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TARTALOM/CONTENT

MÓDSZERTANI TANULMÁNYOK / METHODOLOGICAL STUDIES

INFORMAL SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: A BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY STUDY OF MORAL ECOLOGY AND INTERCALARY LEADERSHIP IN JORDAN'S WATER GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

In the context of Jordan's chronic water scarcity, this research investigates how ethical leadership is practiced within the Ministry of Water and Irrigation. Moving beyond technocratic models, the study adopts an anthropological lens to frame governance as a "moral ecology"—a dynamic space where environmental constraints, cultural values, and organizational structures intersect. Through qualitative ethnographic methods, the paper highlights the role of middle managers as intercalary leaders who must navigate the tension between rigid bureaucratic mandates and the informal social networks, or *wasta*, that underpin Jordanian social life. The research argues that these informal networks are not merely indicators of institutional weakness or corruption; instead, they function as culturally meaningful mechanisms essential for maintaining trust, cooperation, and legitimacy within the ministry. By situating ethics in the everyday labor of relational negotiation, the study demonstrates that effective governance in resource-scarce environments requires moving away from individualistic leadership models toward a more socially embedded understanding. Ultimately, this work contributes to business and cultural anthropology by reframing ethical leadership as a relational and ecological process, offering a nuanced framework for understanding institutional life under severe environmental and social pressure.

Keywords: ethical leadership, moral ecology, water governance, informal social networks, intercalary leadership, wasta

Disciplines: ethnography, cultural anthropology

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Absztrakt

INFORMÁLIS TÁRSADALMI HÁLÓZATOK ÉS ETIKUS VEZETÉS: ÜZLETI ANTROPOLÓGIAI VIZSGÁLAT JORDÁNIA VÍZGAZDÁLKODÁSA ESETÉBEN A MORÁLIS ÖKOLÓGIA ÉS AZ INTERKALÁRIS VEZETŐI SZEREPEK TÜKRÉBEN

Jordánia krónikus vízhiányának kontextusában a jelen kutatás azt vizsgálja, miként realizálódik az etikus vezetés gyakorlata a Vízügyi és Öntözési Minisztérium intézményi keretein belül. A technokrata megközelítéseken túllépve a tanulmány antropológiai perspektívát alkalmaz, amely a kormányzást „morális ökológiaként" konceptualizálja: olyan dinamikus térként, ahol a környezeti korlátok, a kulturális értékek és a szervezeti struktúrák egymással metsződve fejtik ki hatásukat. Kvalitatív etnográfiai módszertan alkalmazásával az elemzés rámutat a középvezetők meghatározó szerepére, mint interkaláris vezetőkre, akiknek egyidejűleg kell kezelniük a rigid bürokratikus előírások és az informális társadalmi hálózatok – azaz a *wasta* – által strukturált társadalmi működés közötti feszültségeket. A kutatás amellett érvel, hogy e hálózatok nem pusztán az intézményi gyengeség vagy a korrupció indikátorai, hanem olyan kulturálisan jelentésteli mechanizmusok, amelyek nélkülözhetetlenek a bizalom, az együttműködés és az intézményi legitimáció fenntartásához. Az etika mindennapi, relációs tárgyalási gyakorlatokba való beágyazottságának feltárásán keresztül a tanulmány demonstrálja, hogy az erőforrás-szűkös környezetekben a hatékony kormányzás megköveteli az individualisztikus vezetési modellektől való elmozdulást egy társadalmilag beágyazottabb értelmezési keret irányába. Összességében a tanulmány hozzájárul az üzleti és kulturális antropológia diskurzusaihoz azáltal, hogy az etikus vezetést relációs és ökológiai folyamatként újraértelmezi, és egyúttal árnyalt analitikai keretet kínál az intézményi működés megértéséhez súlyos környezeti és társadalmi nyomás alatt.

Kulcsszavak: etikus vezetés, morális ökológia, vízkormányzás, informális társadalmi hálózatok, interkaláris vezetés, *wasta*

Diszciplínák: etnográfia, kulturális antropológia

Introduction

Water governance in Jordan exemplifies the complex interplay between environmental scarcity, institutional authority, and cultural ethics. As one of the most water-poor countries globally, Jordan faces chronic challenges in balancing supply and demand, intensified by climate variability, population growth, and refugee influxes. In such contexts, governance is not purely technical; administrative decisions carry moral weight, influencing livelihoods, social stability, and perceptions of fairness.

Anthropological perspectives increasingly challenge conventional assumptions that ethical behavior derives solely from formal institutional rules or individual decision-making. Instead, ethics are understood as emerging relationally, shaped by social interactions, institutional practices, and environmental conditions. This paper explores ethical leadership in Jordan's water sector through two key frameworks: moral ecology, which situates ethics within socio-ecological relations, and intercalary leadership, which highlights the mediating role of middle managers operating between formal and informal systems.

The research asks: How do leaders within Jordan's water governance institutions navigate ethical dilemmas and reconcile competing obligations under conditions of scarcity? It also considers how informal networks, such as wasta, shape everyday organiza-

tional practice, and how these dynamics influence employee performance and institutional legitimacy.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive anthropological approach, drawing on existing ethnographic research, organizational analyses, and literature on water governance in Jordan and the Middle East. This research relies on secondary ethnographic materials and organizational documentation as its primary empirical sources, including prior ethnographies, institutional reports, and policy analyses. Rather than relying solely on new interviews or surveys, the research employs an organizational ethnographic reading, treating documented institutional practices, reports, and prior ethnographic accounts as legitimate ethnographic material (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989). This approach aligns with interpretive anthropology, which emphasizes understanding social worlds as culturally and morally situated, and foregrounds the researcher's reflexive positioning within the analytical process (Crapanzano, 2004).

The methodology prioritizes situated analysis of relational dynamics, informal social networks, and leadership practices through the lens of moral ecology. It interprets how bureaucratic procedures, informal mediation, and cultural values co-produce ethical governance, treating organizational life itself as a field of moral and social negotiation (Herzfeld, 1992; Gupta, 2012). By focusing on middle managers and departmental heads as intercalary leaders, the study highlights the interpretive labor required to mediate between formal institutional mandates and socially embedded expectations. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of ethical leadership as emergent, relational, and contextually embedded rather than a fixed attribute of individual actors.

Adopting interpretive ethnography is particularly suitable for analyzing water governance in Jordan, where institutions operate under conditions of scarcity, political complexity, and cultural embeddedness. Ethnographic insight enables the examination of how informal networks, relational obligations, and moral reasoning shape decision-making in practice, complementing technical and administrative accounts. Such an approach ensures that the analysis remains faithful to the lived realities of governance while maintaining rigor through anthropological theory and interpretive methodology (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989; Herzfeld, 1992).

The researcher approaches the material from a cultural anthropological perspective attentive to the interpretive nature of institutional analysis. Rather than claiming objective neutrality, the analysis recognizes that interpretations emerge through engagement with existing ethnographic scholarship and theoretical debates on governance, ethics, and organizational life. This reflexive positioning acknowledges that knowledge production is shaped by analytical framing while seeking to remain grounded in empirically documented institutional practices (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Gupta, 2012).

Rather than aiming to produce universal causal explanations, this study seeks to generate contextualized anthropological understanding of ethical leadership as a culturally embedded and relational phenomenon, revealing how governance practices acquire moral meaning within specific socio-ecological settings.

Main Analysis

Moral Ecology in Natural Resource Management and Water Governance

Anthropological approaches to governance increasingly challenge the assumption that ethical behavior originates solely from individual decision-making or formal institutional rules. Instead, morality is understood as emerging from situated social relations embedded within material environments

and cultural systems. The concept of moral ecology captures this relational understanding of ethics by emphasizing how moral judgments and practices arise through interactions among social actors, institutional structures, and ecological conditions (Huff et al., 2008). Rather than viewing ethics as a fixed normative framework, moral ecology conceptualizes moral action as a dynamic process shaped by historically situated relationships, shared meanings, and environmental constraints.

Within anthropology, ecological perspectives have long demonstrated that human societies interpret natural resources not merely as material assets but as socially constructed entities embedded in systems of value and obligation. Environmental governance, therefore, cannot be reduced to technical management; it involves negotiations over legitimacy, fairness, and responsibility. Moral ecology highlights how ethical expectations develop within specific socio-ecological contexts, where cultural norms, political authority, and environmental realities mutually constitute one another. Institutions do not simply regulate resources but also cultivate moral understandings about how resources should be distributed and protected.

Water governance provides a particularly revealing site for examining moral ecology because water occupies multiple domains simultaneously. Anthropological research describes water as a socio-natural phenomenon linking biological survival, political organization, and symbolic meaning (Orlove & Caton, 2010). Decisions about water allocation are never purely administrative; they are interpreted through moral frameworks concerning justice, collective rights, and social responsibility. Especially under conditions of scarcity, water governance becomes an arena in which ethical claims are continuously negotiated among state institutions, professionals, and communities. Bureaucratic procedures intersect with lived moral expectations, transforming technical decisions into socially meaningful acts that affirm or undermine institutional legitimacy.

In water-scarce societies, environmental constraints intensify moral evaluation of governance practices. Scarcity produces heightened awareness of distributive justice because access to water directly affects livelihoods, agriculture, and social stability. Anthropological scholarship shows that when essential resources become limited, administrative authority is judged less by procedural efficiency than by perceived fairness and moral intent (Gupta, 2012). Institutional actors must therefore navigate competing ethical expectations, balancing bureaucratic rationality with culturally grounded understandings of obligation and reciprocity. Ethical leadership, from this perspective, emerges not from individual virtue alone but from the ability to sustain trust within a fragile moral environment shaped by ecological pressure.

The moral ecology of water governance in Middle Eastern contexts is further informed by religious and cultural conceptions of stewardship. Environmental responsibility is frequently articulated through ethical traditions that frame natural resources as entrusted goods rather than commodified assets. The notion of *amana*, or divine trust, exemplifies this moral orientation by positioning humans as custodians accountable for the just management of shared resources. Such concepts infuse administrative work with moral significance, allowing public-sector professionals to interpret technical responsibilities as expressions of ethical and spiritual duty. This moral framing reshapes organizational behavior by linking professional performance to broader narratives of collective responsibility and accountability before both society and God (Benadi, 2024).

Understanding governance through moral ecology also shifts analytical attention toward everyday organizational practices. Bureaucracies are not neutral mechanisms but social worlds constituted through

routines, interactions, and informal norms. As Gupta (2012) demonstrates, the state is experienced through mundane encounters that produce perceptions of care, indifference, or justice. Within resource management institutions, employees interpret policies through interpersonal relationships and shared moral assumptions, creating ethical climates that cannot be explained solely through formal regulations. Ethical leadership thus becomes an emergent phenomenon arising from relational dynamics rather than hierarchical authority alone.

Adopting moral ecology as an analytical framework enables a more nuanced understanding of how environmental scarcity, cultural values, and organizational structures interact in shaping governance outcomes. It allows leadership to be examined as a process embedded within socio-ecological systems rather than as an individual managerial attribute. In the context of water governance, this perspective reveals how ethical practices develop through ongoing negotiations between institutional mandates and culturally grounded expectations of fairness, stewardship, and social responsibility. Moral ecology therefore provides a critical lens for analyzing how legitimacy, trust, and ethical leadership are co-produced within organizations operating under conditions of ecological constraint.

Intercalary Leadership: Mediating Formal Institutions and Informal Social Worlds

Intercalary leadership refers to forms of authority exercised by actors positioned between hierarchical levels of governance, particularly middle managers and departmental leaders who operate at the interface of policy formulation and everyday implementtation. Rather than functioning merely as administrative intermediaries, these actors play a mediating role that connects formal institutional mandates with socially embedded expectations, relational obligations, and informal systems of coordination. In contexts characterized by institutional complexity and resource scarcity, leadership emerges less as individual command and more as an ongoing process of negotiation across overlapping moral and organizational orders (Herzfeld, 1992; Gupta, 2012).

Within bureaucratic institutions, formal rules, procedures, and accountability mechanisms define the official structure of governance. Yet organizational practice rarely unfolds exclusively through these formal arrangements. Everyday decision-making frequently depends on informal communication, trust-based relationships, and culturally grounded understandings of responsibility and fairness. Intercalary leaders navigate these dual domains simultaneously, translating policy directives into locally workable practices while also conveying social realities upward within institutional hierarchies. Their work therefore involves interpretive labor—making institutional expectations intelligible within social contexts and reconciling competing demands without destabilizing organizational coherence. Interpretive anthropology emphasizes that social action must be understood through culturally situated meanings rather than purely technical explanations (Geertz, 1973; Marcus & Fischer, 1986).

Anthropological analyses of bureaucracy further demonstrate that institutions operate not only as administrative systems but also as moral and cultural environments shaped by everyday practices and symbolic meanings (Herzfeld, 1992; Hull, 2012). From this perspective, leadership cannot be reduced to formal authority or managerial efficiency alone. Governance depends on relational capacities, including the ability to mediate conflicts, sustain legitimacy, and balance procedural compliance with socially recognized notions of fairness. Intercalary leaders occupy a structurally liminal position that enables such mediation, deriving authority both from institutional roles and from their embeddedness within networks of trust and professional reciprocity (Turner, 1969; Gupta, 2012).

In the context of water governance, these mediating practices become particularly significant. Scarcity conditions, political sensitivities, and competing

stakeholder interests generate situations in which rigid adherence to formal procedures may be impractical or socially disruptive. Intercalary leaders therefore engage in pragmatic adjustment, informal consultation, and negotiated problem-solving to sustain institutional functioning. Such practices should not be interpreted as deviations from governance but as constitutive elements of how governance operates in practice. Studies of organizational ethnography demonstrate that bureaucratic effectiveness often relies on informal adaptation and situated decision-making rather than strict procedural uniformity (Czarniawska, 2012; Mosse, 2005).

Understanding intercalary leadership as mediation between formal institutions and informal social worlds shifts attention away from leadership as a fixed personal attribute toward leadership as an emergent relational process. Ethical governance, in this sense, arises through ongoing interaction among actors, norms, and institutional constraints rather than through the actions of singular decision-makers. By foregrounding interpretive practice and relational negotiation, this framework highlights how everyday bureaucratic actions contribute to broader moral ecologies of governance, revealing leadership as embedded, negotiated, and contextually situated (Fassin, 2012; Gupta, 2012)

Institutional Landscape of Water Governance in Jordan

Understanding leadership and ethical practice within Jordan's water sector requires situating organizational behavior within the broader institutional ecology governing water management. Anthropological studies of bureaucracy emphasize that institutions are not merely administrative structures but socially embedded systems shaped by historical development, political authority, and cultural expectations (Gupta, 2012). In Jordan, water governance operates through a multilayered institutional arrangement in which authority is distributed across several interrelated state entities, each carrying distinct mandates yet functioning through overlapping social and organizational networks.

At the center of this system stands the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, the primary policymaking body responsible for national water strategy, regulation, and sectoral coordination. Established in response to increasing water scarcity and rapid demographic growth, the ministry formulates long-term planning frameworks addressing groundwater depletion, infrastructure expansion, and international water agreements. From an anthropological perspective, ministries function not only as policy producers but also as symbolic representations of state authority. Policies acquire meaning only as they move through administrative layers and are interpreted by actors responsible for implementation.

Operational authority is largely executed through the Water Authority of Jordan, which manages water supply systems, groundwater extraction, and municipal distribution networks. The authority represents the technocratic dimension of governance, emphasizing engineering expertise, resource monitoring, and service delivery. Yet ethnographic research on public utilities demonstrates that technical institutions inevitably encounter social realities that exceed formal planning models (Mosse, 2005). In practice, distribution decisions often intersect with community expectations, local negotiations, and perceptions of fairness, making administrative processes deeply social rather than purely technical.

A third central actor, the Jordan Valley Authority, governs irrigation systems and agricultural development in the Jordan Valley, one of the country's most strategically significant ecological regions. Unlike urban water administration, irrigation management directly connects state institutions with rural livelihoods, tribal land relations, and agricultural economies. Anthropologically, this creates a governance environment where bureaucratic decision-making must continually engage with local moral economies—shared understandings about entitlement,

reciprocity, and resource access shaped by historical settlement patterns and social organization.

Together, these institutions form a fragmented yet interdependent governance assemblage. Authority is distributed vertically across ministries and agencies while simultaneously extending horizontally into regional offices, municipalities, and community-level interactions. Organizational anthropologists note that such arrangements generate spaces of negotiation rather than clear chains of command (Hull, 2012). Policies formulated at the national level must be interpreted and enacted by mid-level administrators who translate abstract directives into locally workable practices. This institutional complexity creates fertile ground for intercalary leadership, as actors positioned between strategic planning and everyday implementation reconcile competing expectations.

Jordan's extreme water scarcity intensifies the social significance of these institutional relationships. As one of the most water-poor countries globally, Jordan faces chronic imbalance between supply and demand driven by climate variability, population growth, refugee influxes, and agricultural pressures (Al-Omari et al., 2019). Scarcity transforms water governance into a morally charged arena where administrative decisions carry ethical implications affecting livelihoods and social stability. Anthropological scholarship suggests that scarcity amplifies the visibility of governance practices, making fairness, transparency, and legitimacy central concerns for both employees and citizens (Barnes & Alatout, 2012).

Within this institutional landscape, formal bureaucratic procedures coexist with informal mechanisms that facilitate coordination across organizational boundaries. Employees frequently rely on interpersonal relationships to navigate administrative complexity, accelerate processes, or resolve conflicts between policy requirements and local realities. Rather than representing institutional failure, these practices often function as adaptive strategies enabling governance systems to operate under conditions of uncertainty and resource constraint. This coexistence of formal hierarchy and informal interaction reflects the "lived state"—the state as experienced through everyday encounters rather than official structures alone (Gupta, 2012).

For researchers examining ethical leadership, the Jordanian water sector provides a uniquely revealing context. Leaders must simultaneously uphold national regulations, respond to technical imperatives, and remain attentive to social expectations embedded within communities and workplaces. The institutional landscape does not simply shape leadership behavior; it produces the conditions under which ethical dilemmas emerge. Decision-makers operate within overlapping accountability systems—legal, organizational, and social—requiring continuous negotiation between efficiency, equity, and cultural legitimacy.

Seen through a business anthropology lens, these institutions constitute more than administrative bodies; they form a moral and organizational ecosystem in which leadership practices are culturally enacted. The interaction between ministry-level policy, agency implementation, and local social dynamics creates spaces where intercalary leaders become essential actors linking institutional authority with social trust. Understanding this institutional ecology is foundational for analyzing how ethical leadership and employee performance are experienced within Jordan's water governance system.

Informal Networks" Wasta" and Organizational Life in Jordan's Public Sector

Anthropological analyses of organizations emphasize that institutional life extends beyond formal bureaucratic structures into domains shaped by personal relationships, moral obligations, and culturally embedded systems of exchange. In Jordan's public sector, informal social networks constitute a central mechanism through which authority is exercised, resources are negotiated, and administrative pro-

cesses are enacted. These networks operate alongside official hierarchies, forming what anthropologists describe as parallel systems of governance that mediate between state rationality and social belonging (Ledeneva, 2013). Understanding ethical leadership within Jordanian institutions requires examining how informal relational practices influence everyday decision-making.

A key organizing principle within these networks is *wasta,* commonly translated as mediation, intercession, or social brokerage. While often framed in policy discourse as favoritism or nepotism, Anthropological scholarship situates wasta within broader systems of reciprocity characteristic of Middle Eastern social organization (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). Rather than functioning solely as corruption, wasta represents a culturally recognized mechanism for maintaining social cohesion, redistributing opportunity, and reinforcing obligations among kinship and community networks. Individuals mobilize social ties not merely for personal advantage but as participants in a moral economy, where assistance establishes enduring social bonds.

Within public institutions such as the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, informal networks often emerge as practical responses to bureaucratic complexity. Employees navigate administrative procedures through trusted relationships that enable faster communication, conflict resolution, and coordinateon across departmental boundaries. Anthropological studies of bureaucracy demonstrate that such practices are adaptive strategies allowing institutions to function in environments characterized by limited resources and high social expectations (Gupta, 2012). Informal interactions frequently compensate for procedural rigidity, enabling flexi-bility where formal rules alone cannot address situ-ational demands.

Tribal affiliation and extended kinship structures further shape workplace interactions within Jordanian organizations. Tribal identity functions as a dynamic social resource that informs trust, reputation, and mutual obligation. Organizational actors may rely on shared regional or familial connections to establish credibility and cooperation, particularly in contexts involving sensitive resource allocation such as water distribution. These affiliations constitute forms of social capital structuring access to information and influence (Bourdieu, 1986). Leadership legitimacy, therefore, often depends not only on formal authority but also on an individual's capacity to navigate relational expectations embedded within social networks.

The coexistence of bureaucratic norms and relational ethics produces a hybrid moral system. Employees interpret ethical behavior through multiple evaluative frameworks: adherence to institutional regulations, loyalty to social networks, and culturally grounded notions of fairness. Leaders must negotiate competing moral obligations, balancing procedural justice with expectations of social responsiveness. Anthropologists argue that informal networks should be analyzed as infrastructures of coordination rather than deviations from formal governance (Hull, 2012). In Jordan's water sector, relational mediation can reduce conflict by enabling negotiation outside rigid administrative channels. Department heads and middle managers often function as brokers translating institutional policies into socially acceptable outcomes. These actors maintain organizational stability by reconciling state mandates with community expectations, illustrating how leadership emerges through relational practice rather than positional authority alone.

Generational change is gradually reshaping perceptions of informal networking. Younger professionals increasingly emphasize meritocratic ideals, transparency, and procedural fairness influenced by global professional norms. Nevertheless, these emerging values do not eliminate relational practices; instead, they produce hybrid forms where employees selectively engage informal networks while advocating institutional accountability. This transformation reflects broader social shifts in

Jordanian society, where modernization reconfigures tradition within organizational contexts.

From a business anthropology perspective, informal networks represent a cultural logic through which organizational effectiveness is negotiated. Ethical leadership in this environment depends on recognizing when relational mediation supports collective goals and when it risks eroding institutional trust. Leaders who manage this balance act as moral intermediaries, aligning social obligations with organizational ethics

Water Scarcity, Social Ethics, and Administrative Practice: Anthropological Perspectives

Anthropological scholarship increasingly recognizes water scarcity not merely as an environmental or technical problem but as a social condition reshaping moral relations, institutional behavior, and governance practices. In arid regions such as Jordan, water operates simultaneously as a material resource, political instrument, and moral symbol embedded within cultural understandings of justice and collective survival. Scholars examining hydro-social systems argue that water governance must be understood as a relational process linking ecological constraints with social organization, ethical reasoning, and state legitimacy (Orlove & Caton, 2010). This perspective challenges technocratic models by emphasizing how cultural values influence administrative decision-making and institutional performance.

Jordan is among the most water-scarce countries globally, a condition that intensifies the ethical dimensions of governance. Studies demonstrate that scarcity transforms routine bureaucratic actions into morally charged decisions affecting livelihoods, regional equity, and perceptions of state fairness (Murad, 2021). Anthropologists describe such contexts as hydro-social environments, where flows of water mirror flows of power, authority, and social obligation. Administrative actors therefore operate not only as technical managers but also as moral agents negotiating competing claims over a shared and limited resource.

Research on water governance institutions—including the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, the Water Authority of Jordan, and the Jordan Valley Authority—illustrates how formal policies intersect with localized social expectations. Institutional reforms aimed at efficiency and privatization often encounter resistance rooted in moral conceptions of water as a public trust rather than an economic commodity. Citizens frequently evaluate water distribution decisions through ethical frameworks grounded in fairness, dignity, and communal rights rather than purely administrative criteria (Wojnarowski, 2024). Bureaucrats must interpret policy within culturally meaningful narratives of responsibility and care.

Anthropological analyses across the Middle East show that scarcity intensifies moral economies surrounding resource distribution. Studies in Yemen, Oman, and rural Egypt indicate that water allocation relies on negotiation, mediation, and relational authority rather than formal regulation alone (Barnes, 2014). These findings resonate with James Scott's concept of the moral economy, where communities assess governance legitimacy according to perceived fairness and reciprocity (Scott, 1976). Administrative behavior cannot be separated from local ethical expectations, as officials must maintain social trust while implementing state mandates.

Religion further shapes ethical understandings of environmental stewardship. Islamic ethical traditions conceptualize natural resources as divine trusts (amana), positioning humans as stewards responsible for equitable distribution and sustainable use (Benadi, 2024). This moral framework transforms administrative work into ethical labor, linking professional duties to accountability before society and God. Comparative religious environmental

ethics in the region reinforce shared moral Narratives around stewardship.

Scarcity also reshapes leadership practices. Governance in drought-prone regions often relies on negotiation and relational authority to maintain institutional legitimacy during crises (Molle & Mollinga, 2003). Administrative effectiveness depends less on hierarchical control than on the ability to mediate among competing stakeholders, including communities, political actors, and technical experts.

These findings align with anthropological theories emphasizing leadership as an emergent social process rather than a fixed managerial attribute. In Jordan, rapid population growth and refugee influxes have intensified demand, forcing institutions to make distributive decisions under chronic insufficiency. Administrative actors balance efficiency-driven reforms with culturally embedded expectations of solidarity and fairness, producing hybrid governance models combining bureaucratic rationality with relational negotiation.

Taken together, this literature demonstrates that water governance in Jordan and similar contexts cannot be explained through policy analysis alone. It must be approached as a cultural and ethical field shaped by scarcity, social relations, and moral reasoning. Administrative behavior emerges from the interaction between institutional structures and lived moral worlds, highlighting the importance of informal negotiation, ethical interpretation, and relational leadership in sustaining governance systems under environmental stress.

This scholarship provides the empirical and theoretical foundation for examining ethical leadership through the lens of *moral ecology*. Situating organizational practice within broader hydro-social dynamics shows how environmental conditions shape organizational culture, leadership legitimacy, and employee performance. Water scarcity becomes both an ecological constraint and a formative force in the moral organization of institutional life.

Intercalary Leadership in Practice: Middle Managers as Moral Brokers

Anthropological approaches increasingly challenge the assumption that leadership resides solely at the top of institutional hierarchies. Instead, leadership emerges most visibly within intermediate layers of bureaucracy, where actors translate abstract policy into socially meaningful practice. In Jordan's water governance institutions, middle managers and department heads occupy *intercalary positions*—structural locations situated between state authority and societal expectations. These actors function as mediators across multiple moral worlds, negotiating tensions between formal administrative rationality and informal social obligations.

The concept of intercalary leadership draws from the Manchester School of anthropology, particularly Max Gluckman (1958), who emphasized that social order is produced through conflict management rather than hierarchical stability. Organizations are "social fields" in which actors continuously interpret norms according to situational demands. In Jordanian public institutions, middle managers translate national strategies into operational decisions that remain socially legitimate within local communities. Leadership becomes interpretive brokerage—the ability to reconcile competing moral expectations without destabilizing institutional coherence.

Policy directives frequently originate at the national level in the language of efficiency, sustainability, and regulatory compliance. Implementation, however, occurs within communities shaped by kinship networks, tribal affiliations, and relational accountability. Middle managers engage in *moral calibration*, selectively applying rules while maintainning social trust. This reflects the coexistence of bureaucratic legality and relational ethics, two normative systems that rarely align perfectly but must coexist in administrative practice.

Intercalary leaders operate as translators between these systems. Upward, they demonstrate compliance with institutional performance indicators,

reporting structures, and audits. Downward and outward, they respond to employees, citizens, and community representatives who interpret water distribution through culturally grounded notions of fairness and dignity. Effectiveness depends on legitimacy in both arenas simultaneously. Failure in either direction risks institutional breakdown—either through accusations of corruption or loss of social trust.

This mediating role is particularly pronounced under water scarcity, where decisions carry immediate social consequences. Requests mediated through informal networks—including kinship or shared social identity—require leaders to balance impartiality with culturally expected responsiveness. Business anthropology interprets this balancing act as adaptive governance. Leaders develop situational competencies to preserve organizational stability while minimizing social conflict, using skills rarely captured in formal leadership models. Ethical leadership, in this context, emerges as an *emergent relational practice* rather than an individual moral trait.

Middle managers also counter the "social production of indifference" (Herzfeld, 1992), rehumanizing administrative processes through informal dialogue, mediation, and discretionary judgment. Leadership involves restoring moral meaning to routines that might otherwise appear detached from social realities.

Generational and gender dynamics further shape intercalary leadership. Younger professionals emphasize meritocracy, transparency, and professionnalism, while female department heads often rely on procedural legitimacy to establish authority. These dynamics create opportunities for gradual institutional change, as moral expectations shift without direct confrontation.

From a business anthropology perspective, intercalary leaders function as *moral brokers*, ensuring institutional action remains intelligible and acceptable across diverse social domains. Their work sustains organizational legitimacy by integrating bureaucratic rationality with culturally embedded ethics, stabilizing governance systems under scarcity and social complexity. Understanding leadership through this lens reframes ethical leadership as a distributed phenomenon embedded within everyday organizational interactions. Effectiveness depends not solely on policy design or executive vision but on the interpretive labor of intercalary actors, translating abstract ethical principles into lived administrative practice.

Conclusion

Ethical leadership in Jordan's water governance emerges from the intersection of formal rules, informal social networks, and environmental constraints. Moral ecology provides a lens for understanding how ethics are co-produced through relationships, institutions, and ecological conditions. Intercalary leaders act as moral brokers, mediating between bureaucratic mandates and cultural expectations, while informal networks such as wasta facilitate adaptive governance under scarcity.

This study demonstrates that leadership should not be understood solely as positional authority or individual virtue. Instead, ethical governance is relational and situational, shaped by organizational practice, social trust, and moral negotiation. These insights have implications for policy design, organizational management, and employee performance in resource-scarce contexts, emphasizing the value of anthropology-informed approaches to governance.

