

The MUNers Digest

International Affairs — Country-Specific Focus — Simulations Skills and Strategies

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**MUNERS
ACROSS
BORDERS**

The MUNer Digest is a journal dedicated to exploring global affairs, diplomacy, and international cooperation, providing a platform for students, young professionals, and experts to engage in meaningful discussions on international relations. Established in 2024 by MUNers Across Borders, the journal reflects our commitment to fostering dialogue and critical analysis on pressing global issues. By bringing together diverse perspectives, MUNers Digest aims to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world policymaking, contributing to a deeper understanding of international dynamics.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

MUNers Across Borders is always proud to be pushing the boundaries of what Model United Nations and all simulations can contribute to the world. In this digest, we enter into the world of publishing in a way to highlight to the international community that MUNers are a valuable source of insights and thinking. We wish to use this digest as a way to share best practices between the MUN and Simulation Community, Share and publish research from those engaged in simulations about current events, and create a focal point around the Model UN Community.

With thanks to Soumya as our inaugural Editor-in-Chief for this edition, and those who supported her including Tomi, and Tereza - we hope you enjoy this and join us for our Summit and activities throughout!

Philippe Lefevre

DIRECTOR, MUNERS ACROSS BORDERS



FOREWORD

SOUMYA ARORA

EDITOR-IN- CHIEF



As the Editor-in-Chief of the first edition of the MUNers Digest, I am delighted to introduce this inaugural issue. Over the past four years with MUNers Across Borders, I have had the privilege of witnessing our community's growth firsthand. This project holds a special place in my heart as it reflects the spirit of innovation and commitment that characterises us.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Philippe, Tomi, and Tereza for their unwavering support, which has been crucial in bringing this publication to life. As we embark on this new chapter, I invite you to delve into its content and join us at our upcoming Summit and other events, where we strive to expand the possibilities for our community.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

Warm regards,
Soumya Arora

Editor-in-Chief, The MUNers Digest

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DESIGNERS

TOMI REJU



Taking part of this project as the deputy has been such an insightful journey, from the initial planning process to the final stages of completion, of which I am very honoured.

I would like extend my deepest gratitude to each and every person that took the time to contribute their insightful articles to the MUNers Digest.

All in all, words cannot explain how excited we are to finally release this publication. It has been a long but delightful road, and we truly hope that our readers enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed creating it.

TEREZA CORRADI



Working on the visual side of this issue has been a meaningful and hands-on experience. There's something special about watching words and ideas take shape on the page, and I'm grateful to have played a part in bringing that to life.

A sincere thank you to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge, and perspective to this edition. It was a pleasure to match that focus and dedication through design.

It's always a little nerve-wracking and a lot exciting to see a project like this come together. We hope exploring these pages feels just as rewarding for you as shaping them was for us.

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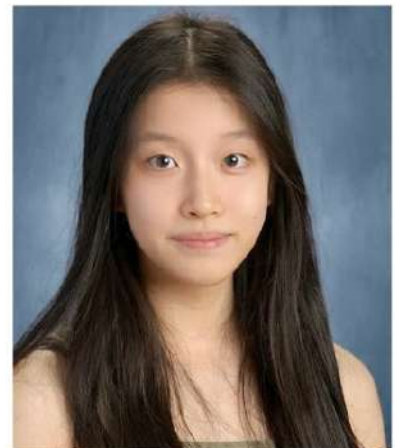
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Why MUNers Across Borders

Phillipe Lefevre



Image by MUNers Across Borders

The concept of MUNers Across Borders emerged from the realization that the millions of people involved in Model United Nations (MUN) could benefit from a stronger system of cooperation, training, and understanding between conferences. By focusing on training the trainers, the idea took shape through experiences gained from hundreds of MUNs—whether I participated in them directly, heard about them, or learned from others' perspectives. In this article I want to briefly look at the three pillars that led to the foundation of MUNers Across Borders, and where we might be going next.

One defining characteristic of MUN is that many people love participating in simulations, but after doing it once, they often experience burnout or lose engagement. One downside of the yearly MUN cycle is that key lessons from these experiences are not always retained. After a conference, the process of writing handbooks, mentoring the next generation, or hiring new teams can feel overwhelming, leading to a lack of consistency and continuity across conferences worldwide. This is where MAB can be a receptacle for all these lessons learned, and provide platforms like our Model UN Summit to share them.

Another factor is the cultural diversity inherent in MUN. With my own experience of conferences in a dozen countries across three continents, I've found it fascinating how MUN means different things to different people. For instance, MUN culture in India—one of the most vibrant MUN circuits in the world—differs significantly from how conferences are run in the United States or Africa. Even within Africa, the terminology and practices vary greatly between North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and individual circuits in South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya. MUNers Across Borders was there to also be able to recognize and celebrate this.

The history of MUN was also a significant part of MAB's founding. 2021 was the 100th Anniversary of the first student simulation of an international organisation at the Oxford International Assembly in 1921. And through this, I also began exploring the rich, yet largely forgotten, history of MUN. Credit must go to Bill Yotive, the preeminent historian of MUN, who has been involved with the movement for decades. His guidance has been instrumental in helping me understand this history. Model UN itself dates back to 1943, predating the founding of the United Nations, yet much of this legacy remains unacknowledged. MUNers Across Borders seeks to honour this history while providing a framework for effective and meaningful cross-cultural collaboration in MUN.

These three strands—continuity, cultural diversity, and historical context—form the foundation of MUNers Across Borders. I'm optimistic about what the future

holds for this initiative. It is not just about training and education but also about fostering international values, which feel increasingly threatened in today's turbulent world. I hope to expand our scope to include other types of simulations and activities that inspire and empower those who participate in them.

A key challenge we face lies in the term "MUN" itself. To some, it means everything; to others, it means nothing. Without a strong sense of community, individual perspectives dominate, and experiences can become fragmented. For instance, someone with a negative experience at one conference may struggle to reconcile that with someone else's positive experience, especially if both have limited exposure to MUN.

Looking ahead, one of the ultimate goals of MUNers Across Borders is to advance the concept of education through simulation. MUN is a powerful tool for teaching young people about international relations while also helping organizations connect with the next generation.

As we move into 2025, I'm excited about what lies ahead and hope you'll join us on this journey.

Double Colonial Oppression: *The Gendered, Racial, and Religious Bias in International and National Refugee Policies with a Focus on Rohingya Refugees*

Soumya Arora



Image by Antonio Cansino from Pixabay

Introduction

The global refugee crisis remains one of the most complex human rights challenges of the 21st century. The plight of the Rohingya refugees, a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority from Myanmar, highlights the severe intersection of colonial legacies, gendered vulnerabilities, and religious biases within the framework of international and national refugee policies. For decades, the Rohingya have been subjected to systemic persecution, culminating in a genocidal campaign that forced over a million individuals to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh. This crisis is not simply a humanitarian disaster; it is a case study on how both international and national refugee policies, influenced by colonial legacies, perpetuate gendered, racial, and religious biases. This paper uses the concept of "double colonial oppression" to describe the dual layers of marginalisation experienced by the Rohingya: first, through international frameworks like those of the United Nations which are rooted in Western-centric and colonial ideologies; and second, through the national refugee policies of host countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh, shaped by their own colonial histories. This oppression disproportionately affects refugees based on their gender, race, and religion, particularly Muslim, indigenous, and female refugees, whose vulnerabilities are often ignored or aggravated by these policies. Through a critical analysis of key theoretical perspectives, media reports, and empirical research, this paper explores these biases and their impact on the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Thesis Statement How do international and national refugee policies, influenced by colonial legacies, perpetuate gendered, racial, and religious biases that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of Rohingya refugees?

Rohingya refugees endure "double colonial oppression," facing marginalisation within UNHCR frameworks and further discrimination through national policies in Myanmar and Bangladesh. International policies, while intended to protect, frequently fail to account for the specific cultural, gendered, and religious needs of marginalised groups. National policies compound these biases, particularly in post-colonial states. This thesis situates the Rohingya crisis within a larger critique of global refugee governance, asserting that the system is inherently biased and reflects enduring legacies of colonialism and patriarchy.

International Policy Analysis

I. Historical Background on the UNHCR: Eurocentric Origins The UNHCR's Eurocentric origins continue to influence systemic bias, disadvantaging non-Western refugees like the Rohingya. Established in 1950 to address European displacement post-WWII, its

frameworks are rooted in Western understandings of statehood and citizenship. Despite the 1967 Protocol expanding its scope, systemic inequities persist, often marginalising refugees from the Global South. The 1951 Refugee Convention, while foundational, is selectively applied, privileging Western interests and failing to address the specific cultural, religious, and gendered needs of non-western refugees reflecting "colonial internationalism." The Rohingya, due to their stateless status, fall into a legal grey area. The UNHCR's response to the crisis has been categorised as "somewhat different" by critics.

Although the Global Action Plan aims to end statelessness, it lacks binding mechanisms, reflecting a colonial mindset that prioritises state sovereignty over human rights. Countries like Myanmar are not held accountable for their discriminatory laws as they refuse to ratify such treaties. The UNHCR's delayed recognition of the Rohingya genocide highlights a reluctance to fully acknowledge the religiously motivated violence they face, reflecting broader colonial attitudes. This reflects a broader colonial mentality that often downplays the severity of violence against marginalised groups.

