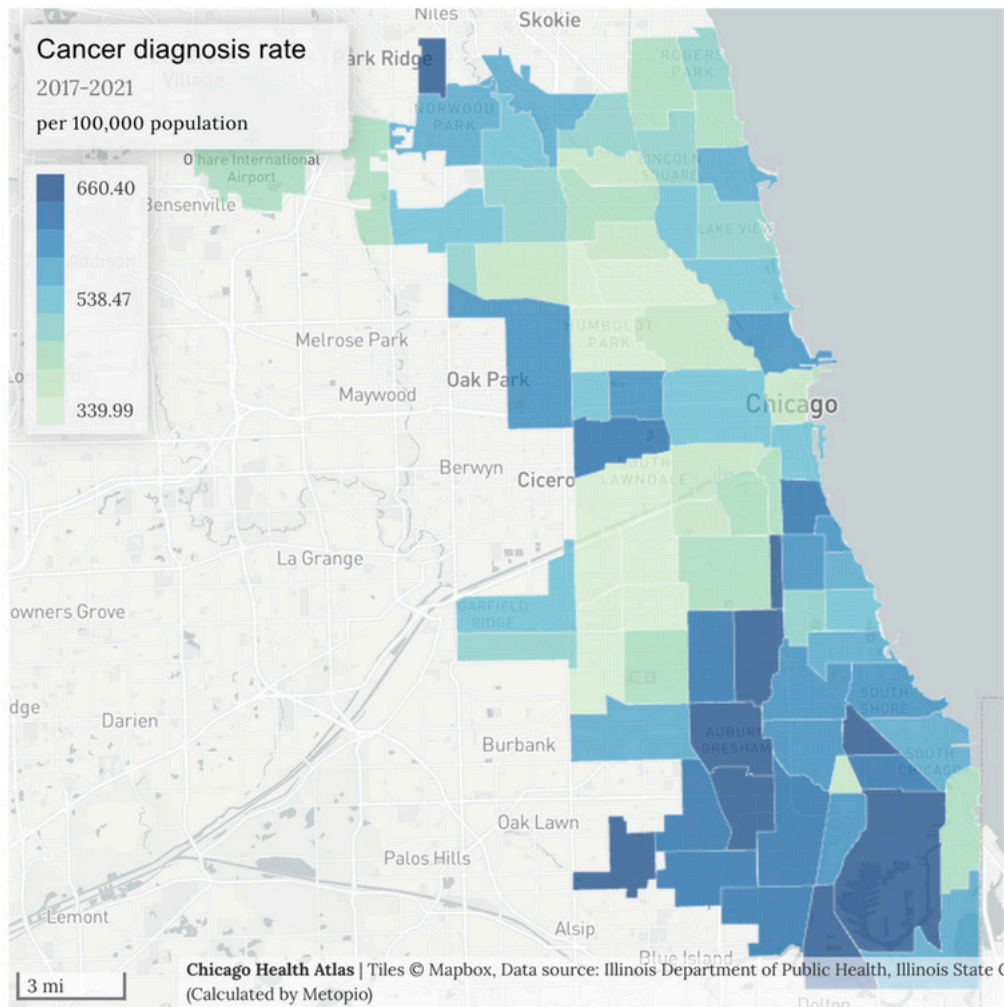
Figure 4: Cancer Diagnosis Rate per 100,000 population. Data are collected from the Illinois Department of Public Health's Illinois State Cancer Registry. According to the Chicago Health Atlas, "cancer cases are collected through mandated reporting by hospitals, ambulatory surgical treatment centers, non-hospital affiliated radiation therapy treatment centers, independent pathology labs, dermatologists and through the voluntary exchange of cancer patient data with other (mostly nearby) states" (Chicago Health Atlas 2025).

This trend of greater pollution and health disparities on the South and West Sides compared to the North Side continues for other conditions. For instance, Chicago's lead poisoning rate for children ages 1-5 is much higher on the South and West Sides compared to the North side. This phenomenon is demonstrated in Figure 5:
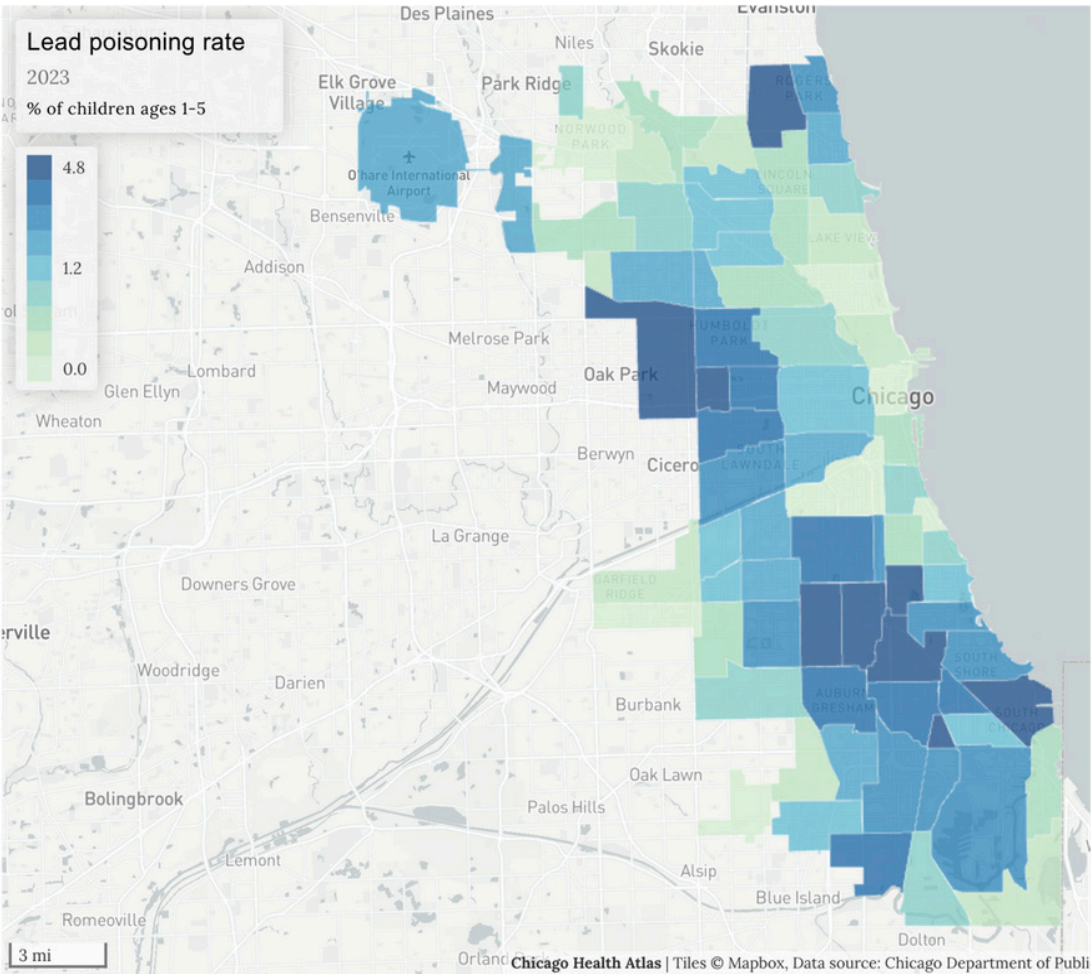

Figure 5: Lead Poisoning Rate, calculated as the percent "of children aged 1-5 with peak annual blood lead level (bll) 5 or more micrograms of lead per deciliter (μg/dL) blood, venous draw" (Chicago Health Atlas 2025).

Lower life expectancy, greater lead poisoning for children, and higher cancer rates on the South and West Sides would be a clear and indisputable violation of this capability for life and health. However, without a respect for the human-Earth relationship, which is fraught in the case of pollutants and causing harms to health, one might conclude that better medicines and greater access to healthcare could solve this issue rather than a fundamental reimagining of Chicago without the sources of pollution themselves that cause human and environmental illness. Better healthcare to deal with this situation is undoubtedly necessary, but a holistic and ecological perspective is necessary to deal with the root causes of pollution-related illness rather than a superficial solution.

Furthermore, local public policy is in harmony with a root-causes approach to pollution mitigation, citing an intent to "preserve, protect and improve the air, water and land resources of Cook County (which includes Chicago), so as to promote the health, safety, welfare and comfort, prevent injury to human health, plant and animal life, and property" (Cook County Code of Ordinances 30-2; see Appendix A). In this text, humans are situated alongside other stakeholders such as animal and plant life, demonstrating the inseparability of our fates in our shared ecosystem. Therefore, because human life is always conditioned upon a healthy environment to live in, the human/nature dichotomy cannot be maintained in this capability. And for this capability to be fulfilled, environmental health and wellbeing must also be sustained.

For the bodily health capability, for Nussbaum includes the ability to "have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter" (Nussbaum 2000:78). As stated previously, pollutants such as heavy metals are carcinogenic, compromising the ability to live a long and healthy life for those exposed to the pollution. Further, some heavy metals such as arsenic (As), selenium (Se), and lithium (Li) are also teratogenic, meaning they cause birth defects with exposure to pregnant people (Evans 2020). This has reproductive justice implications, as pollutants subvert control over our bodies and their reproductive capacities. Therefore, polluted landscapes are inherently a reproductive and gender justice concern, and a threat to this second capability. Viewing human health, including reproduction, as distinct from environmental health ignores the deep interconnectivity demonstrated in the science of this case study.

Lastly, bodily integrity describes the ability to "move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction" (Nussbaum 2000:78). Ecofeminist scholars such as Fred Besthorn and Diane Pearson McMillen also argue that the oppression of nature and women are 'twin oppressions' (Besthorn and McMillen 2002). This oppression is argued to be the result of hegemonic masculinist logics of domination over the environment and other non-human beings alongside women and gender minorities. Masculinist domination is also present in other systems of oppression, such as racism and queerphobias. Consistently throughout Nussbaum's work, she is deeply concerned with the equitable and just treatment of women, and her work is situated within a distinctly feminist worldview.