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TOURISM IN KHUVSGUL LAKE NATIONAL PARK, NORTHERN MONGOLIA

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Abstract

Tourism has surged in Khuvsgul Lake National Park region in the past few decades. This area attracts both foreign and domestic visitors due to its natural scenery, cultural heritage and unique ethnic minorities. As a result, numerous tourist camps, restaurants, and shops have dramatically established in Khatgal village and lake surrounding campsite areas, recently. The area is also home to several indigenous ethnic communities including Tsaatan and Darkhad. They maintain distinct culture and diverse nomadic lifestyle. Tsaatan people depend on their reindeer herding while Darkhad nomads engage in pastoralism, raising livestock including yak**.** Local communities in this area actively participate in tourism development. However, rapid tourism growth can also introduce environmental pressures. This research aims to briefly describe main tourism patterns and trends in Khuvsgul Lake National Park and its surrounding camp site areas, indigenous ethnic communities with their cultural practices, their participation in tourism development and current ecological environment conditions. The research analyzes secondary data resources, literature, tourism and domestic statistics and firsthand field findings including visual observation.

Keywords: tourism in Khuvsgul Lake National Park, nomadic culture, cultural identity, residents' employment and seasonal income, environment

Discipline: cultural anthropology

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Absztrakt

TURIZMUS A HÖVSZGÖL-TÓ NEMZETI PARKBAN, ÉSZAK-MONGÓLIÁBAN

Az elmúlt néhány évtizedben a turizmus jelentős növekedést mutatott a Khuvsgul-tó Nemzeti Park térségében. A terület mind a nemzetközi, mind a belföldi látogatók számára vonzóvá vált a természeti adottságai, kulturális öröksége, valamint egyedi etnikai kisebbségei révén. Ennek következtében az utóbbi időszakban dinamikus fejlődés tapasztalható Khatgal település és a tavat körülvevő kempingterületeken, a turisztikai táborok, a vendéglátóegységek és a kereskedelmi létesítmények nagy számú növekedésével. A térség több őshonos etnikai közösség lakóhelye is, köztük a Tsaatan és a Darkhad csoportoké, amelyek sajátos kulturális hagyományokkal és diverz nomád életmóddal rendelkeznek. A Tsaatan közösség megélhetése elsősorban rénszarvastenyésztésen alapul, míg a Darkhad nomádok állattartó pásztorkodást folytatnak, többek között jakokat tenyésztenek. A helyi közösségek aktívan részt vesznek a turizmus fejlesztésében, ugyanakkor a turizmus gyors ütemű bővülése környezeti terhelésekkel is járhat. Jelen kutatás célja a Khuvsgul-tó Nemzeti Parkban és a környező kempingterületeken megfigyelhető főbb turisztikai mintázatok és trendek rövid ismertetése, továbbá az őshonos etnikai közösségek kulturális gyakorlatainak, turizmusfejlesztésben való részvételüknek, valamint a jelenlegi ökológiai környezeti állapotnak a bemutatása. A vizsgálat másodlagos adatforrások, szakirodalmak, turisztikai és hazai statisztikák, valamint elsődleges terepi megfigyelések - beleértve a vizuális észlelést - elemzésén alapul.

Kulcsszavak: turizmus a Khuvsgul-tó Nemzeti Parkban; nomád kultúra; kulturális identitás; lakossági foglalkoztatás és szezonális jövedelem; környezet

Tudományterület: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

Tourism industry plays one of the most important roles in global economic development. According to the Statista (2025), the number of international tourist arrivals reached 1.52 billion globally in 2025. Tourists spending increased to around USD 1.9 trillion, showing 5% growth from 2024 (UN Tourism, 2026).

Tourism in Mongolia also indicates a growth trend. The country welcomed over 850.000 visitors from overseas in 2025, which is 14.8% growth compared to 2024. While Khuvsgul Lake National Park received 285.500 travelers in 2024, showing experiencing growth in local tourism industry.

Today, many tend to escape from their normal, busy city life or environment in order to relax and have great time. They prefer to experience more nature-based tourism and outdoor activity. Nature-based tourism involves a large number of different outdoor activities such as hiking, horse-riding, and camping etc (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017). Experiencing in nature or the outdoors with primary attractions or setting where nature is in undisturbed or pristine state, they can feel more relaxed and forget daily stressful, and busy life (APA., 2020, Jimenez et al., 2021). Khusvgul Lake National Park features clear example of this type of tourism.

Khusvgul Lake National Park is located in the northern Mongolia and is famous for UNESCO biosphere reserve with its ecological importance. Several indigenous communities live in this region including Tsaatan and Darkhad with rich, diverse and unique nomadic cultures existing together in that place. The National Park has become one of the important tourist destinations in Mongolia for both domestic and international tourists over last two decades, because of natural beauty and cultural diversity.

In Mongolia, there is still limited research that examines detailed tourism research related to cultural identity, local traditions, and the natural environment. Therefore, the study is to investigate Khuvsgul Lake National Park, its habitats, tourism growth pattern in the national park, local people, and their participation in tourism.

Khuvsgul Lake National Park

Mongolia is a landlocked country located between two large nations, Russia to the north and China to the south (Figure 1) and it has a territory over 1.56 million square kilometers. Population of Mongolia is relatively small, approximately 3.5 million (NSOM, 2025). Therefore, population density is very low, with around 1.5 people per square kilometer, particularly in remote and rural areas.

Figure 1. Map of Mongolia.

Khatgal village is situated in the southern tip of Khuvsgul Lake. The village was first established in 1727 as a military camp and later developed port town for trading between Russia and Mongolia. During socialist period, between 1930-1990, the village blossomed significantly with oil base, wood processing plants and wool washing factories etc and settlement population reached 7000 (KSKP, 2024). Today the settlement numbers is around 3700 (NSOM, 2020).

Khuvsgul Lake National Park is located in Khuvsgul province in northern Mongolia, covers a total area of 9,920 square kilometers. The national park includes four soum (administrative units) such as Alag-Erdene, Renchinlumbe, Khankh and Chandmana-Undur serves as the main settlements within the park.

Khuvsgul Lake (also locally known as "Blue Pearle", "Mother Sea") is located within National Park. The Lake is the second-largest freshwater lake in Asia and holds approximately 70% of Mongolia and 0.4% of world freshwater reserves (Prokopenko et al., 2007, Orkhonselenge et al., 2022). The lake is 136 km long, 27 km wide and 268 meters deep (Imler, 2025) and it lies at an elevation of 1645m above sea level. Over 90 rivers flow into Khuvsgul Lake, while only one, Eg River, flows out. It is considered one of the seventeen ancient lakes in the world, estimated to be more than two million years old (McCarthy et al., 2018). The Mongolian government declared Khuvsgul Lake and its watershed under state protection in 1992, as a Natural Complex Protected Area. In 2022, the Khusvgul Lake National park has been registered as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, because of its high ecological value.

The National Park is home to some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world (McCarthy et al., 2018; Bank, A. D., 2021). Dense forests of spruce and larch (locally known as taiga) cover surrounding mountain ranges. The taiga forest is home to various creatures for rare mammals such as ibex, argali sheep, Siberian roe deer, red foxes, and endangered snow leopards. There are 12 species of fish inhabit in the area several of them are endemic including subspecies of Siberian grayling and roach (McCarthy et al., 2018; Bank, A. D., 2021; Imler, 2025,). The area is also very rich in bird species, with more than 200 recorded, including golden eagles, bearded vultures, and various cranes (Imler, 2025).

Ethnic communities

Population of Mongolia is 3.5 million (NSOM, 2025). Ethnically, 94.4% percent of the population consider themselves Mongols. A majority of Mongols are subgroup of Khalkha, and remaining are

Buryat, Durvud, Drakhad, Khotgoid and others. Another 5% of are ethnic Khazakh, Tuvan (Tsaatan) and other ethnicities (Gabbay, 2015).

Population of Khuvsgul province was 136,885 in 2023, with a population density of approximately 1.4 people per square kilometer. This province is in northern Mongolia, so indigenous people are called Northern Mongolian communities including Khalkh as the majority, along with 13.7% Darkhad and 5.2% Khotgoid, as well as Buriat, Uriankhai, and Tsaatan (NSOM.,2020).

These people have historically maintained a nomadic way of life, based on relationships with land, life stocks (animals), and seasonal migration. These everyday practices are basement of their cultural practices and cultural identities. Most communities in this region speak Mongolian language some with low and/or strong dialect. Only, Tsaatan people speak different language (Tuvan language).

Among northern Mongolian communities, a unique and small indigenous ethnic group is called the Tsaatan (Picture 1). The word *Tsaatan* means „reindeer herders" in Mongolian.

Picture 1. Tsaatan reindeer herders with their herd in northern Mongolia. Source: responsible travel (n.d.)

They are of Tuvan origin (Inamura T., 2005; Aiyzhy E., 2018) and have traditionally lived in a very close relationship with their reindeer and the taiga forest. Their cultural identity, daily practices, and worldview are strongly shaped by long-term human-animal relationship. Accoridng to Flenniken (2007), the Tsaatan, an indigenous people of the northernmost province of Mongolia, have preserved their unique culture through nomadic reindeer husbandary. Indigenous reindeer herding practices and cultural strategies link the survivability of the people with the survivability of their reindeer. Another important aspect of their culture is 'boo'/shamanic belief system. Tsaatans are among few ethnic communities that have remarkably preserved their strong shamanic traditions and rituals a nomadic long side way of life over many generations.

Their traditional homes are called 'urts'(Picture 1), which are made with long wooden poles and thick waterproof cloth (in the past, animal skins were used instead of cloth). The urts perform the most important part of their culture and daily life, keeping them warm in extreme cold weather in taiga, temperatures can be -40 to-50 C. Moreover, 'urts' is an integral part of their culture, and it is lightweight and easy to assemble and disassemble, making "urts" highly suitable for nomadic lifestyle that depends on prequent relocation with their reindeer. Their nomadic lifestyle and unique cultural practices truly attract domestic and international tourists and researchers. As a result, the Tsaatan have become an important cultural and tourism feature of the Khuvsgul Lake National Park region.

Another important indigenous community in this region is Darkhad. Badamkhatan (1965) described, 'Darhad' is an ethnic Mongolian group who lives in the northern part of Khuvsgul province. They speak Mongolian language with a strong local dialect. Like other Mongolian ethnic communities, Darkhad are traditionally nomadic and breed livestock locally called „tavan khoshuu mal" including cows, horses, sheep, goats and camels.

The Khuvsgul region is rich in higher mountains therefore yaks are also popular livestock for local residents. And they live in a Mongolian traditional home ger (Picture 2) with walls, poles and a peaked roof covered with canvas and felt and tightened with ropes. It is light enough for nomads to carry and move (UNESCO, 2013).

Picture 2. Mongol traditional home ger and its building process. Source: UNESCO, 2013

Their traditional song is distinct song starting with high tone of the music. So, they have strong vocal skills. Many of them believe Buddhism, but there are still strong remnants of shamanism among the Darkhad community. Shamanic rituals are the most important and attractive tourism activities among the tourists and scholars.

Khuvsgul Lake National Park and Tourism

Tourism in Mongolia

Mongolia is known for its nomadic lifestyle, untouched natural landscapes, rich history and well preservation traditional culture. These features show that Mongolia has abundant tourism resources. This wide-open landscape, together with rich natural environments and nomadic traditions, makes Mongolia attractive to natural and cultural tourists from around the world.

Tourism services in Mongolia were first introduced in 1954 and were limited to organized groups of visitors, hunters, and travelers mostly from socialist countries. This marked the beginning of institutionalized tourism development in Mongolia. After 1990, Mongolia transitioned to a democratic system and opened its economy to the world (TIC., 2015) and tourism sector began to develop gradually.

Today, there are more than 1,200 tour companies (about 120 of them actively operating), around 370 hotels, and more than 300 tourist camps, employing over 50,000 people in total (TIC., 2015, MB&TDC, 2019). In terms of economic contribution, tourism is considered the third largest sector after mining and agriculture. (MB&TDC, 2019).

Figure 2. Tourists in Mongolia and Khusvgul Lake National Park, between 2000 and 2025 (NSOM, 2025)

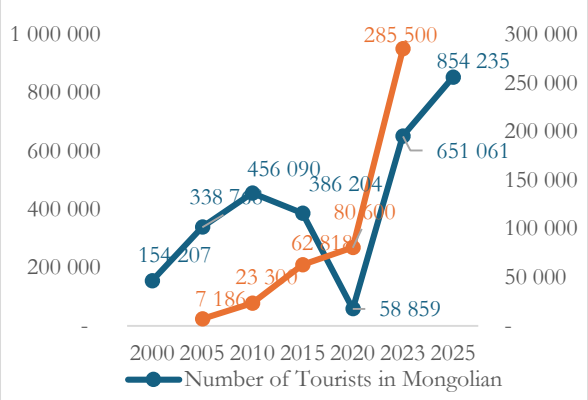

Figure 2 illustrates development pattern of tourism in Mongolia over past two decades. The number of tourists visiting in Mongolia has been steadily growing from about 150,000 in 2000 to more than 570,000 in 2019. Although tourist numbers dropped sharply in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the

sector recovered quickly, and by 2025 the number of international visitors exceeded 850,000 (NSOM, 2025).

Tourism growth in Khuvsgul Lake National Park

Since the fall of socialism, tourism in the National Park has developed and now it is one of the most important tourist destinations in Mongolia for both domestic and international visitors. Major attractions in this region are pristine nature, well-preserved nomadic culture, reindeer herding tradi-tions and diverse cultural heritage. The number of visitors to the National Park increased rapidly over the past 15 years. Traveler numbers grew from approximately 7,000 in 2005 to about 285,000 in 2024 (AD&TO., 2025). Interestingly, tourist arrivals did not decline during the pandemic in this region. The trend illustrates significant growth interest of domestic visitors (Figure 2).

The development of tourism infrastructure has followed this increase in visitor numbers. The number of tourism service providers has grown by an average of three times over the past 25 years. Hotels experienced the fastest growth, increasing 9.5 times from 2 in 2005 to 19 in 2025. Tourist camps increased 2.9 times, from 41 in 2005 to 120 in 2025, while ger camps grew 2.6 times, from 65 in 2005 to 171 in 2025. In addition, small food processing plants have been newly established, reaching 11 by 2025 (TIC, 2015; AD&TO., 2025**).**

In 2019, the Government of Mongolia announced its plan to further develop Khuvsgul Lake National Park as an eco-tourism destination (GOM, 2019)**,** reflecting its growing economic importance. These figures clearly show that tourism plays an important role in the development of northern Mongolia.

Tourist activities in Khuvsgul Lake National Park

Tourism can be classified into many types. Among these types, natural tourism, eco-tourism, and adventure tourism are formed of outdoor travel. In Mongolia, tourists mainly choose adventure, natural tourism, cultural tourism and eco-tourism. Activities commonly include nomadic and local culture (art performance, husbandry practices, and shamanic rituals), paleontological tours (dinosaur fossils) to Mongolian Gobi Desert and National Parks. Some visit to experience Mongolian traditional cultural festivals for example Naadam, Reindeer & Tsaatan festival, Camel festival and Khukh Suvd ice festival etc. Tourism peak season is between June to September (Picture 3).

Picture 3. Khatgal Village (Field work 8 AUG. 2025)

In Khuvsgul Lake National Park, tourists usually visit to enjoy the beautiful nature and experience nomadic culture. Many draw the several minority ethnic communities Tsaatan and Darkhad with their unique lifestyle in taiga region and religious rituals. Popular activities include relaxing in nature, horse and reindeer riding, trekking, exploring shamanic and cultural practices, photo shooting, birdwatching, and fishing.

Local people participation in tourism

According to the official records of the Khatgal village, there are 3,738 registered residents, of which 21% (around 800 households) are engaged in livestock herding. The largest proportion at 63.13% (2,360) of people work as freelancers and in tourism-related activities. Meanwhile, 15% (560 people) are employed at tourist camps, and 1.23% (46 people) work as guides (NSOM, 2020; AD&TO., 2025). These figures demonstrate the increasing importance of tourism in the local economy.

Today, local people and herders actively participate in tourism as a source of additional income.

Many perceive tourism as the main driving force of the regional economy.

They are involved in various tourism-related activities, including reindeer and horse guiding, selling meat and dairy products, working in tourist camps, producing handicrafts and selling souvenirs, and running small shops, restaurants, hotels and tourist camps. One of the most rapidly expanding services is home stay accommodation, where families host visitors in their homes, shovgor (cabins) and gers (yurt) in their backyards.

Overall, local people have become highly dependent on tourism. Nearly all working age residents except children and the elderly are engaged in seasonal tourism-related work.

Picture 4. Tsaatan handicrafts, including carved antlers, reindeer skin pouches, soapstone carvings and leatherwork. (Anna Kaminski) (Link)

It has notably accelerated village development, particularly in infrastructure, tourist accommodations, and buildings constructions. Another major improvement has been education. Since tourism began in the area, local people have started learning foreign languages, and many can now communicate in English and other languages to sell their products and interact with visitors.

Ecological Issue

The ecological pressure in Khuvsgul Lake National Park is not only current problem. It has some historical roots. During the socialist era, water transport, many industrial factories, such as fuel depots, a wool washing factory, and a wood processing plant significantly contributed to environmental pollution and the loss of ecological balance. One of the most notable examples is the ship "Sukhbaatar" (Figure 5) that sank in the lake in 1985 (Yadam et al., 2024). In addition, more than 28 vehicles transporting fuel, fertilizer, and supplies broke through the ice and sank to the bottom of the lake, some of which are still polluting the lake's ecosystem (News, 2024).

Picture 5. "Sukhbaatar" sunken ship, Khatgal village (field work 15 Jul. 2025)

Mongolian government, in collaboration with foreign and domestic organizations implemented a clean-up project between 2020 and 2024. The project included pulled up waste by towing a 309-ton ship and 10 (Figure 6) other vehicles along with fuel, oil, lubricants, and other hazardous waste (Yadam et al., 2024, News, 2024).

Today, tourism in the Khuvsgul Lake National Park region is rapidly developing. Regional tourism is mainly based on natural environment. Nature-based tourism has both positive and negative environmental impacts. Positive sides include environmental protection, improving ecological knowledge of both local residents and tourists, and increasing local income. However, negative impacts include water and waste pollution, soil degradation, habitat disturbance, and overuse of natural resources.

Nowadays, people prefer to spend their leisure time in pristine natural environment. The main rea-

son is development of urban area extension, and rapid population growth in where green spaces are partially disappearing (Goddard et al., 2009). As a result, the nature and rural protected areas have become popular tourist destinations.

Picture 6. Sunken vehicles, Khatgal village (field work 15 Jul. 2025)

In Mongolia, almost half of the total population (NSOP, 2025) lives in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, and the amount of green space in the city is limited (City Plan 20/40, 2019). Therefore, the number of residents traveling and spending their leisure time in rural, natural, protected areas, such as Khuvsgul Lake National Park for leisure, had increased steadily in recent years.

Tourism significantly contributes to the regional economy. As the number of tourists increases, the number of ger camps, tourist camps, and hotels has increased, and leading to expansion of resort area. However, increasing number of tourists leads to environmental pressure. During the peak season solid waste and dumping / open waste are crucial issues for national park administration staff. In this time waste always exceeds their management due to lack of ecological knowledge among some locals and tourists. They also leave waste in protected area zones when traveling by horse, reindeer, or hiking.

Another major negative impact is the loss of the fragile ecosystem of Khuvsgul Lake National Park. Due to the feet of tourists, wild animals run far away, their habitats are being changed, their migrations are being reduced, and the boundaries of their habitats are being reduced, which is threatening the extinction of endangered species (Bank, A. D., 2021)

Tourism also affects local pastoral livelihoods. Herders may be forced to move their livestock farther from tourists' areas due to land use pressures and in some cases, they pay other herders to take care of their livestock away from tourism destinations.

There are, however, positive activities in environmental management. In terms of waste, the Mongolian government, in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank, has built a land fill waste collecting center for sorting and burial in away from tourism areas. A landfill waste facility was constructed to run in 2024 (EMR., 2024). The land fill center also receives wastewater.

Some local horse and reindeer guides collect the waste left in the open fields and bring them to the waste center.

These examples suggest that, if environmental issues are managed properly, tourism activities have the potential to develop more sustainably. However, due to the limited availability of comprehensive research on this topic, further investigation is needed and will be addressed in future studies.

Conclusion

This study shows that Khuvsgul Lake National Park is one of the well-known and most important tourist destinations in Mongolia.

The area features freshwater Khuvsgul Lake, its biosphere ecosystem, and ethnic communities with unique cultural practices. These features attract tourists from domestic and overseas.

According to the statistical data, the number of tourists has significantly increased recently. This rapid growth provides plenty of job opportunities for locals. Moreover, many locals actively participate in tourism-related activities such as guiding, producing and selling handicrafts, running their own busi-

nesses, working as camp staff and learning foreign languages. As a result, tourism provides them with a seasonal but relatively stable source of income.

In addition, tourism also supports local and regional development. Infrastructure has been improved by paved roads, service facilities, tourist camps, and hotels.

However, tourism growth is also followed by environmental pressure including ecological imbalances, waste issues and habitat destruction. Future research will focus more deeply on how tourism development influences local residents and ecological environment positively and negatively.

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THE SUDAN GEZIRA IRRIGATION AGRICULTURAL SCHEME: THE AGRARIAN NEOLIBERAL REFORMS IN THE SCHEME—A BREAK FROM OR RECONFIGURATION WITHIN THE GOVERNING COLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGY?

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Abstract

Founded during Anglo-Egyptian Condominium colonial Rule (1899-1956) and continuing into postcolonial Sudan as the main development project, the scheme underwent significant governance changes, shifting from a centrally managed system characterised by a bureaucratic irrigation network and relatively well-functioning infrastructure to a more liberalised and decentralised system, as presented by the dominant literature. In this view, the reforms are regarded as a break from the inherited colonial logic, marked by the state's withdrawal and the transfer of risks and responsibilities to tenants, labourers, and local subsistence economies. Such accounts highlight a rupture with earlier forms of governance, often portraying the colonial system as more coherent and effective than the current one. However, this perspective overlooks how these changes conceal the persistence of an underlying colonial epistemological and governance framework that continues to organise, classify, and control land, labour, population, and nature. The scheme continues to

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be operated through a centralised hydraulic irrigation system, despite uneven recent conditions for its reproduction, functioning as a mechanism for regulating farmers and agricultural production. This is intertwined with the ongoing development of agrarian subjectivities within the tenancy regime, which recognises local Arab groups as political agrarian entities. Conversely, West African labourers and ethnic minority groups are marginalised and excluded subjects. The recent reforms reflect and deepen the logic of the colonial extractive economy, which prioritises technocratic scientific knowledge over local systems of understanding and indigenous needs. By combining long-standing ethnography with a Decolonial perspective and employing a methodological framework that integrates multi-sided ethnography with Decolonial critical literature, this approach enables scholars to trace how colonial epistemologies have persisted in hegemonic, reinterpreted, and contested forms across comparable Sudanese agrarian contexts and throughout postcolonial Africa.

Keywords: Sudan Gezira Scheme; Postcolonial Africa; Ethnography; Decolonial Anthropology; Agrarian Neoliberalism; West African (W.A.) Groups: Colonial Epistemologies

Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

A SZUDÁNI GEZIRA ÖNTÖZÉSES MEZŐGAZDASÁGI RENDSZER: AZ AGRÁR NEOLIBERÁLIS REFORMOK – SZAKÍTÁS VAGY ÚJRAALAKULÁS AZ IRÁNYÍTÓ GYARMATI ISMERETELMÉLETEN BELÜL?

Az angol–egyiptomi kondomínium gyarmati uralma idején (1899–1956) létrehozott, majd a posztkoloniális Szudánban is központi fejlesztési projektként tovább működtetett Gezira-rendszer irányítási struktúrája jelentős átalakulásokon ment keresztül. A domináns szakirodalom szerint a korábban központilag irányított, bürokratikusan szervezett öntözőhálózattal és viszonylag jól működő infrastruktúrával jellemezhető rendszer egy liberalizáltabb és decentralizáltabb modell irányába mozdult el. Ebben az értelmezési keretben a reformokat a gyarmati örökségként fennmaradt logikától való elszakadásként értelmezik, amelyet az állam visszahúzódása, valamint a kockázatok és felelősségek bérlőkre, mezőgazdasági munkásokra és helyi megélhetési gazdaságokra történő átruházása jellemez. E megközelítések hangsúlyozzák a korábbi kormányzási formáktól való törést, és gyakran a gyarmati rendszert a jelenleginél koherensebbnek és hatékonyabbnak ábrázolják. Ugyanakkor ez a perspektíva figyelmen kívül hagyja, hogy e változások miként fedik el egy mélyebben meghúzódó gyarmati episztemológiai és kormányzási keretrendszer fennmaradását, amely továbbra is meghatározza a föld, a munkaerő, a népesség és a természeti környezet szervezését, kategorizálását és kontrollját. A rendszer – a közelmúltbeli újratermelési feltételek egyenetlenségei ellenére – továbbra is egy centralizált hidraulikus öntözési infrastruktúrán keresztül működik, amely a gazdálkodók és a mezőgazdasági termelés szabályozásának kulcsmechanizmusaként szolgál. Ez szorosan összefonódik az agrárszubjektivitások folyamatos formálódásával a bérleti rendszer keretein belül, amely a helyi arab csoportokat legitim agrárpolitikai szereplőkként ismeri el, míg a nyugat-afrikai munkásokat és különböző etnikai kisebbségeket marginalizált, illetve kizárt pozíciókba helyezi. A közelmúlt reformjai egyúttal a gyarmati extraktív gazdasági logika továbbélését és elmélyülését tükrözik, amely a technokrata, tudományos tudásformákat a helyi ismeretrendszerekkel és őshonos szükségletekkel szemben részesíti előnyben. A hosszú távú etnográfiai kutatás és a dekoloniális perspektíva összekapcsolásával, valamint egy olyan módszertani keret alkalmazásával, amely a többszínterű etnográfiát dekoloniális kritikai irodalommal integrálja, ez a megközelítés lehetővé teszi annak feltárását, hogy a gyarmati episztemológiák miként ma-

radnak fenn hegemonikus, újraértelmezett és vitatott formákban a hasonló szudáni agrárkörnyezetekben, illetve tágabban a posztkoloniális Afrikában.

Kulcsszavak: Gezira-rendszer (Szudán); posztkoloniális Afrika; etnográfia; dekoloniális antropológia; agrár neoliberalizmus; nyugat-afrikai csoportok; gyarmati episztemológiák

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Legibility and Racialised Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Governance: The Gezira Irrigation Scheme

The Gezira scheme of Sudan, the largest agricultural development initiative in Africa, was founded in the 1920s under British colonial rule to supply cotton to the British textile industry.(Gaitskell, 1952) and, in the postcolonial period, from 1956 until the present day, was considered the backbone of the country's national development (Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025). Within the dominant classic and recent scholarly literature (Abashera, 2011, 2019; Abdelgalil & Adeeb, 2015; Barnett, 2019; Benson & Duffield, 1979; Bushara et al., 2006; Clarkson, 2005; De Waal, 2015; D'Silva, 1986; Duffield, 1983; Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025; Elshaikh et al., 2018; Gaitskell, 1952, 1955; Goelnitz & Al-Saidi, 2020a, 2020b; Mahgoub et al., 2017; McLoughlin, 1963; Osman, 2015; Salman, 2010; Sikainga, 2010) It can be broadly characterised along two lines. First, it presents the scheme as a centrally managed hydraulic system rooted in modernist planning and state-led development. Second, it interprets the reforms introduced under the 2005 Act and its subsequent agrarian governance arrangements as signalling a break with this model, emphasising processes of liberalisation, decentralisation, and the state's withdrawal. While these perspectives highlight significant institutional changes, they share a common assumption: that changes in administrative structure reflect a transformation in the fundamental logic of governance.

However, this dominant perspective obscures the profound, ongoing colonial epistemological foundation that has shaped the scheme from its inception to the postcolonial era. This foundation establishes a mode of governance that influences the Gezira structures of knowledge, the diverse agrarian subjectivities, and the administrative authority within the region among various actors. In fact, the scheme was created as a knowledge system based on classification and selection, which unevenly distributes economic resources, political representation, moral economies, and recognition. Building on this premise, this article argues that the changes associated with the 2005 Act do not break from this logic but instead reconfigure it. Although the visible structures of centralised control have been altered, the core principles of simplification, differential inclusion, and hierarchical recognition persist, now operating through decentralised and market-oriented mechanisms. The Gezira scheme functions as a site of colonial and postcolonial epistemological and governance knowledge, as well as the construction of subjectivity. This continuity in epistemological and governance aspects is a gap that needs to be addressed. Against this backdrop, the article raises the following questions: how these epistemological colonial legacies and lived experiences—how they are perceived, internalised, negotiated, and contested—persist into the postcolonial era remains central to this discussion.

While these earlier studies are invaluable and illuminate the agrarian economy and the scheme's institutional dynamics, they seldom regard the scheme as a colonial epistemological system that reshaped agrarian life, authority, and labour relations in central Sudan. As a notable exception among these

scholarly works, the work of Bernal(1997), in her work titled "Colonial Moral Economy and the Discipline of Development: the Gezira scheme and Modern Sudan," is one of the key anthropological texts on the scheme and offers our initial point of reference. Bernal analysed the scheme not only as an agricultural economic project but also as one that encompassed its moral and economic dimensions and impacts, demonstrating that it operates as a modernist developmental disciplinary system within postcolonial Sudan—using Foucault's terms—not only restructuring labour relations but also society and moral order imposed on peasants and labourers. Through what she called the modernist discipline of development, which persisted through postcolonial regimes, new moral-economic expectations and disciplinary regulations were established, fostering new work ethics that regulated the local population's time, labour, and production under new rules aimed at creating a modern farming category. Moreover, Bernal indicated that the governing logic of the Gezira scheme has been carried over to other agricultural projects and initiatives and has also influenced shaping the national economy more broadly.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to expand, develop, and refine this Bernal account, as it focuses only on the disciplinary order, colonial discourse, and the moral economy of tenants, while overlooking agricultural labourers' subjective moral worlds and the newest developments in tenants' social lives. It represents a traditional academic work that does not cover many recent insights and advancements. Also, it ignores the scientific and technical structures that support the scheme and its governance, which shape the discipline into a physically embodied system and a lived experience for tenant farmers and labourers. In the Gezira scheme, the irrigation infrastructure—particularly the canals—and how it is managed, regulated among farmers, and timed have created a specific category of farmers whose production, agricultural activities, and schedules depend on irrigation regulations. In other words, the technical system of water engineering acts as an administrative mechanism through which colonial and postcolonial authorities control production and rural popular-tions. These engineering, irrigation, and disciplinary practices reflect systems of knowledge about land, nature, and agriculture that make the population governable.