II. Critical Analysis of UNSC Resolutions and its Implications:

The 2022 UNSC Resolution has implicit bias in its construction. Firstly, the preambulatory emphasis on "need to uphold human rights" is vague, reflecting a tendency to prioritize formal recognition over substantive action. It further emphasises the need to "fully" protect the rights of women and children, but its language lacks specificity in actionable measures. The emphasis on "protection" without detailing culturally sensitive operationalisation perpetuates patriarchal norms. This gender-blind approach fails to address systemic barriers faced by Rohingya women and girls in accessing healthcare, education, and legal support.

This language choice illustrates a colonial attitude where the state apparatus attempts to control narratives, stripping the Rohingya of their rightful identity. Such language further entrenches systemic discrimination and alienation within humanitarian frameworks. The ongoing state of emergency in Myanmar has severely limited the rights of Rohingya refugees, particularly their access to education, health services, and legal protections—but the countless acknowledgments to ASEAN's efforts over incorporation of gender-based violence (GBV) solutions is disappointing. The resolution's call for upholding democratic processes (Article 3) appears superficial when juxtaposed with the reality of statelessness faced by the Rohingya, failing to address the complexities of colonial histories that have shaped their political landscapes. The resolution's call for "full,

safe and unimpeded humanitarian access” can be critiqued for its colonial undertones, as it often frames humanitarian access as a benevolent act from Western powers, overshadowing their right to self-determination.

IV. Western Bias in Refugee Reception The Rohingya’s Muslim identity has been a focal point of discrimination. The international community’s response to the Rohingya crisis has been muted compared to other refugee crises, indicating a racial bias. The lack of urgent action from countries to accept Rohingya refugees contrasts sharply with their responses to crises involving predominantly Christian populations. (Appendix III) Religious biases manifest globally, and the varied treatment of this refugee crises highlights the racial and religious biases within international systems, strengthening the argument that refugee frameworks are far from neutral and instead mirror entrenched power dynamics. This can be seen in the lack of funding and support from Europe. (Appendix III) The swift and compassionate response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 stands in stark contrast to the slow and inadequate response to the Rohingya crisis. European countries, including Poland and Germany, opened their borders to millions of Ukrainian refugees, while Muslim-majority refugees have been met with reluctance and suspicion. There are patterns of preferential treatment unravelling the deep colonial roots of “white Christian supremacy.” This discrepancy is not merely coincidental; it reflects a broader racialized hierarchy in refugee reception policies that systematically privileges other refugees while marginalising Muslim and non-Western populations.

Conclusion:

Future Transformation Through an examination of these intersecting oppressions, this paper has argued that the global refugee system, rooted in colonialism and patriarchy, perpetuates historical inequities, and is in dire need of transformation to better protect vulnerable populations like the Rohingya. The paper calls for a reform of refugee policies to be more culturally sensitive and free from colonial biases, particularly by integrating gender-sensitive approaches that address the intersectional vulnerabilities of female refugees, especially those from Muslim-majority countries. The international community must confront the racial and religious biases that continue to shape global refugee policies, ensuring that all refugees, regardless of their background, are treated with dignity and respect.

A case study of the Dublin Riots and the lessons we can learn: *A need of algorithmic change, not platform governance, to address polarising and hateful content*

Siofra O'Mahony

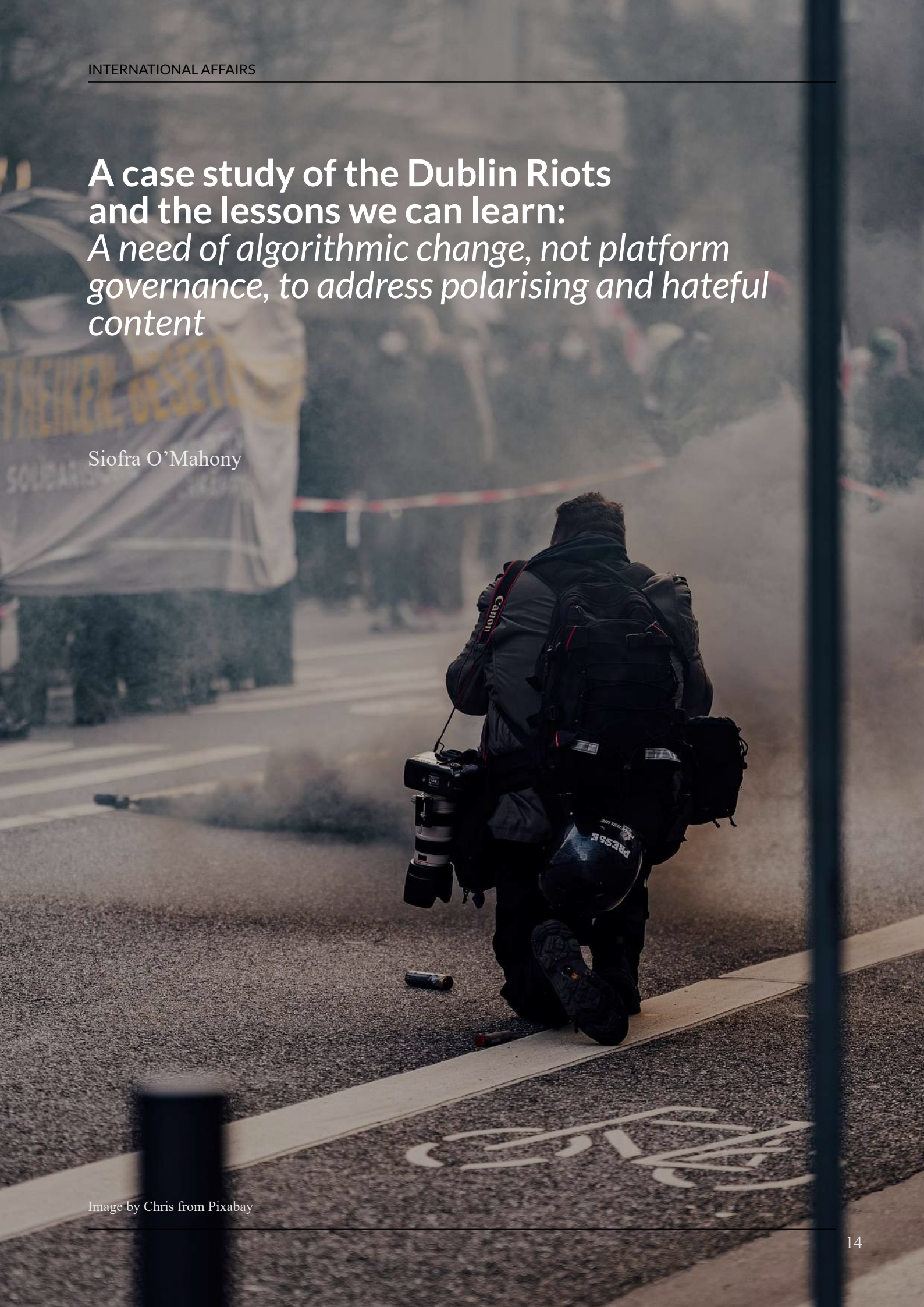


Image by Chris from Pixabay

The current platform governance framework, at both the EU and national level, is failing to address polarising content on X and other online platforms. To prevent a recurrence of the Dublin Riots or future atrocities fuelled by online misinformation, algorithmic overhaul is needed. Platforms taking down content is a band-aid response, not a meaningful solution – and operators of big platforms are aware of this. International law must continue to develop with an understanding of technological advancements. Understanding why social media platforms' take-down policies are completely inadequate in addressing social media frenzies, such as the one which triggered the Dublin Riots, is essential to understanding the outbreak of future episodes of violence. International lawyers and legislators are beginning to look to public figure's social media accounts for proof of genocidal intent or incitement of international crimes. The future of crimes of 'incitement' in international law lies in the digital sphere. Failure to change the algorithms which allow these platforms to function will have far-reaching consequences, potentially involving massive losses of human life. This case study of the Dublin Riots, and the regulatory response to its online instigators, highlights the inadequacy of this approach and the need for a systemic change.

#DublinIsBurning

On November 23rd 2023, a man stabbed four people, of which three were children, outside a school in Dublin. Far-right actors on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, began circulating misinformation that the stabbings were perpetrated by an 'illegal' Muslim immigrant. People were urged to take to the streets in protest. One widely circulated WhatsApp voice message called for people to kill any foreigners they saw. Approximately 500 people took part in the riot - looting shops, attacking Gardaí and setting fire to police cars, buses and trams.

Under the #DublinRiots, the top posts utilise other anti-immigrant hashtags, including: #STOPimmigration, #IrelandBelongsToTheIrish, #IrelandIsFull.

These manifestations of anti-immigrant rhetoric are representative of a global increase in right-wing politics. Social media has played an undeniable role in this phenomenon. It is important to analyse the existing legal framework aimed at tackling online hate, to improve future interventions.

It is clear that X plays a crucial role in providing a platform for these racially motivated agitators, presenting their content to an ever-increasing audience base. This allows radicalisation of the vulnerable, especially disillusioned, young, working-class men, in this case.

Current Legal Framework

The Digital Services Act (DSA) came into force on 16th November 2022. This regulation aimed to provide a clear legal framework governing the online world, striking a balance between protecting consumers and encouraging innovation. The ECJ has also emphasized the balance between protecting fundamental rights like freedom of speech, and confronting illegal or harmful content. X was designated a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP), based on its user base exceeding the threshold of 45 million users. Therefore, X was obligated to comply with all applicable DSA provisions by 25th August 2023. In October, the European Commission sent a Request for Information (RFI) to investigate X's compliance with the DSA.