Therefore, an extension of this feminism ought to recognize our interconnection with the natural environment, which has undergone degradation through the same logic that oppresses women and gender minorities. This logic is also present in the case of heavy metals, where neighborhoods on the South and West Sides are deemed pollutable,

whereas the North Side is not. Further, the concerns for gendered sovereignty that Nussbaum presents in this capability should extend to the freedom of non-human beings to move from place to place, to be treated as sovereign, to prevent assault, abuse, and violence, and to have the opportunity for pleasure beyond the human experience. And, just as women have intrinsic value outside of what we can provide for men, nature also has value beyond human use. Thus, without an ecofeminist perspective, and especially a deep ecological feminist perspective, the capabilities approach ignores oppressions of nature and perpetuates the same logic of gender oppression.

Senses, Imagination, Thought, Emotions, Control over Environment, Play

Nussbaum writes that the fourth capability for senses, imagination, and thought is the ability "to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason- and to do these things in a 'truly human' way...being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression...[and] being able to have pleasurable experience, and to avoid non-necessary pain" (Nussbaum 2000:78-79). Following philosopher Abraham Maslow's famous Hierarchy of Needs, physiological needs of humans are the existential preconditions for higher-order needs, such as self-actualization (Maslow 1943). In the case of heavy metal pollution in Chicago, full sensory, imaginative, and expressive abilities depend greatly on foundational conditions of health and wellness. The same can be said about the eighth capability, which describes play. The time, resources, and physical and mental energy that are required internal capabilities for this combined capability, which are complicated greatly by the negative health consequences of heavy metal pollution. I mean to say that all people regardless of circumstances have the basic capability for senses, imagination, and thought (though it looks different between people). The internal capability, meaning the infrastructure to support the capability, is what I argue is not afforded equally to all people, especially in the case of health inequities caused by pollution.

Dealing with the health and social consequences of heavy metal pollution takes up space in many Chicagoans' lives, which can subtract from physical and mental bandwidth in other aspects of life. Cook County has recognized the financial, social, and psychological impact that pollution disparities cause in Chicago. For instance, the County cited concerns for environmental injustice in their Policy Road Map, which describes a series of goals and visions for the County from 2024-2027. Objective 1 of the goal for more "sustainable communities" aims to "advance environmental justice by means such as investing equitably across the County to address historic disinvestment and inequitable pollutant overburden" (Cook County Policy Roadmap 2024; see Appendix B). One of the strategies deployed for this objective is to "increase awareness of and financial support for environmental benefits to ensure access to services and resources" (Cook County Policy Roadmap 2024). Attention to environmental and

economic disparities on the South and West Sides of Chicago are strategic ways that local governance is addressing the impact that pollution has on the capabilities of Chicagoans to live and thrive.

While the internal capability for this section—or the infrastructure and resources necessary for a full capability—is hindered by pollution disparities, marginalized communities are always resisting their oppression. Art is a particularly useful medium to convey the impacts of social and environmental issues through the senses, imagination, thought, and emotion, and is a tool of many local environmental justice organizations. Earth Chicago, for instance, is a local organization that aims to bring "attention to issues such as climate change and environmental justice in non-traditional ways [which] can drive people to think, feel, and act" (Earth Chicago 2024). Ultimately, pollution disparities in Chicago threaten Nussbaum's capabilities for senses, imagination, thought, and emotion because they threaten the very health and lives of individuals and communities in Chicago. Nevertheless, communities wield these capabilities as mechanisms of knowledge sharing, emotional release, and ultimately, resistance. Furthermore, polluted environments can disrupt our human/Earth connection because it can be unsafe and unpleasant to be in outside spaces that are polluted. This has serious implications for the ability to be creative because natural environments have the ability to evoke a creative way of thinking by making us more curious, allowing us to think of new ideas, and facilitating flexibility in our way of thinking (Van den Bosch et al. 2015). The higher-order needs that these capabilities describe depend on the foundational physiological needs, which are virtually always mediated by our environmental landscapes.

Control over one's environment is split into two sections: political and material control. The political dimension concerns participation "effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protection of free speech and association" (Nussbaum 2000:80). The material dimension described the ability to "hold property (both land and movable goods)...having property rights on an equal basis with others," and other basic property concerns (Nussbaum 2000:80). Similarly to the concern for senses, imagination, and thought, this capability depends on foundational physiological needs and the maintenance of a clean and healthy environment. Democratic rights are much more difficult to exercise when the basic necessities for survival, all of which depend on the environment, are not met. The case of heavy metals pollution in Chicago is a fantastic example of a violation of the right to material property's entanglement with the environment. Property owners on the South and West Sides face lower property values due to a multitude of factors including neighborhood disinvestment, de facto discrimination, and also the presence of pollution sources such as highways and industrial plants (Shelton 2022). The capability to hold property equally

in the city of Chicago is complicated by the sources and effects of pollutants. Thus, this capability is always situated within a context of an environment in which politics and property are always existing.

Regarding emotions, Nussbaum argues for the capability to "have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger...[and] not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect" (Nussbaum 2000:79). The distinctly humanistic language is notable in this capability alongside the fourth capability, especially when Nussbaum qualifies that capability as being able "to do these things in a 'truly human' way" (Nussbaum 2000:78). This is correct in the sense that a 'truly human way' is to be in deep interconnection with the Earth. Similarly, the ability to "have attachments to things and people outside ourselves" can certainly include non-human beings and objects. This language is quite consistent with a deep ecological view of human relations. While connections of love do occur between humans (romantic, friendship, familial, etc.), there are also a wide myriad of other love relations beyond humans. Many Chicagoans feel love towards Lake Michigan, for example, and the indigenous peoples of this area have been in loving relation to Michigami[1] for tens of thousands of years. When our relations, human or otherwise, are harmed through processes such as pollution, feelings of 'solastalgia' can emerge. Solastalgia is a concept developed by Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht to describe "the pain and longing we feel as we realize the world immediately around us is changing" (Albrecht 2023). Albrecht specifically recognizes this feeling as a response to the effects of disasters from climate change and industrial mining and the ensuing dread, grief, and powerlessness of its witnesses. Thus, to view this capability as distinct from the interwoven human/Earth connection is to ignore the various dimensions of emotion beyond human-human relationships.

Practical Reason, Affiliation

As stated previously, Nussbaum theorizes that the practical reason and affiliation capabilities are interwoven throughout the other capabilities. Following philosopher Immanuel Kant, Nussbaum posits that practical reason is the ability "to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" (Nussbaum 2000:79). Planning of one's life is always going to be in relation to the environment where one is located. Where one lives, works, plays, etc. is going to be a physical location that is a part of a larger ecosystem. We cannot ever escape our interconnectedness with the environment because we too are a part of it. Thus, the

---

1 The Anishinaabemowin name for Lake Michigan is Michigami, which is used by various Indigenous nations such as the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, and other members of the Council of the Three Fires.

environment is always at least in the background, though often in the foreground of human thought and life.

Moreover, the capability for affiliation is twofold: 1) the ability "to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation or another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship;" and 2) "having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others" (Nussbaum 2000:79). This conceptualization of affiliation is not unique to human beings, as non-human beings also show emotions, witnessed through subjective, behavioral, cognitive, and physiological indicators (Neethirajan et al 2021; see more examples in 'Other Species' section). Treatment as a dignified and equal being is also something that should be afforded to non-human beings. No animal is deserving of indignities and humiliation just as humans also deserve respectful treatment. Nussbaum unnecessarily narrows the language of this capability (and others) to exclude non-human beings that have these combined capabilities, though they often look different. For the case study of heavy metals pollution, exposure to pollution is of concern for the ecosystem in and around Chicago beyond just human beings. For instance, metal accumulation in Lake Michigan's species of prey fish is very concerning to some biologists (Conard et al 2021). This research demonstrates a concern for other species, notably even species that are not typically eaten by humans, such as prey fish. Beyond simply concern for humans eating contaminated fish, these fish ought to be able to live in a clean environment. Otherwise, masculinist domination of nature prevails in this capability, with numerous downstream social effects reproduced.

Other Species

Nussbaum writes that the capability for 'Other Species' encompasses the ability to "live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature" (Nussbaum 2000:80). In *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum roughly articulates a counter argument towards a deep ecological critique of this capability. She writes that some may view this capability "from both the human and the animal side, [which] calls for the gradual formation of an interdependent world in which all species will enjoy cooperative and mutually supportive relations" (Nussbaum 2006:400). However, she concludes, "nature is not that way and never has been" (Nussbaum 2006:400). Nussbaum is quick to dismiss the reciprocal potential of this capability, arguing that nature is not 'just.' This argument would imply the human/nature dichotomy, that human thought is outside of the natural world. Systems of justice are not unique to humans. Primate researcher Frans B. M. de Waal, for instance, has found in his study of chimpanzees that they demonstrate social regulation of equality and inequality through their social norms and interactions (de

Waal 1991). Many species have intricate social systems that are not incomparable to human society. If humans are deserving of this capability to live in relation to nature, and humans are not entirely dissimilar socially from other types of social animals, then the application of this capability to only humans is incongruous. Again, living in "concern for and in relation to" non-human beings while also reproducing the logic of species hierarchy that "supplants the natural with the just" (Nussbaum 2006:367) is just another form of masculinist domination.