To address these limitations, I first expand this analysis by examining how the scheme functions within a broader system of agrarian governance, in which the colonial epistemological worldview has reshaped not only the farmer's moral economy but also land, labour, power relations between tenants and labourers, and overall agricultural production. Second, from an epistemological perspective, building on Bernal's concept of the Discipline of Development, she interpreted the scheme as an empirical manifestation of modernist scientific rationality. However, it does not account for the scheme's underlying structure, including the unequal power relations it generates and the ways of seeing that organise nature and labour within the modernist discourse of science and rationality. Using Bernal as the initial analytical framework, this article situates the Gezira irrigation scheme within debates about the relationship between colonial knowledge systems and governmentality (Foucault, 1978), demonstrating how the Gezira, like other development modernist projects, embodies a governing modernist scientific vision that redefines social life, nature, and agriculture based on principles of classification, simplification, mapping, and administrative regulation—aimed at making nature, land, and the population controllable and manageable. Furthermore, the article discusses what is omitted from Bernal's account of how irrigation engineering design and governance reshape agrarian management, influence agricultural outcomes, and involve potential differential risks associated with irrigation governance. Additionally, Bernal focuses empirically on tenants' lives through a case study of Wad Alabas

and examines developmental discourse. I expand this by exploring how that persistent colonial modernist vision continues to influence the lives of tenants, labourers, the engineering structure of irrigation, and administrative actors across multiple ethnographic sites within the original Gezira scheme and the Al-Manaqil extension.

To understand these issues, this article draws on various theoretical traditions related to colonial rule and systems of knowledge production. According to Foucault's (Foucault, 1978) The concept of governmentality, which serves as our starting point, holds that modern power structures are not only coercive but also productive of social and economic order and of subjectivities through categorisation and labelling. Additionally, Scott's(Scott, 2020) book: Seeing Like a State, illustrates how modern power, which he calls high modernism, involves the state using large-scale development projects to reshape social life through mechanisms of simplification, abstraction, and administrative procedures, thereby making nature, land, and labour legible and governable. While Mamdani (Mamdani, 2012, 2018) deepens this understanding by showing how modern power in Africa simplified African communities and economies—including the agrarian economies—through hierarchical racial arrangements embedded within the modern governance of African states, resulting in exclusionary ethnically defined states unable to establish inclusive national frameworks and thus contributing to ongoing armed violence on the continent, the system Mamdani called the Bifurcated System. Taken together, these perspectives help us see the Gezira scheme not only as an agricultural project but also as an epistemological site shaped by abstract, simplified categories and administrative procedures, thereby rendering nature, land, and the population governable and producing differential, ethnically stratified political subjects and economic actors with different moral economies.

Building on the previously discussed framework, the article examines, ethnographically and through archival analysis, how the Gezira scheme's institutional structure, as a governance regime, is shaped by administrative regulations, procedures, and irrigation infrastructure. It highlights the mechanisms and procedures through which land, labour, and agricultural production are classified, managed, regulated, and supervised within the scheme. These mechanisms include tenancy regime regulations, irrigation schedules, and bureaucratic oversight procedures, which collectively establish the epistemological foundation through which land, labour, and agricultural production are made legible and governable. Methodologically, this article combines multi-sited ethnography as a method of data collection and decolonial anthropology as the analytical perspective to explore how these epistemological and constructed structures are dispersed across different sites in the scheme.

By reflecting on these mechanisms, this article presents the scheme not merely as a site of agricultural production but as a colonial-modernist epistemological space that reorganises and controls population, nature, and labour, thereby constructing a stratified agrarian regime within the Sudanese agrarian economy and the Gezira scheme.

The article is organised as follows: it begins by highlighting the main gap and providing justification in the introduction. It then outlines the methodological steps, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework that situates the Gezira within broader debates on colonial rule and knowledge systems. The conclusion offers an ethnographic analysis that demonstrates how these colonial structures continue to operate and influence daily life and practices in the Gezira scheme.

Methodology

The Research Design and the Methods of Data Collection

A mixed-methods research design is employed to address the gap discussed in this article. It includes

ethnographic data collection, involving both institutional and everyday fieldwork with local tenants and labourers, as well as the state administrative machinery. Additionally, a quantitative approach supports measuring overarching trends in the study and the opinions of local actors involved.

The empirical data in this article are drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources rely on a comprehensive record of data concerning the Gezira scheme's social, economic, and political relations, as well as its developments, structures, and debates. The author conducted his fifth-year research at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Khartoum University as a supplementary project for the 2018-2019 academic year. This was an ethnographic study of social and economic differentiation within the Gezira scheme between local Arab tenants and West African labourers. Focusing on Um Aligour village, Hilat Bashir, and Banat villages, their surrounding labour settlements, and local state representatives, the research involved three months of ethnographic fieldwork in Al Manaqil agricultural extension. The main findings were then generalised to the Gezira scheme and Al Manaqil extension.

During the same academic year, the department organised annual field training for fifth-year students in the Gezira scheme, involving seven villages of tenant farmers and seven camps in Al Hasahia locality, eastern Gezira scheme, over three weeks, with daily evening analysis and discussions. Additionally, the researcher has completed an ethnographic article on the legal and social developments of the Gezira scheme, which is currently under review by a peer-reviewed journal.

Additionally, my master's supplementary dissertation (Ibrahim, 2021) at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, in Qatar, titled 'Rural Transformations and the Revolutionary Movement in Sudan, December Revolution 2018: the case of Gezira state and Al-Manaqil demonstrators,' covering 2019 to 2021, adopted a micro-sociological perspective and used methodological triangulation: questionnaires, intensive interviews, secondary sources, and scholarly literature. The non-random quantitative sample included 111 respondents, and 11 interviews were conducted to complement the statistical data. About 85% of respondents called for reform of the Gezira scheme. Reform was one of the three main reasons for participation.

Subjectivity and Positionality

I analyse the Gezira Act of 2005 from two perspectives: as an insider and as an outsider. The Gezira is where I was born, raised, and spent most of my life. However, I am also an outsider, as an anthropologist and sociologist trained to think reflexively, treating my subjectivity as a unit of analysis and observation. At university, I was taught to develop empirically supported arguments, setting aside my emotions and prior biases and perceptions to shape the core of my work. Consequently, I will keep this in mind throughout the writing process. Additionally, I will refer to authoritative texts on the scheme, which can serve as a relatively objective benchmark for assessing my work; readers are encouraged to consult these sources to ensure the analysis remains balanced.

Moreover, my anthropological-ethnographic approach utilises tools to gather evidence from lived experiences, with subsequent analysis and discussion grounded in that evidence—an epistemological advantage.

Analysis Strategies and Reflexivity

The methods of analysis include thick description, critical discourse analysis, and quantitative analysis, the latter conducted using SPSS. Drawing on extensive field data and initial engagement with issues and developments related to the scheme, this rich dataset supports arguments in policy debates concerning the Act of 2005. To prevent the reproduction of inherited hierarchical legacies, we

propose an integrative methodological approach that combines multi-sited ethnography with Decolonial ethnography. According to Leve (2022) the decolonial approach begins by deconstructing colonial conditions in knowledge production, which continue to influence the social and human sciences. Colonial knowledge systems depend on hierarchical relationships between researchers and those studied, in which the latter are dominated in the knowledge-creation process, and their voices are treated as mere anecdotes rather than as valid knowledge; as a result, local communities are often excluded. In response to critiques of how the term "informant" encodes and sustains colonial power dynamics, ethnographers have sought alternative language to describe fieldwork relationships. This article discusses one of the most common terms— "interlocutor"— and considers the implications of choosing a term emphasising voice and speech over embodied participation. "Interlocutor" appeals to contemporary scholars because it signifies respect for the people we work with and aligns with modern secular values. In fact, relying on colonial categories in academic literature obscures the complexity of real-world systems of identity, belonging, and everyday agrarian politics—spaces where people live, interpret, reinterpret, and challenge these hierarchies and the social and political inequalities they produce. According to Gupta & Ferguson (1997) and Marcus (2012)The ethnographic field is no longer confined to a single geographical site, as traditional Anthropology once suggested. Instead, it constitutes a network of dispersed sites. These sites are interconnected despite their differences, making it essential for researchers to investigate their connections. Moreover, field sites are not neutral spaces for data collection; they are contested and dialogical arenas—furthermore, the researcher's positionality and social background influence access to or rejection of the field site. Therefore, the Gezira scheme will be understood as a dispersed network of locations, including villages, camps, canals, farms, administrative centres, tenants' unions, knowledge institutions, and neoliberal global entities.

Note: In the process of writing, I used the Grammarly editor solely for language improvement, while ChatGPT was used to translate some Arabic texts into English; all the ideas are mine.

The Colonial Knowledge Systems and the Development of Agrarian Governance Modes in Postcolonial African Setting, Sudan Gezira Scheme

To understand how the Gezira scheme functions as an agrarian governance model reflecting colonial knowledge regimes that continue to shape it through the postcolonial Sudan era, this article draws on various theoretical frameworks, beginning with Foucault's (Foucault, 1978) concept of governmentality, Scott's (Scott, 2020) ideas on legibility and simplification, and Mamdani's (Mamdani, 2012, 2018) insights into colonial bifurcation and classification.

The concept of governmentality, outlined in Foucault's influential work Security, Territory, Population, underpins the understanding of how modern power functions both as a productive force within social systems and as a regulator of behaviour. Foucault's view of power is particularly relevant because it recognises that modern power operates not only through coercion and direct violence but also through administrative processes, disciplinary regulations, and practices. These establish regimes of knowledge, produce social order, internalise it, influence individual conduct, and shape subject identities. Productive power fosters systems of knowledge, constructs identities, creates specific interactions and behaviours, and moulds subject formation through various institutions and norms. Foucault's theory illustrates that power operates not only through coercion but also through the creation of knowledge, which defines what can be known,

measured, and governed. In line with this view, the governance mode within the Gezira scheme employs both coercive and productive forms of authority. Coercive forces enforce the scheme's rules and regulations, while a productive approach seeks to regulate farmers' behaviour and organise daily agricultural routines via mechanisms such as a tenancy regime agreement, which allocates administrative authority, agrarian surplus values, political recognition, bureaucratic regulations, and irrigation schedules. Within this framework, the agrarian governance of the Gezira scheme produces specific, individual, and institutional agricultural practices and identities.

Although Scott's conception of legibility and simplification does not directly stem from Foucault's concept of governmentality, which highlights its productive role in transforming the social order, it complements and exemplifies that concept through state developmental projects aimed at legibility and simplification. Through what he calls high-modernist state development projects, he demonstrates that to manage and govern natural landscapes, along with complex social and economic realities and populations, the state must simplify and make them legible and understandable. The principle of simplification is implemented in practice through mechanisms such as cadastral surveys, maps, categorisations, and technical regulations that support contemporary high-modernist initiatives.

For Scott, legibility is the primary means by which the relationship between power and knowledge is expressed, thereby enabling a tangible system of governance. Legibility supports this system by simplifying complex realities into manageable formats, streamlining populations, spaces, and practices, and often erasing or marginalising social complexities. This governance framework operates through techniques of knowledge, classification, and ordering, transforming populations, identities, land, political economy, and space—beyond mere formal authority. By producing legible knowledge, social realities are condensed into administratively understandable formats like maps, censuses, categories, and statistics, while aspects that remain unseen or unmeasured are excluded.

Classification and ordering methods categorise populations, land, identities, and resources into fixed groups that allow intervention (e.g., citizen/foreigner, productive/unproductive, legal/illegal). Administrative structures, institutions, rules, and procedures implement this knowledge—turning abstractions into everyday governance.

Territorialisation and spatial control involve recon-figuring space through boundaries, zoning, sche-mes, camps, corridors, or frontlines—crucial in both development and conflict contexts. Instruments of coercion and enforcement include police, the army, militias, taxation, forced displacement, and surveillance, all used to secure compliance without consent. Ideological justifications or legitimising narratives, such as development, security, modernisation, order, or salvation, serve to normalise domination. The political economy of extraction and distribution relates to control over labour, land, aid, rents, or violence-based accumulation that materially sustains the regime. There is also the suppression, incorporation, or management of local knowledge—vernacular practices are either erased, disciplined, or selectively co-opted when aligning with state objectives. However, Scott describes these limitations as unintentional oversights in the legibility process.

The Gezira scheme exemplifies where Scott's simplification and clarification are applied. Before the scheme's inception, the Gezira plain was shaped by the unpredictable seasonal flooding of the Blue Nile, during which pastoral and agricultural activities depended on a range of ecological factors. The colonial regime simplified this ecological plain into a managed landscape by constructing dams, establishing a regulated irrigation network, and implementting fixed irrigation schedules. Using modernised, homogenising discourse, colonial rule reduced the

local, diverse moral economies in Gezira into modern moral-economic considerations that serve its extractive aims, often at the expense of local meso regimes. In fact, the meso represents local experiential knowledge embedded in moral-economic expectations and commitments that maintain the balance between fulfilling subsistence needs and social obligations, which scholars refer to as the moral economy.

However, despite their importance in understanding the context of the Gezira scheme, Scott's outlined processes still do not fully capture the many layers of simplification. Mamdani fits well here through his Bifurcated system, as he is best positioned to highlight this oversight left unaddressed by Scott.

Processes of Ethnic Simplification and Legibility in the African context, Sudan

Mamdani's books offer a bold, insightful analysis of how colonialism simplified governance through an examination of its legacy. He explains how colonial rule established a dual system of governance: a divided power structure. This split system managed racial dominance through tribally organised local authorities, thereby reproducing racial identity among citizens and ethnic identity among subjects. This authority system, which segments the population into hierarchical ethnic groups, operates through mechanisms of indirect rule. While direct rule denied subjects rights based on race, indirect rule integrated them into a "customary" system of governance, with state-appointed Native Authorities defining customs. By harnessing authoritarian potential within culture and shaping it into an authoritarian form, indirect rule (decentralised despotism) set the tone for Africa. It involved legal and historical procedures whereby colonial authority manipulated and invented customs that, via the modern state, neither abolished nor eliminated traditional tenure but rather codified and froze it, restructuring land authority through chiefs and indirect rule. While colonial rule allocated rights to political representation, authority, and land resources along ethnic lines, the main aim of economic and land governance was extraction for colonial benefit rather than serving local moral economies or subsistence needs. Here, colonial indirect rule entailed processes of simplification and legibility through the differential reorganisation of populartions, granting some groups greater access to resources and authority, aligning them more closely with colonial aims, and enabling them to meet their needs and moral-economic expectations—usually urban populations—while marginalising other ethnic groups from political and economic systems—often rural populations.

While Mamdani describes the African state as a bifurcated political system, urban areas operate under modern governance structures that treat their populations as citizens. In contrast, rural governance remains indirect, with authority rooted in customary practices that manage and control the population, who are viewed as political subjects without recognition or representation. However, the Gezira scheme context refines Mamdani's dual system by noting that the rural subjects in the Gezira scheme are stratified rather than a homogeneous unit. Since its colonial inception, the Gezira scheme has revealed further differences within rural governance. It stratified the rural populations in Gezira by categorising them into distinct groups, recognising farmer tenants as farmers integrated into the scheme's governance system. Conversely, agricultural labourers were regarded as mere replaceable labour without political recognition or representation. This differential governance extended to their residence sites: farmers reside in villages, whereas labourers live in illegal settlements called Alkanabi, labour settlements (Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025).

The Gezira scheme, through processes of simplification and clarification, encompassed ecosystems, social relations, and economic relations, becoming a highly regulated system of agrarian governance.

However, this system is not entirely totalitarian and controlling. Building on Foucault's concept of counter-conduct highlights how tenants and labourers' practices tend to contest, negotiate, and redirect the ways they are governed; these practices range from everyday negotiations and refusals of regimes of conduct to overt collective protests. In the Gezira scheme, counter-conducts against the processes of simplification are not limited to everyday resistance or negotiation but also extend to collective public acts that challenge the scheme's persistent epistemological and administrative structures.

In the next section of the article, the reader will observe, through empirical and archival analysis, how colonial processes of epistemological simplification made nature, population, and land understandable. These processes established administrative control and reconfigured persistence over time, embodied in extractive agrarian economies. Moreover, it will demonstrate how this enduring structure is also challenged and negotiated through everyday practices and organised political acts of contestation, as seen in the participation of rural agrarian subjects in the December 2018 revolution.

The Analysis

Gezira Irrigation Scheme as a Governance Model: Processes of Simplification and Legibility

To understand how the Gezira scheme, as a modern form of power and a colonial modernist way of seeing, transformed agrarian life in central Sudan, it is essential to first examine the ecological and social landscapes of the Gezira plain before the scheme's inception. The analysis will then proceed as follows: discussing the scheme's hydraulic infrastructure and the processes of ecological simplification. Subsequently, it will analyse the administrative governance of agricultural production, the formation of agrarian subjecthood, the hierarchy of production forces, and then conclude by examining the counter-conduct practices of tenant farmers and West African labourers.

Pre-scheme Gezira: Systems of Rainfed Agriculture and the Priority of Moral Subsistence Economies

This subsection of the analysis examines the Gezira plain, in the pre-scheme stage, focusing on its overall geographical location, rainfall, ecological conditions, agricultural practices, settlement patterns, and dominant social and economic organisations. Building on the invaluable classic works of Gaitskell (1952 and 1955) and McLoughlin (1963) and the recent work of Barnett (2019). It is documented that before the establishment of the Gezira scheme, the area was a sparsely populated clay plain between the Blue and White Nile, characterised mainly by scattered settlements and rainfed subsistence agriculture adapted to variable ecological conditions.

The Gezira is an Arabic word meaning 'island' or 'peninsula'. It appears in place names across the Arab world, notably in the name Algeria, which is an anglicised form of the Arabic al-guzayir, translating as 'the islands. In Sudan, Gezira has a specific meaning: it refers to a large tract of land situated between the Blue and White Nile. Specifically, following the establishment of the scheme, it denotes the irrigated part of that region used to cultivate cotton, Sudan's main export crop. Some geographical and climatic considerations are worth noting: the central region of Sudan is characterised by extensive clay plains that extend from the Nuba Mountains to the Ethiopian border, and from the south-eastern Equatoria mountains to the confluence of the Blue and White Niles at Khartoum, stretching about 100 kilometres north to Sabaluka on the main Nile.

Barbour considers that this broad area of clay plains should be divided into northern and southern regions, given the diversity between the desert north and the woodland and tropical forest in the south. This division makes sense; from north to south, the

clay plain stretches roughly 1400 kilometres. Clay soils play a significant role in shaping Sudan's economy today.

Additionally, within this region, the Gezira Scheme holds exceptional importance. One notable advantage of this land is its relative affor-dability for irrigation, owing to specific properties of the clay soil. Being impervious, clay enables the construction of canals without the need for expensive concrete lining. Although some water seeps into the subsoil, the loss is minimal; it rarely penetrates more than a few centimetres deep.

The typical rainfall pat-tern, concentrated from late July to early November, allowed people to develop an economy based on cultivating dura (Sorghum vulgare) before irrigation was introduced. (Bernal, 1997).

Before the introduction of the scheme, the subsistence agricultural economy, which was the main livelihood, depended on subsistent agriculture and semi-nomadic herding of cattle and sheep. Drawing on McLoughlin (1963), in the period before the construction of the dams in the 1920s, the region's inhabitants, local Arab groups, shared social and economic activities with the nomads, semi-nomads, and rain-land farmers who now reside in the area. Usually attached to traditional economic behaviours, they were accustomed to forming relationships based on specific moral duties and obligations. These were rooted in economic and social systems that determined the main objectives of the economic activity.

Besides, during that pre-scheme phase, the local population groups were politically and ethnically stratified rather than homogeneous due to the processes of slavery and enslavement. Building on Sikainga (2010) the influential work of titled Enslaved People into Workers, which, who mentioned in it that during the re-scheme establishment stage in Northern and Central Sudan, described how local communities employed enslaved people—primarily from Western, Nuba Mountains, and South Sudan, who are currently within the scheme—that were transformed into wage labour, and who had previously been employed by the local communities (ex-slave masters) to perform agricultural and domestic activities; after the arrival of British Condominium rule (1898-1956) in Sudan, due to increasing pressure from Western human rights campaigns and the needs of the colonial extractive economy for mobile wage labour forces, a law was passed to end slavery relations, and this is what occurred.

Even after the abolition of slavery and before the establishment of the scheme, those ex-slaves remained in a patronage relation with the local communities, which were economically and politically embedded in the local, rainfed, moral agrarian economy of dependence among communities, with no rights to local residential and agricultural land or local authority. However, despite the dominant structural constraints at that stage, here Sikainga affirms that these ex-slaves negotiated and resisted to secure better subsistence conditions, improved exchange relations, and even sought alternative relations. Therefore, the subsistent local actor was not unfamiliar with modern technology and the administrative regimes later brought by British colonial rule, the complex timing of processes, and the links among many small but equally important tasks. He was unaccustomed to detailed instructions about nearly every aspect of his economic and social life and lacked education in accounting or documentation.

To summarise and conclude this subsection, the Gezira region, prior to the establishment of the scheme, was characterised by dispersed rural settlements that adapted to seasonal ecological changes and the flows of the Blue Nile. The main livelihood was subsistence agriculture, supplemented by pastoral activities. These were socially rooted and aimed at meeting subsistence needs, social obligations, and moral responsibilities.

While the ex-slaves are part of a moral subsistence economy of dependence, they resist and negotiate to

improve their living conditions. These were the ecological and social conditions that colonial administrators aimed to transform through the creation of the Gezira irrigation scheme, which sought to establish their extractive agrarian economy and produce cotton through an exploitative capitalist mode of relations.

In fact, the establishment of the Gezira scheme in the early twentieth century was a key factor in reorganising the Gezira region, including the construction of the Sinnar dam and the development of an extensive irrigation network. It also became necessary for colonial administrators to convert Muslim nomads, semi-nomads, and rain-land farmers into tenants and wage workers through the tenancy regime, which served as a site of subject formation and simplification, as we will see.

The Colonial Irrigation Infrastructure and the Development of the Gezira Scheme

Drawing on Bernal (1997) Influential work, colonial administrators perceived the Gezira scheme as a force that transformed the Gezira landscape from an unregulated, backward, chaotic condition into a modern, Western-style, scientifically managed area for growing cotton and export crops. Consistent with Scott's idea of state-led simplification and legibility regimes, this transformation was driven by the construction of the Sinnar dam and the introduction of a regulated irrigation system, thereby replacing and simplifying the previous ecological variability and uncertainty.

Practically, the ecological simplification in Gezira involved gradually replacing traditional farming methods that relied on rainfall, the Nile's uncontrolled flows, and local experiential knowledge. These were replaced by more systematic and regulated agronomic and hydraulic engineering techniques. The dam served as the material and technical basis for the scheme's existence. Agricultural practices and knowledge systems came under the control of technocratic, standardised cropping systems; regulated irrigation schemes for allocation and distribution; and administrative oversight. The Sinnar Dam, which spans the Blue Nile 250 miles south of the urban centres of the Three Towns (Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman), and the Gezira, covering an area of one million acres (just under 2,000 square miles), is irrigated annually with intensive cultivation (with the other half cultivated the following year). The landforms used in the scheme form an upside-down 'V' created by the confluence of the White and Blue Niles.(Gaitskell, 1952, 1955). Before the dam's construction in the 1920s, the region's people were similar in their social and economic activities to the nomads, semi-nomads, and rain-land agriculturalists who currently inhabit the neighbouring desert and the Central Clay Plains grazing and growing districts. Annual rainfall averages 6-8 inches in the Scheme's northern reaches, and up to twice that amount at the southern end. July and August are wet; rainfall is practically unheard of during the five winter months. Under these conditions, the pre-Scheme pastoralists and farmers survived rather more precariously than their extra-Scheme present neighbours, who may now enter the Scheme in picking season and be assured of both grain supplies and cash employment (Gaitskell, 1955). The transition to the hydraulic irrigation system was assisted by decades of research and experimentation. Long-staple cotton thrives on the clay soils deposited over the centuries before the Scheme by annual Blue Nile floods. The long dry season both kills pests and cracks the soil, making it less impervious and less prone to waterlogging. However, the high salt and low nitrogen content, combined with impermeability, inhibit root development in many crops. While dura (millet), pulses, wheat, onions, and some other vegetables will grow with proper care, certain others will either not grow at all or very poorly. These include dukhn, maize, sesame, groundnuts (oils), root crops of all kinds, sugar cane, and fruit and tree crops. Are trees of any kind difficult to grow? Hence, firewood costs are

abnormally high. The Kharif, the July-August rainy period, is the main food-growing season, as is the July-September rainy period. The Sennar dam, two miles wide, is approximately 18 miles from the beginning of the irrigated land (the nearest hydrologically feasible point). Within the entire Scheme are over 600 miles of main canals and 2,500 miles of lesser distributing canals. The gradual downward slope from south to north ensures an entirely gravity-flow system (no pumps needed). The Al-Manaqil Extension, another 830,000 feddans (thus almost doubling the size of the total unit), while utilising an enlarged Sennar dam system, will rely primarily on a new dam now under construction at Er Roseires on the Blue Nile near the Ethiopian border. Al-Manaqil agricultural extension was completed in 1963 as part of the scheme's gradual implementation and operation. In this irrigated development project, water is the key, not land. Irrigated development: water is the key, not land. Of the cultivated land (50 per cent of the total waterable annually), approximately half is devoted to cotton production and half to food crops, particularly dura and lubia. Dura is a staple in the Northern Sudanese diet, and lubia serves as livestock fodder. The northern parts of the Scheme produce Sakel long-staple, while the southern districts yield a Sakel derivative called X1730A(McLoughlin, 1963).

Administrative Regulation and Agrarian Governance

Supporting this hydraulic regime requires an Administrative Regulation and Agrarian Governance. Consequently, colonial administrators established an administrative body to oversee and manage irrigation, agricultural production, and rural life. This body inherently assumes the dominance of technical hydraulic knowledge over local systems of knowledge and experience; therefore, control is central, and local communities are recipients of orders and instructions. In this context, the practices of this administrative organisation can be understood through the concept of governmentality, whereby agricultural production and the rural population in the Gezira were managed, categorised, and regulated through coordinated administrative oversight and institutional practices.

Building on Abashera (2019), the hydraulic system forms the material foundation of the scheme, which was always celebrated during the colonial and post-colonial eras as the greatest scientific miracle in the Sudan and in the world, on which the administrative apparatus operates to regulate agricultural production and the rural population. Through the coordination of irrigation schedules, crop allocation, and the supervision of tenant cultivation, colonial authorities organised agricultural production across the irrigated landscape. The Gezira Board oversees the scheme's technical and agricultural operations. They supply seed, transport from local collection centres, market the crop, maintain major canals, advance loans, conduct research, and keep the accounts. Their ginning operations are the largest in the world under a single organisation. Service costs are evenly distributed among tenancies, so despite varying levels of spraying, weeding, ploughing, and similar activities, each tenant pays the same amount to the Board. The Board employs about 3,000 workers year-round, with an additional 3,000 labourers during ginning season. The Irrigation Department provides wage employment for 2,000 people at any one time. This does not account for the total number of individuals who hold these jobs, as high turnover means that 8,000 people may fill these roles over the course of the year. Beyond crop marketing, the main issues in Gezira are technical and social. The technical challenges include crop research, disease prevention, and the development of new strains and varieties, among others. Social issues relate to the values, mores, and motivations of both tenants and resident workers, as well as the seasonal labour force of over 200,000. In any country, establishing such an agricultural scheme is of significant develop-

mental importance. In this sense, the administrative organisation of the scheme can be understood as a form of governmentality that regulates agricultural practices and rural populations.

The colonial Tenancy regime and the hierarchical, ethnicised simplification forms

Within this administrative framework, agricultural production in the Gezira Scheme was organised through a systematic system of tenancy and labour relations. The tenancy regime transformed the complex, socially rooted economic landscape of the Gezira prior to the scheme—where multiple subsistence farming activities by pastoralists, farmers, ex-slaves, and seasonal labourers, as well as flexible land-use relations, dominated—into two administratively simplified categories: tenants and labourers within extractive colonial capitalism. However, this socioeconomic simplification is not only in the sense Scott mentioned, regarding the exclusion of the meso and its embedded local moral economies, but also in other ways.(Sikainga, 2010), (Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025), (Duffield, 1983), (Mamdani, 2012, 2018). Insights reveal that agrarian governance in the colonial Sudan and the Gezira scheme, particularly since its inception, has been based on ethnic and political stratified classification and simplification, strictly dividing the Gezira's social forces into overlapping layers within a class-rooted, ethnicised, bifurcated regime. The cornerstone of the Gezira management system was a tenancy agreement outlining the rights and responsibilities of each of the three stakeholders. For a long time, it focused solely on cotton production, but from the 1990s onwards, it also included wheat. Other crops, such as groundnuts, sorghum, and fodder, were solely the responsibility of the farmers. The government provided the water and financing needed for cotton production; the Gezira Board offered central management and mechanised work; and the tenant farmers were responsible for other cultivation activities, irrigation, cleaning, and harvesting cotton. After deducting costs, the income was split as follows: 40 per cent for the tenant farmers, 40 per cent for the government, and 20 per cent for the Gezira Board (Salman, 2010).