The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 confirms the 1989 Act's continued applicability to online incidents. It is unclear, as there has been no case law yet, whether a potential criminal charge could be brought against an online platform, as a broadcaster. However, the same legal requirement of knowledge of the nature of the content, per Article 6(1) of the DSA, is required to attract criminal liability. Therefore, if a platform could not be held criminally responsible under national law as a broadcaster, for content of which it had knowledge, it could still be subject to sanctions under the DSA.

This report highlights the shortcomings of approaches to platform governance which focus on content moderation, rather than acknowledging the issues inherent in this business model itself. A report from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that platforms depend on practices and algorithms which "promote content that contributes to online and offline human rights harms and grave human rights abuses, including genocide." This was well documented by Amnesty in the case of the Myanmar genocide. As globalisation advances, technological developments create an increasingly borderless online world. This is evident from the involvement of US and UK-based far-right extremist figures in inciting the Dublin Riots, such as Tucker Carlson and Tommy Robinson. Effective regulation is more important than ever.

Another shortcoming of platform governance was highlighted by the Amnesty report on Myanmar – a lack of comprehensive language skills in content moderation. Concerningly, X does not employ a single content moderator capable of speaking Irish. 12 other EU languages are not represented at all. This is a glaring lacuna in content moderation capabilities, which could allow illegal content to evade detection. The importance of extensive awareness of the local cultural context was also highlighted by Meta's Oversight Board.

Coimisiún na Meán met representatives from online platforms, including X, to raise concerns relating to extremist content in the context of the Dublin riots. The Commission will act as the Digital Services Coordinator (DSC) to implement the DSA. It will be responsible for enforcement, in cooperation with national authorities, other Member States' authorities and the European Board for Digital Services.

The Commission is also drafting online safety codes which will implement legally binding rules for online service providers on dealing with harmful content, including incitement to hatred. Failure to comply with these codes would enable the Commission to impose financial sanctions on tech companies of up to €20 million or 10% of their annual turnover. These safety codes could increase the incentive for platforms to take a more proactive self-regulating approach in ensuring online safety and tolerance. However, the importance of increased involvement and oversight from both state-led and non-governmental monitoring bodies cannot be overemphasised.

Conclusion:

This area of platform governance is increasingly important in the current era of misinformation. Content moderators drawn from a diverse range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds are essential in an effective regulatory ecosystem. However, content moderation alone has proven to be an ineffective response to tackling harmful content. Algorithms actively promote or “viralize” polarising content, resulting in echo chambers which encourage hatred and violence. More successful interventions should involve a complete re-evaluation of the algorithms utilised by tech companies. The Media Commission's incoming safety codes may ensure that those who publish polarising content can be held responsible. Additional legislation, such as the introduction of a broader hate speech offence, will also be useful in ensuring these kinds of harmful online behaviour does not go unpunished.

Critical comparative analysis of the Escazú Agreement to the Aarhus Convention

Soumya Arora



Image by Edward Lich from Pixabay

Introduction

The Aarhus Convention (Aarhus) and the Escazú Agreement (Escazú) are two influential international treaties imperative for strengthening environmental democracy and governance. These treaties provide frameworks for access to information, public participation, and justice in environmental affairs. While both treaties are grounded in the principle of environmental democracy, ie, principle 10 of the 1922 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, they reflect distinct regional priorities and legal traditions. The two treaties represent distinct approaches to private enforcement of environmental rights, shaped by their regional contexts and priorities. Aarhus excels in institutionalised governance, relying on established legal frameworks and judicial systems, particularly within the stable governance environment of the European Union (EU). In contrast, Escazú adopts a transformative and inclusive approach to private enforcement, tailored to the socio-political realities of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Escazú addresses socio-political barriers which are pervasive in the region. This progressive lens positions Escazú as a more inclusive framework for addressing inequality and empowering vulnerable communities.

This essay argues that while Aarhus established a formalised framework for private enforcement of environmental rights through a strong legal system suited for procedural and institutionalised governance of environmental rights, Escazú represents a more progressive and transformative approach by addressing systemic barriers such as corruption, inequality, and threats to environmental defenders. It integrates human rights protections, sustainable development principles, and Indigenous peoples' rights to address pressing environmental challenges.

The paper critically compares the objectives, scope, and implementation of both treaties through the lens of private enforcement. First, by examining how Aarhus institutionalises private enforcement through legal remedies, public participation and access to information with rigorous systems like the European Union. Then, it compares and evaluates Escazú's progressive approach, which addresses systemic inequities in private enforcement like corruption, inequality, and violence against environmental defenders, empowering the indigenous communities. Finally, it synthesises the arguments to reaffirm that in comparison to Aarhus's formalised framework for private enforcement, Escazú offers a more inclusive model for environmental justice.

Private Enforcement in Environmental Law

Private enforcement—"the practice that directly allows private actors to enforce statutes or regulations"—of

environmental law serves as a vital tool for ensuring accountability and compliance. It empowers individuals, NGOs, and communities with the ability to enforce environmental rights especially when government oversight falls short. Aarhus and Escazú, adopted in 1998 and 2018 respectively, represent two different perspectives on developing environmental democracy, especially through their emphasis on access to justice. Although international, these treaties are regional in scope; the former primarily focuses on Europe and North America, and the latter is the first environmental treaty for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Their approach towards private enforcement reflects the socio-political and institutional contexts in which they operate.

Objectives and Scope

Both treaties establish three core environmental rights: public participation, access to information, and access to justice but vary in their broader objectives and scope. Aarhus's primary objective is to guarantee these procedural environmental rights, focusing on transparency and accountability in environmental decision-making, deeply rooted in EU law. This transforms the perception of environmental governance and operation within member states by empowering public and non-governmental organisations to actively participate in these democratic processes to ensure greater accountability.

However, Escazú offers a more comprehensive scope. It goes beyond Aarhus to address sustainable development and protection of vulnerable groups like indigenous communities and environmental defenders. This corresponds to the socio-political realities of the LAC region, wherein environmental conflicts intersect with social justice and human rights issues. Its inclusive aim enhances procedural rights like Aarhus but goes further to ensure the safety and protection of environmental justice advocates. While Aarhus employs strict prescriptive language backed by EU enforcement mechanisms, Escazú adopts a more flexible approach that balances mandatory obligations with regional adaptability to accommodate diverse legal systems across LAC.

Institutional vs Transformative Private Enforcement Mechanisms

The treaties differ significantly in their approach to implementing private enforcement, reflecting respective legal and regional challenges. The Three Pillars are:

1. Access to Information

Aarhus provides a detailed and mandatory foundation for access to environmental information. In order to

increase transparency and accountability, Article 4 requires public authorities to respond to information requests within a month, and failure to comply is challenged in court. It is integrated into EU Law through the Access to Environmental Information Directive. Escazú also emphasises access to information but places greater focus on ensuring that information is accessible to marginalised groups, including rural and Indigenous demographics. Although it has a narrower definition of “environmental information” compared to Aarhus, its prioritisation of vulnerable groups ensures their access to critical environmental data to increase their participation in decision-making processes.

2. Public participation

Aarhus dedicates three separate articles to public participation, differentiating obligations based on type and level of decision-making. This reiterates its commitment to formalised governance, ensuring public involvement earlier in the process and requiring authorities to highlight decisions with significant environmental impact. *Client Earth v European Commission* exemplifies the EU’s failure to disclose environmental information via the Aarhus framework. These inconsistencies in implementation demonstrate significant weaknesses in the Aarhus framework, particularly in terms of enforcement and accountability. While the Convention provides a detailed structure for public participation, its practical effectiveness is hampered by bureaucratic resistance and varying levels of institutional commitment across member states. This limitation ultimately undermines the Convention’s core objective of ensuring meaningful public engagement in environmental decision-making.

3. Access to Justice

1. Aarhus Convention: Procedural Guarantees under Article 9

Aarhus guarantees justice in environmental matters (Article 9) allowing individuals and NGOs to challenge actions or omissions of public authorities that violate environmental law. The EU’s “piecemeal” implementation of Aarhus implies that the level of protection and mechanisms available vary with different environmental issues. This has resulted in a “two-tier system” where some environmental issues fall under EU Directives’ specific enforcement procedure, while others fall under national law, leading to inconsistencies in implementation.

Although vigorous, this inconsistent application causes complications in enforcement. This provision is integrated into multiple EU Directives, creating a powerful system for judicial recourse within member states. The AIE directive enforces access to

information, Directive 2003/35/EC deals with participation with the maximum directives directed to Access to Justice, such as the Environmental Liability Directive, Seveso III and more. The European Court of Justice (CJEU) can clarify the scope and application of the convention’s principles within the EU Legal Order.

i. Judicial Interpretation and Barriers to Justice with EU Implementation

The EU’s dual role creates complexities in dissolution of accountability and responsibility for non-compliance, which limits the convention’s access to justice as it relies significantly on non-binding recommendations invoked by compliance mechanisms. Aarhus’s compliance mechanism is managed by the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee (ACCC) that accepts complaints from various parties. While the Committee’s findings are not legally binding, they hold substantial moral and political significance.

Judicial interpretations significantly influence access to justice under the convention. Article 9(2), which promotes legal standing for the “public concerned,” has been narrowly interpreted by the CJEU in the *North East Pylon* case, particularly regarding the application of the “not prohibitively expensive” (NPE) rule to public participation rights.