Philosophical Extension: Being With Earth

Given the limitations of an anthropocentric approach implicit in Nussbaum's capabilities approach, an extension of the theory to incorporate the human/nature connection is vital. Environmental philosopher Christian Diehm (2014) argues that "Western society has become alienated from nature and due to false ideas about humanity's place in the order of things." To address this alienation, Diehm astutely calls for us to make amends with our 'ecological Self,' which "will catalyze an existential affirmation of our embeddedness in and belonging to the natural environment" (Klemmer 2020). In order to develop and expand this 'ecological Self,' I draw from Indigenous botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer, who insightfully writes about the concept of a 'grammar of animacy.' A grammar is a system of meaning that guides and structures a language, and animacy is the state of being alive. Kimmerer noticed that in their language of Potawatomi, there is no grammatical distinction between the personal pronouns such as she, they, and we, and the object pronoun it, which are typically reserved for non-human beings and objects in English and other Germanic languages. Kimmerer argues that "the arrogance of English is that the only way to be animate, to be worthy of respect and moral concern, is to be a human" (Kimmerer 2013:40). While largely unintentional by Nussbaum, this same arrogance underlies the capabilities approach and its anthropocentric grounding.

To move beyond this arrogance, Kimmerer imagines whole new ways of living in the world where other species are respected as sovereign, there can be a world democracy of species rather than a tyranny of one, "with moral responsibility to water and wolves, and with a legal system that recognizes the standing of other species" (Kimmerer 2013:40). This is the very core of what Being with Earth adds to the capabilities approach. Further, Canadian historian and philosopher, Murphy, theorizes about a concept they call 'alterlife,' which "requires bursting open categories of organism, individual, and body to acknowledge a shared, entangling, and extensive condition of being" (Murphy 2017). Alterlife is "a state of already having been altered by environmental violence that is nonetheless a capacity to become something else…[and] is forged in recognition of the realities of large-scale and everyday environmental violence (Murphy 2017). Heavy metals pollution is an example of environmental violence that reveals the insufficiency of an anthropocentric conception of human rights and leads us towards the promises

of 'Alterliving' beyond the domination of nature. Thus, it is through the building of the ecological Self by the means of a grammar of animacy, that we can imagine becoming something else—a world of species living in harmony.

Conclusions

It is through the case study of heavy metal pollution in Chicago that the capabilities approach to human rights become visibly dependent on the foundational claims of deep ecology- that humans are inextricably connected to the Earth, and that the Earth itself has value independent of human beings. Nussbaum's capabilities list is not intended to be a comprehensive list of human rights, but rather an iterative exercise in theorizing what a just vision of human flourishing could require. Thus, I argue that Being with Earth is the next iteration of this list as an underlying principle for all capabilities. In conceptualizing this capability of Being with Earth, I do not mean to reduce all species to the same existence because there are a wide variety of differences between beings in our ecosystem. Just as the capabilities approach is not prescriptive of choice, but rather a champion of the existence of choice in the first place, Being with Earth does not prescribe a certain practical outcome to this philosophy other than the dissolution of masculinist systems of domination.

Lastly, Being with Nature is a starting point for future explorations about what integrated human-environmental rights policies can entail. Rather than viewing human rights and environmental rights as competing or adversarial interests, Being with Nature can serve as a launching point for policy that embraces the deep overlaps between human and environmental flourishing. While the scope of this paper does not allow for an extended list of policy recommendations that would support the capability of Being with Earth, this analysis ultimately leads to a recommendation of a rethinking of human systems and the ways in which non-human beings and common resources are respected, and reciprocal relationships can be re-established. Kimmerer puts it well when she writes that "we are all bound by a covenant of reciprocity: plant breath for animal breath, winter and summer, predator and prey, grass and fire, night and day, living and dying" (Kimmerer 2013:230). All our fates are bound with each other- human and non-human. Being with Earth means embracing our interconnectedness and moving forwards toward a more just relationship with our environment- for a better future for all.

Appendix A: Cook County Code of Ordinances, Section 30-2

Chapter 30 - ENVIRONMENT

ARTICLE I. - IN GENERAL
Sec. 30-1. - Short title.
This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the Cook County Environmental Control Ordinance.
(Ord. No. 17-0059, 4-12-2017.)
Sec. 30-2. - Findings, intent, and purpose.
(a) The County Board hereby finds and determines that in the public policy of the County to preserve, protect and improve the air, water and land resources of the County so as to promote the health, safety, welfare and comfort, prevent injury to human health, plant and animal life, and property; foster the comfort and convenience of its inhabitants and to the greatest degree practicable, facilitate the enjoyment of residents and visitors of the living, recreational and business environment of the County and recognizing that environmental damage does not respect political boundaries or subdivisions of the County, and:
(1) Recognizing that air, water, and other types of pollution, solid waste disposal and noise are closely interrelated and must be dealt with as a unified whole;
(2) Recognizing it is the obligation of the Board of Commissioners of the County to manage the affairs of the County so as to minimize environmental damage and encourage and assist local governmental entities within the County to adopt and implement environmental protection programs consistent with this chapter;
(3) Recognizing the need to assist industry and municipal corporations within the County to promote the development of technology for environmental protection and conservation of natural resources; and
(4) Recognizing the desirability of uniform and consistent pollution abatement, regulations, programs and enforcement, this chapter is being enacted.
(b) The environment in which we live is a basic natural resource of the community. The purity of this resource has been increasingly threatened with the incidental by-products of processes and activities which constitute modern technology. Heating plants, vehicles, industrial processes, and various phases of everyday living contribute increasingly to contamination of the environment. That such contamination, if unchecked, works to the detriment of all by affecting health, property, and the appearance of the community, is now a well-accepted fact.
(c) Cook County in its rapid growth since World War II is becoming a completely urbanized part of the Chicago Metropolitan Area. As such, it is both generator and recipient of environmental contaminants which are increasing, and will continue to increase unless appropriate measures are taken.
(d) To prevent this from happening, the people of the County, acting through their elected representatives, have declared that environmental control legislation is both reasonable and desirable.
(e) This chapter constitutes the above mentioned legislation. It has been written to be comprehensive, fair to all concerned, and consistent with the latest scientific and technical knowledge available. With its adoption, the chapter will secure for present and future residents of the community an environment which is clean, healthful and wholesome.
(f) The administration and enforcement of this chapter falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Control. Effective December 1, 2017, the Department of Environmental Control will be renamed and referred to as the Department of Environment and Sustainability.

(Ord. No. 17-0059, 4-12-2017.)

Appendix B: Text of Page 24 of the Cook County 2024-2027 Policy Roadmap

Sustainable Communities

GOAL: Support healthy, resilient communities that thrive economically, socially, and environmentally

Sample Metrics
- Percentage reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from County facilities from baseline year
- Number of linear miles of bike trails (off-street routes for bicyclists and other non-motorized users)

Objective 1
Advance environmental justice by means such as investing equitably across the County to address historic disinvestment and inequitable pollutant overburden.

Strategies
Strategy 1.1) Address communities' environmental priorities and identify their assets and vulnerabilities.

Strategy 1.2) Offer programs that reduce exposure to pollution, with priority given to environmental justice areas.

Strategy 1.3) Increase awareness of and financial support for environmental benefits to ensure access to services and resources.

Strategy 1.4) Minimize environmental impacts of facilities by adopting technology that reduces energy and water consumption, minimizes toxics use and output and diverts waste.

References

Akamani, Kofi. 2020."Integrating Deep Ecology and Adaptive Governance for Sustainable Development: Implications for Protected Areas Management." *Sustainability* 12(14):5757.

Albrecht, Glenn. 2023. *Solastalgia: An Anthology of Emotion in a Disappearing World*. Edited by Paul Bogard. University of Virginia Press.

Bartosch, Jamie. 2023. "UChicago Medicine Breaks Ground on State's First Freestanding Cancer Center." *UChicago News*. Retrieved May 1, 2025 (https://news.uchicago.edu/story/uchicago-medicine-breaks-ground-states-first-freestanding-cancer-center).

Besthorn, Fred, and Diane McMillen. 2002. "The Oppression of Women and Nature: Ecofeminism as a Framework for an Expanded Ecological Social Work." *Families in Society* 83:221-32.

Buse, Ken, Hesselman Marlies, and Meier Benjamin Mason. 2022. "The Human Right to a Healthy Environment—Time for the Public Health Community to Take Urgent Action." *BMJ* 378:o2313. doi: 10.1136/bmj.o2313.

Conard, Whitney M., Brandon S. Gerig, Lea M. Lovin, David B. Bunnell, and Gary A. Lamberti. 2021. "Metal Accumulation in Lake Michigan Prey Fish: Influence of Ontogeny, Trophic Position, and Habitat." *Journal of Great Lakes Research* 47(6):1746-55.

de Waal, Frans B. 1991. "The Chimpanzee's Sense of Social Regularity and Its Relation to the Human Sense of Justice." American Behavioral Scientist 34(3):335-49.

Diehm, Christian. 2014. "Darwin and Deep Ecology." *Ethics and the Environment* 19(1):73–93.

Earth Chicago. n.d. "About E(art)H Chicago." Retrieved February 28, 2025 (https://earthartchicago.org/about/).

Esie, Precious, Madeline Daepp, Asta Roseway, and Scott Counts. 2022. "Neighborhood Composition and Air Pollution in Chicago: Monitoring Inequities With a Dense, Low-Cost Sensing Network, 2021." *American Journal of Public Health* 112(12):1765-73

Evans, Tim J. 2020. "Reproductive Toxicity and Endocrine Disruption of Potential Chemical Warfare Agents." Pp. 641-657 in *Handbook of Toxicology of Chemical Warfare Agents*, edited by R.C. Gupta. Academic Press.

Griffin, James. 2009. *On Human Rights*. OUP Oxford.

Kim, Hyun Soo, Yeo Jin Kim, and Young Rok Seo. 2015. "An Overview of Carcinogenic Heavy Metal: Molecular Toxicity Mechanism and Prevention." *Journal of Cancer Prevention* 20(4):232-40.

Kimmerer, Robin W. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Klemmer, Cary L., and McNamara, Kathleen A. 2020. "Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: Social Work to Address Global Environmental Crisis." *Affilia* 35(4):503-515. doi: 10.1177/0886109919894650.