The tenancy regime is the scheme's organising operational principle. It was not merely a legal contract within agrarian policies and arrangements but also a colonial construct: a way of seeing, knowing, and classifying, governing and managing the land, labour, nature, and population through a legible administrative logic. Colonial governance classified and rendered land, labour, and nature legible, simplifying the complex agrarian realities into standardised, measurable units of territory, production, and productivity that could be administered, disciplined, overseen, and taxed. It also defined tenant farmers as recognised subjects alongside the government and the Gezira Administration Board, while labelling labourers as full political subjects and as a transferable, replaceable labour force performing specific tasks, without political and economic rights, thereby denying them recognition as tenant farmers. This aligned with the colonial political economy, grounded in a colonial legibility of seeing, in which simplification and selective inclusion and exclusion are central to its policies and orientations, as Scott (2020) presents.

In the 1960s, during the post-inde-pendence era, the management of the Gezira sche-me expanded its structure and framework by adop-ting a horizontal growth policy that included the addition of the Al-Manaqil Extension and an additional 830,000 feddans—almost doubling the project's size. By this period, over 700,000 people resided within the Gezira Scheme, including app-roximately 200,000 seasonal cotton pickers. There are 8000 officially registered tenants, with around 140,000 people—an increase attributed to the Al-Manaqil Extension. Tenants receive 40 per cent of the net proceeds; the government also takes 40 per cent, and the Gezira Board receives 20 per cent. Rent above the cost generates a surplus. The pricing system encourages

the use of cleaner, higher-quality cotton. Tenants are responsible for labour, particularly weeding and harvesting, as well as for main-taining field sanitation by burning cotton stalks and irrigating the fields. While the reported 30,000 te-nants may actually number closer to 50,000, they also share the costs of spraying and fertilisers, which are supported by a general reserve fund. Besides that, population management and classification, the tenancy agreement in the Gezira scheme is the cornerstone of the Gezira management system and the primary means of seeing and classifying the population, thus a primary site of subject formation, through which the rights and duties of the main stakeholders, political recognition, and the distribu-tion of agrarian surplus value are mediated. Agricultural labourers were excluded and marginalised, despite being essential to meeting the scheme's labour shortage—a pattern of agrarian politics in the Gezira scheme (McLoughlin, 1963).

Building on what was mentioned above, the tenancy regime exhibits internal contradictions: it not only structurally excludes agricultural labourers who are West African groups, most of whom are perceived locally as descending from exslave origins. However, tenant farmers, despite their inclusion in the tenancy agreement, have limited political participation that has developed over time, further restricted by the 2005 Act and the 2014 Act modifications, and persists in 2026. According to Duffield (1983), the Tenancy System, established in the 1920s, has become increasingly unsatisfactory as social and economic conditions have changed. Tenants still have little influence over what they produce and how they produce it.

Originally, tenancies were intended to be worked by the tenant and their family, but hired labour has always played a significant part within the scheme. Gezira tenants also began to organise col-lectively in the late 1940s, leading to the creation of an official representative organisation, the Tenants' Farmers' Union. At that time, what tenants chose to demand is significant: they did not simply ask for a larger share of cotton profits; they also demanded participation in decisions about cotton production, grading, and sales, as well as the right to audit the scheme's accounts (Barnett, 1977).

Tenants gained a larger share of cotton profits, but they were unsuccessful in their other demands, which would have fundamentally altered the scheme's power structure. Colonial arguments against Sudanese par-ticipation in running the scheme were (predictably) phrased largely in terms of the dangers of ineffi-ciency and poor performance that might result, which is the official opinion held until the day, reflecting what Scott called the Metis versus techne.

To this day, both W. A. migrants and Sudanese from the Western regions remain the primary labour force in these schemes, including the Gezira Scheme. Building on Duffield's (1983) work, Duffield Esti-mates that around 1 million people, or 10% of northern Sudan's current population, are descendants of migrants from northern Nigeria or nearby regions, mainly Hausa, with minorities of Bornu and Fulani. They are primarily settled across a belt that includes Darfur, Kordofan, Gezira, Blue Nile, Gedaref, and Kassala. Known as 'Fellata' by the Sudanese, the term is rarely used by the groups themselves due to its derogatory connotations, particularly among the Takari community. In Sudan, capitalist expansion and political changes have reshaped Takari identity.

During colonial times, Hausa and Westerners were encouraged to settle, but now the 'Fellata', especially along the Niles, are viewed unfavourably. Sudan's nationality laws (1948, 1957) define citizenship by descent prior to 1897, thereby ignoring colonial influences. Many Hausa settlers were poor peasants, not traders, and, beyond pilgrimage, sought to leave Nigeria. According to McLoughlin, individuals from the Western region accounted for 11% of the Gezira Scheme's population of 201, including tribes from Darfur, French Equatorial Africa, Nigeria, and

other Western groups, as well as Sudanese and non-Sudanese West Africans and Belgian Congolese.

Abd-Alhadi's recent work indicates that, despite the lack of recent census data, West African populations in Gezira are the main agricultural labour force, as the 1963 World Bank report states that 40% of the total labour force are agrarian workers. There are no official figures on the number of Al-Kanabi in the scheme. However, estimates by the Kanabi Conference — a civil society organisation led by West African youth — suggest that approximately 95,000 Al-Kanabi out of a total population of 2,495,000 in Gezira constitute about 39%. Gezira has around 1,572 villages. The Al-Kanabi residents are mainly Tama (65%), Barco (25%), Alarenga (5%), and other Darfur tribes.

To conclude this subsection, prior to the reforms introduced by the 2005 Gezira Act, the scheme operated under a highly centralised system of irrigation and tenancy that tightly coordinated land, labour, and production. Water distribution followed a regulated canal hierarchy, while tenancy arrangements defined access to land and institutional recognition, positioning tenants as the primary interlocutors of the state and marginalising labouring populations. This system constituted an integrated form of hydraulic and administrative governance that simplified complex social relations and embedded ethnically differentiated forms of authority and belonging. Most importantly, the hydraulic governance regime is built on the modernist view that technical knowledge is superior to Metis systems. The 2005 Act is often seen as marking a break with this structure, introducing decentralised irrigation management and market-oriented reforms. However, in this article, the interpretation tends to argue differently, prioritising changes in institutional form over the underlying logics of governance. Ethnographic observations suggest that, despite these transformations, the core patterns of authority, differentiation, and exclusion persist, and irrigation still functions in the colonial way of modernist seeing.

The 2005 imposition of the authoritarian patronage-based neoliberal reforms

Numerous transformations gradually shifted towards imposing authoritatively neoliberal agrarian reforms within the scheme, implemented through patronage politics, which eventually led to a systemic decline of its agricultural system. Many scholars have interpreted these changes, given their highly destructive outcomes and their departure from the colonial-inherited scheme, institutional arrangements, and management, as a departure from the scheme's colonial logic.

Scholarly works by Elkreem & Jaspars (2025), Abashera (2011, 2019), Salman (2010), Ibrahim (2021), Barnett (2019), and Goelnitz & Al-Saidi (2020a)Those who have positioned the scheme so that the current developments represent a distinct stage, present their highly destructive outcomes and different institutional arrangements and manage the scheme's institutional developments and its subsequent destruction of the agrarian system.

According to Abdelgalil & Adeeb (2015)The study explores four major institutional changes: the joint account system (JAS), the individual account system (IAS), economic liberalisation (EL), and water users' associations (WUAs) within the Gezira scheme. Data on crop productivity and cultivated area were collected over 40 years, from 1970 to 2009, to examine the historical effects of policies on productivity in the scheme. The data were analysed statistically using SPSS. The results show that sorghum productivity and area have increased due to policy changes. Cotton productivity and cultivated area, however, exhibit a decreasing trend over time. Groundnut productivity presents mixed outcomes. The combined impact of IAS, EL, and WUAs yields positive results for sorghum but negative results for cotton. It can be concluded that changes in institutional policies and arrangements in the irrigated sector influence agricultural crop productivity. These studies assume a shift in the framework, with farmers and production forces integrated into a

globalised agrarian market logic rather than a solely stateled scheme, resulting in independent farmers operating within diverse institutional and agrarian contexts. Liberalisation processes in the Gezira scheme started gradually in 1992 and culminated in a more radical legal and institutional breakthrough with the 2005 act. This act led to the complete replacement of government corporations by private-sector entities. Following the Gezira Scheme Act of 2005, farmers are no longer bound by specific crop rotation rules; the act guarantees farmers the freedom to manage productive and economic factors using art and technology to enhance productivity and profitability. The 2005 Act influenced crop rotation practices within the scheme, resulting in a decline in cultivated area, lower yields, and decreased profitability in recent years. It replaced the 1984 Act—adopted after the last major rehabilitation project in 1983—and the 1927 Gezira Land Ordinance/Decree, which required private Landowners to lease land to the government. In 1992, private banks began providing agricultural finance under the scheme, replacing the Bank of Sudan's interest-free loans. According to this act, responsibilities for farm irrigation and management, including fee collection and weed control, shifted to Water Users' Associations (WUAs). By controlling minor and field canals, the reform transferred responsibility for field irrigation from the government to farmers. Additionally, prior to privatisation, the government sold crops on behalf of farmers; now, farmers manage their sales independently, negotiating with private-sector parties. Private banks financed the scheme's agricultural operations, replacing the interest-free loans from the Bank of Sudan. However, some experts view this as a negative development due to the high cost of loans and increased interest rates.

In support of the governance logic break thesis, the most recent studies on the Gezira scheme's agrarian changes, building on the works of Abashera (2011, 2019) and Elkreem & Jaspars (2025), show that the implementation of these neoliberal reforms was not grounded in the necessary technical capacities but rather in a patronage-based approach. These changes should be described within the broader context of the Sudanese economy or the Gezira scheme as a whole.

These policies were implementted not to boost the Sudanese economy but to empower the Islamised regime members politically and economically, often disregarding the principles of fair competition and technical standards when selecting institutions responsible for managing economic sectors efficiently. Consequently, these reforms have been described as "a total failure" because the mismanagement of the scheme's assets, the lack of regulation over crop choices, and the establishment of WUAs lacking the necessary capacity have caused "irrecoverable damage" to the scheme. The scheme faces severe sediment buildup in its irrigation canals, which could pose challenges for those responsible for its operation and mainten-ance. Moreover, these WUAs led to infrastructure damage due to a lack of expertise—for example, over-digging which demolished parts of the gravity system; failure to collect fees; and inadequate weed control or water management for different crops. As a result, service deterioration and delays have repeatedly occurred during the irrigation season. Additionally, infrastructure inspection and maintenance worsened after the government sold vehicles to employees who no longer wished to use them, and others lacked the necessary technical knowledge.

This thesis break has got its extension to the transitional government, deterioration was further reflected in the policies and initiatives of the transitionnal government (2019-2021), when, in 2021, the resigned transitional prime minister, Abdallah Hamdok, recognising that the scheme had been exposed to significant damage and transformations, thus, in response, launched a national campaign to rehabilitate and develop the Gezira scheme. (Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025).

However, by starting from and criticising them, we argue that, although their importance in describing recent liberalised developments is recognised, the colonial epistemic and institutional governance logics continue to persist, even as they appear to cause a break or rupture, which is the main contribution of this article.

The Gezira Scheme: Neoliberal Transformations as a Reconfiguration within Colonial Epistemological and Governance Logics

Although these changes seem to mark a break and a new phase in the scheme's development, moving away from colonial logic, much of the literature interprets the 2005 Gezira Act as a departure from the scheme's colonial institutional framework. The dominant literature adopts economic and policy perspectives, highlighting the disruptive effects of recent reforms and often viewing them as a departure from earlier institutional arrangements. While these accounts highlight important shifts in irrigation management, cost structures, and production systems, they tend to focus on the apparent breakdown or restructuring of the scheme. Ethnographic observations presented here suggest a different interpretation.

The introduction of the Water Users Act of 2005 and the assumed break from the colonial logic.

Despite the introduction of new institutional forms—such as Water Users Associations and market-based tenancy arrangements—the underlying patterns of authority, recognition, and exclusion largely remain colonial.

The Gezira Act of 2005 is widely regarded as a turning point in the organisation of the scheme, introducing a series of reforms that restructured both irrigation management and tenancy relations. These changes were framed in terms of decentralisation, efficiency, and market-oriented governance, marking a departure from the centralised administrative model that had historically defined the scheme. That restructured both irrigation management and tenancy relations. A central component of the reform was the introduction of Water Users Associations (WUAs) (Goelnitz & Al-Saidi, 2020a), which transferred responsibilities for irrigation management from state authorities to localised groups of farmers, in line with the general trend of liberalising scheme governance. In line with this view, changes to tenancy arrangements and institutional oversight reduced the state's direct role in coordinating production, thereby encouraging greater autonomy among producers.

The reforms also promoted cost recovery, individual responsibility, and market-based decision-making, repositioning farmers as free economic actors operating within competitive conditions. Within much of the existing literature (Abashera, 2011, 2019; Abdelgalil & Adeeb, 2015; Barnett, 2019; Elshaikh et al., 2018; Goelnitz & Al-Saidi, 2020a; Ibrahim, 2021; Mahgoub et al., 2017; Osman, 2015; Salman, 2010). These reforms are interpreted as signalling a rupture with the scheme's colonial and postcolonial foundations. The shift toward decentralisation and market-based governance is often understood as dismantling the rigid administrative structures that previously organised production, replacing them with more flexible and participatory forms of management. In this view, the Gezira Scheme is seen as moving away from a centrally controlled system toward one governed by dispersed authority and market dynamics. While such interpretations highlight important institutional transformations, they raise a critical question: to what extent do these reforms alter the underlying structures through which authority, recognition, and access to resources are organised? As the following analysis demon-strates, the apparent dismantling of centralised cont-rol does not necessarily entail the disappearance of the governing logics that historically structured the Gezira Scheme.

To understand the broader contexts behind the persistence of the core elements of the colonial vision, one must consider two factors: first, the widely accepted formal and administrative view that technocratic hydraulic knowledge dominates Métis local knowledge systems, which cannot tolerate significant decentralisation of responsibilities. Second, the tenancy regime and its inherent differential political subjects and political recognition are arranged in a hierarchy that reflects the cultural legitimacy and crisis of nationalism inherited from colonial rule to the present.

The Irrigation system as continuity of colonial logic

The colonial epistemic continuity was especially evident in the way irrigation was governed. During the colonial period, the irrigation system was not just a technical hydraulic process for delivering water to farms but also a centralised governance strategy that made agricultural production more administratively managed, legible, and controllable.

The Gezira Scheme was established in the early twentieth century between the Blue Nile and the White Nile, benefiting from flat terrain that enabled gravity-fed irrigation at relatively low cost. The colonial irrigation scheme would fundamentally re-configure this ecological and institutional landscape. The tenancy regime did not merely reorganise agricultural production; it reconstituted the social relationship between land, authority, and cultivation. Whereas precolonial land access was embedded in lineage-based mediation and seasonal ecological adaptation, the Gezira Scheme allocated fixed holdings through written contracts and subordi-nated cultivation to centrally scheduled irrigation and crop rotation. Land was transformed into a measurable unit of production, and cultivators were reclassified as registered tenants within a bureaucratic system of control. This institutional shift separated land from customary authority and recast cultivators as contractbound subjects accountable to scheme management. In doing so, the tenancy regime transcended customary land use and cultivated a new agrarian subjectivity structured by administrative recognition and economic calculation (Abashera, 2019; Gaitskell, 1955). While the 2005 Act introduced new institutional arrangements, such as Water Users Associations and later cooperatives, these reforms did not fundamentally alter the governing logic of irrigation. Rather, they redistributed certain managerial responsibilities while preserving the underlying system through which water continues to discipline agricultural activity, coordinate production, and maintain administrative visibility over farmers (Goelnitz & Al-Saidi, 2020a). This has been cancelled by amendments to the 2014 Act, under which the Ministry of Irrigation assumed primary responsibility for irrigation management in the scheme (Abashera, 2019). Despite that, according to Abashera, these agrarian reforms and the 2014 amendments have not resolved the disruptive effects of the 2005 changes, with farmers suffering from inconsistent water delivery times, crop failures, and canals that are not properly cleaned and maintained, focusing that the central control of water deprived the farmers of the traditional fixed timing of water, and thus the governance of irrigation be-came uncertain. Besides the central governance of irrigation, the hydraulic logic, and the inherited irrigation grid, the daily embodied practices of irrigation governance expose the unequal simplification and hierarchical structure that prioritises and recognises the Tenant farmer in water allocation and distribution. This is evident in the daily practices of the tenants and the labourers.

The Persistence of Hydraulic Irrigation Systems in Daily Practices

This section illustrates how the hydraulic colonial irrigation system continues to operate as a centralised governance mechanism despite ongoing patterns of unequal reproduction stemming from the patronage politics of the 2005 Act mentioned ear-

lier. It highlights scenes and events that show how irrigation remains centralised, even though some responsibilities have been transferred to the WUAs.

This reflects the hierarchical relationship between the techne and the Miso forms of knowledge, which cannot tolerate full decentralisation. A pattern emerges in the following interviews and participant-observation notes: the Water Users Association, in practice, acts as a gatekeeper with neither decision-making authority nor significant power. Problems with the timing of water delivery schedules arise from policy inconsistency caused by patronage-mediated policies that accompanied the 2005 agricultural reforms.

Moreover, the 2014 amendments to the Gezira scheme, which abolished the Water Users and shifted its responsibilities back to the Ministry of Irrigation (Abashera, 2019), are not merely technical policy changes or irrigation issues but also a reassertion of colonial technical logic. Across the interviews and the field notes, we will see how the irrigation system operates under the colonial logic of techne while excluding local communities and traditional knowledge systems. Below, when the farmers and the labourers talk, water not arriving on time, poor coordination, and central decisions ig-noring the farmers' needs, and unfair distribution. They are not just describing technical irrigation problems of inefficiency, but also complaining and exposing a centralised regime that controls the whole of agricultural life through governance mechanisms of timing, administrative authority, and water allocation.

In early February 2026, the farmer Karar, aged 45, from Al-Manaqil extension, Um-Aligour village, about 40 kilometres south of Al-Manaqil, recorded a video in the social groups of the Al-Manaqil locality and the village, calling for help due to the excessive release of water, and said:

"…We are here at Um Aligour's main canal. We pray to God, who is the only one who can assist us (an Islamic Sunni Dua recited when harmed and unable to change adverse situations). There is an irony in the release of irrigation water. By the time we need it, it is cut off. Even when we resort to water pumps to raise water to the crops, by the time we no longer need the water and just come to harvest our crops, the water is released too much, to the extent that even the roads to the crop fields are closed, the water is drowning the fields and spoiling our crops. What a painful reality…"

Interview in the West African camp of Sabag Ragad in Al-Manaqil agricultural extension, located around Um-Aligour village on the southern side, with a 37-year-old agricultural labourer in crop-sharing,

"*… Nowadays, the Arab farmers cannot afford to pay us as agricultural labourers, as we have two casual wage shifts, one in the morning called Aldahawa, which runs from 9 am to 11 am, and the second from 1 pm to 6 pm called Alduhria. However, farmers lack the necessary inputs and credit to fund crop cultivation; therefore, we have now shared the crop cultivation process. However, we face the risk that the crop may fail due to uncertain water releases, sometimes too much, to the degree that it spoils the crop, or sometimes due to the late arrival of the water, the crop dries up, and we sometimes cannot afford to rent or purchase a generator to raise the water level from the canal when levels are low…"*

In an interview with seven agricultural labourers in Alkuda camp in Alhasahisa locality, east of the Gezira scheme, they narrated that,

"…We use the pumping water generator to save our crops from the delay in water release, as the gatekeepers of the major canals in the locality release the water at their convenience, not when we need it. When a representative group of us call them urgently to release the water, they ask us to pay the administrative water fees first. Many times, after paying the fees, we must rent a machine to clear the secondary canals of grass and mud so the water can reach us…"

In 2021, in an interview with demonstrators from the category of Gezira scheme farmers, including the farmers' sons, some of whom were still linked to rural agricultural life in terms of their livelihoods and

others who had entered the modern bureaucratic sector of employment, all of them ranked their demands for participation into three main demands: the demand for a democratic regime as an alternative to the authoritarian regime of the Om Al-Bashir regime, 1989-2019. The second demand is to combat corruption, and the third is to reform the Gezira scheme. In the interview, the interviewees linked their participation to the development of the Gezira scheme, citing the application of the 2005 Act. To characterise the scheme's development, they described the state of the irrigation grid and its functioning as characterised by destruction and chaos. They framed what is going on in the scheme as chaos, noting that the farmers have the necessary capabilities to meet the needs of agricultural activity, as irrigation has been managed by private companies and the farmers' efforts, while both lack the technical know-how and financial ability to manage the scheme as it was before the 2005 Act, when irrigation and the maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure and canals were fully under the responsibility of the bureaucratic administration.
One farmer said that,

"Instead of the systematic, timely flow of water to crop fields, we are using pumping generators and tanker trucks to irrigate the far fields from the canals."

Another protester from Madani city, the capital of the Gezira state, mentioned that,

"… the late arrival of the water is not strictly scheduled; it sometimes arrives before or after we need it, and the control is not in our hands at the scheme administration…"

A woman from Madani city narrated that,

"…The scheme's infrastructure is deteriorating, as we must clean the canals and pay higher fees to the irrigation administration. Despite this, we sometimes use pumping generators to lift water to the field when water levels are low. Sometimes we contact the gatekeepers, but they do not respond promptly. Others have authority or connections to release water when needed …"

In Abu-Digin camp in the eastern part of the Gezira scheme, Alhasahisa locality,

The scheme is in poor condition, and the irrigation canals show signs of neglect. The lack of technical expertise is compounded by the fact that secondary canals and subchannels are blocked by grass and mud, a problem that farmers and labourers must address. Even private companies hired by farmers and labourers (for crop sharing, input-cost sharing, and yield sharing) do not perform the work properly. We maintain the comprehensive revision…

Karrar's statements reflect everyday observations of researchers, as the researcher is in the study area where he was born and raised and where he still has familial ties. The release of irrigation water should be scheduled consistently to meet farmers' needs and cultivation levels. However, in practice, it is often inconsistent and centralised, not even in the hands of the farmers' associations. Releases are often arbitrary, either delayed until farmers have already found other solutions or timed when no release is necessary, such as during harvest, as Karrar recounts. Since the 2005 act, the Gezira scheme has commonly seen water pumped into crop fields by generators across the canals because the level provided cannot be directly transferred to the fields—the sub-canals operate in accordance with the scheme's design and the pre-2005 stage. This situation is also evident in various canals, such as those in Al-Hasashisa locality in eastern Gezira. In 2018, we conducted two weeks of ethnographic fieldwork as part of training at Khartoum University's Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. The use of pump-generated water was also a common coping strategy in the canals of Al-Manaqil locality. In these cases, water pumping has become a daily cultivation practice because the controlled release of water remains unpredictable. However, that destruction is attributed to the uneven reproduction of the hydraulic irrigation system, a colonially inherited one.

The Patronage politics and the disruptive impacts on the irrigation agricultural system

Reflecting the scheme patronage politics and its disruptive impacts(Abashera, 2011, 2019; Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025; Goelnitz & Al-Saidi, 2020a), which represent the conditions that resulted in the uneven reproduction of the agrarian system, differing from how it functioned before the 2005 Act reforms. This is presented in the press, public discussions, and investigative reports, and in scholarly works as a rupture and a dismantling of colonial scientific logic. The problems and disruptive changes to the irrigation infrastructure have been reported in local newspapers, including Arakoba online newspaper (Ahmed, 2025). In 2012, an investigative report was published, as follows: The Gezira Scheme was established in the early twentieth century between the Blue Nile and the White Nile, benefiting from flat terrain that enabled gravity-fed irrigation at relatively low cost. It was governed by successive legal frameworks, beginning with the 1925 Agreement under the Condominium, followed by the Gezira Scheme Acts of 1950 and 1960, which expanded state control and incorporated Al-Manaqil Extension. Later reforms, including the 1984 and 2005 Acts, reflected broader political and economic shifts in Sudan and sought to address mounting structural and financial challenges. From the early 1970s, how-ever, the Scheme entered a period of decline, driven primarily by deteriorating irrigation infrastructure. Poor maintenance of the extensive canal network led to severe siltation from the Ethiopian highlands, reducing water flow, increasing seepage and eva-poration, and encouraging weed growth. The Sennar and Roseires dams also lost significant storage capacity due to silt accumulation, while competition between irrigation and hydroelectric uses further strained water management. Weak irrigation performance triggered a cycle of declining productivity, reduced farmer incomes, and insufficient maintenance funding, deepening infrastructural decay. Although numerous committees and donor-funded rehabilitation efforts were launched, especially from the 1960s onward, these interventions failed to reverse the decline in the absence of sustained institutional and governance reform. Irrigation dysfunction thus became the central driver of the Scheme's longterm deterioration.

The most recent investigative report, released on 19 March 2025 by Independent Arabia Newspaper (Independent Arabia, 2025) states that after the Sudanese Army retook Gezira state from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), where the Gezira scheme is located, the state is now under its control during the current civil war in Sudan since 15 April 2023. Many urgent interventions are required, as follows. The committee tasked with writing a report on the scheme's losses and problems during the war reported that the irrigation systems require urgent maintenance to ensure irrigation of all targeted cultivated areas during the upcoming summer season, following the suspension of routine and preventive maintenance over the past two years. The committee's statement further explained that the war resulted in the loss of approximately 70 per cent of the Scheme's agricultural engineering machinery. At the same time, much of the remaining equipment was stolen or looted. Therefore, the upcoming summer season urgently requires the provision and rehabilitation of this machinery.

Based on the interviews, participant observations, and field notes presented above, the everyday operation of the hydraulic irrigation regime reflects a deeper political and structural transformation within one of the scheme's vital institutions: the irrigation institution. The principal pattern extracted from the interviews across the different sites presented, the Almanaqil locality cases, and the Alhasahisa locality cases is that the scheme's infrastructure deteriorated from excellent functioning to the worst. According to the interviewees, the scheme's irrigation history has been divided into two contrasting stages: one dating to the establishment of colonial rule in the 1920s, characterised by scientific irrigation, precise

and fixed schedules, and effective management that consistently met farmers' water needs. During this period, they argued that power was concentrated in the hands of professional, skilled technocrats. This stage ended with the application of the 2005 Act, which, for them, brought disastrous changes to the scheme, replacing skilled technocratic labour with private companies that lack the necessary know-how for the scheme's irrigation needs and, under the political regime of Alingaz (1989-2019), empowered their members at the expense of the scheme's efficiency and future. This transition has led to serious problems in irrigation, such as canals blocked by grass and mud, and water gatekeepers at the major canals were appointed from the villages with knowledge of how to operate them. Therefore, inconsistencies in the water schedule and release, which cast a negative shadow over the farmers and agricultural labourers in the scheme, and the irrigation system became a financial burden for them. Following the dominant literature on agrarian governance in Sudan, agrarian changes in the Gezira scheme indicate a pattern in which major changes are implemented gradually and peak with the 2005 Act, with policy reforms mediated through the political marketplace and personal networks, as presented by Alex Dewal in his famous book The Real Politics in the Horn of Africa. Through this politically marketised logic, agrarian governance and public resources are distributed along personalised networks rather than impersonal institutional arrangements. As the scheme's following of the 2005 act is based on political patronage, which left its management lacking the necessary technical know-how to run it, this sheds light on the agrarian governance of irrigation in the Gezira scheme and the situation of irrigation amid the mess of political patronage networks. The Gezira Scheme has experienced a significant decline in water management performance over the past few decades. This decline led to several institutional changes to put the system back on track. The main organisations involved in water management at the scheme are the Ministry of Irrigation & Water Resources (MOIWR), the Sudan Gezira Board (SGB), and the Water Users Associations (WUAs). Different combinations of these organisations were established to manage the irrigation system. This pattern suggests inefficiencies in water allocation and low productivity.

The 2005 Act tenancy agreement: a continuation of colonial agrarian subjectivity

Besides challenging the decentralised irrigation governance thesis, the interviews and relevant literature also show that the 2005 Act has not significantly altered the core elements of tenancy agreements or their associated agrarian subjectivities, despite the limited transfer of responsibilities. Previous studies have focused more on the forms of governance resulting from the 2005 agrarian reforms and have highlighted their policy impacts on the agricultural system, particularly issues such as irregular water delivery and maintenance shortcomings. As a result, they do not reveal the persistent colonial structures that continued through these changes. The ethnographic statements discussed above confirm that, despite the farmers' association, control of irrigation remains a key tool of governance, as the pre-act situation persists.

Yes, no one can deny the highly destructive impacts on the agricultural system and the unequal conditions of reproduction caused by the patronage policies mentioned earlier, but this is not a break in the logic; rather, it can be seen as a reconfiguration within the colonial logic itself. This claim is also supported by the interviews, which show that the tenancy's main elements continue to function as both tenants and labourers, and as strict subjects within the colonial scheme's arrangements, as stated. While the dismantling and marginalisation of the relatively stable local subsistent and moral economies of the tenants and labourers (Abashera, 2019; Elkreem & Jaspars, 2025), but even the inherited system could relatively satisfy or prioritise

the local subsistent systems, as the colonial agricultural system was designed as an extractive, export-oriented scheme, treating the local system of knowledge and moral-economic considerations as backward and of a savage nature(Bernal, 1997).