This restrictive interpretation contradicted both its previous findings and the ACCC, revealing inconsistencies that overlook the convention’s goals. In contrast, Escazú addresses these limitations by making accessibility for marginalised groups a priority through its affordability provisions—demonstrating a proactive approach to eliminating systemic barriers. Although Advocate General Bobek criticised this interpretation; the CJEU later offered a broader interpretation under Article 9(3). This demonstrates how often institutionalised procedural rights can hinder environmental justice rather than facilitate it. Legal standing and excessive litigation costs present major challenges to achieving the convention’s objective of equitable access to justice. Even though the convention and subsequent CJEU rulings expanded the scope of standing, allowing challenges with “sufficient interest” or “impairment of a right”, member states lean towards national legal traditions in conflicts of interest.

Similarly, while Aarhus requires legal proceedings not to be “exorbitantly expensive,” it does not explicitly define this. Member states like Ireland apply the “loser pays” rule of litigation that hinders access to justice. *Klohn v An Bord Pleanála* illustrates the crippling financial burden faced by individuals pursuing environmental challenges. Furthermore, *Usk Resident Association v An Bord Pleanála* demonstrate the lengthy, complex and expensive nature of environmental litigation in member states like Ireland.

These barriers heavily discourage environmental justice defenders and hinder Aarhus's objective, while Escazú has specific provisions that overcome them. It acknowledges these financial barriers by mandating accessible and legal support, reflecting the economic realities of its region

ii. Strengths of Aarhus Convention's Institutional Framework

Notwithstanding its scope for development, the Aarhus Convention also shows its effectiveness in advancing procedural safeguards through strong EU institutional frameworks. In *Heather Hill*, Irish courts applied Aarhus principles to address inadequate public participation in a wind farm project, strengthening Article 9(3) procedural protections. Likewise, in *ClientEarth* the General Court upheld accountability by using Article 9(1) to secure access to environmental information that had been withheld, enabling NGOs to hold authorities responsible.

However, these cases reveal Aarhus's reliance on well-developed legal and judicial systems. The *ClientEarth* victory stemmed from the EU's established legal framework—a resource not available to all non-EU signatories. Aarhus's procedural guarantees see limited use in regions with less developed institutions, particularly Eastern Europe and Central Asia. While the Convention promotes transparency and accountability, its focus on procedure doesn't necessarily lead to better environmental outcomes, particularly in areas with weak judicial systems. Such reliance on established legal systems starkly contrasts with Escazú's more inclusive provisions, which accommodate regions with weaker judicial infrastructures and marginalized communities.

II. Escazú Agreement:

(i) Procedural and Substantive Guarantees Addressing Structural Inequalities

The Escazú agreement overcomes these limitations. Even though Article 8 is more general, it emphasises affordability and inclusivity. The lack of detail does not prohibit the agreement from ensuring affordable legal procedures reflecting the regional financial constraints in the LAC. It prioritises sustainable development and the protection of environmental defenders targeted for their activism.

Escazú through Article 8 (Access to Justice) and Article 9 (Human Rights Defenders), represents a transformative, inclusive, and forward-thinking framework for environmental governance. It surpasses Aarhus's procedural formalism by addressing systemic barriers and prioritising vulnerable groups' protection.

While Aarhus focuses on procedural enforcement

within established legal systems, Escazú integrates human rights protections, Indigenous peoples' rights, and safeguards for environmental defenders into its justice mechanisms. Article 8(5) requires states to provide "support mechanisms for persons or groups in vulnerable situations," including free technical and legal assistance, enabling marginalised communities to participate meaningfully in judicial processes. Article 9(3) enhances these provisions by mandating that remedies for environmental harm must be "effective, timely, and appropriate." This groundbreaking provision explicitly acknowledges how resource disparities often prevent marginalised Indigenous communities from accessing legal remedies. Escazú establishes clear expectations for equitable and efficient solutions to environmental grievances by ensuring both procedural access and substantive redress—elements often lacking in Aarhus, which leaves remedies subject to varying national legal frameworks. However, Escazú faces challenges with staunch resistance in the LAC region, posing a challenge to implementation.

(ii) Protection of Environmental Defenders, Indigenous Rights and Pro-Persona Justice

Article 9 fills a crucial gap highlighted in Aarhus by focusing on the protection of environmental defenders in high-risk regions like the LAC. Absent in Aarhus, it focuses on protecting environmental defenders and addresses the socio-political realities of the LAC region, where activists face severe violence and intimidation. Article 9(1) guarantees "a safe and enabling environment" addressing global threats faced by environmental activists. It responds to Global Witness's finding that three-quarters of environmental defender killings occur in the LAC region, such as the case of Berta Caceres, a Honduran indigenous leader. These provisions are instrumental in preventing such tragedies which are contingent on political will and effective enforcement.

Escazú advances a broader legal standing through the pro-persona principles, ensuring vulnerable groups get participatory rights in environmental governance. It advances a pro-persona approach to justice through its preamble, Articles 2(k) and 4(3), requiring states to interpret provisions to maximise human rights protection. This principle ensures broader legal standing for vulnerable groups, including Indigenous peoples and women. Article 2(e) defines "persons or groups in vulnerable situations" as those facing barriers to exercising their rights and requires states to actively support their participation in environmental decision-making.

Conclusion: Future Prospects

Looking ahead, both treaties present distinct opportunities for evolution while maintaining their

core strengths. The Aarhus Convention can leverage digital transformation to enhance access to environmental information and expand its role in transboundary climate-related decision-making, building upon its strong institutional framework. Meanwhile, Escazú must focus on strengthening state capacity and implementing anti-corruption measures to fulfil its transformative potential, particularly in protecting environmental defenders and addressing climate justice for marginalised communities. While both treaties offer complementary approaches to environmental governance - Aarhus through its formalised procedural framework and Escazú through

its progressive, rights-based approach - their future effectiveness lies in their ability to adapt while staying true to their regional contexts. This comparative analysis ultimately demonstrates that while the Aarhus Convention established a formalised framework for private enforcement through strong legal systems suited for procedural governance, the Escazú Agreement's more progressive approach in addressing systemic barriers, integrating human rights protections, and championing Indigenous peoples' rights represents a necessary evolution in environmental governance frameworks.

Digital Apartheid

Grainne Popen



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The genesis of AI has prompted a societal transformation that is often compared to the creation of the internet. A particular kind of AI system, known as Large Language Models (LLMs), has greatly impacted how we access and process information. With the rapid advancements in language processing and the growing accessibility of LLMs, pertinent AI-powered tools are poised to become primary sources of information for future generations due to their ability to provide instant, personalized, and comprehensive answers to a wide range of queries. These systems, at times, are portrayed as objective superintelligent machines capable of solving all kinds of problems. However, AI systems, as pointed out, are imbued with biases present in the data used to train them. There are all kinds of different biases, from race to gender and even political ones. However, there is a less discussed and perhaps more important one: language bias.

Because these systems are trained with the data available on the Internet, what they “know” about the world comes from predominantly Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies that contribute the greatest amount of training data. This composes a threat to equitable knowledge representation. In particular, the lack of digitized historical and cultural information from non-WEIRD countries creates digital amnesia, erasing the contributions of entire civilizations and making them invisible in a world that increasingly sees and values what is digital.

At its core, the problem does not only stand at the fact that LLMs are a representation of the datasets used to train them, but at the creation of content that reproduces that information. As Kate Crawford, in ‘Atlas of AI,’ notes: “Computational reason and embodied work are deeply interlinked: AI systems reflect and produce social relations and understandings of the world.” On the one hand, these datasets, representing existing social practices and power dynamics, can be exclusionary, leading to problematic algorithms that, on the other hand, reproduce those biases.

The evolution of Large Language Models (LLMs) is deeply intertwined with the emergence of massive datasets, such as the Toronto Books Corpus (2007). The BookCorpus is a data set consisting of 7,000 self-published books that trained the initial GPT model for OpenAI. In some cases, as demonstrated by the BookCorpus, this data that trains LLMs can be surprisingly narrow. Crucially, any phenomenon that is not digitized will not be included or represented in LLMs, meaning that entire civilizations will be absent. This data exclusion has significant consequences, especially given the increasing extent to which LLMs dictate modern information acquisition.

Deficits of digitized information create blind spots for

LLMs. Ancient Mesopotamian civilizations and the unique cultural tapestry of Surinam exemplify the erasure of knowledge and cultural diversity in LLMs algorithms. Ancient Mesopotamian civilizations laid the foundation for modern civilization. The earliest known writing and numerical systems are accredited to Sumerian societies within the borders of modern-day Iraq. However, much of their rich history remains undocumented or, specifically, non-digitized. When prompted about the development of writing, LLMs are not able to provide comprehensive information about Sumerians. This form of digital amnesia effectively erases significant portions of human history. The digital divide is also especially present in prioritizing Dutch culture over the closely linked Surinamese culture, a reflection of the Netherlands’ status as a WEIRD country. Surinam’s culture is incredibly nuanced and rich, incorporating African, Indian, Javanese, and Chinese elements, many facets of which can be marginalized and misrepresented. Cultural traditions of Surinam are less digitized than the Netherlands due to many factors, including colonization, stringent oral tradition, limited resources, and language diversity. Ephemeral oral traditions, especially when expressed in a varying harmony of languages, are difficult to record and thus become relatively inaccessible to LLMs and the populations that utilize them. A disparity emerges in the representation of nations, a difference that is reliant on digitalization and the WEIRD framework. The impact is multifold, extending far beyond the examples provided. The increasing tendency to utilize LLMs in educational settings means that any biases or gaps in the information they provide could have far-reaching consequences for how future generations perceive and understand different cultures and historical events. If LLMs become primary sources of information for future generations, underrepresenting non-Western cultures and historical periods could skew understanding of the past and entrench marginalization.