Maslow, Abraham H. 1943. *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Martino Fine Books.

Murphy, Michelle. 2017. "Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations." *Cultural Anthropology* 32(4).

Neethirajan, Suresh. 2021. "Happy Cow or Thinking Pig? Wur Wolf—Facial Coding Platform for Measuring Emotions in Farm Animals." *Ai* 2(3).

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2007. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard University Press.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2000. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Rahman, Mostafizur, Kaniz Fatima Binte Hossain, Sadia Afrin, Takeshi Saito, and Masaaki Kurasaki. 2022. "Effects of Metals on Human Health and Ecosystem." Pp. 81-119 in *Design of Materials and Technologies for Environmental Remediation. The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry*, edited by S. Tanaka, M. Kurasaki, M. Morikawa, and Y. Kamiya. Singapore: Springer.

Schencker, Lisa. 2019. "Chicago's Lifespan Gap: Streeterville Residents Live to 90. Englewood Residents Die at 60. Study Finds It's the Largest Divide in the U.S." *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved May 1, 20259 (https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-chicago-has-largest-life-expectancy-gap-between-neighborhoods-20190605-story.html).

Shelton, Deborah L. 2022. "Chicago Communities Wage Environmental Justice Battles." *Crain's Chicago Business*. Retrieved May 1, 2025 (https://www.chicagobusiness.com/equity/chicago-communities-environmental-justice-battles).

Van den Bosch, Cecil C., and Trine Plambech. 2015. "The Impact of Nature on Creativity – A Study Among Danish Creative Professionals." *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 14(2):255–263. doi: 10.1016/j.ufug.2015.02.006.

Voyles, Traci B. 2015. *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Watson, George P., Nicolas F. Martin, Zachary B. Grant, Sarah C. Batka, and Andrew J. Margenot. 2022. "Soil Lead Distribution in Chicago, USA." *Geoderma Regional* 28: e00561.

White, Deidre, and Tekleab Gala. 2022. "Environmental Injustice? Disparities in the Exposure to Environmental Lead Poisoning and Risks Among Children in the Chicago Neighborhoods." *American Journal of Public Health* 10(3):124–133.

MEGAN MORRELL is a community-engaged researcher interested in the intersections of environments, public health, and social inequities. She currently works as a Research Project Coordinator at Northwestern University's Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science (CORNERS). Prior to joining CORNERS, Megan worked as a Research Assistant at Northwestern University's Center for Health Equity Transformation, working on various studies that investigate the social dimensions of cancer disparities in Chicago, Illinois. They earned a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Denver and an M.A. in Social Science Research from the University of Chicago.

SALT 'FARMING': GENDERED LABOUR AND ECOLOGIES OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN LITTLE RANN OF KUTCH

by RITIKA PATEL

. . . it grows
when the sun beats down– turns
earth to salt turns sweat to rupees
it grows from the ground
fields of white
funeral flowers
for the ones who
harvest them

– Divya Victor

Mithu barabar che? (Is the salt alright?), asked Ruksana as she served a meal of Dal rice to the reporter. The harmless query brought sarcastic smiles as the family sat around a large plate, all eating from one plate. "*Salt farming is our traditional livelihood and my family has been making the journey to the Little Rann of Kutch for the past three generations,*" said Ruksana's husband Chhanabhai. As the monsoon recedes, and the flooded salt marshes grow dry, Chhanabhai and his extended family, including women and children, hop on to trucks and tractors to migrate to the Little Rann of Kutch and stay there in extremely poor living conditions with very limited resources for 8 months to begin salt production. Just before the onset of monsoon, they sell their entire harvest to traders and return to their native villages.

Little Rann of Kutch is an uninhabited and seemingly never-ending stretch of cracked earth that is spread over an area of 5180 sq km (Singh et al. 1999). It is a desert for eight months of the year and flooded for the remaining four when the seawater from the Gulf of Kutch on the Arabian Sea turns the dry surface into wet marshes over briny water. At the beginning of the farming season in October, around 60,000 members of the Agariya community leave behind their homes in the towns surrounding the marshes and travel to the desert to undertake the backbreaking work of harvesting salt until June (Kaur 2021). Although salt farmers contribute

to capitalist production and are nominally included by the state, their lives are managed in such a way that they are constantly exposed to deadly threats. In other words, to borrow the language of Giorgio Agamben (1998), they live in a state of "inclusive exclusion." This makes salt farmers a modern figure of bare life, trapped "at the deadly intersection of poverty, illiteracy, and migrancy."

According to the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) report 2020, the salt workers in Gujarat are largely bereft of benefits from welfare schemes owing to a serious lacuna in imposition of basic clauses to deter exploitation in leasehold agreements as well as due to a lack of inter-departmental coordination and an absence of long term policy in place. The Agariya community remains socio-economically poor, perpetually exploited, ecologically threatened, and administratively unattended and uncared for.

This paper is an attempt to study the ecologies of migrant workers (Agariyas) in the Little Rann of Kutch, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of salt production through a gendered perspective. By centering Agariya women's experiences, the paper challenges conventional conservation narratives and shows how conservation approaches, ostensibly aimed at protecting wildlife, have systematically marginalized the Agariya community. The analysis highlights the paradoxical position of Agariya women, who are both indispensable to salt production and yet rendered invisible by patriarchal and capitalist structures. Salt production in Gujarat is predominantly processed and distributed for industrial purposes, rarely appearing with a "Product of India" label in high-end grocery stores. However, the techniques employed for its extraction remain remarkably artisanal.

Thus, I argue that salt making is not just an economic activity but a complex social process deeply embedded in gender relations, ecological constraints, and historical power dynamics. Contrary to reductive interpretations of salt as a mere currency of emotional labor performed by women to placate men in their lives, on the western coast of India, where the burdens and benefits of salt production are highly gendered, it's a product of their physical labor as well. However, women's essential economic contributions are systematically devalued and invisibilized, despite their indispensable grunt labor in the artisanal process of salt production. Therefore, there's a need for improved infrastructure and organizational support, through which women can gain control over their time and labor and can reconceptualize traditional work into an opportunity for economic empowerment. The Banaskantha study showed that when women had access to improved infrastructure to facilitate water supply and organizational backing, they could transform time saved into

economic gains of Rs. 750 to Rs. 5,500 annually (James et al. 2002). Similarly, investing in better infrastructure at salt pans and providing organizational support could help women salt workers move beyond mere labor to become stakeholders in the production process.

This paper uses a combination of methods to understand the Agariya community and its relationship with the landscape of Little Rann of Kutch. Press clippings and primary data gathered by the *Agariya Heet-Rakshak Manch*, a non-governmental organization, provided valuable insights into the community's ground realities. Additionally, key community members were interviewed, and group discussions were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Due to the absence of a reliable list of households for selection, the "random walk method" of sampling was used to identify participants. The research primarily focused on the South East zone, as it is the largest area and contains the highest quality brine for salt production. The research was structured to examine the relationship between gender and salt production, with particular attention to women's experiences and challenges in the industry.

Salt Making: A Historical Perspective

In Little Rann of Kutch, several traditional communities like Chunvalia Koli, Miyana, Sandhi, Wagher, Jat, Rabari, Bharwad, Patel, Darbar, Ahir, etc., living in the 107 peripheral villages spread across five districts along the Kutch region, and are involved in diverse occupations. Of various livelihood activities pursued by the people here, salt making, fishing, charcoal making, and pastoralism have a strong dependence on the resources of Kutch. Interestingly, all these activities are seasonal. Studies indicate that salt making is one of the largest economic activities for the people living in the peripheral or fringe villages (Singh et al. 1999). Traditionally Chunvalia Koli community has been known for its excellent salt making skills (Kathiawar Gazetteer 1889). It involves making pans with two-foot high bunds. These pans are filled with brine, pumped from underground wells. The brine gradually dries out through evaporation, allowing for the harvesting of *Vadagra*, a type of large crystal salt, typically collected once per seasonal cycle. However, in places where tidal water is available apart from subsoil brine, karkach salt (small crystals) is harvested 10-12 times in the same duration. The salt-making tradition of the Agariyas has deep cultural roots, with their folkloric songs continuing to resonate and be sung across generations, keeping their heritage alive.

For instance, this song describes how the salt pans of Odu city have brought prosperity to many of the people; though it makes them dark by working in the sun and makes life difficult, it gives them money to be able to buy various things from the market.

સારા પરતાપ સેર ઓડુ અગરના,
ભવની ભાંગે ભીડ રે, ગાંગડો વાલો લાગે
પૈસાનો સાબુ બજારે મળશે,
ઉજળા થઇ ઘરે આવો, ગાંગડો...

The agars, salt pans of Odu town, bring good luck. It brings lifetime respite to all of us. [And therefore] We all love the crystal of salt. By paying, you can get the soap from the market. [through the money earned from salt] Go, wash, get fairer, and then come home.

The early history of salt making is not known, but it is believed that large-scale salt making has been going on in the areas of Patadi, Jhinjuwada, and Kharaghoda since the 10th century (Campbell 1887). The method of salt farming was well developed by 1680. A Firman[1] issued by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1669-70 states that Jashwantsinh, the king of Halvad, was reinstated as the rightful owner of Agar (salt pans). From the *firman*, it appears that in 1669 the salt was taxed, but probably taxes were low. Salt was not a state monopoly item under the princely rule, and the licenses were held by the people from other states too. In many other places, Agariyas made their own salt and paid small royalties to the state. This salt was sold at low prices, and specific occupational groups like farmers, tanners, etc., were even allowed to collect Ghasiyun salt [This was the lowest quality salt, albeit easiest and quickest to make] for free (Watson 1886). It is only when the British Government intervened and took control of salt production, distribution, and began heavy taxation that the salt became a monopoly of the Victorian rule.[2] To secure their heavy duties on the salt, a customs line was established across the whole of India (Moxhom 2001). After 1880, salt production and distribution in the Little Rann of Kutch was highly restricted, and in order to exercise complete control over salt manufacturing and its market, by 1900, the making of Vadagara salt was completely banned by the British Government which was lifted in 1924 but only for the native states. People were still barred from making it. British rule had imposed severe

---

1 The word "firman"originates from the Persian word "farmān," meaning an official decree or order.
2 Roy Moxhom's The Great Hedge of India, 2001 gives insights into how the salt was viewed and exploited by the British empire to amass huge revenues at the cost of the health and survival of the Indian people.

restrictions on the native states for expanding their sources of revenue including salt (Williams 1958:253).