Reflecting the principle of modernist simplification that marginalises the meso(Scott, 2020). In fact, the persistence and the reproduction of the differrential agrarian subjects in the scheme are not detached from the nature of nationalism in the postcolonial Sudan, which is inherited from the colonial era. Drawing on(Abdelhay et al., 2016; Assal, 2014) that the Sudan, as a postcolonial country, is still functioning along the racialised political identities constructed in the colonial rule divide and rule policy. Sudan, as a multi-ethnic and religious country, should be governed through a multicultural and equal citizenship approach, but has been built along an exclusively ethnic basis, which is a key factor behind the country's long history of instability and wars. The country has been controlled by Riverine Ethnic Arab Northern groups, favouring Arab communities over other non-Arab groups, such as West Africans and Southerners. Along this general ethnicised form of citizenship, it is no surprise that the tenancy regime persists and differentially excludes West African while including and recognising the local Arab groups.

However, what happened following the act of 2005 was the deepening of the modernist sense through the systematic erosion of the local subsistence and moral economies of the tenants and farmers in the interest of a harsh extractive economy led by free-market forces. Reflecting what Polanyi (2002) called the dis-embedding of the economy from society, this separation of economic activity from social and moral expectations is a consequence of the free-market economy. Therefore, the agrarian logic is not about quality but about degree, within the same colonial framework, but more severe on local communities and also accompanied by systematic patronage politics enacted by the Islamised regime (1989-2019) to stabilise and sustain its regime through the economic empowerment and the Politics of Belly presented by (Bayart, 2009) where the resources and wealth are distributed along patronage networks and narrow, biased political and social networks and also echoes the Real Politics approach of De Waal (2015) where political loyalty is bought and sold as a commodity in the political marketplace.

The persistent colonial epistemological structure and the counter-conduct

The described colonial centralised hydraulic and governance structure that formulated the conduct of the population, in the sense of Foucault (Foucault, 1978) Concept and categorising them into distinct economic and political subjects does not mean being fully hegemonic and controlling, but also contested. These disruptive impacts and the disengagement of the economic from the social were harshly challenged through everyday forms of resistance and systemic public contestation and protest.

Tenants and labourers have contested these disruptive elements of the 2005 Scheme Act in the Gezira region through organised participation in the December 2018 protests, which called for reform of the Gezira Scheme. The everyday resistance practices have been documented through participant-observation notes collected during visits to the Almanaqil agricultural extension and the eastern part of the original Gezira scheme, particularly in Alhasahisa locality. Tenants in the villages of Wad Aaabas, Managza, and Abushinaib use discursive resistance as a form of counter conduct. They describe these changes brought by the 2005 Act with words such as: Destruction, Dismantling, Conspiracy, and Starvation. The primary concerns and demands behind these terms relate to preventing the loss of their agricultural land and protecting their subsistence and social commitments. In this context, the free market is viewed as an enemy of their subsistence economies, as market pressures threaten

to force them to sell their produce and thereby lose their main livelihood. Similar language is used in the villages of the Almanaqil extension, including Um-Aligour, Hilat Bashir, and Banat, to describe the changes to the Act, emphasising destruction and conspiracy, and demanding the dismantling of patronage politics in the scheme's governance to enable proper infrastructure functioning. Through interviews with tenants, they diagnose the scheme's problems as requiring the reform of irrigation infrastructure and a return to pre-2005 relations. This stance is understood as structurally rooted and reflected in the tenancy agreements. While the structural position of the West Africans led them to interpret the scheme's issues using language similar to the tenants', they also expanded their demands by reconsidering the tenancy regime, describing it as unjust. They both agreed to reject the liberalised agrarian transformation, as it would deepen their marginalisation and threaten their moral and economic economies. However, the counter-conduct also echoes the colonially based tenancy-stratified agrarian citizenship. They diverged over the position of the tenancy regime entitlements and their recognised actors. This divergence took a sharper form in the December Revolution 2018-2021 protests. According to Ibrahim (2021)The master's thesis examined the social forces in the Gezira region that participated in the revolution and the main demands they raised—concluded that the majority of the study sample, 111 respondents, chose the reform of the Gezira scheme as a main demand behind their participation in the protest. However, the tenants were incorporated into the famous Farmers' Union. At the same time, the West African organisations themselves, under the Alkanabi Congress, demanded the dismantling of the tenancy regime in favour of reconstructing a more inclusive one that included them. The divide in the public systems of resistance over the tenancy regime is one piece of evidence that could be taken to support the article's main claim that the 2005 Act has reconfigured the form of governance but not the logic of governance inherited from British colonial rule.

Conclusion

This article argues that the Gezira Scheme should be seen not just as an agricultural system but as a colonial epistemological construct that continues to shape land, labour, and population through per-sistent logics of simplification, differentiation, and control. Using Scott's concept of simplification and legibility, the scheme remains a project that renders complex social and ecological relations administratively manageable. Simultaneously, Mamdani's bifurcated governance framework, reflecting the country's crisis of nationhood, demonstrates how different forms of recognition continue to influence the positions of tenants and labourers. From a Foucauldian perspective, these arrangements serve as techniques of governing conduct, reproduced through institutional reforms and daily practices. The changes introduced by the 2005 Act, often regarded as a move towards decentralisation and liberalisation, are thus not a break but a reconfiguration of these underlying logics. Moreover, these structures are neither absolute nor uncontested: everyday negotiations and more visible acts of resistance—such as participation in the December 2018 revolution—constitute counter-conduct that challenges and reshapes governance. In this manner, the Gezira Scheme reveals the enduring nature of colonial modes of ordering, even as they are continuously contested and transformed.

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BEYOND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE HOUSEHOLD AS A SITE OF CULTURAL PERSISTENCE AND ADAPTATION

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Abstract

The paper examines the idea that the Tunisian migrants in Hungary are capable to preserve the feeling of home by means of conducting their domestic activities. The point is that the sphere in which cultural contingency is the most prominent is not the community life in general, but the very household where the traditions of the cooking process, family life, and ritual activity are practiced every day. Based on a questionnaire survey (N = 100) and 25 semi-structured interviews, these domestic practices remain remarkably stable and are passed to younger family members. It is observed in the analysis that daily activities aid greatly to the continuity of cultures even when the family has migrated; food preparation, hospitality, and the ritual celebrations are ordinary and routine practices that introduce cultural information and principles into the family environment. The results show how domestic heritage helps the migrants to maintain cultural continuity as they adjust to the Hungarian society. This way, they become part of the host culture without losing their identity back home because they remain involved in domestic affairs. In brief, daily domestic activities, create a hybrid experience of integration that upholds cultural identity and adopts new environments

Keywords: Tunisian diaspora; domestic practices; cultural transmission; migration and food; transnationalism

Discipline: cultural anthropology

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Absztrakt

A NYILVÁNOS SZFÉRÁN TÚL: A HÁZTARTÁS MINT A KULTURÁLIS FENNMARADÁS ÉS ADAPTÁCIÓ TERE

A tanulmány azt a feltevést vizsgálja, hogy a Magyarországon élő tunéziai migránsok képesek megőrizni az otthonosság érzését a mindennapi háztartási tevékenységeik révén. A tanulmány érvelése szerint a kulturális kontinuitás leginkább nem az általános közösségi életben, hanem a háztartás szintjén ragadható meg, ahol a főzés, a családi élet és a rituális gyakorlatok hagyományai napi szinten valósulnak meg. A kérdőíves felmérésre (N = 100), valamint 25 félig strukturált interjúra támaszkodó kutatás kimutatja, hogy ezek a háztartási gyakorlatok figyelemre méltó stabilitást mutatnak, és generációról generációra öröklődnek. Az elemzés rámutat arra, hogy a mindennapi tevékenységek kulcsszerepet játszanak a kulturális kontinuitás fenntartásában migrációs kontextusban is: az ételkészítés, a vendéglátás és a rituális ünnepek olyan rutinszerű, mégis jelentéssel teli gyakorlatok, amelyek révén a kulturális tudás és értékek a családi környezetben újratermelődnek. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a háztartási örökség elősegíti a migránsok számára a kulturális folytonosság megőrzését, miközben alkalmazkodnak a magyar társadalomhoz. Ily módon képesek a befogadó kultúra részévé válni anélkül, hogy feladnák származási identitásukat, mivel a mindennapi háztartási tevékenységekben való aktív részvétel fenntartja az otthonhoz való kötődést. Összességében a mindennapi háztartási gyakorlatok az integráció egy hibrid formáját hozzák létre, amely egyszerre őrzi meg a kulturális identitást és teszi lehetővé az új társadalmi-kulturális környezethez való alkalmazkodást.

Kulcsszavak: tunéziai diaszpóra; háztartási gyakorlatok; kulturális átörökítés; migráció és étkezés; transznacionalizmus

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

The concept of home is transformed by migration. Home to the migrants is about the everyday activities where familiarity and belonging are recreated in the foreign country not only a geographical spot in the homeland. Food and ritual in the context of the diaspora are not usually merely nostalgic representations; more often, they are practical means of preserving stability, strengthening family bonds, and cultural identification (Ray, 2004; Sutton, 2001).

The article addresses the problematic of how do cultural continuity in daily domestic life among the Tunisians in Hungary take place? It is not the public sphere (associations, religious institutions, interdiasporic cooperation) that is of interest, but rather the household where culture is replicated. The significance of this point of view lies in the domestic practices which are not always so obvious to the researchers as the events of the public although, it can be more permanent and more generational.

The empirical discussion is based on the three intertwined areas including: (1) food as daily domestic heritage, (2) ritual practices and continuity in the family, and (3) the cross-border family link that strengthens home practices. The interpretation is based mainly on the practice theory, the way of cultural transmission and a selective acculturation reading

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers a useful way to understand the way domestic heritage can be resilient**.** He defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" that, without the need for constant conscious planning, generate and organise cultural practices (Bourdieu 1990:53). This perspective treats culture as actions not only a belief. Without being consciously described as cultural

preservations habitual practices such as cooking, hospitality, and family dynamics become embodied competences. This helps explain why domestic heritage can remain stable even when life outside the household changes rapidly.

Food mostly embodies the idea of cultural heritage as it represents a link between authentic sensory experiences, daily dexterities, and social engagements at home. Sutton (2001) claims that food and memory are strongly shaped by a of sense perception and practice. According to research on migrant families, food and cooking tend to reproduce home in the shape of diasporic space (Ray, 2004). In the other hand, the concept of food is not strict when related to migration as it depends on different factors such as availability and prices. Studies proved that migrant food preparations frequently presents a negotiation between nostalgia and requirements as well as the opportunities that the host setting presents (Ray, 2004; Sutton, 2001).

The intergenerational continuity can be explained by the concept of cultural transmission. Which explains the way the culture is passed down generations through contributing in common activities. The traditional literature on cultural transmission differentiates between several transmission pathways; among them, vertical (parent-child), horizontal (peer-peer), and oblique (institution or other non-parental agents) transmission (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman, 1981: 77-78). Cultural transmission when related to migration is often defined by the Vertical transmission since the environment around is affected by hosting-country language in addition to the school system and their moral order. In contrast, Home play as a primary piece in reserving the knowledge and bases of the minority cultures to save traditions and inherit it to the next generations.

The cultural continuity can be discussed in the framework created by John W. Berry to understand how it can be combined with the process of adaptation. Berry views acculturation in two important aspects, namely, retaining the original cultural identity and being a part of the broader society. Out of this interplay of dimensions emerge various possible strategies such as assimilation, separation, marginalisation and integration. The integration strategy can be described as the circumstances where the migrants preserve some of their cultural backgrounds and at the same time engage in the wider society (Berry 1997). Domestic culture continuity could thus not serve as a barrier to the host culture, rather it may serve as a fixed point that enables an individual to engage in other activities beyond the home.

Other perspectives helps to illuminate related processes. Stuart Hall's state that "being" and "becoming" as a cultural identity change is not a loss of roots but simply a unavoidable ongoing process (Hall, 1990:225). Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity describes the "in-between" situations in which migrants interact with more than one cultural framework (Bhabha, 1994). Finally, Steven Vertovec's definition of transnationalism as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" highlights how regular contact with relatives in Tunisia can reinforce domestic cultural continuity abroad (Vertovec, 1999:447).

Methodology

This study combines a questionnaire survey (N = 100) with 25 semi-structured interviews. It explored the culture and identity concepts transmitted by the family and connections with Tunisia. The questionnaire focused on the daily lifestyle, testing the communication style with the home-country and the hosting country as well as routine practices and adaptation such as the language used during the day which provided a qualitative depth for the survey.

The questionnaire certified a wide range of Participants to ensure diversity so variables like age, migration motivation (study, work, or family) could be neglected. place of residence, primarily Budapest and Debrecen and perceived integration level. This

wide variation allowed the study to include different types of participants (students, professionals, and long-term residents) with different experiences and backgrounds within the Tunisian diaspora in Hungary. quantitative indicators and qualitative narratives provide a clear understanding on how cultural continuity operates in everyday domestic life.

Fieldwork Materials (Hungary, 2024–2026)

Questionnaire survey conducted among Tunisian migrants in Hungary (N = 100), primarily in Budapest and Debrecen, collected between March and July 2025. Semi-structured interviews with selected Tunisian migrants in Hungary (N = 25), conducted in Budapest and Debrecen between October 2025 and January 2026. Interview guide used for qualitative interviews on identity, domestic practices, and transnational ties. Profiles of selected interview participants, compiled during the interview phase of the research.

Findings

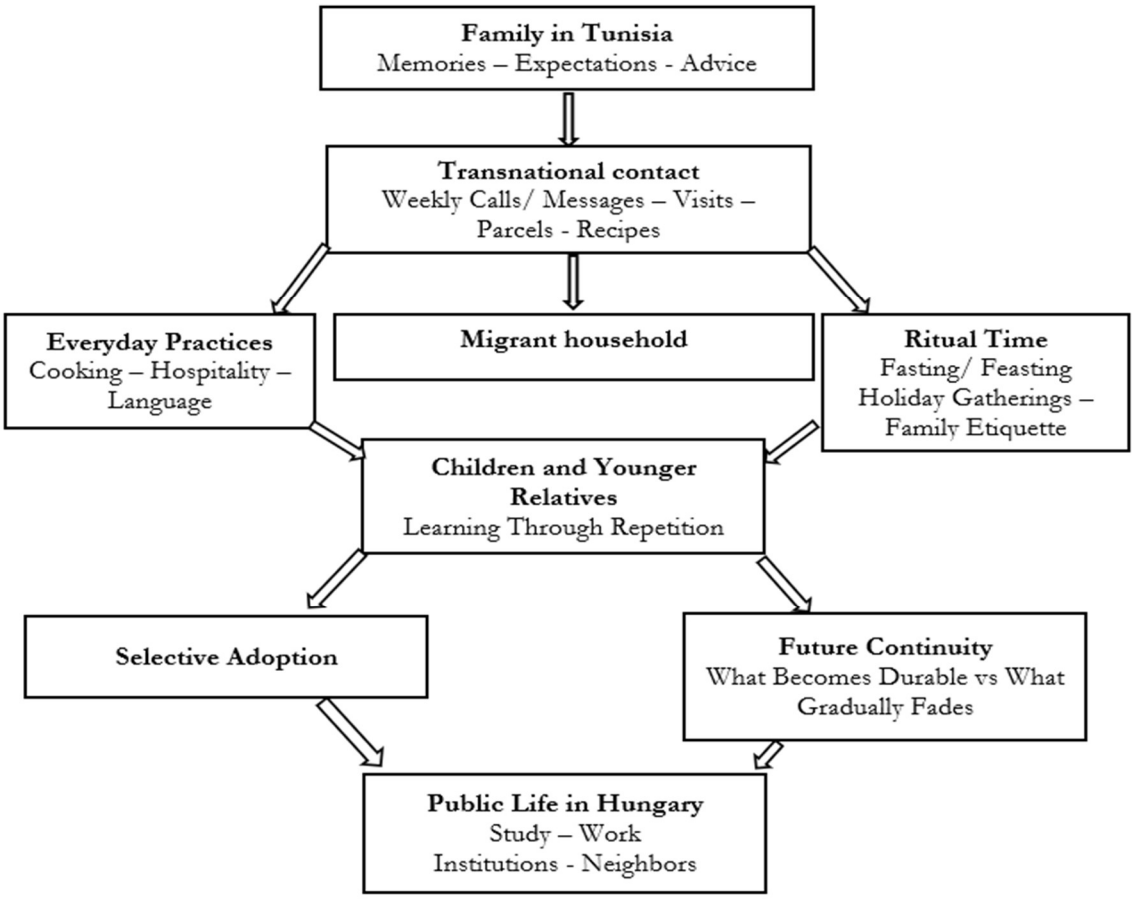
Food and Everyday Domestic Heritage. The most preserved cultural practice for the respondent was cooking traditional food. This is proved by the questionnaire which shows that the majority (88%) of participants prepare Tunisian dishes regularly in Hungary. Which indicates the importance of food in everyday domestic life within migrants. This could also be described by one of the interviewees as he explains it clearly: "When I cook couscous on Friday, it feels like the week becomes normal again. Even if outside I speak another language, at home I return to myself." (P20). Another interviewee said: "At the beginning I ate anything, but later I needed Tunisian taste. Now I plan my shopping around those flavours." (P03) Such cases demonstrate the transition of culinary practices from symbolic nostalgia to habitual domesticity, thereby anchoring cultural identity within the private sphere. Socially-Theoretically, cooking is beyond being a symbol to cultural identity. It is about the repeated embodied actions: spices and techniques, serving and form of hospitality. Such routines correspond to what Pierre Bourdieu describes as habitus, where the everyday routine and actions is naturalized through a long process of repetition (Bourdieu, 1990). Family interaction is also brought by food. Cooking usually shares tasks among the family members: who cooks, who purchases food, who receives guests, and who initiates the young family members into the world of cooking. Under these circumstances of migration as well, shared meals can maintain social histories and sensory memory as portable archives of identity as the literature on food and memory (Sutton, 2001; Ray, 2004) has already discussed.

Ritual and Family Continuity. Another dimension of cultural continuity is also religious holidays. Based on the answers on the questionnaires, 82% of the participants declared that they continued to contribute in religious activities and celebrations like Ramadan and Eid. These events regather people and provide a shared sense of meaning to the family members. Cultural learning often occurs through ritual practices as well. In These events children are taught some family traditions as well as sharing values and greetings. In this respect, ritual events serve as informal cultural educational events. Also, in the questionnaire respondents were asked if they teach their children or younger relatives the Tunisian traditions, and it shows that more than half of participants answered positively. And this cultural transmission happens step by step in the small daily activities. They would encourage the children to try traditional food and what common phrases should they use in certain situations. One participant described this process clearly: "I teach my little sister the expressions we say before eating, because if she forgets, it is like forgetting respect." (P12), These patterns correspond to what cultural transmission theory describes as vertical transmission, where cultural knowledge passes from parents or elders to younger generations (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981: 77–78)

Cross-Border Family Ties. Another significant area that strengthens the continuity of domestic culture is the frequent interaction with family members in Tunisia. Based on the questionnaire, 81 % of the respondents indicated that they contact their family weekly. Those calls could include sharing news and updates or discussing matters or exchanging ideas or even a pointless cozy call with the family**.** Such patterns correspond to the concept of transnationalism described by Steven Vertovec as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec, 1999: 447).

In the domestic arena, these transnational relations play the role of maintaining cultural norms. Frequent communication with family members back home in Tunisia also serves as a booster when it comes to keeping up with the first language, celebrating traditional holidays and carry-ing on with daily cultural activities. One interviewee described this dynamic in the following way: "When my mother calls, she asks what we cooked, what the children said in Arabic, and if we remembered the holiday. It keeps us connected and also accountable." (P22) In this sense, transnational communication does not simply maintain emotional ties. It also supports the reproduction of cultural practices within migrant households.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of cultural transmission and adaptation in the Tunisian diaspora in Hungary.



Discussion

The research concludes that Tunisian cultural lifestyle in Hungary is maintained by everyday lifestyle. This unique culture is implanted by every individual through common interactions in domestic real not by some kind of formal institution or public practices. In theoretical terms, this trend aligns with the concept of embodied cultural reproduction, which is drawn from practice-based theories of cultural transmission. Everyday practices can be explained by habitatus as Pierre Bourdieu proposes that routine manners are responsible of bringing back and maintaining cultural patterns, instead of making declarations about themselves (Bourdieu, 1990). The data proved that saving cooking and hospitality patterns (routine actions) ensures the continuity of patterns.

Simultaneously, cultural maintenance is not always associated with social division, specally when domestic cultural practices are frequently involved in Hungarian social life. Participants also try their best to integrate into the hosting country styles in work field or educational level but also carry their cultural practises. This trend is associated with the integration strategy outlined by John W. Berry where migrants save some parts of their original cultural Identity and meanwhile trying to involve in the bigger picture of social context (Berry, 1997). Domestic cultural continuity serves as a grounding framework that supports, rather than hinders, the transition into a new society. It provides the internal stability necessary for successful external adaptation.

The result, furthermore, revealed the family-based transmission in perpetuating the practices of cultures between generations. Common behaviour are taught around and by family which indicates the reproduction of cultural knowledge in the day-day interactions. This active process is related to the vertical transmission process mentioned in the cultural transmission theory where the cultural knowledge is transferred from older generations to younger generations (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman, 1981).

Within migrant contexts, the household plays a primary role in preserving and transmitting the cultural knowledge of the minorities. The other significant point that the data has shown is the influence of cross-border family communication on the formation of domestic culture life. The fact that migrant still interact with transnational network is evidenced by frequent contact with relatives in Tunisia. According to Steven Vertovec, transnationalism entails long-term social networks that tie migrants to their countries of origin (Vertovec, 1999). Within this study's framework, such communications bolster domestic cultural expectations and shared rituals, effectively sustaining a continuous sense of cultural belonging.

Lastly, the narratives of the respondents describe how migration is a concept where two cultures face each other and this controversial concept result in the dynamic identity, and it also contradicts the idea of mere switching of cultural identity with one another. This view is an indication of the argument by Stuart Hall that cultural identity ought to be perceived as a being and becoming process (Hall, 1990). This regular practice where migrants adapt to new social conditions of the domestic in which they can serve some stabilizing point of reference and can preserve some sense of continuity. Such interim niche places can also be understood through the notion of hybridity which was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha, and emphasizes on the way of negotiating cultural meaning in various social contexts (Bhabha, 1994).

Combined, everyday interactions between domestic activities results in preserving the flow of cultures within the context of diaspora, in addition to social and family relationships as well as domestic activities. The study of these processes will aid in understanding more about how migrant communities can maintain cultural points of reference and

simultaneously adapt to new social and institutional contexts.

Conclusion

The generalizing idea of this research is to study the continuity of migrant's culture and how it is usually determined by the daily organisation of domestic life. The feeling of home in foreign country is embodied in daily routines whether it is food or custom or even when the native language is spoken, not by official bodies or blatant cultural endeavours. In such cases, the household itself plays as a spot for cultural reproduction as migrants integrates to new cultures. Moreover, this idea also points at the process of heritage preservation; where its used everyday life and not only in public. The implications of the findings to the policy-makers and practitioners are that, to reinforce the integration without imposing assimilation, it is worthwhile to support family-centred cultural programmes (such as bilingual family education, community kitchens, cultural holidays etc.).

Going forward, two directions of future research would be assumed upon this work. firstly, the significance of domestic rituals could be further evaluated by performing comparative research across a diverse range of migrant groups. (such as other North African or Middle Eastern groups, or other Tunisians in other countries). Secondly, Incorporating the perspectives of younger generations would enrich longitudinal research, offering deeper insight into how these domestic rituals evolve over time and shape the identity of the second generation. Further studies on the contribution of digital media to the sustenance of transnational family relationships will also be useful, yet the two directions mentioned first are the most important to comprehend how heritage is being passed and transformed in new contexts.

To sum up the foregoing discussion, this research indicates the importance of the daily domestic life in preserving cultural identity as it occurs in the process of migration. The family ties and the rituals practiced by households as the main process of reproduction of the heritage enable the migrants to retain their original culture despite creating new ones in new surroundings.

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ETYMOLOGY, COSMOLOGY, AND MARINE STEWARDSHIP: THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF *HYGERALAI* IN LUANG ISLAND

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Abstract

This study examines *hygeralai* as a system of knowledge and socio-ecological governance practiced by the Indigenous community of Luang Island, Southwest Maluku, within the broader context of global climate change and increasing coastal development pressures. Against the backdrop of rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification that significantly affect coastal ecosystems, the study positions *hygeralai* not merely as a customary tradition, but as a normative and cosmological framework that structures sustainable human–nature relations. The research employs a qualitative ethnographic design grounded in ecological anthropology and the socio-ecological systems (SES) framework. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and spatial analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Sampling followed the principle of data saturation, reaching a saturation level exceeding 90%. Data analysis proceeded through domain, taxonomic, componential, and thematic stages to identify

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This paper will be presented at the 11th International Conference organized by the Faculty of Child Education and Special Educational Needs of the University of Debrecen, Hungary, on April 24–26, 2026. The presentation is aligned with one of the conference subthemes focusing on the application of innovative technologies grounded in environmental awareness and sustainable development principles, with an emphasis on advancing climate neutrality.

the normative, ecological, and social dimensions embedded in *hygeralai* practices. The findings indicate that *hygeralai* is rooted in linguistic transformation and local cosmology that conceptualize the sea as both a sacred domain and a communal resource. The system regulates seasonal harvesting closures and openings, restricts fishing gear, and institutionalizes collective responsibility for maintaining ecological balance. Coral reef conditions in the Luang region, including Metiamarang Island, remain relatively healthy, characterized by low levels of degradation and high biodiversity. Nevertheless, ecosystem sustainability faces internal challenges, such as unstructured waste management, as well as external threats including illegal fishing, destructive fishing practices, and the impacts of global climate change. The study demonstrates that *hygeralai* represents a spiritually grounded environmental ethic integrating historical, linguistic, and ecological dimensions within a community-based governance system. It contributes to the development of marine resource management models for Indonesia's outermost small islands by emphasizing the integration of local knowledge, institutional support, and adaptive policy responses to global environmental change.

Keywords: Hygeralai; ecological anthropology; socio-ecological systems; marine governance; outermost small islands; and climate change

Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

ETIMOLÓGIA, KOZMOLÓGIA ÉS TENGERI GONDNOKSÁG: A *HYGERALAI* TÁRSADALMI-ÖKOLÓGIAI JELENTŐSÉGE LUANG SZIGETÉN

Jelen tanulmány a *hygeralai* jelenségét vizsgálja, mint a tudás és a társadalmi-ökológiai kormányzás olyan rendszerét, amelyet a Délnyugat-Malukuban található Luang-sziget őslakos közössége gyakorol, a globális klímaváltozás és a fokozódó part menti fejlesztési nyomás tágabb kontextusában. A növekvő tengervízhőmérséklet és az óceánok savasodásának hátterében – amelyek jelentős hatást gyakorolnak a parti ökoszisztémákra – a tanulmány a *hygeralai*-t nem pusztán hagyományos szokásként értelmezi, hanem olyan normatív és kozmológiai keretrendszerként, amely a fenntartható ember–természet viszonyokat strukturálja. A kutatás kvalitatív etnográfiai megközelítést alkalmaz, amely az ökológiai antropológia és a társadalmi-ökológiai rendszerek (SES) elméleti keretére épül. Az adatgyűjtés mélyinterjúk, résztvevő megfigyelés, dokumentáció, valamint térbeli elemzés (Geographic Information Systems – GIS) alkalmazásával történt. A mintavétel az adattelítettség elvét követte, amely meghaladta a 90%-os telítettségi szintet. Az adatelemzés domén-, taxonómiai, komponenciális és tematikus szinteken zajlott, lehetővé téve a *hygeralai* gyakorlatokba ágyazott normatív, ökológiai és társadalmi dimenziók feltárását. Az eredmények rámutatnak arra, hogy a *hygeralai* nyelvi átalakulásokban és helyi kozmológiában gyökerezik, amely a tengert egyszerre szent térként és közösségi erőforrásként konceptualizálja. A rendszer szabályozza az idényjellegű halászati tilalmak és engedélyezések rendjét, korlátozza az alkalmazható halászati eszközöket, valamint intézményesíti az ökológiai egyensúly fenntartásáért viselt kollektív felelősséget. A luangi térség korallzátonyainak állapota – beleértve Metiamarang szigetét is – viszonylag kedvező, alacsony degradációs szinttel és magas biodiverzitással jellemezhető. Mindazonáltal az ökoszisztéma fenntarthatóságát belső kihívások (például a strukturálatlan hulladékgazdálkodás), valamint külső fenyegetések (illegális halászat, romboló halászati gyakorlatok, valamint a globális klímaváltozás hatásai) egyaránt veszélyeztetik. A tanulmány megállapítja, hogy a *hygeralai* olyan spirituálisan megalapozott környezeti etikai rendszert képvisel, amely történeti, nyelvi és ökológiai dimenziókat integrál egy közösségi alapú kormányzási struktúrában. Hozzájárul Indonézia leg-külső kis szigeteire vonatkozó tengeri erőforrás-gazdálkodási modellek fejlesztéséhez azáltal, hogy

hangsúlyozza a helyi tudás, az intézményi támogatás és a globális környezeti változásokhoz való adaptív szakpolitikai válaszok integrációjának jelentőségét.

Kulcsszavak: *hygeralai*; ökológiai antropológia; társadalmi-ökológiai rendszerek; tengeri kormányzás; legkülső kis szigetek; klímaváltozás

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Background

Global warming has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary planetary governance. This phenomenon cannot be understood in isolation; rather, it is closely intertwined with demographic dynamics, economic pressures, and global patterns of production and consumption that intensify the exploitation of natural resources on both land and sea (IPCC, 2023). In addition, emissions and pollution generated by industrialized countries further accelerate climate change at the global scale. The roots of this crisis are frequently associated with an anthropocentric paradigm an epistemological orientation that positions humans at the centre of the living system (Moran, 2017; Steffen et al., 2011). In contrast, ecological perspectives emphasize that humans represent only one component within the broader web of planetary life (Di Paola, 2024; Tiberius, 2008).

Consequently, strategies grounded in adaptation, ecological harmony, and prudent environmental governance become essential foundations for cultivating reciprocal and sustainable relationships between human societies and the natural world (Dearing et al., 2015).