Digital divides are created by many factors, one of the most pertinent being the WEIRD bias. The democratization of knowledge and preservation of cultures will be greatly assisted by increasing awareness of flaws in the creation of LLM algorithms. While these models help build further perspectives of the world, the inherent problems deepen, making existing power differences stronger. These trends erase history, as seen by examples from Mesopotamia/Iraq, and limit voices, as seen by Surinam. As LLMs progress alongside the modernization of the world, datasets diversify, and previously non-digitized cultures contribute to advancement. However, even as incremental progress is made, it remains important to be conscientious of potential divides and to support efforts of equity. Through intentional knowledge generation we can combat digital amnesia.

Challenges facing future cities; *Environmental threats, overpopulation & lack of resources.*

Diana Nagle

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To begin, as according to the 2014 report conducted by the Government Office for Science 'By 2030, the UN estimates, 70% of people will be in our global cities, the hubs of innovation and economy that today provide about 80% of global GDP'(Madden,2014). The UN Habitat 2015 report further states that as the dominance of urban areas is ever increasing this process of urbanisation is the most significant global trends of the 21st century. In saying this, when examining the challenges in which future cities will face in years and decades to come it is first important to conceptualise this concept of what a city is defined as. Cities here are referred to as large, permanent, densely populated human settlements. Furthermore, cities can either be planned in their design, or organically grown through decades of settlement. Cities from all over the world from different regions, vary largely within their structure, layout, and population size. However, as a general code of measurement megacities are cited to be populated by over 8 million people, where hyper cities are said to hold over 20 million inhabitants, with most of the world's city population growth taking place within the southerly regions of the world.

This essay will examine the challenges in which future cities face in terms of firstly environmental threats, and how this may have devastating and far-reaching impacts for many citizens spread out over different world regions. Further outlining the responses/solutions proposed to prevent future effects of these environmental threats including air pollution and extreme weather. Secondly this paper will discuss how the increase in overpopulation/overcrowding in cities will be a major future challenge for local city officials and state heads. As to ensure these spatial issues are reduced, providing clear and realistic solutions to these issues of violence and crime, lack of affordable housing and decreasing qualities of life. Finally, this paper will discuss how scarcity/lack of resources, will be a major issue facing many future cities, as they try to feed and provide for their growing populations. The regions which these future challenges will be examined under include Northeast America, South America (Brazil) and the South-Asian (Indian) region.

Environmental threats

Firstly, the threat of climate change to future generations and the effects that can already be seen today, spread their reach to all corners of the globe. However, climate change and cities are heavily interlinked as cities are by a stretch the largest contributors to climate change. According to Leighton 'the built environment of cities account for 70% of all greenhouse gas emissions while consuming 2/3 of the world's energy' (2019). Future cities face many challenges due to this factor of climate change including, the issue of extreme weather. As according

to Leighton, 'as temperatures rise, more heat related deaths will occur in cities due to the urban heat island effect, as well as already devastating wildfires, floods, and extreme floods'(2019). This has huge economic costs to city regions as well as the loss of human life, wildlife and lived in landscapes. Damages due to increased storms will also occur as 'unexpected expenditures from storms, flooding, snow removal etc..., will cause major disturbances to businesses and city budgets'(2019). This will have a future economic impact to these cities as storm and damage relief need to be accounted for within city budgets. These extreme storms and weather scenarios will also effect roadways and riverbanks as excessive flooding can push its way through bridges and other structures.

Responses/solutions to environmental threats

In terms of responses to these challenges faced by future cities, a number of different preventative approaches have been taken, as the purpose of sustainable development is to 'meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'(McGranahan and Satterthwaite). This means cutting back and scaling down on large scale consumption, both at a national and individual level. The World Health Organisation stated in their 2021 report that in order to curb these effects of climate change and environmental threats, 'changes need to be made in the way cities manage solid waste, kerosene and charcoal could be eliminated as one of the main cooking fuels, since they are highly polluting'(2021). Further stating that policies could encourage people to stop driving their own cars and either use public transport/walk or cycle'(WHO,2021).

Overcrowding/overpopulation

Secondly, another major challenge facing future cities is the issue of overcrowding/overpopulation in already extremely densely packed areas. As previously mentioned in this paper, environmental threats pose a major challenge to future cities, however the influx of climate refugees due to these impacts of climate change will put major strains on future cities carrying capacities, in turn causing overpopulation in cities. As of 1992 there were an estimated '10 million environmental refugees'(Myers, 1992). Today that number is estimated by the earth island journal to be over 50 million and only increasing year by year (Lam A. 2012). However, these increasing levels of population are not only down to migration, in India the main reasons of overpopulation include higher birth then death rates, universal early marriage due to cultural norms, and high illiteracy rates. The UN estimates that the current 1.3 billion population of India, is projected to rise to 1.8 billion by 2050, which in itself poses a number of severe challenges to India's cities. This issue

of overpopulation leads to many knock-on challenges for future cities. These include increasing rates of violence and crime, unemployment and access to affordable housing being limited, which further leads to a decrease in quality of living, leading to the lower- and middle-class suffering.

Responses to overpopulation

In terms of responses to these issues, the Indian government alike, other countries (including China) have introduced a number of 'hasty, and at times violent, attempts to limit the birth rate' (Pakhomov, 2020). Due to this these governments were 'forced to adopt a different approach; and it has now (the Indian government) moved on to a policy of persuasion and 'small steps' tactics' (Pakhomov, 2020). This has included offering government sponsored vasectomies, which '300,000 procedures were undertaken from 2008-2009'. (Pace, 2018). Furthermore, other solutions to these issues of overcrowding involved the increase in the amount of women on IUCD's (contraceptive devices), 'the number of women using contraceptive went up from 13% in the 70s to an estimated 48% in 2009' (Pace, 2018). Alternative solutions to these issues of overpopulation would be to improve education/literacy rates, as educated women are less likely to have children early on in life, and can learn about fertility, safe use of contraceptives and smart family planning.

Lack of resources

Lastly, another issue facing these future cities involves the depilation/lack of future resources. According to Hodson and Marvin, it was cited that during the 2000s 'present organisation of cities is not sustainable but can be made so if the correct measures are taken' (2017). Since then, this situation, has escalated even further, for the worse into the present day. They further state that these steps towards eco-sustainability are 'on an assumption of continued economic growth underpinning the management of urban environments, which is built on unsustainable lending and debt that puts future sustainability into question' (Hodson and Marvin, 2017). This question of sustainability for future cities, is in terms of resources, including food, safe drinking water, and other key resources for the insurance of human survival. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined that 'food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active life' (Nicholson H., 2016). With the mass consumption of 7 billion on a daily and annual basis, with an ever-expanding population especially in cities, this issue of food insecurity becomes a major challenge for future cities.

Responses to lack of resources

As according to Hodson and Marvin, 'debates around natural resource management, have seen struggle about whether there needs to be relative decoupling between resource use and economic growth or absolute decoupling' (2017). Many responses have been made to try curb this depletion of resources. The major one being a shift towards clean, energy production and renewables, that ensures manageable and sustainable energy production for now and future generations. In terms of food insecurity, new technologies are being implemented meaning that land is being used and harvested in more sustainable ways including monitoring of soil degradation and the use of green housing to produce faster growing foods, using smarter harvesting techniques. However, in order to tackle these major issues of food insecurity in future terms, government intervention is the key to tackling this challenge head on. Lastly, in terms of water shortages, smart management and a reduction in waste are the key policies that are outlined in order to prevent any major future challenges of water shortages. As well as this, desalination is expected to grow in the future as the growing population in the Middle East will cause an increase in the demand for fresh water (Sawe B. 2017).

Conclusion

To conclude, future urban generations face many issues and challenges when ensuring access to healthy and affordable food, and housing, as well as an overall good quality standard of living. This means that current generations need to live in a sustainable way, by taking steps to decrease their consumption levels and implement structures that will maintain positive current and future impacts for urban citizens. If current responses and targets are met, we as a generation have some hope in curbing the disastrous consequences that may lay before us if current trajectories of death and destruction continue. It is now down to policy makers, world leaders and advocates to make sure these measures are implemented to ensure a safe and prosperous future for all urban dwellers.

Civil and Political Rights in Hong Kong

Ana-Danielle Yembet



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Strategic litigation is a tool used to pursue change. It is not solely about winning individual cases, the broader implications on social, political and legal landscapes are just as important. This method empowers activists to enforce human rights frameworks, but its effectiveness is highly debated. Critics highlight its dependence on costly judicial processes and the intrinsic conservatism of legal institutions devised to maintain the status quo. This essay explores strategic litigation, utilising the case study of the 2019 Hong Kong protests and subsequent litigation. By examining the use of strategic litigation to pursue civil and political rights objectives in this case, the extent to which the method was effective within a semi-authoritarian context like Hong Kong will be evaluated.