In 1930, Salt protest events started taking the coastal areas of colonial India by storm, a snowball effect of a mass pilgrimage, led by Mahatma Gandhi, to the seaside town of Dandi. Here, Gandhi and his followers made their own salt in resistance against the British Empire's Salt Act of 1882; the law prohibited Indians from collecting and selling salt, forcing them to rely on heavily taxed imports instead. Part of the protest's power stemmed from the symbolism that salt, in many ways, is life. Without salt, there is no preservation, no flavour, and no sustenance. Dandi March was followed by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931. As demanded by Gandhi, the British Government after almost 200 years of total control over salt in India, granted the local villagers in salt-producing regions the right to manufacture and sell salt for both domestic use and local trade. It is then that Agariyas of Little Rann of Kutch got their rights for independent salt making.

Despite many natural sources for salt making and known traditional technologies in many parts of India, including the Little Rann of Kutch, due to British policies, India was heavily dependent upon salt imports till its independence in 1947. After independence, in 1948, the Indian Government took steps to democratize salt production by allowing individuals to set up small salt works (under 10 acres) without licenses or applications. This particularly benefited the Agariyas in Little Rann of Kutch, who could now produce salt independently on small plots, known as 'dus acre Agariyas' (Aggarwal 1956:533). While this initial policy helped restore rights to small producers, subsequent salt policies mostly favored large-scale producers and market interests over small-scale salt makers.

Until 1952, the Agariyas were classified as a "*Denotified Tribe*" according to the Constitution of India; although this label is no longer used, it birthed persistent social and administrative biases that still haunt the Agariyas and other indigenous groups to this day. Moreover, Little Rann of Kutch, a traditional homeland of Agariyas during salt farming, is known as "Survey Number Zero" because no official land survey was ever conducted before or after independence, and it also did not figure in government revenue records. Consequently, leaving the Agariyas' traditional land rights unrecognized. Thus, some pre-independence claims have been recognised while post-independence leases are deemed invalid. The post-independence industrial policy's focus on large-scale salt production marginalized small producers. The 1948 delicensing of small producers, while seemingly

liberalizing, actually removed them from formal recognition systems (Arularasan, Balaharish & Babu 2023).

The Agariyas' relationship with salt production represents a classic case of how colonial and post-colonial policies transformed traditional resource rights and livelihoods. The Agariyas maintained customary rights over salt production in the Little Rann of Kutch, operating within a decentralized system of resource management. Their traditional knowledge and techniques were integral to the local salt economy. The British enacted the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which severely impacted the Agariyas along with other indigenous communities. This legislation reflected the colonial state's attempt to control mobile populations and resource-rich territories through criminalization (Radhakrishna 2001). The colonial salt monopoly fundamentally altered traditional production systems. The British introduced licensing requirements and restricted access to salt pans, effectively delegitimizing traditional claims to salt-making areas.

The contemporary challenges faced by Agariyas stem from this historical trajectory of dispossession and non-recognition. Climate change impacts exacerbate these vulnerabilities; unpredictable rainfall prompted by climate variability and floods from the drainage of the nearby Narmada River quite literally wash away any harvest, and increasingly frequent dust storms sully the salt, lowering its price. The lack of formal recognition means they cannot access disaster compensation or industrial subsidies (The Hindu 2022). Up to 76 per cent of India's salt is produced in Little Rann of Kutch. But the Agariyas have for generations been compensated little for their labor, and they bear the cost of their own supplies. These salt farmers earn an average of only 150 Indian rupees ($2.10) per ton of salt—even though the market price is 17,000 Indian rupees per ton, which is 239 US dollars (World Bank Report 2021). Until recently, the salt farmers were compelled to accept the prices set by middlemen and moneylenders. But for the last few years, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union of more than 2 million women, has been advocating low-rate loans tailored to their situation.

Conservation Policy and Its Gendered Outcome

Agariyas, like many other nomadic or semi-nomadic indigenous communities in India, were evicted from the lands they generationally occupied, without being provided definite alternatives. In 1973, the government designated 4,840 sq. km of Little Rann of Kutch as Wild Ass Sanctuary, with an additional 112.81 sq. km added in 1978, totaling 4,952.81 sq. km (Singh, Patel and Pravez, et al, 1999).

The Surendranagar district administration for the Wild Ass Sanctuary issued a formal directive on September 25, 1997, requiring Agariyas (traditional salt workers) to document their land rights within the protected area within 60 days.[3] Officials mandated that this notice be broadly circulated throughout all Panchayats in villages surrounding the Little Rann of Kutch, with implementation reports to be submitted to the additional collector's office appointed under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. However, when the notification was issued, most Agariyas were already working in the remote salt pans of the Rann, areas that exist beyond any Panchayat jurisdiction or revenue village boundaries. As a result, the critical information failed to reach the majority of salt workers, leaving only a small fraction able to file their claims before the deadline expired. In the four decades since the Sanctuary's establishment, numerous developments have unfolded, but this initial communication failure had significant consequences for the salt farming community (Singh et al, 1999).

The situation became more complex with the enactment of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in 2006, which recognized the rights of communities dependent on forests and protected areas for their livelihood. Since 2007, Agariyas have faced multiple eviction notices demanding documentary evidence of their salt farming rights in Little Rann of Kutch, with threats of imprisonment. This has placed enormous pressure on this traditional community, threatening their primary livelihood (Singh et al. 1999). The Agariyas have lived in harmony with wild donkeys for centuries and have played a crucial role in the species' survival. However, despite this coexistence, the Agariyas faced threats of eviction, and their traditional salt-harvesting practice was labeled "illegal," ostensibly to protect the wild donkey population (Bharwada and Mahajan 2008). It shows how the product of Agariyas work is fundamental to our nourishment, but they are shunned as obscure interlopers in its production. As a result of these policy decisions, the Agariyas have been marginalized and effectively reduced to the status of indentured servants, their vital contributions dismissed and their way of life imperiled.

The landscape hosts multiple forms of life and livelihood, each with its own rhythms and requirements. Shy wild ass generally runs away from any movement or any effort

---

3 In response to an application dated 12th Dec 2006, put under right to Information Act 2005, Public Information Officer of Additional Collector (wild Ass) Office has clearly said that the office has received only 1776 individual claims and 77 representations within stipulated time of 60 days from the date of notification. Out of which 268 individual applications and 14 claims from co-operative societies are being approved. As per annual report of Department of Industries, 45,439 families are engaged in salt production in the districts Surendranagar, Patan, Rajkot (maliya) & Kutch, surrounding sanctuary area. The question comes, if 45,000 Agariyas were aware of the process for verification of rights in the proposed sanctuary area (LRK), why only 1776 gave their representation before the collector?

to get closer to them. But it shares a close relation with Agariyas. Wild asses are often seen very close to the salt pans, even sharing Agariyas' drinking water. Agariyas often express their cordiality with wild asses by saying that the ass and their children often play together. There have been no incidences of Agariyas harming the wildlife. The field discussions with many Agariyas and their representatives indicate that most Agariyas are willing to get involved in any effort towards conservation and peaceful co-existence. This demonstrates the "heterogeneity and multiplicity" in conservation contexts and shows that conservation involves complex assemblages of humans, animals, landscapes, and cultural practices that cannot be reduced to simple binary tensions (Chua et al. 2020:51).

The wildlife conservation model in India since colonial rule has been exclusionary, often displacing indigenous communities from Protected Areas due to the perception that their livelihood activities threaten conservation efforts. Protected Areas are always perceived differently by different sections of society. Urban conservationists see them as sanctuaries for wildlife and tourism, local communities regard them as ancestral lands vital for their survival, and industrialists view them as sources of economic resources. These conflicting perspectives create tensions that challenge conservation efforts, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and balanced approach to environmental protection (Saberwal et. al. 2001:71).

Before the founding of the Little Rann of Kutch wildlife sanctuary, the publicly owned desert land was leased to private owners with whom the Agariyas would negotiate the terms of their salt production. Since 1997, when the settlement process related to the wildlife sanctuary began to unfold, leases have ceased to exist, but the salt farmers continue to rely on the informal credit system called *dhiraan*: the former lease-owners provide the Agariyas with an advance payment for the salt they will harvest. The payment, however, is a discordantly small compensation for their labour. They earn about 0.30 rupees (or three-hundredths of a cent) for a kilogram of salt that is later sold on the market for 20 rupees a kilogram (Kaur 2021). By the end of the season, many Agariyas had spent about half on fuel for the water pumps they used for brine collection, and most of the remaining funds were on repairs, labour, and basic supplies for survival in the desert. This means they habitually leave Little Rann of Kutch with almost no profits and often accrue debt.

In 2012, the Forest Department introduced the World Bank-supported Biodiversity Conservation and Rural Livelihood Improvement Project. While this project aimed to conserve biodiversity and improve stakeholder communities' livelihoods, its implementation focused mainly on periphery villages, effectively excluding the Agariya salt farmers, who are major stakeholders and play a crucial role in wildlife conservation

according to members of Agariya Heet-Rakshak Manch (AHRM) (Pandya 2020). Conservation policies that separate the Agariyas from their ancestral land have profoundly impacted their lives. This underscores how conservation efforts, whatever their intentions, can disenfranchise Indigenous communities by severing their connection to vital ecosystems and resources. Marginalized groups like the Agariyas often rely heavily on the natural resources and ecosystem services, such as salt, that their environments freely provide. Forced displacement strips them of these critical resources, exacerbating their vulnerability and deepening existing inequalities.