Contemporary efforts in environmental protection and natural resource management have become a shared agenda articulated through public policies, international regulatory frameworks, and modern governance instruments involving both governments and the private sector. Nevertheless, in many regions across both island and mainland settings local communities continue to maintain and practice traditional knowledge systems as the primary foundation for their interaction with the environment. Within the Indonesian cultural context, this principle is reflected in the expression *"di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung,"* which conveys an ethical imperative to respect the lived environment and to align human behavior with the prevailing ecological order. The expression embodies a cosmological awareness that humans are an integral part of the ecosystem rather than its sole sovereign authority. A substantial body of research demonstrates that Indigenous communities in various parts of the world have long developed traditional mechanisms for managing coastal and marine resources, including in Sasa Village (Fong, 1994), the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (Johannes, 1998), New Zealand (Ballantine, 1999), Brazil (Anaya & Espírito-Santo, 2018), Oceania (Aswani & Canela, 2011) and Indonesia (Brouwer, A., 1996; Harkes., 2000; Bagir et al., 2021). Although Indigenous peoples constitute only approximately 6% of the global population (World Bank Group, 2023), evidence indicates that they steward around 80% of the world's biodiversity (International Labour Organisation, 2020; World Bank Group, 2023). This empirical reality underscores the strategic significance of local knowledge systems in advancing conservation efforts and ensuring long-term ecological sustainability. Indonesia is an archipelagic state with a substantial population. According to *World Population Review* (April 2024), Indonesia's population has reached 279, 390, 258. Administratively, the country comprises 38 provinces, including eight island-based provinces, and is home to approximately 1,340 ethnic groups and 718 local languages (Nurasmawi & Ristiliana,

2021). Approximately 70% of Indonesia's territory consists of marine areas and 30% of land (Darajati, 2023; Maruf, 2024), encompassing more than 17,500 islands, including 111 outermost small islands. Indonesia also shares land and maritime boundaries with ten neighbouring countries (Arsana, 2007; Hamzah, 1984). This geographical configuration positions Indonesian waters as one of the world's centres of marine biodiversity (Randall, 1998; Roberts et al., 2002), while simultaneously rendering the country strategically significant in global discourses on climate change and marine resource governance.

As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia faces multidimensional consequences across political, economic, social, and cultural domains (Cribb & Ford, 2009). Within this diversity, customary-based environmental management practices have long constituted an integral dimension of local community life. Indigenous communities are generally understood as traditional collectivises (Malinowsky, 1932) that possess value systems and customary laws regulating their internal order (Berkes & Folke, 1998) and whose subsistence and continuity are closely tied to the ecological knowledge embedded in their surrounding environments (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Ecological knowledge transmitted intergenerationnally has shaped distinctive adaptive systems within each community, both in upland and coastal regions (Geertz, 1983).

In this regard, Luang Island in Southwest Maluku Regency represents one of Indonesia's outermost small islands, characterized by distinctive ecological and social features. The coastal Indigenous community inhabiting this island has developed a body of local knowledge to regulate its relationship with the environment, long before the emergence of formal environmental governance policies and official recognition of Indigenous peoples. One of the local institutions that continues to be maintained is *hygeralai*. It is may be understood as a system of traditional values and normative regulations governing the utilization of natural resources, particularly marine resources. It constitutes not merely a set of prescriptive norms, but a philosophical framework that guides the people of Luang Island in cultivating harmonious relationships with the natural world. As a socio-ecological system, *hygeralai* functions as a mechanism of collective regulation, reinforcing principles of sustainability through proportional resource use grounded in the limits of environmental carrying capacity.

Academic scholarship addressing environmental management practices among the Indigenous communities of Luang Island remains relatively limited. The island's remote geographical location and restricted transportation access constitute significant factors contributing to the scarcity of research in this area. This situation has resulted in a limited body of available information concerning the island's socio-ecological dynamics. Existing studies have generally concentrated on specific thematic domains, such as linguistics, belief systems, fisheries ecology, biodiversity surveys, or issues related to national strategic interests. Research conducted about examined belief systems in the Babar Islands, including Luang, analysed phonological and morphological aspects of the local language. Moreover, the distribution of language and culture and discus-sed *sasi* within the framework of traditional political economy. More recent studies) on marine ecosystems, the fish and sea cucumber species, local wisdom as a pedagogical resource, and and the fish diversity within the Luang atoll.

In contrast to previous studies, this research conducted within the framework of the Applied Excellent Research Program positions *hygeralai* as a socio-ecological institution analysed through the lens of ecological anthropology. The study focuses on the existence and dynamics of *hygeralai* in the everyday life of the Indigenous community of Luang Island, including the ways in which environmental conditions shape patterns of thought, daily practices, and the socio-cultural structure of the

community. This research employs an ethnographic approach integrated with ecological anthropological analysis. The study aims to generate original and academically rigorous contributions to the development of scholarship on local institutions and environmental governance in Indonesia's outermost small islands.

Problem Statement

Building upon the foregoing background, this study is designed to examine in depth the relational patterns between the Indigenous community of Luang Island and the natural environment in which they reside. The central focus lies in understanding how this community constructs, maintains, and reproduces its ecological relationships through an intergenerationally transmitted system of local knowledge known as *hygeralai*. Accordingly, the principal concern of this research extends beyond acknowledging *hygeralai* as a cultural tradition; it seeks to analyze how this system functions in shaping and reinforcing the socio-ecological embeddedness of the Luang community within its lived environment. From this formulation emerges the primary research question: what contributions does *hygeralai* make in shaping the worldview, attitudes, and environmental practices of the Luang community? Addressing this question requires a systematic examination of the normative, ecological, and social dimensions embedded within *hygeralai*, as well as an analysis of how these values guide collective action in natural resource governance. This study places particular emphasis on assessing the functional significance of *hygeralai* for the sustainability of marine environments. The focus is directed toward identifying the mechanisms, principles, and ecological signals recognized by the community as guiding references in the prudent management of coastal and marine resources. At a subsequent stage, this focus is operationalized into specific research questions to be examined through an empirical methodological approach.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine in a comprehensive and systematic manner the reciprocal relationship between the Indigenous community of Luang Island and its natural environment by positioning *hygeralai* as the principal analytical framework. Conceptually, the research seeks to understand how this intergenerationally transmitted system of local knowledge functions as a foundational structure for constructing, maintaining, and reproducing the community's socio-ecological relations with its living space. The focus extends beyond recognizing *hygeralai* as a cultural heritage; rather, it emphasizes its role as a normative institution encompassing a set of values, principles, rules, and action-guiding frameworks for natural resource governance, particularly within coastal and marine domains.

Furthermore, this study aims to analyze the concrete contributions of *hygeralai* in shaping the ecological worldview of the Luang community, including how the system influences attitudes, moral orientations, and everyday practices in environmental interaction. The research endeavors to trace how the values embedded in *hygeralai* are translated into social mechanisms, such as temporal regulation of resource use, limitations on exploitation, and the reinforcement of collective responsibility for ecosystem sustainability. In this regard, the study seeks to identify the integrated normative, ecological, and social dimensions embedded within *hygeralai* as a community-based regulatory system.

Specifically, the research also aims to assess the functional significance of *hygeralai* in sustaining marine environmental integrity as an integral component of the life system of Luang Island. This focus includes examining locally recognized ecological principles, environmental indicators interpreted by the community, and adaptive strategies implemented in response to environmental dynamics. Through an ethnography-based empirical approach combined with socio-ecological analysis, the study is expected to generate a comprehensive understanding of

hygeralai as a socio-ecological system that not only maintains ecosystem balance but also strengthens social cohesion and the cultural sustainability of the Indigenous community of Luang Island.

Method and Analysis

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design (Creswell, 2012) situated within the framework of ecological anthropology and socio-ecological systems (SES) analysis. This approach is selected in order to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the Indigenous community of Luang Island and its natural environment, as mediated through *hygeralai* as a living system of local knowledge that is prac-ticed and transmitted intergenerationally. Ethnography enables the researcher to capture meanings, values, symbols, and everyday practices within their specific social and ecological contexts (Spradley, 1980). In this regard, *hygeralai* is not treated merely as cultural heritage, but as a normative system func-tioning as a mechanism of ecological adaptation and community-based resource governance.

Epistemologically, the research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm that conceives social reality as a construct emerging from human-environment interactions. Community experiences, perceptions, and social practices constitute the primary sources for analytical interpretation. Accordingly, the analysis is directed toward identifying three integrated dimensions embedded within the practice of *hygeralai*: the normative dimension (values, principles, and rules), the ecological dimension (environmental conditions, dynamics, and resource characteristics), and the social dimension (collective mechanisms, community structure, and the distribution of responsibilities). These three dimensions are examined simultaneously to elucidate how *hygeralai* ope-rates as a coherent socio-ecological system.

The analytical framework follow ethnographic methods, the analytical process begins with ethnographic data collection through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. This stage generates narrative accounts, social practices, and symbolic representations associated with the implementation of *hygeralai* in the daily life of the Luang Island community. The subsequent stage involves domain analysis, which entails identifying primary categories of meaning emerging from the field data. At this stage, key concepts are mapped, including temporal regulation of resource use, prohibitions and restrictions, collective responsibility, and locally recognized ecological indicators. The objective of this phase is to delineate the foundational structure of meaning within the *hygeralai* system.

This is followed by taxonomic analysis, through which identified domains are organized into more detailed classificatory structures. This analysis elucidates how the Luang community categorizes the environment and natural resources within its local knowledge framework. The next stage, componential analysis, aims to identify differences in meaning and attributes across categories. For instance, distinctions are examined between areas permitted and prohibited for use, variations in rules according to seasonal or specific ecological conditions, and differentiated responsibilities among social groups. This phase clarifies the interrelationships among the normative, ecological, and social dimensions embedded in the *hygeralai* system. The final stage involves thematic analysis, which synthesizes all categories to identify overarching cultural themes that integrate the system as a whole. Emergent themes such as ecological balance as a guiding principle, collective morality in marine governance, adaptation grounded in local knowledge, and the sacred relationship between humans and the sea collectively frame *hygeralai* as an integrated socio-ecological system. Through these analytical stages, the study generates a comprehensive understanding of how *hygeralai* operates as a community-based regulatory mechanism that sustains ecosystem balance while simultaneously reinforcing social cohesion and the cultural

continuity of the Indigenous community of Luang Island.

Sampling Framework

The sampling strategy employed in this study is guided by the principle of data saturation as articulated by Morse (1995), which emphasizes the adequacy and depth of information rather than the numerical size of respondents. Within this framework, participant selection is not determined by large sample numbers but by the extent to which the collected data comprehensively address the research focus. The sampling strategy is therefore directed toward achieving conceptual sufficiency relevant to the study of *hygeralai*, as the research does not seek statistical generalization but rather an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Informants were selected purposively based on their level of knowledge, experience, and involvement in the practice of *hygeralai* and environmental governance. The participants included village heads, customary leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, school principals, women leaders, and children aged 5–13 years from two villages on Luang Island. These groups were chosen on the basis of their representational capacity to elucidate the values, meanings, and environmental implications of *hygeralai* as an ancestral legacy. The sampling process remained flexible and evolved throughout the research, with subsequent informants identified based on insights obtained from prior participants.

Data saturation was considered achieved when the information obtained became repetitive, no longer generated new categories or themes, and all dimensions related to the environmental implications of *hygeralai* had been sufficiently elucidated. The identification of saturation was conducted through systematic coding procedures, constant comparative analysis of responses, and component-based data grouping to assess consistency and thematic patterns. Responses to 148 research questions were analyzed and tabulated to measure the degree of similarity across participants. Based on established saturation criteria, data consistency exceeding 70% was regarded as indicative of saturation. The analysis demonstrated that the saturation level in this study exceeded 90%, indicating that both sample adequacy and data sufficiency had been achieved. Consequently, data collection was concluded, as the information obtained had reached a stable and comprehensive level sufficient to address the research objectives in an academically rigorous and systematic manner.

Data Collection

Data collection in this study was designed to generate a comprehensive understanding of the function of *hygeralai* in shaping the socio-ecological relations between the Indigenous community of Luang Island and its natural environment. The data collection strategy was systematically structured through the integration of ethnographic techniques, in-depth interviews, participant observation, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and documentation. These methods were employed to capture the normative, ecological, and social dimensions embedded in the practice of *hygeralai*.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants who possess substantial knowledge of and direct involvement in the practice of *hygeralai*. Informants included customary leaders, village heads, religious leaders, women leaders, youth leaders, fishers, seaweed cultivators, and children as the next generation of local knowledge bearers. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow for in-depth exploration of the values, principles, rules, and action-guiding frameworks embodied in *hygeralai*. The interviews focused on the community's ecological worldview, mechanisms for regulating marine resource use, limitations on exploitation, and forms of collective responsibility for ecosystem sustainability.

Participant observation was undertaken to understand everyday practices within the context of direct

interaction with coastal and marine environments. The researcher engaged in activities such as fishing, seaweed cultivation, and customary events associated with the implementation of *hygeralai*. Through this direct involvement, empirical data were generated not only from verbal narratives but also from concrete practices reflecting ecological values in action. This approach facilitated the identification of locally recognized ecological indicators, including natural signs used by the community to determine appropriate timing for resource utilization.

FGDs were conducted to confirm and deepen individual findings, particularly regarding the historical development of *hygeralai*, its spatial scope of implementation, customary territorial boundaries (*petuanan*), and collective perceptions of environmental change. These group discussions functioned as a form of social triangulation to ensure data consistency and enrich interpretive analysis. Secondary data were collected through literature review of scientific reports, policy documents, prior research, and archival materials related to the ecological and social conditions of Luang Island. All collected data were analysed thematically through systematic coding and categorization processes to identify patterns, relationships, and socio-ecological mechanisms embedded in *hygeralai*. This approach enabled the production of a thick description of how this local knowledge system functions as a community-based regulatory instrument that sustains marine environmental integrity while simultaneously reinforcing social cohesion and the cultural continuity of the Indigenous community of Luang Island.

Findings

Research Site

Luang Island (see Figure 1) is one of the administrative areas within Southwest Maluku Regency, Maluku Province, Indonesia. Geographically, the island forms part of the Luang Archipelago situated in the Banda Sea, within the broader region of eastern Indonesia. To the west, the area lies in close proximity to Timor-Leste, while to the south it shares maritime boundaries with Australia. This location positions Luang Island as both strategically significant and peripheral within the broader geopolitical and regional oceanographic context.

As a small tropical island, Luang Island exhibits distinctive physical characteristics. The island is surrounded by extensive shallow waters composed of large coral heads that become exposed during low tide. This shallow zone covers approximately 264.58 km² and forms a highly productive coastal ecosystem, including coral reefs and seagrass meadows (see Figure 2). These ecosystems provide critical habitats for a wide range of economically valuable marine species, such as reef fish, sea cucumbers (*nyawi*), and naturally occurring seaweed, which constitute the primary sources of livelihood for the local community.

Figure 1.(A) Luang Island, (B). bordering with Timor Leste & Australia. Source: Researcher, 2025

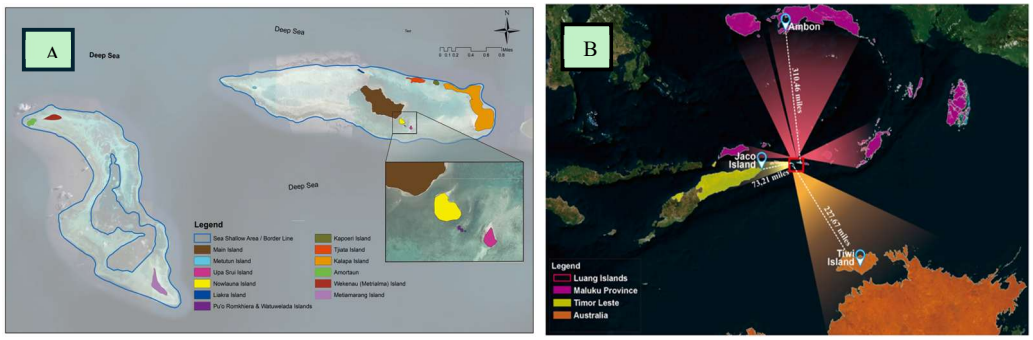
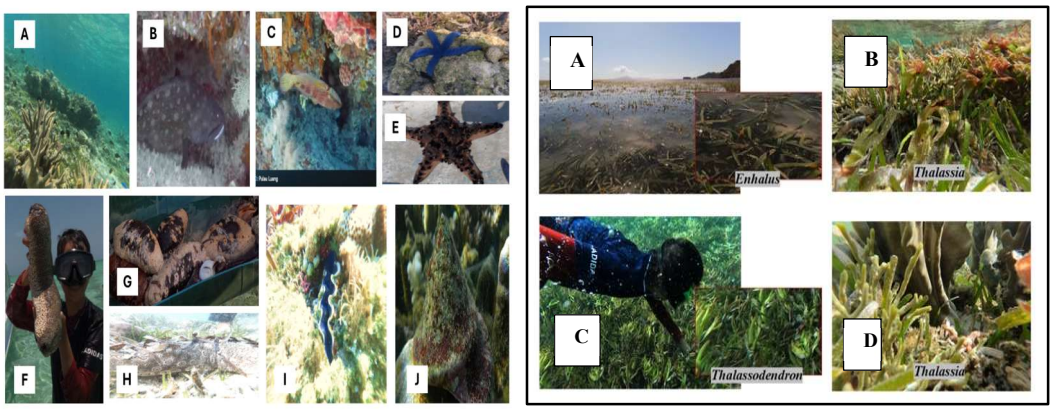


Figure 1. Marine ecosystem conditions on Luang Island. Source: results of the 2025 underwater survey conducted on Luang Island.



From a terrestrial geomorphological perspective, Luang Island is primarily characterized by low hills, with a topography that ranges from narrow coastal plains to more elevated interior zones. The island's rocky and relatively dry soil conditions constrain agricultural potential, limiting the development of large-scale farming activities (see Figure 3). As a consequence of these ecological constraints, the local population relies predominantly on marine-based livelihoods, particularly small-scale capture fisheries and customary marine resource management practices.

Figure 2: Morfology condition in Luang Island

Luang Island is composed of two villages Luang Barat and Luang Timur both of which are situated along the coastal strip of the island. Beyond these primary settlement areas, the Luang community holds customary territorial rights (*petuanan*) over several surrounding small islands, including Liakra, Kapoeri, Tiaata, Nowlauna, Po'u Romkihiera, Watuwelada, Upasrui, Metutun, Metiamarang, Wekenau, and Tamta/Kalapa. Collectively, these territories form an interconnected ecological and social unit that constitutes an integral component of the local knowledge system and customary institutional framework of the Luang people (Kissiya & Biczó, 2024).

Administratively and socially, the island's two villages extend longitudinally along the coastline, reflecting a settlement pattern closely aligned with marine-based livelihoods. The broader customary domain encompassing the adjacent small islands functions not merely as an extension of territorial space but as a living socio-ecological landscape. It serves as the spatial arena in which local knowledge systems and customary governance institutions are enacted and maintained.

Spatially, Luang Island's location in the southern Banda Sea renders it relatively remote within the

administrative structure of Southwest Maluku Regency. Despite this geographic peripherality, its position within the global Coral Triangle confers considerable ecological significance. The region functions as a marine biodiversity corridor in the southern part of eastern Indonesia (Kissiya & Biczó, 2023) thereby holding strategic ecological value in terms of marine conservation and sustainable resource management. However, geographic isolation also constrains transportation and communication access, reinforcing the community's reliance on localized governance systems. In this context, *Hygeralai* plays a central role as a customary regulatory mechanism that governs marine resource utilization while simultaneously maintaining ecological balance within the coastal environment.

Main Points of *Hygeralai*

Hygeralai is a local knowledge system of the Luang community that encompasses a set of values, principles, norms, and strategies for the management of marine resources oriented toward sustainability and environmental protection. As a customary institution, *Hygeralai* regulates the use of natural resources through rules and practices that have become institutionalized and deeply internalized in the everyday life of the community. In the context of Luang Island, the sea is understood as a communal resource; accordingly, its governance is grounded in the principle of collectively recognized customary ownership.

The defining characteristic of this system lies in its recognition of customary rights and traditional tenure arrangements that frame marine resource governance. Regulation is shaped not only by ecological norms but also by the community's social structure, including social status, institutional roles, and genealogical background, all of which influence the distribution of authority and responsibility. *Hygeralai* thus operates simultaneously as a mechanism of ecological control and as a reflection of an organized customary social order within the Luang community.

The rules embedded in *Hygeralai* are unwritten and transmitted across generations through social conventions embedded in lived community practices. The system serves as the primary foundation for marine resource governance, particularly in regulating the harvesting period of *nyawi* (sea cucumber), which is implemented through a periodic open–close mechanism in shallow coastal waters. In certain circumstances, such as collective needs related to religious activities or village interests, harvesting schedules may be adjusted through communal agreement. Beyond temporal regulation, *Hygeralai* also defines the rights and obligations of stakeholders, decision-making procedures, mechanisms for information dissemination, and systems of sanctions for violations. These practices are often accompanied by customary rituals and the use of traditional communication media to ensure collective compliance. Even the types of fishing gear permitted during harvesting periods are regulated as part of broader efforts to maintain marine ecological balance. In this way, *Hygeralai* constitutes a communal governance system that integrates ecological, normative, and social dimensions within a cohesive customary institutional framework.

Etymology and Historical Transformation of *Hygeralai*

The oral traditions preserved by the community of Luang Island constitute a significant historical archive through which the origin and development of the term *hygeralai* can be analytically reconstructed. These intergenerational narratives indicate that *hygeralai* did not emerge as an instantaneous cultural construct; rather, it evolved through a long historical process, reflecting linguistic shifts intertwined with broader social and cultural transformations within Luang society. Although not all episodes of Luang's historical trajectory are directly linked to the etymology of the term, its gradual transformation from

a linguistic marker into a core component of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) demonstrates its enduring cultural and institutional significance.

Local accounts recount that the origin of h*ygeralai* is associated with the journey of three men from Luang Island who sought to establish new settlement sites. Each individual marked the selected territory using a distinct symbolic sign (*gheralyai*) to assert spatial claims and identity. The first individual constructed a stone altar (*watu*) as a ritual marker. The second embedded a spear (*welahra*) into the ground as a sign of territorial authority. The third figure, Tonulu Takrulu, created a territorial marker in the form of a woven *koli* leaf ornament (*hgerlarkuhi*), which was suspended at the tip of a wooden pole. These symbolic acts functioned not merely as indicators of spatial possession but also as expressions of social identity and spiritual affiliation.

Among these markers, the woven *koli* leaf created by Tonulu Takrulu possessed the greatest variability in form and the widest territorial reach. Over time, this particular symbol became linguistically and culturally elaborated, eventually giving rise to the term *hygeralai*. Its evolution reflects a process of semantic expansion whereby a material marker of territorial identification transformed into a culturally embedded concept. In its contemporary understanding, *Hygeralai* extends beyond its original symbolic function to encompass a normative framework regulating marine resource use, communal responsibility, and ecological stewardship.

Thus, the etymological development of *Hygeralai* illustrates the dynamic relationship between language, territoriality, spirituality, and ecological governance in Luang society. The term's transformation from a spatial symbol into an institutionalized component of local environmental management underscores how oral tradition operates as both historical memory and a mechanism for sustaining socio-ecological order.

The term *hygeralai* is linguistically derived from two lexical elements in the Luang language (*Lgona Ltiery*), namely *hgeralyai*, meaning "stone or spear marker," and *hgerlarkuhi*, referring to a "koli leaf marker." In the phonetic practice of the Luang community, the first element undergoes articulatory adjustment: the consonantal cluster *h* + *ger* is realized as "hyger," while the sequence *ly*+*ai* contracts into"lai," resulting in the transformation of *hgeralyai* into *Hygeralai*. The terminal vowel "i" is absorbed from *hgerlarkuhi*, indicating that the contemporary term represents a phonological and semantic fusion of two distinct lexical forms. This process reflects an allophonic phenomenon, namely a phonetic variation that does not alter the fundamental meaning of a lexical item (Keraf, 2016). The formation of *hygeralai* thus illustrates how linguistic evolution operates not only at the level of sound articulation but also through semantic integration within a specific cultural context.

Conceptually, *hygeralai* embodies the cosmological worldview of the Luang community, in which both terrestrial and marine spaces are understood as sacred domains under the guardianship of ancestors and spiritual forces. The *koli* leaf marker created by Tonulu Takrulu did not merely signify territorial claim; it simultaneously encoded an ethical obligation toward environmental continuity. This reflects a relational ontology (Descola, 2013) wherein humans and non-human entities are situated within a balanced network of reciprocal relationships. Within such a cosmological framework, violations of *hygeralai* principles are believed to disrupt cosmic harmony, potentially resulting in ecological degradation as well as spiritual consequences.

Accordingly, *hygeralai* functions as a set of socio-ecological norms that regulate resource utilization through customary provisions, symbolic expressions, and ritual practices. Over time, the system has undergone gradual transformation through two principal stages, marking a shift from a predominantly cosmological-animistic mode of governance toward a more hybrid ecological governance model. This transformation does not indicate a rupture

with its cosmological foundations; rather, it demonstrates adaptive continuity, whereby traditional symbolic structures are rearticulated within evolving social and ecological conditions.

In line with the perspectives advanced by (Dinneen, 1995) and (Halverson, 2013)continuity of the Luang language manifested, among other forms, in the sustained use of the term *hygeralai* cannot be understood merely as an effort to preserve a linguistic system. Embedded within this continuity is a broader endeavour to maintain horizons of meaning, orientations toward life, and constructions of collective identity. For the Luang community, language is not simply a communicative instrument; it is a medium that carries values, norms, and the ethical structure of the community. Consequently, *hygeralai* transcends its status as a lexical term or customary institution; it functions as a symbolic representation of cultural identity as well as an articulation of ecological ethics.

Taken as a whole, *hygeralai* reflects a synthesis of linguistic dynamics, historical experience, and spatial governance grounded in local cosmology. It encompasses a normative dimension that regulates human relations with the environment and frames resource use within a moral order. The persistence of the term and its associated practices across generations demonstrates the close interweaving of oral tradition, linguistic transformation, and ecological practice. Through this process, an indigenous knowledge framework emerges one that integrates humans, nature, and ancestors within an enduring and cohesive value system.

Coherence in the *Hygeralai* Social–Ecological System within an Ecological Anthropology Framework

The ecological dimension of *hygeralai* refers to the biophysical conditions, natural dynamics, and characteristics of coastal-marine resources that constitute the foundation of livelihood sustainability for the community of Luang Island in Southwest Maluku Regency. Ecologically, this region is situated within the Coral Triangle, globally recognized as the area with the highest marine biodiversity in the world (Veron et al., 2009). Coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and shallow coastal waters function as the primary pillars of food security, subsistence economy, and social identity for small-island coastal societies. However, as emphasized by the (IPCC, 2023), tropical marine ecosystems are currently under significant pressure due to rising sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, and the increasing intensity of extreme weather events. In small-island contexts, ecological vulnerability is further amplified by limited terrestrial carrying capacity, high dependence on local natural resources, and geographic isolation (Nurse et al., 2014).

Within this setting, understanding ecological conditions such as reef health, fish stock availability, and the reproductive cycles of marine species becomes a crucial component of the *hygeralai* system. The institution operates by internalizing seasonal environmental dynamics, including monsoonal wind patterns (east–west monsoons), fish migration routes, and phases of resource regeneration, as the basis for determining temporary closures and seasonal openings. This approach aligns with principles of resource governance grounded in ecological limits and collective-choice arrangements, as discussed in the literature on common-pool resource management (Ostrom, 2009). Thus, ecological knowledge is not peripheral but constitutive of institutional regulation.

The social dimension of *hygeralai* concerns the collective mechanisms, customary institutional structures, and distribution of responsibilities that sustain ecological regulation. From the perspective of common-pool resource theory, long-term sustainability depends on clearly defined rules, internal monitoring mechanisms, and legitimate social sanctions (Ostrom, 1990). *hygeralai* fulfills these criteria through a customary governance structure endowed with normative and symbolic authority to

declare periods of closure and opening, regulate fishing gear, and conduct ritual processes that reinforce collective compliance. Resource governance in this context is not merely administrative but embedded within local cosmology, kinship relations, and customary hierarchies. In ecological anthropology, human–environment relations are understood as culturally institutionalized systems of reciprocity and regulation (Kottak, 1999). Accordingly, the collective mechanisms of *hygeralai* do not simply regulate economic behaviour; they cultivate an ecological ethic grounded in communal responsibility.

The distribution of responsibilities within *hygeralai* is socially differentiated yet collectively integrated. Customary leaders exercise normative authority; clan-based groups maintain territorial rights and monitoring roles; and families transmit ecological values across generations. Social control thus operates primarily through the internalization of norms and horizontal accountability rather than through formalized bureaucratic enforcement. This embeddedness of ecological governance within social structure enhances compliance and strengthens social cohesion.

The integration of ecological and social dimensions enables *hygeralai* to function as a coherent socio-ecological system (SES). SES scholarship emphasizes that sustainability emerges from adaptive interactions between ecological processes and social institutions through non-linear feedback mechanisms (Berkes & Folke, 1998). In this case, local ecological knowledge is translated into social norms that constrain exploitation in accordance with natural regenerative rhythms. When ecological disturbances occur such as declining fish catches or habitat degradation the community may collectively respond by tightening regulations or extending closure periods. Such responses reflect adaptive capacity, defined in resilience theory as the ability of a system to maintain its core functions while adjusting or transforming in response to changing conditions.

Therefore, *Hygeralai* should not be understood merely as a customary tradition, but as an adaptive governance institution that integrates ecological knowledge, social legitimacy, and cosmological norms within a coherent regulatory framework. Its coherence lies in the mutually reinforcing relationship between environmental limits and social organization, ensuring that resource sustainability and community cohesion are maintained simultaneously over time.