The 2019 Hong Kong protests form the social justice movement in the background of this case. The Hong Kong Government sought to amend existing extradition law, putting forward the controversial 'extradition bill' (Purbrick, 2019, p. 466). Two features of the bill were highlighted as particularly problematic. Firstly, the adoption of ancillary legislation on a case-by-case basis in circumstances where deportation was not viable meant that details of criminal cases were subject to legislative scrutiny, which compromised "the opportunity for a fair hearing in court" (ibid). Secondly, the proposed amendment would permit extradition to other parts of the People's Republic of China, including the mainland (ibid). Many factions in society -pro-establishment, anti-establishment and everything in between- agreed about the dangers of such law. Political dissidents (as stressed by the Democratic Party) and suspects of white-collar crimes alike feared being forcefully deported to mainland China, where their civil and political rights were negligible in comparison to in Hong Kong (ibid, pp. 466-467). Opposition was widespread but ignored, and so the people (hundreds of thousands at their peak) took to the streets in frustration. Many of these peaceful protests unravelled into violent encounters with the police (ibid, p. 467) with around 9,000 arrests over the course of the protests (Tin-bor Hui, 2020, p. 122). The unrest continued for over 4 months, before the Hong Kong government announced the bill's withdrawal in early September (Purbrick, 2019, pp. 483-484).

In response to the protests, the Chief Executive in Council (CEIC), under the Emergency Regulations Ordinance (ERO) enacted the Prohibition of Face Covering Regulation (PFCR), in the interest of "restoring law, order and public peace" (para 6). Activists viewed this regulation as a draconian law formulated to stifle the movement by creating fear of arrest, to the effect of criminalising their civil and political rights. Thus, activists implemented strategic litigation.

The case in the court of first instance came as an

application for judicial review of both statutes, based on constitutionality and legality. By invoking their constitutional rights, the plaintiffs declared that the provisions of both statutes were inconsistent with the Basic Law and the Bill of Rights, arguing that the restriction of rights did not meet the statutory requirements of clarity, precision, proportionality and necessity, among other grounds (para 11). The court found for the plaintiffs, declaring the ERO, and the PFCR thereunder, unconstitutional, with the PFCR failing the proportionality test and thus imposing an unlawful restriction on fundamental rights (para 193).

The court of appeal decision upheld the court of first instance's position that the prohibitions on face covering at public meetings and public processions was not proportionate (para 280) but reversed the decision of unconstitutionality (para 353).

Finally, in the court of final appeal, the decision on the proportionality of the restrictions on the relevant freedoms was reversed (paras 125-126), with the constitutionality of the ERO, and the PFCR thereunder maintained (para 85). Accordingly, the government's appeal allowed with the applicant's appeals dismissed (para 147).

At first glance, looking at this strategic litigation case critically, it falls for the trap that many activists believe is inherent to this method of pursuing social change: reliance on an institution which is viewed as specifically constructed to "maintain the status quo, reinforce social hierarchies and produce inequality in legal outcomes" (Boutcher and McCammon, 2019, p. 312-313). Arguably, this sentiment is intensified in this case, as the strategists relied on institutions beyond the courts, such as the constitution. Again, "political and broad-based grassroots organising" is preferred and viewed as more effective (ibid, p. 313). To some degree, this is proven through the success of the protests in demanding the withdrawal of the bill.

This angle, however, is limited and misconstrued in its characterisation of strategic litigation, as it appears to hinge on legal victory. While it is true that strategic litigation can be a burdensome undertaking, and other methods of organisation may be tried and tested, there is nothing to suggest that strategic litigation is the only worthwhile form of attaining social change. In fact, the advocates of strategic litigation are most aware of this mechanism's contingencies. Jeßberger and Steinel propose a control question for potential litigants: "even in case of a legal loss, would it still be worth the litigation effort?" (2022, p. 385). Expanding on this idea, Roa and Klugman's article concentrates on Women's Link Worldwide's test for determining whether to engage in strategic litigation (2014, p. 31). They stress the necessity of engaging in a process of "mapping," an analysis of the political, social and legal

context of the court and the country in which the litigation is to take place, before commencing any proceedings (ibid, p. 32).

The four conditions are (1) an existing rights framework; (2) an independent and knowledgeable judiciary; (3) civil society organisations with the capacity to frame social problems as rights violations and to litigate; and (4) a network able to support and leverage the opportunities presented by litigation. Crucially, it is not the presence of these four conditions that guarantee victory, nor is it always the point of employing strategic litigation to aim for victory. Additionally, all four factors do not have to be firmly established to strategically litigate. The question includes whether these conditions can be "created or strengthened through the judicial process" (ibid). If the answer is yes, then strategic litigation is still a valuable enterprise. In terms of the first condition, the constitutional law of Hong Kong has human rights embedded in it, as established earlier. With the second, while judicial independence is enshrined in Hong Kong constitutional law, it being at risk is one of the many themes of the social justice movement which forms the backdrop of our case. The context of the riots, the litigants who expressed the issues in terms of rights, and the widespread social media support (through platforms like LIHKG and Telegram; Purbrick, 2019, p. 475) all worked to create a flourishing and diverse civil society network to spread awareness, fulfilling condition 3. Finally, minimum funding was available to the litigants to carry the case through to the highest court of the land.

In the context of Hong Kong, where democratic ideals are vulnerable under semi-authoritarian rule, strategic litigation provided a platform for resistance, and a mechanism to stress the erosion of freedoms. While structural constraints pose limitations, strategic litigation remains a vital tool for activists. It complements other forms of advocacy, fostering long-term progress even in cases of defeat, and reinforces the significance of legal action in the pursuit of human rights and social justice.

The Female Husband:

Creative Conformity in Pre-Colonial Nigeria

Jessica Odema

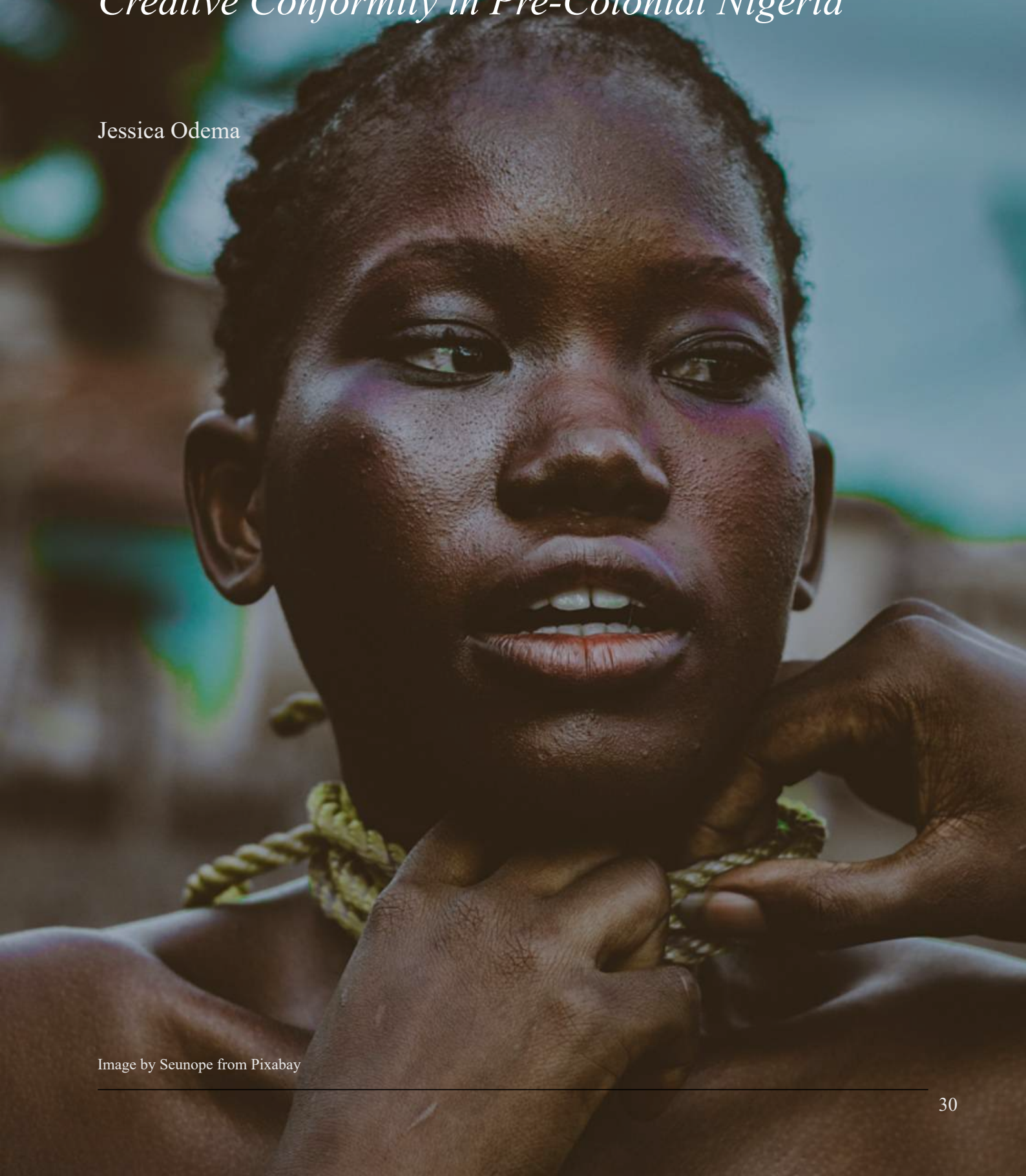


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Introduction

The effects of religious imperialism on traditional African society have been widespread. In societies where the forces of religion, politics, culture and tradition are so closely intertwined as to be almost indiscernible, interference in one sphere can have severe consequences in others.