Women, who generally have less access to capital, land, and resources than men, are even more dependent on the ecosystem. A 2006 report on the 'Socio-Economic Status of Workers in the Salt Industry in India' revealed stark inequalities: women salt workers earned significantly less than their male counterparts, and literacy rates among women salt workers in Gujarat were just 14%, compared to 28% for men. This disparity leaves women less equipped to withstand economic shocks and with fewer opportunities to transition to alternative livelihoods. If Agariya women were displaced from the land they have farmed for generations under the guise of fortress conservation—a policy approach that has definitely overlooked the need for gender-sensitive measures, they would face extremely limited options for survival and adaptation.

In September 2023, the Gujarat government reversed its earlier decision to evict the Agariyas from the Little Rann of Kutch, allowing salt workers with leases for up to 10 acres to continue production in the area. Agariya women now possess identity cards issued by the Gujarat Forest Department, officially recognizing them as part of the salt-working community. After decades of restriction, the department has officially acknowledged the role of the Agariyas in wildlife conservation, and it has also recognized salt production as a "traditional occupation practiced for centuries", granting the Agariyas legitimate access to financial markets (Hindustan Times 2023). However, a formal decision on their land rights remains pending, leaving the community vulnerable to continued insecurity. The economic implications of this insecurity are significant. Merchants have been hesitant to establish fixed prices for salt, and access to financial services remains limited. Moreover, the government's recognition has been accompanied by new, often stringent, conditions governing salt production, making it challenging for the Agariyas to maintain their livelihoods.

For instance, Deviben Patel is forced to work as a farm laborer in Surendranagar district due to the economic hardships and uncertainty in the salt-making profession. With a large family of 8 to support, Deviben and her husband struggle to make ends meet. The lack of formal land rights means she cannot use her salt pan as collateral for

loans, limiting her access to formal financial services. Even with solar panels reducing operational costs, the stringent new production conditions—including restrictions on entry into the Little Rann and the constant threat of equipment confiscation make it difficult to maintain a stable income for her family. Like many Agariya women who spend eight months of the year in the desert with their families, Deviben must balance salt production with caring for her family in their makeshift desert home, all while navigating the additional vulnerabilities that come with uncertain land rights and changing governmental policies.

Agarias' poor financial condition has worsened due to exploitation by moneylenders and traders. Although Agarias are major salt producers, debt and market activities have transformed them into wage laborers. According to SAVE (2005), salt makers earn only 1% of the market price for their physical labor and skill, while merchants and others receive nearly 99%. Under economically bonded conditions, salt workers' labor rights are violated. Limited resources and access to information hinder growth and development. Agariyas often enter the Rann with debt and leave with even more, perpetuating the cycle.

Agariya women, if given an alternative, might envision different lives and aspirations for themselves and their children—a choice that deserves recognition and respect. With increased income from solar pumps, new generations of Agariyas are focusing on education and diversification of livelihoods. For example, Gauriben Zinzaria, a long-time SEWA member from Nava Kuda village, has two solar pumps and a small flour mill. Her children now go to school more regularly as she can afford to leave them behind at home with an elderly family member during the salt production season. Plus, she can afford to travel back home, over 5 kilometers from the Rann, more frequently. She also hopes to send her children to high schools outside the village with the rise in income because of her solar pumps. Dozens of other women like Gauriben are using their solar pumps to create a brighter future for their children (NRDC 2018). The increased financial stability from solar pumps has allowed some women like Bhavnaben Koli to invest in additional businesses, such as flour mills, while continuing salt farming. SEWA's interventions since the 1990s have helped mainstream women's role in income generation activities and increased their decision-making power in households. However, while some women are diversifying their income sources, salt farming remains their primary occupation. Their increased participation in financial decisions and asset ownership suggests greater mobility and agency compared to previous generations, although this progress remains fragile.

Traditional practices should not be synonymous with oppression, as a sustainable food system cannot rest on a foundation of exploitation. Once again, salt is pivotal in

the fight for the freedom to choose how to live in India, but it is not Gandhi who is marching. This time, the rebellion is led by resourceful and resilient Agariya women, who for centuries have been the leaders of a traditional cultural practice. Perhaps, like salt on our food, we wouldn't fully appreciate the essentiality of the Agariya women unless they were gone.

Women Agariyas: Between Tradition and Survival

The case of Agariya women shows us how market-oriented production tends to create gender polarization in rural communities where women continue traditional subsistence production and are categorized as housewives despite their essential economic contributions, whereas men are increasingly viewed as breadwinners (Chitra 2002). This process doesn't fully transform rural labor into wage labor, nor does it completely convert women into dependent housewives. Instead, it creates a hybrid system where women's vital economic contributions are systematically undervalued and hidden (Mies 2012). Despite this systemic discrimination, they continue to preserve and innovate upon their traditional harvesting practices.

For instance, the song Agariyo Agnani is a complaint of a village girl to her parents for marrying her off to an Agariya and all the drudgeries and hardships involved in being wife of an Agariya. This is one of the many pieces of folk music that illuminates the harsh lived experiences of Agariya women.

અગરીયો અજ્ઞાની માડી, મુને અગરચિાને શીદ આલી
ફુઇઓ ગળાવતો ને ટાપા તળાવતો, ઝીલો લેવડાવતો દાડી, માડી મુને . . .

Oh mother, Agariya is ignorant and illiterate, why did you marry me to him? He makes me dig salt wells, pull the mud from the well and toss it out.

Landscapes remember the labour lost in them:
Agariya women in Little Rann of Kutch working in Salt pans
Source: Sugato Mukherjee/Al Jazeera

The modern economic paradigm represents a masculine project that systematically devalues women's contributions. It sees the essential work performed by women—cooking, caregiving, and resource gathering as non-productive and economically irrelevant. This narrow mechanistic framework recognizes only commercial transactions as legitimate economic activities, creating a system where capital becomes real while actual human realities are rendered invisible.

The Agariya community exemplifies these distortions in practice. Agariya women face severe ecological precarity and socio-economic vulnerability within the artisanal labor sector. They bear the brunt of this system, experiencing multiple layers of discrimination and exploitation despite being pivotal to salt production. Their labor, though integral to the community's survival and production, is systematically rendered invisible. This narrow mechanistic thought and highly alienated artificial economic system grants personhood to corporations and sees actual people, particularly women in subsistence economies, as non-persons whose contributions remain uncounted and unvalued in official economic calculations.

The working conditions for women salt workers are particularly stringent, characterized by poor nutrition, excessive physical labor, and health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth (SAVE 2005). Agariya women's reproductive labor constitutes a critical yet largely invisible aspect of their daily existence, intricately linked to both their physical well-being and the survival of their families. In addition to the strenuous, visible tasks in salt production, these women shoulder intensive reproductive responsibilities—ranging from childbearing and domestic caregiving to managing household sustenance under harsh conditions. The constant pressure to reproduce, driven by high child mortality rates within salt worker families, exacerbates health risks and compounds the physical strain incurred during long hours at the salt pans. Moreover, women face domestic violence and social discrimination, often linked to their husbands' alcohol addiction. This indicates how women's labor in salt industries subsidizes family survival but is excluded from formal economic calculations. Their income from labor or product sales doesn't cover their reproduction costs, although they serve as the ultimate guarantors of family survival through various types of paid and unpaid labor.

At the pan site, women contribute an average of eight hours per day labor. In the production cycle, women are involved from the preparation stage to production stage. She has to do tiring work of preparing a makeshift production unit in the ground, which requires the formation of bunds with use of mud paste (garo) that collects underground brine in a well, and concentrates it in salt pans called pattas. These pans

have hardened bases to prevent the liquid from sinking back into the soil, and are moulded manually through the ancient practice of *paglee*—being stepped on with bare feet, usually for over a month—often by Agariya women. Which is used to precipitate perfectly shaped and sized salt crystals as the captured brine evaporates under the sun's burning heat. During the salt production stage, women also bear the responsibility of monitoring the engine and stopping accumulation of dust particles in the salt. Since engines run for 12-24 hours for eight months, it becomes difficult for women to manage the household and monitor the engine together. The type of salt produced influences the working hours of women staying in the salt pan. The women working in marine salt production have to work for more than eight hours, mainly due to more harvesting where women are involved in lifting the salt. Though women contribute an equal amount of physical labor, the traditional role of women in the production cycle is restricted to invisible, intensive, unskilled work.

The gendered division of labor in salt production mirrors agricultural patterns, where women are excluded from certain visible, strength-symbolizing tasks. For instance, while women participate in most aspects of salt production, they are prohibited from operating the *Dantari* or *Dantali* (a wooden rake used for breaking salt crusts) in salt pans, similar to restrictions on plowing in agriculture. This division reinforces traditional gender hierarchies while maintaining women's economic subordination.

Through the eight months, families deal with many small crises: the pump stops working, the level of the groundwater decreases, there are unseasonal rains or sandstorms. If the family has not made enough salt at the end of the cycle, they will be in debt to the salt trader the following year. The rewards are few, but still they take pride in making the best and whitest salt in the world. The severe living conditions and uncertainty about the success of salt production activity have created strong superstitions and customs, as well as addictions among salt-pan workers. The activities related to salt production are guided by ritual rather than any scientific method. For an Agaria, digging a well is a divine process. They do not follow any scientific method to identify the source of water but instinctively select a place. Many times they fail to strike water and are forced to move to another location leading to a repetition of the exercise. According to SAVE (2005), "Women are blamed if the well turns out to be barren."