Conclusion

Based on the overall historical, linguistic, ecological, and ethnographic findings, it can be concluded that *Hygeralai* constitutes a system of knowledge and socio-ecological governance deeply rooted in the cosmology, oral history, and linguistic structure of the Luang Island community. The term emerged through a process of linguistic transformation reflecting the community's historical experiences and evolved into a normative framework regulating human relations with terrestrial and marine spaces within an ecologically grounded spiritual ethic. In this regard, *hygeralai* functions not merely as a customary institution but as an expression of local epistemology that integrates cultural, moral, and environmental dimensions.

From an ecological perspective, the waters surrounding Luang Island and its adjacent island cluster including Metiamarang Island demonstrate relatively healthy ecosystem conditions, characterized by the dominance of hard corals, significant atoll formations, and high levels of marine biodiversity. Scientific survey data, geospatial mapping, and field observations indicate that coral reefs, seagrass beds, and associated marine biota remain in good condition across several zones, particularly in areas experiencing minimal anthropogenic pressure. These ecosystems exhibit interdependent dynamics, with coral reefs functioning as foundational ecological structures that sustain fisheries productivity while simultaneously protecting shorelines from

currents and wave action.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of this socio-ecological system faces multidimensional challenges. Internally, inconsistencies persist in coastal waste management, largely due to the absence of a structured waste disposal system. Population growth, settlement expansion, coastal reclamation, and seaweed processing activities further intensify pressures on natural habitats. Externally, illegal fishing practices and the use of destructive methods by fishers operating beyond customary territorial boundaries pose significant threats to marine ecosystem integrity.

Community responses indicate the presence of strong adaptive capacity. Village authorities, in collaboration with youth organizations, women's groups, religious institutions, and educational bodies, have developed cross-sectoral initiatives to strengthen conservation awareness, enforce customary sanctions, and integrate environmental education into school curricula. These efforts reflect an understanding of ecological sustainability not merely as a technical matter, but as a moral and spiritual responsibility transmitted across generations.

Overall, *hygeralai* represents a community-based model of socio-ecological governance with considerable potential to support sustainability in small island contexts. The continued effectiveness of this system depends on consistent internal compliance, strengthened waste and coastal management frameworks, and protection against external pressures. The integration of local knowledge, institutional support, and responsive policy frameworks remains essential to ensuring the long-term resilience and sustainability of the marine ecosystems of Luang Island.

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SOCIAL VULNERABILITY IN POST-CONFLICT MALUKU, INDONESIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Maluku region constitutes one of Indonesia's post-conflict areas that continues to experience long-term social consequences. The conflict not only resulted in physical destruction but also generated enduring social vulnerability manifested in fragmented social relations, weakened intergroup trust, and limited access to social and educational resources. This article aims to analysed the dynamics of post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku from a sociological perspective, emphasizing how local communities interpret, experience, and respond to these conditions in their everyday social lives. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of community-based social and customary practices. Data were analysed through thematic and narrative approaches to capture the interconnections between conflict memory, social structure, and community-based recovery mechanisms. The findings indicate that post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku is structural, relational, and historical in nature; however, it does not entirely incapacitate the community's social capacity. Customary institutions and community relations play a significant role in rebuilding social cohesion, facilitating social inclusion, and transmitting intergenerational peace values. These findings underscore that post-conflict recovery does not rely solely on formal state interventions, but

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also on the strength of local social and cultural practices and historical consciousness. This study contributes to the development of post-conflict sociology and the sociology of social inclusion by highlighting the importance of community-based approaches in understanding and managing social vulnerability.

Keywords: Maluku, Post-Conflict, Social Vulnerability, & Sociological Perspective.

Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

TÁRSADALMI SÉRÜLÉKENYSÉG AZ INDONÉZIAI POSZTKONFLIKTUSOS MALUKUBAN: SZOCIOLÓGIAI PERSPEKTÍVA

A malukui régió Indonézia egyik olyan posztkonfliktusos térsége, amely továbbra is hosszú távú társadalmi következményekkel szembesül. A konfliktus nem csupán fizikai pusztítást eredményezett, hanem tartós társadalmi sérülékenységet is létrehozott, amely a társadalmi kapcsolatok fragmentáltságában, a csoportok közötti bizalom meggyengülésében, valamint a társadalmi és oktatási erőforrásokhoz való korlátozott hozzáférésben nyilvánul meg. Jelen tanulmány célja a posztkonfliktusos társadalmi sérülékenység dinamikájának elemzése Malukuban szociológiai megközelítésben, különös tekintettel arra, hogy a helyi közösségek miként értelmezik, tapasztalják és kezelik e feltételeket mindennapi társadalmi életük során. A kutatás kvalitatív megközelítést alkalmaz esettanulmányi kutatási terv keretében, mélyinterjúkra, résztvevő megfigyelésre, valamint közösségi alapú társadalmi és szokásjogi gyakorlatok dokumentációjára támaszkodva. Az adatok elemzése tematikus és narratív módszerekkel történt annak érdekében, hogy feltárhatók legyenek a konfliktusemlékezet, a társadalmi struktúra és a közösségi alapú helyreállítási mechanizmusok közötti összefüggések. Az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a posztkonfliktusos társadalmi sérülékenység Malukuban strukturális, relációs és történeti természetű; ugyanakkor nem eredményezi a közösségek társadalmi kapacitásának teljes ellehetetlenülését. A szokásjogi intézmények és a közösségi kapcsolatok jelentős szerepet játszanak a társadalmi kohézió újjáépítésében, a társadalmi inklúzió elősegítésében, valamint a béke intergenerációs értékeinek közvetítésében. E megállapítások rámutatnak arra, hogy a posztkonfliktusos helyreállítás nem kizárólag formális állami beavatkozásokon alapul, hanem nagymértékben függ a helyi társadalmi és kulturális gyakorlatok erejétől, valamint a történeti tudatosságtól is. A tanulmány hozzájárul a posztkonfliktusos szociológia és a társadalmi inklúzió szociológiájának fejlődéséhez azáltal, hogy hangsúlyozza a közösségalapú megközelítések jelentőségét a társadalmi sérülékenység megértésében és kezelésében.

Kulcsszavak: Maluku, posztkonfliktus, társadalmi sérülékenység, szociológiai perspektíva

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

Social vulnerability, from a sociological perspective, is understood as a condition shaped through complex social processes involving structures of inequality, power relations, and historical dynamics that frame community life. Vulnerability is not merely inherent to individuals; rather, it emerges from the social position of groups within unequal systems, limited access to resources, and weakened social networks that sustain everyday life. In archipelagic regions characterized by infrastructural and connectivity constraints, such conditions may become increasingly complex and layered.

The Province of Maluku, as an archipelagic region in eastern Indonesia, possesses a geographically fragmented character, consisting of islands dispersed and separated by considerable maritime distances. This spatial fragmentation has implications for

the distribution of public services, economic access, and the intensity of social interaction among communities. Limited inter-island connectivity and dependence on sea transportation routes place certain areas in structurally vulnerable positions, particularly small islands and remote regions. Maluku is one of the regions in Indonesia that experienced large-scale communal conflict in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The conflict, which erupted in 1999, evolved into widespread communal violence marked by religious polarization and social identity divisions, resulting in significant loss of life and mass displacement (van Klinken, 2001). These events not only damaged physical infrastructure but also triggered changes in settlement patterns, social segregation, and demographic shifts in several areas.

Although overt violence has ceased and a formal peace process was undertaken through the Malino II Agreement in 2002, numerous studies indicate that post-conflict communities continue to experience long-term social consequences. These impacts include fragmented social relations, intergroup distrust, and unequal access to social and educational resources (Justino, 2021).

This condition underscores that the end of violence does not automatically eliminate the social repercussions of conf-lict, as its historical traces continue to shape the dynamics of community life. In this context, social vulnerability in post-conflict Maluku must be understood as a structural, relational, and historical phenomenon. Structurally, vulnerability is associated with development disparities, infrastructural limitations, and weak institutional capacity across several island regions. Relationally, vulnerability is reflected in low levels of social trust and limited cross-community interaction resulting from prior conflict experiences.

Historically, collective memories of violence and social segregation continue to influence how communities construct social relations and interpret shared life.

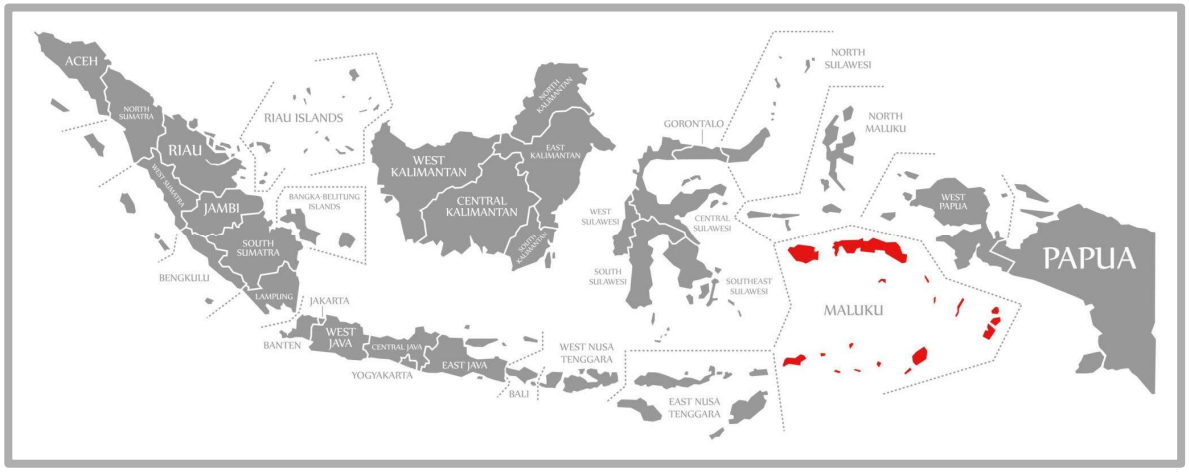
At the same time, Maluku society possesses social capital rooted in customary institutions, deliberative practices, and local solidarity networks. Various community-based initiatives have played an important role in rebuilding trust and strengthening post-conflict social cohesion. The community thus becomes a strategic arena in the process of social recovery, where everyday interactions contribute to the reconstruction of previously fragmented social relations.

Accordingly, Maluku may be understood as an archipelagic social space situated at the intersection of geographic fragmentation, structural inequality, and the historical legacy of conflict. The interaction of these three dimensions shapes a distinctive pattern of social vulnerability in the post-conflict context, while simultaneously opening analytical space to examine how communities collectively manage the impacts of conflict and rebuild social cohesion within a fragmented island environment.

General about Maluku

The Province of Maluku is an archipelagic region in eastern Indonesia that, administratively, consists of several regencies and municipalities distributed across hundreds of large and small islands (Figure 1). The provincial capital is Ambon City, which functions as the administrative hub and a centre of regional mobility. This archipelagic character renders governance in Maluku highly dependent on interisland connectivity and crossadministrative coordination. Geographically, Maluku is dominated by marine areas (Kissiya & Biczó, 2022), with islands unevenly dis-persed and separated by vast stretches of sea. This condition is clearly illustrated on the map of Maluku, which demonstrates the region's spatial fragmentation and the considerable distances between islands. Such a map is essential for understanding constraints related to transportation access, the distribution of public services, and the dynamics of social interaction among communities (BPS, 2024).

Figure 1. Maluku map in Indonesia map.



This geographic fragmentation also contributes to structural vulnerability, particularly for communities residing on small islands and in remote areas. The distribution of islands and the administrative position of Maluku within eastern Indonesia are presented in Figure 1, where the Maluku region is highlighted in red.

The economic character of Maluku, which is largely based on natural resources, not only reflects the ecological potential of an archipelagic region but also demonstrates the close interdependence between geographical conditions and local production patterns. The dominance of primary sectors particularly capture fisheries, marine aquaculture, and subsistence agriculture such as nutmeg, clove, coconut, and sago indicates that economic activities remain highly dependent on environmental dynamics (Andaya, 1993). This dependence renders the regional economy relatively sensitive to external environmental factors, including climate variability, seasonal wind patterns, ocean waves, and the degradation of coastal ecosystems. In addition, limitations in logistical infrastructure and supply chains increase distribution costs, resulting in higher commodity prices on small islands compared to central areas such as Ambon (Leirissa, 1975) .

From the perspective of economic geography, the fragmentation of islands produces decentralized and small-scale market structures. Each island or island cluster tends to develop a semi-autonomous local economic system supported by trade networks grounded in social relations, kinship ties, and customary institutions. This condition demonstrates that regional economic integration is not determined solely by state policies but is also shaped by traditional social networks functioning as informal distribution mechanisms. In this context, the sea does not merely act as a territorial divider but serves as a space of mobility, a route of exchange, and a medium of socio-economic interaction.

Meanwhile, in the socio-cultural dimension, the ethnic and religious diversity of Maluku forms a complex mosaic of collective identities that remain interconnected through local value systems such as *pela-gandong*, *sasi*, and other customary institutions. These institutions function as mechanisms of social regulation as well as community-based conflict resolution systems. Within island societies, customary structures frequently operate as institutions for natural resource governance, indicating that social, ecological, and economic dimensions cannot be analytically separated in a rigid manner (Abdurachman, 2008).

In a post-conflict context, spatial mapping of the

Maluku region constitutes an important analytical tool for understanding demographic distribution, patterns of settlement segregation, and networks of community mobility. Spatial analysis enables the identification of areas with higher levels of social vulnerability, particularly remote islands with limited access to education, healthcare, and economic services. At the same time, spatial approaches offer opportunities for regionally grounded development planning that is more responsive to archipelagic conditions, such as strengthening inter-island connectivity, promoting integrated maritime economies, and revitalizing local social institutions as forms of social capital for reconciliation.

Thus, understanding Maluku cannot be separated from the interrelation among its archipelagic geographical structure, natural resource based economic system, and socio-cultural networks that bind communities across islands. These three dimensions collectively form a distinctive social configuration that shapes development trajectories, regional resilience, and the sustainability of life in eastern Indonesia's island regions.

Theoretical Framework

In contemporary sociological perspectives, social vulnerability is understood not as an individual condition standing in isolation, but as a phenomenon shaped by social relations, power structures, and the broader social history that frames community life. The concept of *social vulnerability* refers to situations in which individuals or groups occupy disadvantaged positions due to limited access to resources, weak social protection mechanisms, and fragile social networks that sustain everyday life (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). Accordingly, social vulnerability is the outcome of structural and relational social processes rather than merely the result of personal choices or individual capacities.

Recent sociological literature emphasizes the multilayered nature of social vulnerability. Structural vulnerability relates to the social positioning of groups within unequal social systems, encompassing economic disparities, limited access to public services, and territorial marginalization. In post-conflict settings, structural vulnerability is often reinforced by weakened institutions and unresolved development inequalities (Justino, 2021).

At the same time, relational vulnerability emerges when conflict erodes trust, disrupts social networks, and produces forms of social segregation within community life. This relational perspective underscores that social well-being is fundamentally dependent on the quality of social relationships and the availability of social capital within society (Krause & Jütersonke, 2022).

In addition, historical vulnerability refers to forms of vulnerability rooted in past experiences particularly collective conflict and violence that continue to be reproduced through social memory and collective narratives (Alexander et al., 2004). Within this framework, post-conflict societies are not understood as communities that have simply "moved beyond" conflict, but rather as societies still engaged in a prolonged and non-linear process of social recovery. Post-conflict sociology conceptualizes the aftermath of conflict as an ongoing arena of social negotiation, in which social relations, group identities, and structures of trust are continuously reconstructed (Mac Ginty, 2010). Conflict leaves social traces that are not only material in nature but also symbolic and emotional, shaping how individuals and groups interact in everyday life.

One significant dimension of post-conflict societies concerns the persistence of collective memory and social trauma. Memories of conflict influence how communities interpret the past and shape attitudes toward other groups, both explicitly and implicitly Assmann, (2006) argue that collective memory is not confined to personal recollection; it is embedded in social practices, community narratives, and cultural symbols. Social trauma, in this sense, extends beyond individual psychological experience and constitutes a collective condition that affects

social cohesion and relational patterns within society (Pihkala, 2024). Consequently, post-conflict recovery cannot be reduced to physical reconstruction or political stabilization alone; it must also encompass the reconstruction of social relationships and shared meanings.

In this recovery process, community plays a central role. Community sociology positions community as a social space in which norms, solidarity, and a sense of belonging are produced and reproduced (Delanty, 2018). In post-conflict contexts, communities often serve as the primary arenas where individuals access social support, rebuild trust, and renegotiate their social identities. Post-conflict social cohesion does not automatically emerge from formal policies; rather, it develops through everyday social interactions that unfold within community life.

Non-formal social mechanisms, such as customary practices, community deliberation forums, and informal solidarity networks, constitute important instruments in processes of social recovery. Recent studies indicate that community-based mechanisms tend to be more adaptive and context-sensitive than top-down approaches that rely solely on formal institutions (Mac Ginty, 2010).

These mechanisms enable communities to manage residual tensions, rebuild social relationships, and gradually restore a sense of collective security. Within this perspective, community is not viewed as a passive object of policy intervention, but as an active social actor capable of managing vulnerability and fostering postconflict social resilience. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study conceptualizes post-conflict social vulnerability as a structural, relational, and historical phenomenon, while emphasizing the central role of community and social relations in recovery processes. This sociological approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of post-conflict dynamics by highlighting how communities collectively confront and manage vulnerability through social practices rooted in lived experience and local contexts.

Post-Conflict Maluku as a Space of Social Vulnerability: A Sociological Interpretation of the Findings

Structurally, the findings indicate that the archipelagic geographical configuration, limited access to social and economic services, and the weakened institutional capacity in the aftermath of conflict have collectively produced objective conditions that intensify social vulnerability. Within the sociology of inequality and conflict, such conditions are conceptualized as structural vulnerability that is, vulnerability arising from unequal social positioning within broader social, economic, and political systems (Justino, 2021). In post-conflict Maluku, structural vulnerability is tangibly reflected in the limited access of island communities to basic services. Communities residing on small and remote islands encounter significant geographic barriers in accessing secondary education, referral health services, and economic markets. Dependence on irregular maritime transportation and high logistical costs further exacerbates disparities in comparison to populations living in larger island urban centres.

In the post-conflict context, these structural constraints are compounded by institutional capacities that have not fully recovered, including the limited presence of public service providers and the delayed distribution of social programs to peripheral regions. Consequently, structural vulnerability manifests not only in economic deprivation but also in heightened uncertainty and diminished trust toward formal state institutions, as emphasized in the literature on inequality and conflict (Justino, 2021). Such structural vulnerability affects not only material well-being but also shapes perceptions of social security and levels of public confidence in state institutions.

At the relational level, the findings demonstrate that past conflict has left enduring traces in the form

of fragmented social relations and low levels of intergroup trust. Patterns of social interaction that remain characterized by caution, subtle forms of social segregation, and weakened solidarity networks reflect relational vulnerability. From a relational sociological perspective, social well-being is fundamentally dependent upon the quality of social relationships and the availability of social capital within communities (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). When social networks are disrupted by conflict, individuals and groups become more susceptible to social exclusion, marginalization, and social insecurity.

In post-conflict Maluku, relational vulnerability is evident in the continued cautiousness of intergroup interactions. In everyday life, for instance, communities tend to confine cross-group relations to public spaces perceived as "safe," while more intimate forms of interaction such as economic cooperation, intergroup marriage, or cross-community social networks develop at a slower pace compared to the pre-conflict period. Furthermore, the weakening of intercommunity solidarity networks becomes apparent during periods of social or economic crisis, when social support circulates predominantly within homogeneous group boundaries. This condition reflects limited intergroup trust and illustrates how past conflict continues to shape the quality of social relations. From a relational sociological standpoint, the restricted development of cross-group networks heightens the risk of social exclusion and deepens the vulnerability of post-conflict communities (Varshney, 2017).

Moreover, the historical dimension emerges as a key factor in shaping post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku. The findings indicate that collective memories of conflict and social trauma remain embedded in community narratives and everyday social practices. From the perspective of cultural sociology and memory studies, experiences of collective violence do not cease as historical events; rather, they are continuously reproduced through collective memory, symbolic representations, and intergenerational social attitudes (Assmann, 2011). This historical dimension helps explain why social vulnerability tends to persist despite the relative maintenance of security stability. In post-conflict Maluku, historical vulnerability can be observed through the enduring presence of conflict memory in community narratives and cross-generational social practices. For example, past experiences of violence frequently surface in family stories, informal commemorations, or protective parental attitudes toward children's interactions with members of other groups. Such narratives shape how younger generations interpret social space and intergroup relations, even when they have not directly experienced the conflict.

Additionally, intergenerational social trauma is reflected in the tendency to avoid certain topics, territories, or social symbols associated with the conflict period. From a cultural-sociological and memory-based perspective, the reproduction of such memories elucidates why social vulnerability may endure over the long term, even under condi-tions of relative security stability (Alexander et al., 2004). This dynamic is illustrated in Figure 2.

The three dimensions, supported by empirical illustrations, demonstrate that social vulnerability in post-conflict Maluku is not an abstract construct but is embedded in everyday social practices. Structural vulnerability constrains life opportunities; relational vulnerability shapes the quality of social interactions; and historical vulnerability influences how communities interpret both their past and their anticipated futures. These examples reinforce the argument that post-conflict social vulnerability should be understood as a multidimensional social process requiring a community-based sociological approach.

These dimensions are mutually interconnected and collectively constitute post-conflict Maluku as a space of social vulnerability.

Figure 2. Post-Conflict Social Vulnerability in Maluku. Source: Author.

This space is not solely geographical in character but also social and symbolic, wherein social boundaries, group identities, and power relations are continuously negotiated through everyday interactions. Such an interpretation aligns with post-conflict sociological perspectives that conceptualize vulnerability as a circular social process, continuously produced and reproduced through the interplay of structural conditions, social relations, and conflict memory (Gery & Beim, 2007). Nevertheless, the findings of this study also indicate that social vulnerability in Maluku is neither absolute nor incapacitating. Community-based customary practices and networks of social solidarity function as important mechanisms for managing and mitigating vulnerability. Through customary deliberation processes, informal solidarity networks, and value-based socialization within communities, local actors actively seek to restore social relations and renegotiate conflict memories. From the perspective of community sociology, these practices demonstrate the social agency of communities in responding to post-conflict conditions, while also illustrating how non-formal mechanisms can complement the limitations of formal institutional interventions (Hickey & du Toit, 2007).

The Role of Community in Managing Vulnerability: Customary Institutions, Solidarity, and Value-Based Education

Within the setting of post conflict Maluku, local communities play a central role in managing and mitigating social vulnerability across its structural, relational, and historical dimensions. The findings indicate that communities function not merely as

social spaces in which vulnerability is experienced, but also as collective actors that actively construct mechanisms of recovery and social resilience. From the perspective of community sociology, this role is manifested through customary institutions, networks of social solidarity, and value-based education processes that operate in non-formal and sustained ways.

Customary institutions constitute one of the principal social mechanisms through which post-conflict vulnerability is managed. In contemporary sociological and anthropological scholarship, *adat* is conceptualized as a social institution that regulates social relations, establishes shared norms, and provides community-based mechanisms for conflict resolution and reconciliation (Mac Ginty, 2010). In Maluku, customary practices such as community deliberation forums and value-based regulation of social relations grounded in collective cohesion play a significant role in restoring trust that was eroded by conflict. Through *adat*, communities create socially legitimate spaces for dialogue that enable the renegotiation of social identities and group boundaries in relatively secure and culturally accepted ways.

Beyond customary institutions, social solidarity functions as a critical buffer in addressing post-conflict vulnerability. The findings indicate that informal solidarity networks manifested in interfamily assistance, community-based support, and collective labour practices serve as social protection mechanisms in contexts where formal state interventions have not fully reached affected populations. From a relational sociological perspective, the quality of social relationships and the availability of social capital significantly shape a community's capacity to cope with risk and uncertainty (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). Social solidarity enables individuals and groups to provide mutual support, mitigate feelings of isolation, and gradually reconstruct a sense of social security in everyday life.

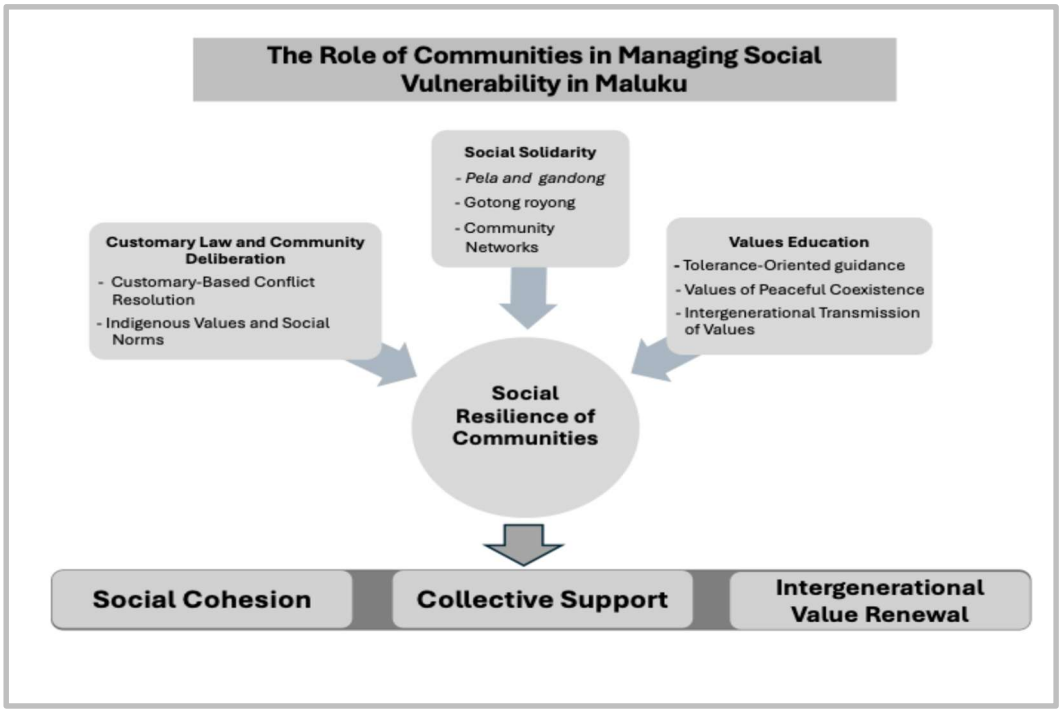
Another equally significant dimension concerns value-based education embedded within family and community life. In post-conflict contexts, value education is not confined to formal schooling institutions; rather, it is integrated into everyday social practices, caregiving patterns, and intergenerational interactions. The findings indicate that values such as tolerance, coexistence, and collective responsibility are transmitted through community narratives, exemplary conduct, and routine social practices. Within contemporary sociology of education, such forms of value-based education are conceptualized as part of broader processes of social learning that contribute to the formation of social cohesion and the prevention of conflict reproduction in the future (Biesta, 2021).

These three elements customary institutions, social solidarity, and value-based education operate in an interconnected manner in managing post-conflict social vulnerability. Customary institutions provide a normative framework; social solidarity strengthens networks of mutual support; and value-based education ensures the intergenerational continuity of social cohesion. From a community sociological perspective, these mechanisms demonstrate the social agency of communities in responding to post-conflict conditions, while also underscoring that social recovery does not depend solely on formal policy interventions but is equally grounded in community-based social practice.

Accordingly, the role of community in managing vulnerability in post-conflict Maluku affirms that vulnerability and social capacity coexist simultaneously. Communities are not merely spaces where vulnerability is experienced, but also arenas in which social resilience is actively constructed through customary practices, solidarity networks, and value-based education.

This understanding is essential to avoid approaches that reduce post-conflict recovery to structural interventions alone, and to emphasize the importance of a community-based sociological perspective in interpreting and responding to post-conflict dynamics. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. The Role of Community in Managing Social Vulnerability in Maluku Source: Author, 2026.



Conclusion

This article argues that post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku, Indonesia, cannot be understood as a temporary condition or merely as a residual effect of past violence. Rather, it constitutes an ongoing social process produced through the interaction of structural, relational, and historical dimensions. From a sociological perspective, the post-conflict context represents an arena in which structural inequalities, damaged social relations, and collective memory and trauma continue to shape everyday social experiences. The findings demonstrate that structural vulnerability in Maluku is rooted in its archipelagic geographical configuration, limited access to socio-economic services, and the weakened institutional capacity that persists in the aftermath of conflict. These conditions systematically constrain life opportunities for local communities. Relational vulnerability is reflected in low levels of intergroup trust, fragmented social networks, and segregated patterns of interaction, all of which weaken social capital and heighten the risk of social exclusion. Meanwhile, historical vulnerability emerges through the enduring presence of conflict memory and intergenerational social trauma, shaping how communities interpret social relations, collective identities, and perceptions of security.

Nevertheless, this article also shows that social vulnerability in Maluku is neither total nor deterministic. Community-based customary practices, social solidarity, and value-oriented education function as significant social mechanisms for managing and mitigating vulnerability. Through these practices, local communities demonstrate social agency in rebuilding relationships, renegotiating conflict memory, and generating contextually grounded forms of social resilience. These findings underscore that post-conflict recovery depends not only on structural and

institutional interventions, but also on the vitality of non-formal social mechanisms embedded within community life.

Theoretically, this study contributes to post-conflict sociology by emphasizing the importance of a relational historical approach to social vulnerability in understanding the dynamics of post-conflict societies. Such an approach enables a more comprehensive interpretation of social vulnerability as a multidimensional process, while avoiding its reduction to purely economic or security-related dimensions. In this sense, post-conflict Maluku can be understood not only as a space of social vulnerability, but also as a space in which social capacity and community resilience are continuously constructed through everyday social practices.