This paper will focus on the imposition of Christianity on the Igbo people of Nigeria in considering the intersection between religion and culture, and the effect of religious imperialism on women within the political and social sphere of a society. It will pay particular attention to the cultural and historical context of the issue in order to reflect the impact of the physical and social place on issues of gender (McDowell, 1999).

This paper asks, 'what effect did religious imperialism have on Igbo women's exercise of agency?' and answers this question by considering Bucar's theory of creative conformity (2010) in the context of the traditional practices of female husbands taking wives. It presents Bucar's framework as a viable lens through which to view the actions of women in societies such as this, emphasising the importance of contextualisation in scholarship.

Igbo Traditional Religion and Religious Imperialism

The Igbo people inhabit the geographical area of south-eastern Nigeria known as Igboland and have done so for at least five thousand years (Chinyere, 2021, p. 38). Religion and spirituality have always played a crucial role in the lives of Igbo people, 'colouring their consciousness' (Okeke at al., 2021, p. 2) and having profound influence on every aspect of society.

Prior to the imposition of Christianity on the Igbo community by western missionaries, Igbo traditional religion was widespread, and characterised by a belief in both a material world and an immaterial spiritual world (Ubah, 1988, p. 71). Igbo people believed in a Supreme Being, known as Chukwu or Chineke, in divinities created by the Supreme Being, and in the power of their ancestors to connect them to the spirit world (Chinyere, 2021, p. 39).

These beliefs and practises played an integral role in every aspect of Igbo society. Igbo people believed that the divinities were actively involved in each person and each community's social and political affairs; blessing them with bountiful harvest when pleased, and cursing them with epidemic when offended (Ubah, 1988, pp. 72-73). Therefore, traditional Igbo cultural practises are so closely linked to religious beliefs so as to be virtually indivisible.

Igbo Women and Creative Conformity

Bucar's theory of 'creative conformity' (2010, p. 662) can be used to conceptualise the Igbo woman's exercise of autonomy via this practise of becoming a female husband. Bucar emphasises the importance of accounting for religious and moral influence in understanding how women exercise agency and autonomy without directly resisting religious, moral or cultural norms.

Western feminist scholarship incorrectly assumes that the only way of exercising autonomy within a patriarchal system is resistance (Bucar, 2010, p. 668). Bucar's paper offers an alternative theory of agency in 'dianomy' – the idea that women can be empowered and exercise agency within the religious and moral boundaries that they accept, accounting for the different forces at play in such women's lives (p. 682).

As outlined above, Igbo women exist within a society that was built upon religion. The religion and culture of the Igbo people intertwine so intricately and completely that their lives are influenced by an amalgamation of many forces. Therefore, living within these communities require adherence to the principles of both religion and culture – Igbo women accept the restrictions placed on them by these forces and live within the status quo they create. They exercise their agency within the boundaries of these forces, by making use of culturally accepted mechanisms that granted them agency, autonomy and power.

The use by Igbo women of the practise of becoming a female husband to exercise agency in an otherwise patriarchal society serves as an example of Bucar's creative conformity; they take and exercise power in the ways they can, while otherwise conforming to the religious and cultural context they live in.

Bucar's conception of creative conformity is helpful in understanding this practise as it accounts for the interplay of religious and cultural forces at work in the lives of such women. This prevents western scholars from engaging in discursive colonialism (Mohanty, 1988, p. 62) by assuming that autonomy must be exercised intentionally via resistance and applying that understanding to contexts with which it is incompatible.

Conclusion

The introduction of Christianity to Igboland came not only with religious ramifications but cultural and social ones too, due to the complex intertwining of both within this society. The imposition of the Christianity and subversion of Igbo traditional religion and values deprived Igbo women of the material benefits of marrying wives, therefore depriving them a

mechanism through which they exercised agency and power.

Bucar's framework is a viable lens through which to view the actions of Igbo women and women in similar societies, paying due attention to the intersecting forces of religion and culture in influencing women and their exercise of agency.

Pious Women's Agency:

A Reconciliation of Piety and Challenging Aspects of One's Faith

Laura Guzenda



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Introduction

How do Polish Catholic women assert their agency in the public sphere and reject Catholic teachings on reproductive practices within the context of a religiously aligned state? My paper will consider the circumstances under which pious women in Poland choose to reject Catholic teachings on reproduction due to the damaging effects it has had in the public sphere, while still remaining devout to their faith. I will do this firstly through a contextualisation of my research and outlining its scope. I will then define agency as it should be understood for my research and highlight other relevant definitions in this discipline. Following this, I will discuss and dispute the existing binary assumption, which states that challenging one's faith means one's beliefs have become secular. Then, I will outline my research findings on this topic through an analysis of the various authors case studies and articles. Finally, I will relate my research to the studies of gender, religion and colonialism.

Firstly, I would like to introduce the current ongoing political/religious controversy occurring in Poland surrounding the reproductive rights of women. In October 2020, mass protests took place across the entire country which were incited by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal's decision to effectively rule out legal abortion, imposing a near total ban on abortion in the state (Kościańska, Kosiorowska, & Pomian, 2021). The reproductive rights of women have been heavily restricted since the nationalist government assumed power in 1989 (Mishtal & Dannefer, 2010). This is due to the heavy influence the Catholic Church has on the government, which is highlighted by how its policies almost always align with Catholic values (Kościańska, Kosiorowska, & Pomian, 2021). The 2020 judgement was endorsed by the Catholic Church in Poland, but despite this, "many devout Catholics joined the demonstrations to protest against the church's opposition to family planning being enacted through state-imposed prohibition" (Kościańska, Kosiorowska, & Pomian, 2021). My research will focus on why so many devout Catholics decided to openly take part in the protests against what are essentially the values of their own Church. I will seek to ask how one can reconcile this disagreement with the teachings of one's faith and remain pious to it at the same time.

How Polish Catholic Women Have Reconciled their Faith and Involvement in an Anti-Catholic Movement

In the article by Kościańska, Kosiorowska and Pomian, the authors present five case studies of Catholic Polish women whom they interviewed, these women give their individual narratives and their attitudes towards the Catholic Church, politics and the issue of

reproductive rights in Poland (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). The first of these women is Mirosława who is a 69-year-old Catholic woman who eagerly establishes she is devout to her faith and even taught Catechesis on Saturdays and on Sundays for 9 years alongside her full time employment (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). Mirosława states that she is able to question Catholic Church principles by pointing out that they do not always directly correspond with the teachings of Jesus, and this allows her to "negotiate daily behaviours, which may at times diverge from the rules of the Church but not necessarily from the rules of faith" (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). Thus Mirosława is able to criticize the state and the Church despite her own beliefs and states that "freedom of choice is a necessity" even if she would not make use of the facilities due to her personal beliefs (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). Other participants of the Authors' study justified their involvement in the Women's Strike movement on the basis of the following:

Theresa believed that humans are given free will to use and follow their own conscience concluding her pro-choice stance despite her religious beliefs, and while she too would not avail of the procedure personally she has always been supportive of her friends who underwent the procedure (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). Julia held a very similar position as to why she participates in the movement, also making reference to free will given to humans by God and she supports unlimited access to abortion because of her own ability to question the teachings of her faith (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021).

Karolina, who is in my opinion the most conservative and devout of the participants of the study, states that "her support for the protests was undeniable" and she makes a very striking point on how she is only able to be pro-choice from a very privileged position: "From the perspective of my safe situation I tell myself that I wouldn't want to do it [abortion]. But it doesn't mean others shouldn't" (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021).

The Final participant in the case study is Beata, whose outrage with the ruling goes as far as comparing forced continuation of pregnancies that are at risk to euthanasia and an issue of human dignity, which she feels should be valued by the Catholic Church and is appalled at the current stance toward it and the priorities of the Church (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021).

The Study of Gender Religion and Colonialism

Firstly, in terms of the theme of gender, my research has focused solely on women and their access to

reproductive rights and their agency in political action. I feel that my research at its core has been a discussion of gender. It is stated by Kościańska, Kosiorowska and Pomian that this topic “attracted a lot of feminist attention, with scholars claiming the Polish situation clearly showed that reproductive rights and control over women’s bodies are central not only to various forms of modern statehood and nationalism but to the processes of transition from socialism to post socialism”, indicating how it has always been about control over women as a gender, not about the rights of the unborn child (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). The theme of religion arises in my research as I have focused on the circumstances under which Polish women of the Catholic faith achieve agency, with their piety to their faith being at the centre of my analysis. Finally, the theme of colonialism can be identified in the context of my research, as Poland was subject to socialism under Soviet Rule until 1989 and as it is stated in the quotation above, control over women’s bodies is central to the process of transition from socialism to postsocialism (Kościańska, Kosiorowska & Pomian, 2021). Thus relating my research to the major themes of my studies.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have investigated how Polish Catholic women assert their agency in the public sphere by rejecting Catholic teachings on reproductive practices in Poland. I considered the circumstances under which these women remained devout to their faith while rejecting specific teachings of the Church. I outlined the scope of my research and analysed various definitions of agency in this discipline and highlighted those definitions that best suited my work both theoretically and practically. I then discussed the existing binary assumption of challenging one’s faith equating to negating one’s beliefs and disputed it by showing that women can in fact through agency challenge certain aspects of their faith while still remaining devout. Later I analysed various case studies of authors in this discipline which outline precisely how one can reconcile challenging their faith and remaining pious, and finally I reviewed how this research has related the studies of gender, religion and colonialism.

Untapped Potential:

The UN's Missed Connection with Youth

Alexander Dietz

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MyMUN have contributed a great piece to Norrag on the UN and Youth. You can find more [here](#) and [here](#).