Agariya men often die young as a result of the serious physical and mental health risks brought on by salt processing, including skin conditions and blindness (Ranpara 1995). The life expectancy of male Agaria is always lesser than that of their female counterpart. They also face the dangers of operating diesel-run pumps, which spew noxious fumes

and are known to combust.[4] The nearby town of Kharaghoda is colloquially called the "village of widows" because of the unnaturally high number of widowed Agariya women it houses. The men die, but their debts live on, and the women often arrive in Little Rann of Kutch with children in tow—work to fulfill them. Life becomes miserable for a widow salt worker; she has to depend on her kinships for livelihood. Amidst the arduous task of salt harvesting, Agariya women simultaneously shoulder the responsibility of raising and caring for their families in the desert. As primary food providers within their households, their efforts extend far beyond their homes. Moreover, they play a vital role in preserving the traditional methods of salt production.

For instance, at just thirty-two, Meena Savadiya carries the heavy burden of her late husband Rajesh's debt. Rajesh, who spent years working with diesel pumps in the harsh landscape of the Little Rann of Kutch, succumbed to severe respiratory issues, leaving behind not only his family but also a debt of 50,000 rupees owed to a salt contractor, which now rests on Meena's shoulders. Each morning, before dawn, she rises to begin her grueling work, leaving her two children—aged eight and twelve—in the care of her mother-in-law, who moved in after Rajesh's passing. Her hands, despite the makeshift protective wrapping, show signs of the salt's constant assault—cracked skin that never fully heals and white crystalline deposits that seem permanently embedded in her fingertips. She remembers how Rajesh's hands looked the same way, how his eyes had gradually weakened over the years until he could barely see in bright sunlight.

During breaks, she sits with other women from Kharaghoda, many of whom share her fate. They exchange traditional salt harvesting techniques passed down through generations, discussing which methods yield the purest salt while requiring the least exposure to harmful chemicals. These conversations are punctuated by memories of their husbands and worried discussions about their children's future. Like many women in Kharaghoda, she finds herself trapped between impossible choices. Despite everything, she maintains the precise traditional methods of salt production that have been practiced for generations. She knows exactly when to shift the brine between pans, how to test its density with experienced fingers, and the exact moment when the crystals are ready for harvesting. This knowledge, passed down through centuries, is both her heritage and her survival. Meena's story mirrors that of countless other Agariya women—widowed too young, working to pay off generational debts, and somehow finding the strength to preserve their community's traditional way of life while dreaming of a different future for their children.

---

4 A book from the 1990s, Kali Majuri, Dholo Mithoo (Black Labour, White Salt) by Dilip Ranpara, describes the legs of Agariyas hardened by exposure to salt, of a lifetime spent working with salt. When an Agariya dies, their legs have too much salt in them. Salt is inert, nonflammable; it is used as a natural fire extinguisher. Agariya legs do not catch fire when cremated. They are removed from their bodies and buried in the salt flats, along with their salt making tools.

The practice of hiring husband-wife pairs for salt production exacerbates women's dependency. Widows and single women face near-complete exclusion, irrespective of their expertise, highlighting the gendered precarity of employment. Usually, the eldest girl child bears responsibility for siblings and hence always tends to be illiterate. The women were forced into salt making activity after their marriage. In fact, in Koli caste, the groom's side has to pay dowry to the girl's father. In addition to this, the groom has to agree and take an oath that he will not involve his wife in salt production activity. However, after marriage, every woman is forced to work in saltpans. This is a societal attempt to minimize women's visibility as economic agents, only to contradict these norms post-marriage when labor demands rise. This practice is rooted in patriarchal and capitalist structures, and it demonstrates how women's economic participation is contingent on their relationship to male counterparts. It reflects the broader historical trend where women's labor is rendered invisible in both colonial and postcolonial economies.

In other major salt-producing nations, the use of solar evaporation as a method is rapidly disappearing even though it is seen as superior in terms of its taste of origins, something akin to having *merroir*. But the Agariya women have doubled down on their efforts to protect the technique. While traditional solar evaporation methods have been central to the Agariya community's identity, their manual nature entrenches the exploitative status quo. Recent initiatives, such as the introduction of solar-powered pumps, illustrate the potential of technology to alleviate physical labor and improve economic outcomes for women.

In 2013, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) tested a program to replace the typical fossil fuel-run pumps used by the Agariyas with solar energy-powered alternatives, based on the idea that solar-powered pumps would be less expensive, more efficient, and less polluting than their fossil fuel-powered counterparts. The scheme was eventually scaled up, with enormous benefits for both Agariya women and the climate. According to Harinesh Pandya, managing trustee of Agariya Heet-Rakshak Samiti, which maintains a constituency of approximately 6,000 Agariyas (traditional salt farmers), the integration of solar technology has yielded multifaceted benefits. These include enhanced product quality, increased production cycles, and improved byproduct recovery rates, coupled with a substantial reduction in working capital requirements. (Hindustan Times 2023) The region's environmental initiatives have garnered international attention, notably through Hillary Clinton's participation in the Self-Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) semicentennial commemoration. During this event, Clinton announced the establishment of a Global Climate Resilience Fund, allocating US$50 million to support women-led climate change mitigation efforts in the region. However, such interventions must be critically evaluated to ensure they do not reinforce existing gender hierarchies but instead empower women as equal stakeholders (The Indian Express 2023).

The Larger Picture

The exploitation faced by salt farmers is a narrative of profound socio-economic and ecological significance. However, a more fundamentally tragic question at the heart of their existence is what compels them to return to the desert to labor tediously year after year, generation after generation? What meaning do they find in this existence? For the Agariyas, their existence is shaped by a long history of marginalization and exploitation, compounded by the enduring stigma associated with their community. Despite these adversities, they persist in the grueling process of salt production, returning annually to the saline fields of the desert. This cyclical return is not merely a reflection of economic necessity but also speaks to deeper cultural, social, and possibly existential drivers that imbue their labor with meaning. The harsh ecological constraints of the desert—extreme temperatures, water scarcity, and the physical toll of salt extraction- underscore the resilience of the community.

The role of Agariya women in salt production illuminates the complex intersections of gender, labor, and economic marginalization. While they perform essential economic work, they are categorized merely as "housewives," a categorization that obscures their vital productive role. Feminist Scholars like Maria Mies (2012) and Silvia Federici (1975) have documented how capitalist and patriarchal structures systematically devalue women's economic contributions. The invisibilization of their labor manifests in policy and economic frameworks, where their contributions remain unrecorded and their skills are undervalued. The salt pans serve as a microcosm of broader social inequalities, with women restricted to intensive, unskilled labor while being excluded from operating specific production tools.

The complexity of their situation is amplified by the reproductive dimensions of their work. These women manage households and bear children under extreme conditions while contributing substantial physical labor to salt production. This shows us how women's dual burden of productive and reproductive work remains invisible, even in situations where they struggle to balance between the two at a significant personal cost. Ultimately, the Agariya women's experience is far more than a localized phenomenon. It represents a critical case study in understanding global patterns of gendered labor exploitation within economic systems that simultaneously rely on and devalue women's work. This paper is part of what I hope will evolve to become a historical class and gender perspective on the labor involved in Salt production in India.

References

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Agariya Heet-Rakshak Manch. n.d. "Press Clippings Collection." India: A Collective of Traditional Salt Farmers of India.

Aggarwal, S. C. 1956. *The Salt Industry in India*, Volume I and II. Government of India Press.

Bharwada, C., and V. Mahajan. 2008. *Yet to Be Freed: Agariyas' Life and Struggle for Survival in the Little Rann of Kutch*. Ahmedabad: Sandarbh Studies.

Campbell, James. 1887. *Gujarat Sarvasangraha*. Gujarat: Gujarat Book Depot.

Chua, Liana, Casey High, Timm Lau, and Viola Schreer. 2018. "Conservation and the Social Sciences: Beyond Critique and Co-optation—A Case Study from Orangutan Conservation." *People and Nature* 1:42-60.

Comptroller and Auditor General of India. 2020. "Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the Economic and Revenue Sector." New Delhi: Government of India.

Federici, Silvia. 1975. *Wages Against Housework*. Bristol, UK: Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press.

G., Arularasan, Balaharish V., and Senthil Babu D. 2023. "Salt Workers in Contemporary South India: Change and Continuity." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 46(4):869-885.

Government of Bombay. 1889. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol. VIII: Kathiawar. Bombay: Government Central Press.

Hindustan Times. 2023. "Renewed Hope for Gujarat's Salt Pan Workers as Eviction Threat Eases in Little Rann." September 12. Retrieved February 25, 2025 (https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/renewed-hope-for-gujarat-s-salt-pan-workers-as-eviction-threat-eases-in-little-rann-101694518359666.html).

James, A. J., Joep Verhagen, Christine van Wijk, Reema Nanavaty, Mita Parikh, and Mihir Bhat. 2002. "Transforming Time into Money Using Water: A Participatory Study of Economics and Gender in Rural India." *Natural Resources Forum* 26(3):205-217.

Joshi, Chitra. 2002. "Notes on the Breadwinner Debate: Gender and Household Strategies in Working-Class Families." *Studies in History* 18(2):261-274.

Kaur, Ravleen. 2021. "When Salt Is an Essential Commodity and Salt Makers Are Not." *Mongabay-India*, October. Retrieved from https://india.mongabay.com/2021/10/when-salt-is-an-essential-commodity-and-salt-makers-are-not/

Mies, Maria. 2012. *The Lacemakers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Moxham, Roy. 2001. *The Great Hedge of India*. London: Constable & Robinson.

Natural Resources Defense Council. 2018. "Worth Their Salt: Improving Livelihoods of Women Salt Farmers through Clean Energy in the Salt Pans of Gujarat." NRDC International: India.

Pacha, Farida. 2013. *My Name is Salt. Switzerland*: Leafbird Films.

Pandya, Harinesh. 2020. "Agariyas and Little Rann of Kutch." Agariya Heet Rakshak Manch (AHRM). Retrieved December 2025 (https://ahrmindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/agariyas-and-little-rann-of-kutch.pdf).