In recent years, it has become evident that students and the youth have become increasingly aware of their role and impact on politics and policy, as seen with the youth climate movements. They are tackling issues such as political instability, inequalities, and climate change, often driven by the realization that their future is at stake. While the United Nations (UN) tries to increase youth participation through youth ambassadors with genuine success, these efforts are limited and fail to address youth engagement at scale. This is particularly frustrating as there is a tremendous untapped potential for the UN's connection with youth: Model United Nations (MUN).

MUN is an educational simulation of the UN that allows participants to engage with global issues and educate themselves on international affairs and policymaking. Students take on the roles of member states and interact in debates with their peers to find resolutions to pressing issues. They dedicate months of their free time to organizing these events, typically lasting two to three days.

Through their efforts in organizing and participating in MUNs, students experience exceptional personal growth that is invaluable in life. They learn to build consensus, (often) debate in a foreign language, and build a diverse network of driven changemakers around the globe. As students engage in MUNs, many have attested to becoming fans of the UN, learning about its work and priding themselves on their knowledge of the SDGs.

Therefore we, as the authors of this essay, are devoted to every student participating in one MUN in their student life. To achieve this, we run mymun.com, a shared platform to support and grow the global MUN community^[1]. Our platform centrally lists conferences, making them accessible to participants and easy to host for organizers. With 300'000 registered users from more than 190 countries and over 6000 listed conferences, looking for the next MUN on mymun.com has become synonymous with googling for information.

Despite these successes, the potential of MUN cannot be realized without the UN's involvement. We advocate for three key initiatives the United Nations system should tap into to realize the potential of MUN to create advocates for our rules-based, multilateral order at scale.

Recommendations for Key Actors

In September 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted A/RES/77/336, their first resolution on MUNs. The resolution recognizes the important contribution of MUNs to diplomacy and international cooperation and encourages further support by

member states and the UN system. Whilst the resolution was raising hopes for increased attention, the current lack of implementation makes the following three recommendations even more imperative:

(M)-UN Dialogue

The UN wants to learn from young people and include their voices in decision-making processes, as highlighted in the UN Youth Agenda 2030. At the same time, young people are interested in what is currently being discussed at the UN. MUN can provide a forum to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas. A model where UN agencies suggest topics to be discussed with preparatory background information allows agencies to share and discuss their strategic priorities with the public, increase immersion for students, and mentor students so that the debates are of high quality. At the same time, youth can more easily advocate for and exchange the outcomes of their discussions directly with policymakers, showcasing their new perspectives and innovative ideas.

This mechanism had already been applied in the MUN Refugee Challenge, in which the UNHCR annually provided four relevant topics with background guides to MUN conferences. Students could contact UNHCR experts to learn more about the topics and submit their resolutions directly to the UNHCR. Unfortunately, budget cuts forced the UNHCR to discontinue the program.

Operational Assistance Beyond Funding

Most MUN conferences are organized by students for students on a non-profit basis. Organizers fight hard to allow for low participation fees, but venues' costliness can substantially drive up prices. Thus, the UN system and its member states should provide direct assistance to youth by, for example, providing locations for debate, connecting them to speakers, and financing scholarships to enable students to participate in conferences.

The ILO is a role model of an engaged UN agency in this respect. They provide rooms and speakers for the Geneva International MUN without much additional financial cost or effort. We expect more UN agencies to open their doors and allow students to use their venues.

Academia

Lastly, the UN needs to increase its presence in classrooms and curricula. Initiatives could include cooperation with universities and high schools to assist educators in preparing classes on the UN and its priorities and workings. Such efforts are valuable,

especially at institutions without an explicit political focus, such as engineering or business schools.

A recent example is the German state of Bavaria, which decided to make participation in at least one political simulation mandatory for every high school student. The UN can particularly gain from mutually beneficial collaborations if those simulations happen to be MUN conferences.

MUN may not be a magic formula for changing the world, yet it changes the people who will change the world by fostering their critical thinking, enhancing diplomatic skills, and cultivating a deep understanding of global issues. By addressing all three proposed recommendations, the UN and its member states would not only adequately implement their resolution but also close the gap between current and future policymakers, thus tapping into an overlooked part of youth engagement.

Key takeaways:

- Open a forum to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas with MUNs
- Provide in-kind assistance to MUN conferences and their participants (e.g. venues or access to staff experts and networks)
- Increase the presence of UN in classrooms and curricula in high schools and universities

Forging Tomorrow's Trailblazers: *The Power of Leadership in Youth Engagement*

Yashvit Danani

Leadership is the cornerstone of innovation, progress, and social cohesion. It equips individuals with the ability to inspire, guide, and navigate teams toward shared objectives, fostering an environment where creativity and resilience flourish. In today's interconnected world, particularly with youth at the forefront of diplomacy, international collaboration, and activism, leadership has become indispensable. It is not merely about holding positions of authority but about cultivating trust, demonstrating resilience, and empowering others to realize their full potential.

Effective leadership in the modern era transcends traditional notions of power and command. It emphasizes emotional intelligence, adaptability, and an inclusive approach that values diverse perspectives. Youth, as the torchbearers of tomorrow, must recognize leadership not as a title but as a process of transformation—both personal and collective. This paradigm shift in leadership philosophy is particularly evident in how young leaders engage with the challenges of globalization, climate change, technological disruption, and social inequities.

Reflecting on my journey, my leadership abilities have been shaped by a blend of academic, professional, and extracurricular experiences. These opportunities allowed me to hone a unique combination of technical expertise and interpersonal skills that are integral to effective leadership.

My tenure as a Residence Lead Don at the University of Toronto provided a profound platform for leadership development. Leading a team of 22 Residence Advisors required managing diverse personalities and navigating the intricacies of community building.

I coordinated emergency response protocols, handled high-pressure situations, and fostered a sense of belonging among students from varied cultural and academic backgrounds. These responsibilities called for clear communication, critical decision-making, and a deep sense of empathy—qualities that form the bedrock of leadership. Moreover, this role taught me to value

inclusivity and collaboration, recognizing that successful leaders cultivate environments where everyone feels seen and heard.

My role as a Digital Storyteller at the University of Toronto sharpened my ability to connect with audiences on a profound level. By crafting engaging content for an audience exceeding 300,000 people, I learned the power of storytelling as a leadership tool. Stories have a unique ability to unite people, bridge cultural gaps, and inspire collective action. This experience reinforced the importance of clarity,

creativity, and authenticity in communication, which are essential for leaders looking to influence and mobilize diverse groups.

A defining moment in my leadership journey was participating and being named the best delegate in a Model United Nations Conference, where I represented the People's Republic of China in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Collaborating with global delegates to tackle climate change exposed me to the complexities of negotiation, diplomacy, and advocacy. The ability to navigate high-stakes discussions and build consensus among stakeholders with varying perspectives is a hallmark of effective leadership. This experience underscored the value of research, critical thinking, and persuasive communication—skills that are vital in any leadership context.

My internships further enriched my leadership repertoire. For instance, as a Software Development Intern, I integrated websites with platforms like HubSpot and analyzed data to improve user experiences. These tasks demanded technical precision, strategic foresight, and a problem-solving mindset. In today's digital age, leaders must possess a combination of technical and strategic acumen to innovate and adapt to rapidly changing environments. This experience enhanced my adaptability and prepared me to tackle the technological challenges of modern leadership.

In the coming decades, leadership will be defined by the ability to lead with empathy, embrace diversity, and foster collaboration across cultural and disciplinary boundaries. The rapid pace of globalization demands leaders who can unite people around shared values, drive innovation, and address multifaceted global challenges. Inclusivity and adaptability will be the hallmarks of successful leadership, enabling leaders to co-create solutions in environments where diverse ideas flourish.

Furthermore, the rise of technology, particularly artificial intelligence and automation, will require leaders to balance efficiency with ethics. They must not only adapt to technological advancements but also address their societal implications, ensuring that progress benefits all.

Leadership is not just a skill; it is a profound responsibility to influence, innovate, and inspire. As youth, we could embrace this responsibility and position ourselves as changemakers capable of reshaping the world. By investing in leadership development, we can unlock the potential to drive meaningful change, redefine diplomacy, and create a legacy of engagement and empowerment on a global scale.

The leaders of tomorrow will not be defined by their titles but by their ability to nurture relationships, build trust, and inspire others to dream bigger. As youth, let us rise to the occasion and forge a future where leadership is synonymous with collaboration, compassion, and progress.

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After the Pact: Recommitting to Global Diplomacy and Youth Fighting for a Better Future

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Join a FREE global Summit and uncover the future of youth!

The Model UN Summits, organized annually by MUNers Across Borders (MAB), aim to unite young leaders, policymakers, and civil society actors from around the world. These gatherings focus on elevating youth voices in global discourse, promoting multi-level international cooperation, and championing a sustainable future in alignment with the United Nations' vision. By celebrating the invaluable contributions of Model UN and other simulation communities, the summits provide a platform for meaningful dialogue and collaboration among participants.

Notable contributors include Bill Yotive, Model UN Coordinator for the World Federation of UN Associations (WFUNA); Farah Eck, Managing Director at the UN Association of the USA; Michael Eaton, Executive Director of National Model United Nations (NMUN); and Kevin Chan, Co-Founder and CEO of Best Delegate. Their participation has enriched discussions, offering invaluable insights into international relations and diplomacy, thereby inspiring and equipping youth to actively contribute to global discourse