Radhakrishna, Meena. 2001. *Dishonoured by History? Criminal Tribes and British Colonial Policy*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Ranpara, Dilip. 1995. "Kali Majuri, Dholo Mithoo" (Black Labour, White Salt).

Saberwal, Vasant, Mahesh Rangarajan, and Ashish Kothari. 2001. *People, Parks, and Wildlife: Towards Coexistence*. Tracts for the Times Series. New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Saline Area Vitalisation Enterprise Limited (SAVE). 2005. "A Pinch of Salt – A Study of Salt Workers of Rajkot, Surendranagar, Kutch and Patan district of Gujarat." Report prepared for CARE India.

Salt Commissioner's Organisation. 2006. "Socio-Economic Status of Workers in the Salt Industry in India: A Report." India: Salt Commissioner's Organisation.

Singh, H. S., B. H. Patel, R. Pravez, V. C. Soni, N. Shah, K. Tatu, and D. Patel. 1999. "Ecological Study of Wild Ass Sanctuary." Gandhinagar: Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation.

The Indian Express. 2023. "Hillary Clinton Meets Salt Pan Workers, Announces USD 50-Million Climate Resilience Fund." *The Indian Express*, January 21. Retrieved February, 2025 (https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/gandhinagar/hillary-clinton-salt-pan-workers-climate-resilience-fund-8427870/).

The Hindu. 2022. "Watch: How Climate Change is Making Salt Farming Unsustainable." January 27. Retrieved February 25, 2025 (https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/watch-how-climate-change-is-making-salt-farming-unsustainable/article38271158.ece).

Victor, Divya. 2017. *Kith*. Toronto/New York: Bookhug Press/Fence Books.

Watson, Kernel. 1886. *Gujarat no Sarvasangraha*. Mumbai: Education Society Press.

Williams, L. F. Rushbrook. 1958. *The Black Hills: Kutch in History and Legend: A Study in Indian Local Loyalties*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

World Bank. 2021. World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

RITIKA PATEL is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Modern Indian History at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi and holds a Bachelor's degree with Honours in History from Hansraj College, University of Delhi. She is also a Postgraduate Member of the Royal Historical Society, U.K. Her academic interests span gender studies, global environmental history, and emerging perspectives in South Asian Studies. Her research explores themes ranging from colonial domesticity and indigenous land rights to the political economy of climate change. She has contributed to both academic and public platforms such as Brown History Newsletter, SABAB: Journal of the Political Science Department (Lady Shri Ram College), and the book titled Seeking the Questions: Field Notes from Rural India published by National Foundation for India in 2024.

The Editorial Board

Vidyasagar Sharma is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. He is working as a Research Assistant in the project "Navigating Universities: Student Aspirations, Boundaries and Transformations in India and the Philippines" funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). He worked as a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Delhi until March 2023. He holds a master's in Political Science from the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and an M.Phil in Political Science from the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi. He has been associated as an Urban Fellow at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru, and worked as a Research Intern at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. He is working as a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Young Ambassador for the academic session 2024-25. His doctoral research focuses on studying non-traditional students' aspirations and social lives at Indian universities. Currently, he is working on his monograph "Reading as Resistance: Study Circles and Changing Contours of Student Movements in Indian Universities."

Research Interests: Belonging, Higher Education, Social Justice, Anti-Caste Pedagogy, Spatial identity, Urban Marginality, Ethnography, Students' Movement

Barbara Zagorc is a PhD Candidate in Sociology of Culture at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, and a Research Assistant at the American Slovenian Education Foundation. Her dissertation delves into the intricate power dynamics shaping contemporary urban spaces, with a particular focus on the case study of People's Park in Berkeley. Barbara's research interests span a broad spectrum, including the intersection of society and space, power dynamics within space production, public engagement in urban planning, the emergence of resistance and alternative spaces, homelessness, the criminalization of space, knowledge production and media, youth studies, and migration patterns. Her passion for urban issues developed during her life experiences and visits to the United States.

Research Interests: Urban Sociology, Social Movements, Law and Society, Knowledge Production and Media, Political Sociology

Meriam Salem is a Ph.D. student investigating how behavioral health interfaces with the legal systems. She was recently awarded the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Research Scholars fellowship. Her research framework draws on the Duboisian question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" with implications for examining how governments manage behavioral health and the encroachment of national security frameworks in healthcare systems. Salem's current research is on California's CARE Court policy.

Research Interests: Sociology of Work, Time and Temporality, Emotion, Science and Technology Studies, Inequality. Comparative Ethnography

Gabriel Alvarez is a Ph.D. student in Criminology, Law and Society and a J.D. candidate at the University of California, Irvine. His research agenda centers on examining family violence, population studies, forensic interviewing of children, and life course disability. Gabriel's work has been published in the Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice, and he is developing several manuscripts on topics including global responses to domestic violence criminalization, gender differences in child testimony, and policing disability. Gabriel holds master's degrees in Social Ecology and Demographic and Social Analysis from UC Irvine, Criminology and Criminal Justice and Public Administration from Arizona State University. He also earned dual bachelor's degrees in Criminal Justice and Psychology from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Research Interests: Family Violence, Psychology and Law, Family Demography, Health and Life Course Criminology, Socio-Legal Studies of Family and Childhood

Andy Carr is a Ph.D. candidate studying American law and politics at the New School for Social Research. Previously, he was a Moscone Scholar and Dean's Research Fellow at U.C. Law, San Francisco (Hastings), where he received his JD in 2019. His research largely focuses on constitutional and administrative law, and his dissertation is focused on bureaucratic decisions concerning the housing sector in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Andy holds a BA in Government from Christopher Newport University and a MA in Political Science from Penn State.

Research Interests: Administrative Law, Constitutional Law, Federal Bureaucracy, Far-right Politics, Law and Political Economy

Mehdi Hoseini is a PhD student in the sociology department at Boston College. Currently, he is doing his dissertation project on the role of multilateral and regional organizations in the Global South regarding developmental policies. At Boston College, he is also a recipient of a fellowship from the Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy.

Research Interests: Historical Sociology, Global & Transnational Sociology, Political Sociology, Development

Farah Hamouda (she/her) is a Sociology Ph.D. student at UC Santa Barbara with research interests in Palestine studies, environmental justice, colonialism, indigeneity, and media. Drawing from her lived experiences as a child of Palestinian immigrants, Farah is interested in unsettling settler colonial processes and state-sponsored violence towards Indigenous populations around the world, including ecological violence, government-initiated censorship, and displacement. Farah received her B.S. in Sociology and minor in Political Science from the University of Utah and M.A. in Sociology from Vanderbilt University.

Research Interests: Environmental Justice, Settler Colonialism/Indigeneity, Middle Eastern Studies, and Media

Felipe Antonio Honorato is a PhD candidate in the Social Change and Political Participation Post-Graduation Programme of the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, under the supervision of professor Valéria Barbosa de Magalhães. He was a visiting PhD researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences of KU Leuven, Belgium, between 2023 and 2024, under the supervision of professor Katrien Pype.

Research Interests: Congolese Migrations, History of DR Congo, Belgian Colonialism, International Migrations

Brittney Augustina Rose (she/her) is a Sociology Ph.D. student at UC Santa Barbara, a research fellow at the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, and a Board Director for Midwest Immigration Bond Fund. Her research interests lie at the intersection of state violence, carcerality, militaries/militarism, and law, informed by her familial and community histories of navigating interlocking systems of domination. Brittney holds a B.A. in Sociology with focus on Law and Society from UC San Diego and a M.A. in Sociology from Vanderbilt University.

Research Interests: State Violence, Carcerality, Militaries/Militarism, Law

Thomas Jones is a Ph.D. student at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. He has been studying several aspects related to the correctional institutes like programming, healthcare, victimization, juvenile justice, etc. Thomas is a cat dad to two tabbies named Timmy and Juniper. He enjoys learning about a variety of topics and seeing how they can possibly connect to the correctional world.

Research Interests: Correctional Institutes, Healthcare, Juvenile Justice, Victimization

Julio Montanez MA, is a third year PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Julio's research is located at the intersection of domestic/family/intimate partner violence, social inequalities, and public policy. His first scholarly co-authored book is entitled, Between Systems and Violence: State-Level Policy Targeting Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Lives. His works can also be found in Crime & Delinquency, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Journal of Legal Research Methodology, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Springer Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence, Stigma and Health, Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology (TRAILS), and Violence Against Women.

Research Interests: Domestic Violence, Public Policy, Social Inequality, Mental Health, Methodology

Support the BJS!

The Berkeley Journal of Sociology is a student organization dedicated to providing all of our content for free. Your gift allows us to keep bringing you an amazing print publication, a cutting-edge website, and events that show us all how awesome sociology is.

Here is a list of projects that we are working on, that your contribution will directly support. In addition, donations are essential to help us cover publication fees. Feel free to make a suggestion for what you'd like to see us do next!

- Publish annual print journal
- Website redesign, including improved web hosting and content organization
- Writing and editing workshops for students and aspiring public sociologists
- Widening our reach by increasing our distribution numbers and locations

We are accepting donations at: https://asuc.org/donate/
(Scroll to the bottom of the page & enter "Berkeley Journal of Sociology" under Student Org Name)

Donate any sum you want, big or small. We appreciate it so, so much.

INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:
Individuals who would like to receive a yearly subscription to the Berkeley Journal of Sociology in the mail, please donate a suggested minimum of $24 (to offset shipping and printing costs) and send us an e-mail with your mailing address. If you'd like more than one copy of a single issue, e-mail us and we can work something out!

If you'd like to use a check, please send to the following address, made out to "Berkeley Journal of Sociology": Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 410 Social Sciences Building, Berkeley, CA 94720-1980

We are a subset of the ASUC, a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Checks made out to the BJS are tax-deductible.

LIBRARY/INSTITUTIONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:
Pricing and subscription instructions for libraries and institutional subscribers can be found on our website: www.berkeleyjournal.org