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF VEDDHA IDENTITY INTO A MODERN MYTH IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

This article examines how the ethnic identity of the Veddha community in Sri Lanka has been transformed into a modern myth through dominant practices of representation. Based on Eriksen's understanding of ethnic identity as dynamic and socially constructed and Barthes's theory of modern mythology, the present study argues that Veddha identity is not inherently primitive or static but is actively reshaped through cultural, political, and symbolic processes. Tourism, media, and political discourse continue to portray the Veddha community as timeless forest dwellers belonging to the past, although they are integrated into the modern Sri Lankan society where they have access to formal education, wage labor, and everyday use of modern technologies. The article utilizes qualitative insights from fieldwork and textual analysis to show how political discourse uses Veddha identity as national heritage. This hides the effects of development, conservation, and land dispossession. Similarly, media narratives depoliticize cultural change by framing it as a natural disappearance. Tourism promotes the staged performance and commercialization of specific cultural practices. These processes simplify history, erase power relations, and naturalize inequality. The article concludes that the Veddhas have become a modern myth not because of their lived realities, but because of how they are represented. It highlights the need to recognize them as a living ethnic community with agency, rights, and an ongoing place in contemporary Sri Lankan society.

Keywords: Veddaha, Identity, Modern Myth, Tourism, Media.
Diszcipline: cultural antrophology

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Absztrakt

A VEDDHA IDENTITÁS MODERN MÍTOSSZÁ ALAKULÁSA SRÍ LANKÁN

Jelen tanulmány azt vizsgálja, miként alakult át a Srí Lankán élő veddha közösség etnikai identitása modern mítosszá a reprezentáció domináns gyakorlatai révén. A tanulmányban megjelenő vizsgálata Thomas Hylland Eriksen által képviselt, az etnikai identitást dinamikus és társadalmilag konstruált jelenségként értelmező megközelítésre, valamint Roland Barthes modern mitológiáról szóló elméletére támaszkodva amellett érvel, hogy a veddha identitás nem inherensen primitív vagy statikus, hanem kulturális, politikai és szimbolikus folyamatok révén folyamatosan újraformálódik. A turizmus, a média és a politikai diskurzus a veddha közösséget mindmáig a múlt részeként létező erdőlakókként reprezentálja, jóllehet annak tagjai integrálódtak a modern srí lankai társadalomba, így hozzáférnek a formális oktatáshoz, a bérmunkához, valamint a modern technológiák mindennapi használatához. A tanulmány terepmunkából származó kvalitatív meglátások és szövegelemzés segítségével mutatja be, hogy miként használja fel a politikai diskurzus a veddha identitást nemzeti örökségként, ezáltal elfedve a fejlesztések, a természetvédelem és a földkisajátítás következményeit. Hasonlóképpen, a médiában megjelenő narratívák depolitizálják a kulturális változásokat azáltal, hogy azokat természetes eltűnésként keretezik. A turizmus pedig bizonyos kulturális gyakorlatok megrendezett performativitását és kommercializációját ösztönzi. E folyamatok leegyszerűsítik a történelmet, eltörlik a hatalmi viszonyokat, és természetesként tüntetik fel az egyenlőtlenségeket. A tanulmány arra a következtetésre jut, hogy a veddhák nem a megélt valóságuk következtében váltak modern mítosszá, hanem reprezentációjuk módja révén. Mindez rámutat annak szükségességére, hogy a közösséget élő, cselekvőképes etnikai közösségként ismerjük el, amely jogokkal rendelkezik, és amely a kortárs srí lankai társadalomban továbbra is aktív szerepet tölt be.

Kulcsszavak: Veddha, identitás, modern mítosz, turizmus, média.

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

Ethnic identity is a crucial concept for understanding how people see themselves and how they are seen by others in society. It refers to a shared sense of belonging that is based on common cultural elements such as history, language, traditions, symbols, and ideas about origin. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains that ethnicity is not a biological or fixed concept. Instead, it is a social process that becomes meaningful through relationships between groups (Eriksen, 2010). Ethnic identity develops when an individual perceives themselves as distinct from others and is acknowledged by others as a distinct group. These differrences are maintained through social boundaries. These boundaries may develop over time due to changes in political, economic, and historical conditions. Therefore, ethnic identity should be understood as something dynamic, not permanent or natural, (Eriksen, 2010) further states that an ethnic group does not have to be culturally uniform in all aspects. Shared belief in a common origin and cultural differences are matters. Ethnicity often becomes more visible when groups experience unequal power relations or when their identity is addressed and shaped by institutions such as the state, media, or education systems.

This perspective is particularly beneficial when examining Indigenous communities, because their identities are frequently influenced by both their

personal experiences and the relationships portrayed by outsiders.

Considering the Sri Lankan context, the Veddhas, also known as the Wanniyalaetto, are widely regarded as both the indigenous community of Sri Lanka and an ethnic group (Stegeborn, 2004). They are often characterised by a common ancestry, a distinct cultural legacy, and a strong historical bond to specific landscapes, especially forest areas. Historically, the Veddhas community engaged in hunting and gathering. They had their own belief systems and maintained social practices closely connected to nature (Seligman, 1911). These shared cultural practices, along with a deep sense of belonging and shared identity, show that the Veddhas are more than just a group defined by a particular way of life. They are a people bound together as an ethnic community.

However, the ethnic identity of the Veddhas has never been static. Over the years, their lifestyles have transformed because of colonial rule, government policies, development projects, conservation laws, and increased interaction with the broader Sri Lankan society. Numerous Veddha families currently reside in established communities, enrol their children in educational institutions, participate in paid work and use modern technologies such as Internet, mobile phones. They often communicate in Sinhala or Tamil alongside or in place of their native language. These transformations indicate that Veddha society is integrated into contemporary Sri Lanka and continues to adapt to new conditions.

Despite these ongoing changes, dominant representations of the Veddhas often present a simplified and static image. In popular imagination, the Veddhas are often described as primitive, unchanging or timeless forest dwellers. This gap between everyday life and public representation raises an important question: Why are the Veddhas still imagined as belonging to the past when their daily lives clearly show adaptation and change? To address this question, the concept of modern mythology is particularly useful.

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes explains that myth is neither an ancient story nor a deceptive belief. Rather, myth serves as a modern system of communication that gives cultural significance to routine images, words, and actions (Barthes, 1972). According to Barthes, myth operates by transforming a historically and socially constructed concept into something perceived as natural and eternal. Also, Myth eliminates history and politics, making cultural concepts seem normal and unquestionable. Thus, myth does not entirely hide reality, but it simplifies and reshapes it.

Furthermore, Barthes noted that modern myth functions on two levels of meaning. Firstly, an image or object carries a straightforward, literal meaning. Secondly, society actively assigns it a broader cultural meaning. For instance, a photograph of a person is not just a visual record. It can also become a symbol of tradition, purity, or national identity. This added meaning reflects the values and interests of those who produce and circulate these images. As a result, modern myth is closely connected to the concepts of power. Thus, it allows dominant ideas to appear natural while hiding social inequalities and historical processes.

Moreover, applying this concept to ethnic identity helps to explain how certain groups are transformed into symbols instead of being recognized as dynamic, evolving communities. In many societies worldwide, indigenous peoples are often portrayed as rooted in past, closely connected to nature, as being closer to nature, or as the "original" people of the nation. These representations may seem respectful. Yet, they often simplify lived realities and ignore present-day struggles. Hence, myths become powerful cultural tools that shape how ethnic identities are understood and valued. In Sri Lanka, the process of modern myth-making is evident in the way Veddha community is represented.

Tourism resources, media narratives, and political discourse often repeat similar images of the Veddhas. In such sources Veddhas are frequently shown wearing traditional attire, holding bows and arrows, living in forests, and positioned outside modern society. As these images circulate widely and repeatedly, they begin to feel natural and true, even when they no longer reflect everyday realities of Veddha life.

Furthermore, this myth-making process is deeply connected to nationalism, heritage discourse, and tourism. Within national narratives, the Veddhas are often described as the "original people" of Sri Lanka, symbolizing ancient roots and cultural purity (Smith, 1999). In the field of tourism, their identity is exoticized and presented as cultural heritage for visitors (Urry, 2002). Additionally, in the field of education, textbook tend to portray them as belonging to the past, ignoring their adaptation to the modern realities. Therefore, these representations create a modern myth of the Veddhas as timeless forest people who exist outside history. According to Barthes, this myth conceals the political and social influences that have affected their existence, including land dispossession, displacement, and economic exclusion.

Based on the given background information, the main aim of the present article is to understand how the ethnic identity of the Veddha community has been transformed into a modern myth in Sri Lanka. In accordance with Barthes, myth is viewed not as a falsehood but rather as a cultural process that influences meaning and perception. The article explores how portrayals of the Veddhas serve as myths that streamline history, eliminate political context, and transform a vibrant ethnic identity into a symbolic representation.

The primary research question that directs this article is 'How has the ethnic identity of the Veddha community been transformed into a modern myth in Sri Lanka?' The primary objective of this article is to examine the process by which the Veddhas' ethnic identity is mythologised in modern Sri Lankan society, drawing on Eriksen's understanding of ethnic identity and Barthes's theory of modern mythology. Through the integration of these perspectives, the article argues that the Veddhas became modern myths not because of who they are, but because of how they are represented by society.

Discussion

Tourism plays a significant role in reshaping the ethnic identity of the Veddha community into a modern myth in Sri Lanka. Tourism portrays the Veddhas not as an evolving community but rather as a cultural representation crafted to fulfill the expectations of the tourists. This process can be clearly understood through theories from tourism anthropology, particularly John Urry's concept of the "tourist gaze," along with the concepts of exotization and heritagization.

According to John Urry, tourism involves not just travel but also the perspectives that tourists have on people and locations. When the tourists arrive, they come with expectations as they have looked into the media, guidebooks, and popular imagination. They do not look for everyday reality. Instead, they look for something "different," "traditional," and "authentic." (Urry, 2002). Urry, (2002) refers to this perspective as the *tourist gaze*. It strongly influences how local communities present themselves. He further argues that this gaze is not natural but organized and regulated by professionals such as tour guides, hotel operators, travel agencies, and media producers, who determine what tourists encounter and how these encounters are framed. Consequently, local communities often highlight or perform selected aspects of their culture to meet tourist expectations. In the case of the Veddhas, tourism encourages the performance of a particular identity that aligns with the tourist gaze.

During fieldwork in Dambana, it was clearly observed that many tourists visit that village specifically to see the Veddha people. Tourists' interests are

focused on aspects such as their physical appearance, rituals, dwellings, and traditional customs. These interests create economic opportunities for the community as many Veddha families sell handicrafts made from natural materials, such as bows, arrows, and ornaments. These items are promoted as "primitive" or "ancient," reflecting tourists' expectations that the Veddhas embody a pre-modern way of life. In order to sustain their livelihoods, the community frequently presents itself in ways that align with these tourist expectations.

Picture 1. Two Veddha men selling handicrafts made from natural materials, ornaments, and honey in Dambana Village, Sri Lanka, 2018. Photograph by Sumuthu Manaranga.

This is where the concept of exotization becomes significant. Exotization refers to the representation of a group as strange, different, and detached from modern life (Urry, 2002). Within tourism, the Veddhas are frequently portrayed as forest people who are closer to nature and untouched by modern society. While this image is appealing to tourists, it does not reflect everyday realities. In contemporary society in Sri Lanka, many Veddhas reside in permanent villages, wear modern clothing, use mobile phones, and take part in the national economy. However, these modern aspects are frequently concealed from tourists because they conflict with the exotic image that visitors expect to encounter.

A clear example of this process can be found in the staged performance of the ritual known as *kirikoraha*. During fieldwork, it was observed that there is a special space in the village where this ritual is performed for visitors. In these performances, Veddha participants wear leaves on their bodies, remain partially nude on the upper body, and act out the ritual in a dramatic way. Tourists are informed that this represents a traditional Veddha ritual, and they often believe they are observing an authentic cultural practice.

Picture 2. Veddha shaman preparing for the Kiri Koraha ritual dance during fieldwork in Dambana, Sri Lanka, 2023. Photograph by the author.

However, in reality, *kirikoraha* has not traditionally been a ritual performed for a public audience. Historically, it was conducted only for special purposes, such as healing illness or seeking prosperity. It is a private ritual, known only within the community. It was never performed on demand. Therefore, the tourist version of the ritual is not a genuine ritual, but rather a performance. This performance exists mainly to satisfy tourist curiosity and generate income.

This ritual performance provides a clear example of heritagization**.** Heritagization refers to the process of turning living cultural practices into fixed heritage items intended for display. When a ritual is detached from its social and spiritual context and repeatedly staged as a performance, it becomes heritage rather than lived culture (Urry, 2002). In this process, the ritual is simplified, standardized, and made safe for tourist consumption. As a result, Veddha culture is presented as a museum-like exhibit rather than a dynamic and living system of meaning.

Another significant example identified during the fieldwork is the way some hotels in Sri Lanka market wedding packages that include so-called "Veddha traditions." In these packages, especially for foreign tourists, couples are invited to celebrate their weddings "according to Veddha tradition." Selected members of the Veddha community are transported to hotels or urban venues to stage symbolic wedding rituals. Although these performances are presented as authentic cultural practices, they are largely constructed for tourist entertainment rather than rooted in everyday cultural life.

In authentic Veddha society, wedding practices adhere to specific customs that are deeply meaningful within family and community life. These practices are closely tied to social relationships, obligations, and cultural values. They are not intended for public display or commercial use. However, in tourist-oriented weddings, these traditions are simplified, shortened, and turned into a visual performance. Their deeper social significance is removed to make them easily accessible and appealing to tourists.

This process can be understood through the theory of cultural commodification. Cultural commodification refers to the conversion of cultural practices, symbols, or identities into marketable products that can be bought and sold (Greenwood, 1989). Within tourism, culture is often repackaged as an experience or attraction. In this case, Veddha wedding traditions are no longer treated as elements of a living social system, but are transformed into cultural products that generate profit for hotels and the wider tourism industry.

Picture 3. Wedding ceremony at The Barnhouse, Panadura, Sri Lanka, featuring a Polish couple celebrating with Veddha-inspired traditions, 2026. Photograph by the author.

Commodification also reshapes power relations within the Veddha community. Tourism encourages the emergence of visible "leaders" or "spokespersons" who maintain close links with tour guides, hotel managers, and tourism authorities. These individuals are often selected to perform rituals, participate in tourist events, and represent the entire community. Although this role can bring economic benefits to them and to certain families, it also concentrates control over cultural representation in the hands of a few.

As a result of tourism and cultural commodification expanding, the public image of the Veddha community becomes selective and simplified. Only those cultural elements that are attractive and profitable for tourists are shown, such as traditional clothing, rituals, and performances. Everyday reali-

ties, such as modern education, wage labour, social change, and political struggles, are often hidden. Through commodification, Veddha ethnic identity is turned into a cultural product. Their traditions are detached from their original social and cultural context and repackaged as purchasable heritage experiences. Consequently, what tourists encounter is not everyday Veddha life, but a carefully staged version that aligns with their expectations of "authentic" Indigenous culture.

This selective form of representation directly contributes to the creation of modern myths. Many tourists leave places such as Dambana with the belief that the Veddhas are still primitive, forest-dwelling people who live exactly as they did centuries ago. This perception is not created by the Veddhas alone, but by the entire tourism system, including tour guides, hotels, brochures, and tourists' own expectations. As Roland Barthes explains, myth does not completely deny reality. Instead, it simplifies reality and removes history. Similarly, tourism presents a timeless and naturalized image of the Veddhas while hiding the social and economic changes that shape their lives today. Thus, tourism does more than merely display Veddha culture. It actively reshapes it. Exotization renders the Veddhas premodern and distinct, while heritagization confines their culture to fixed and repetitive forms. Together, these processes transform Veddha ethnic identity into a modern myth that serves the tourism industry while obscuring the community's lived and changing realities.

The media also plays an important role in transforming the ethnic identity of the Veddha community into a modern myth in Sri Lanka. Through television programs, newspapers, documentaries, and digital media, the Veddhas are often portrayed not as a dynamic and evolving ethnic group, but as symbols of an ancient past. These representations strongly influence how both tourists and the wider public understand who the Veddhas are and what their culture represents.

Research on the Veddhas of Dambana indicates that the media has become one of the strongest external forces influencing both public perception and the community's own sense of identity (Senarath, 2023).

Media narratives frequently describe the Veddhas using terms such as "disappearing tribe," "last forest people," or "original inhabitants." While these descriptions create sympathy and curiosity, they reduce the community to a single emotional image. The Veddhas are portrayed as belonging to nature and the past, rather than as contemporary citizens confronting issues such as land disposition, access to education, employment challenges, and political marginalization.

This process can be clearly understood through Roland Barthes' concept of myth as depoliticized speech. Barthes argues that myth does not lie. Instead, it removes social realities of their historical and political dimensions, making them appear natural, inevitable, and timeless (Barthes, 1972). Media portrayals of the Veddhas seldom address the structural forces behind their cultural transformation, including forest conservation policies, the erosion of hunting rights, forced relocation, and state-led development initiatives. Rather than contextualising these factors, the media frames Veddha culture as "naturally disappearing," suggesting an inevitable and self-generated process of change (Senarath, 2023)

For example, many documentaries focus on elderly Veddha men recalling forest life and the loss of traditional practices. Although these images appear respectful, they usually fail to explain that the decline of many traditions resulted from the government's restriction on forest access and criminalisation of hunting (Senarath, 2023). By excluding this political context, media narratives suggest that cultural loss is unavoidable. This reflects what Barthes identifies as depoliticization, where audiences are not encouraged to question the underlying causes of change (Barthes, 1972).

A very strong example of media-driven myth-making is the repeated emphasis on a single ritual dance, kirikoraha. Most television programs and documentaries show only this ritual when representing Veddha dance culture. As a result, many people outside the community, including both tourists and local Sri Lankans, come to believe that the Veddhas possess only one ritual dance and that it defines their entire cultural identity. However, this assumption is inaccurate and oversimplifies the richness and diversity of Veddha cultural life.

In reality, the Veddha community practices a range of rituals, many of which are performed only for specific purposes such as healing, protection, or ensuring prosperity. Some rituals are known exclusively within the community and are not intended for public display. However, media producers tend to highlight only those practices that are visually striking and easily accessible, often without in-depth research. Through the repeated portrayal of kirikoraha alone, the media elevates a single ritual into a symbol representing the entire culture.

This form of selective representation contributes to the creation of modern myth. In Barthes' terms, kirikoraha becomes a second-order sign. It comes to symbolize "primitive tribal culture" as a whole rather than signifying one ritual among many (Barthes, 1972)(Barthes 1972). Through constant repetition, this image appears natural and unquestionable. Therefore, audiences are led to believe that the Veddhas remain primitive and unchanged, despite the complexity and diversity of their contemporary lives.

Similarly, media narratives tend to privilege Dambana as the "authentic" Veddha village, while overlooking other Veddha communities living in different regions. This emphasises a single, fixed image of Veddha identity and conceals internal diversity within the community (Senarath, 2023). As a result, the public is encouraged to imagine all Veddhas as living and behaving in the same way.

Another important effect of the media can be observed among the younger generation. Research studies show that Veddha youth are actively engaged with modern technologies, such as mobile phones, television, and social media (Senarath, 2023). However, as the media continues to portray Veddhas as strange, primitive, and backward, many young people feel uneasy about openly identifying themselves as Veddha. Hence, some choose to conceal their ethnic identity in schools and public spaces to avoid stigma and negative stereotypes. This demonstrates that media-generated myths influence not only how outsiders view the community, but also how the Veddhas understand and perceive themselves.

In this way, the media transforms the ethnic identity of the Veddhas into a modern myth. The community is represented primarily as a symbol of an ancient past rather than as a group living in contemporary society. As Barthes explains, myth transforms history into nature. Media representations often suggest that the Veddhas are either disappearing or remaining unchanged, while concealing the political, social, and economic forces that continue to shape their lives today.

Similarly, Sri Lankan political discourse has also played a significant role in transforming the ethnic identity of the Veddha community into a modern myth. Political narratives often present the Veddhas as symbols of the nation's ancient heritage rather than as a living ethnic community with present-day rights and challenges. Through state policies, speeches, and development initiatives, the government has contributed to portraying the Veddhas as "primitive," "backwards," or "disappearing," while hiding the political factors that have led to their marginalisation.

One of the key ways in which politics contributes to this myth is through development and conservation policies**.** After independence, the Sri Lankan government regarded the Veddhas' hunting-and-gathering way of life as a sign of backwardness that required transformation. Large-scale development projects such as the Gal Oya Scheme and the Mahaweli Development Project displaced Veddha com-

munities from their traditional ancestral forest lands and relocated them to the resettlement villages (Stegeborn, 2004). These interventions were promoted by the politicians as symbols of "modernization" and "progress". However, they failed to recognize the Veddhas' deep cultural and economic connection to the forest. As a result, the loss of land and livelihood was presented as an inevitable outcome of development rather than the result of deliberate political choices.

At the same time, conservation policies strengthened the myth of the Veddhas as "forest people." When areas like Maduru Oya were declared national parks, Veddhas were banned from hunting, gathering honey, or entering lands they had inhabited for generations (Stegeborn, 2004). Politically, the forests were redefined as a space reserved exclusively for wildlife, not for human presence. This made the Veddhas appear as people who belong to nature but not to the modern state. Although their traditional livelihoods were criminalized, this form of structural violence was hidden behind the discourse of environmental protection.

Political speeches and national narratives further contribute to myth-making. The Veddhas are often described as the "first people" or "living heritage" of Sri Lanka. While such expressions may appear respectful, they reduce the community to cultural symbols rather than recognizing them as citizens with rights. As Obeyesekere (1990) argues, both colonial and postcolonial narratives have consistently portrayed the Veddhas as primitive and timeless, enabling the state to treat them as historical objects instead of political subjects (Obeyesekere, 1990). This symbolic use of Veddha identity enhances national pride while ignoring everyday realities such as poverty, limited access to education, and ongoing land insecurity.

Drawing on Roland Barthes' theory, this form of political representation can be understood as myth functioning as depoliticised speech. Myth does not deny reality. It removes historical and political contexts, making social conditions appear natural and unquestionable (Barthes, 1972). In the case of the Veddhas, political decisions regarding land ownership, development, and conservation are obscured. Their circumstances are explained as the inevitable decline of a "primitive culture." This myth enables the state to distance itself from responsibility for the outcomes of its policies.

In this way, Sri Lankan politics contributes to the transformation of Veddha ethnic identity into a modern myth. The Veddhas are portrayed either as ancient symbols of the nation's origin or as a group that must be modernized and absorbed into the dominant society. Both views hide the underlying political processes that have produced their marginalization. By turning history into nature, political discourse makes inequality appear normal and inevitable, reinforcing the modern myth of the Veddhas as a disappearing people rather than a community shaped by state power and policy decisions.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the ethnic identity of the Veddha community in Sri Lanka has been transformed into a modern myth through processes of representation rather than lived reality. Drawing on Eriksen's concept of ethnic identity as dynamic and Barthes' theory of modern mythology, it is evident that the Veddhas are not inherently "primitive" or "unchanging". Instead, they are constructed to appear this way through social, cultural, and political processes.

Tourism, media, and politics each play a key role in this myth-making process. Tourism promotes the selective performance of traditions to satisfy visitor expectations. The media repeatedly circulates simplified images and narratives that portray the Veddhas as disappearing forest dwellers. Political discourse, meanwhile, uses the Veddhas as symbols of national origins while obscuring the consequences

of development policies, land dispossession, and conservation laws. Across these domains, history and political accountability are erased, and Veddha identity is presented as natural, fixed, and timeless.

As Barthes argues, myth transforms history into nature. In the Sri Lankan context, the Veddhas have become a modern myth not because of who they are, but because of how they are represented. This myth hides pressing realities such as land loss, social marginalization, and the identity struggles faced by younger generations. Recognizing and unpacking this process is essential if the Veddha community is to be understood not as a symbol of the past, but as a living ethnic group with rights, agency, and a future within modern Sri Lankan society.

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COMMODITISED THE SACRED: GNAWA FROM RITUALS AND TRADITIONS TO STARDOM

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Abstract

Influenced remarkable iconic figures in the music scene, their echo reached the farthest corners of the world, attracted souls and spirits to join its magic. Led Zeppelin, Bob Marley, Jimmy Hendrix and many other artists from Jazz, blues and rock made a fusion music with their special music and rhythms. In Morocco, the community of Gnawa is not just an ethnic group but rather a significant cultural patrimony of the country that has been inscribed by the UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage due to its authenticity and special rituals. Despite the huge fame, the commoditisation factors and the tourism, Gnawa preserved its traditions and rituals for the healing purposes, which keep this community sacred and authentic. Gnawa became a cultural phenomenon and movement that influenced many people from all over the world.

Keywords: the sacred, commoditisation, popularity, rituals, music
Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

A SZENT KOMMODIFIKÁCIÓJA: A GNAWA A RITUÁLÉKTÓL ÉS HAGYOMÁNYOKTÓL A NEMZETKÖZI ELISMERTSÉGIG

A gnawa zenei és rituális gyakorlatok jelentős hatást gyakoroltak a globális zenei színtér meghatározó alakjaira, visszhangjuk a világ legtávolabbi pontjaira is eljutott, és sajátos spirituális és esztétikai világába

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különböző kulturális közösségeket vonzott. Olyan előadók, mint a Led Zeppelin, Bob Marley vagy Jimi Hendrix, valamint számos jazz-, blues- és rockzenész integrálták a gnawa ritmikai és zenei elemeit, hozzájárulva hibrid zenei formák kialakulásához. Marokkóban a gnawa közösség nem csupán etnikai csoportként értelmezhető, hanem az ország kiemelkedő kulturális örökségének része, amelyet az UNESCO az autenticitása és sajátos rituális gyakorlatai miatt az emberiség szellemi kulturális örökségeként ismert el. A növekvő nemzetközi ismertség, a kommodifikáció (árucikké válás) folyamatai és a turizmus hatásai ellenére a gnawa közösség megőrizte hagyományainak és rituáléinak – különösen a gyógyító célú gyakorlatoknak – lényegi elemeit. E folytonosságok hozzájárulnak ahhoz, hogy a gnawa kultúra továbbra is szakrális és autentikus jelleggel bírjon. Ennek következtében a gnawa napjainkra transznacionális kulturális jelenséggé és mozgalommá vált, amely világszerte hatást gyakorol különböző közönségekre és kulturális diskurzusokra.

Kulcsszavak: szentség; kommodifikáció; népszerűség; rituálék; zene
Tudományterület: kulturális antropológia

All these games, these sacrifices, these dances that everyone may attend are, of course, destined to hide the secret knowledge of the initiates, but they also constitute the processes of memory that allow them to find in the slightest detail all the alchemy of the human soul, which is that of the world and of God. – Viviana Pâques

Introduction:

The history of Gnawa is rooted back to the enslavement period in Africa. With the end of the twentieth century, Gnawa identity became more porous with the creation of the Gnawa and World Music Festival in 1998. This contributed to the increased popularity and exposure of Gnawa music to the larger Moroccan public. Waves of people who did not self-identify as phenotypically Black, had no enslaved ancestors, and had no ancestral connection to the Sudan also joined the ranks of Gnawa (Becker 2020). Through such ceremonies and practices, the Gnawa transform themselves from the socially constructed identities that are the result of centuries of acculturation into Moroccan society, in which they first arrived as enforced migrants; then, through exclusionary practices, they re-embodied themselves as a spiritually constructed people, independent of their social identity in the world (El Hamel 2008).

Essaouira, Atlantic port city, western Morocco, midway between Safi and Agadir. The site was occupied by Phoenicians and then Carthaginians and was mentioned in the chronicles of the Carthaginian explorer Hanno (5th century bc) (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2007).

Picture 1. Fortress (Skkala) Essaouira, Morocco 2023. Source: Meryem Madili.

Essaouira has become a city intimately connected to the term "Gnawa," which is used across the city to market such goods as paintings, clothing, hotels, and spices; numerous shops sell Gnawa recordings and musical instruments (Becker 2020). Essaouira is also known by the wind-surf, the silver jewellery, the wood and painting art, the Hippism by its period (the seventies of the twentieth century), and above all the festival of Gnawa. For four days, this town becomes cosmopolitan when hundreds of thousands of Moroccans and foreigners get mingled in happiness and delight for the festival of Gnawa (K'hal-Laayoun 2019).

Music can communicate to its listeners on a number of levels, with varying degrees of specificity. Almost every society has one or more genres of music closely associated with certain community events (weddings, funerals, and so that the music alone is able to evoke the behaviour and emotions appropriate those events. Many cultures, from South Asia and the Middle East to Western Europe, attach images and ethical values to various melodic and rhythmic patter thus allowing musicians to play quite effectively on the emotions of their listeners (Schuyler 1981).

Tgnawit (*Tagnawit:* is the act of practicing Gnawa as a music, art and rituals) was only for the craft men. They work all the weeklong until Thursday evening or Saturday evening then they start organizing the *lila* of Gnawa. They choose Thursday evening because the day after it is Friday which is a sacred day for the Muslims in which they pray collectively and Saturday because the day after it is a day off (Madili 2024). To say that 'tagnawit is like a woman,' on the other hand, is to acknowledge that the culture and traditions of the Gnawa have an independent (and sexualized) agency. The master does not create tagnawit; he only interacts with it. In this sense, being a Gnawi is a dialogic enterprise- the Gnawi enters into a relationship with the possessed, who, themselves, have a relationship with all these entities (Kapchan 2007).

Kapchan also noted, those possessing *tagnawit* are most often born into a Gnawa milieu and come up through the ranks, learning the ritual in all its complexity by observation, participation, and slow initiation. Those who do not possess *tagnawit* are the populizers who, for purposes of commercialization, have adopted the Gnawa identity and music but know little of its deeper ritual significance, its history in the bones.

Gnawa Festival

The Essaouira festival is a secular festival supportted by private capital, the state, and the crown. Its official title is Festival d'Essaouira Gnaoua Musiques du Monde, which can be translated into "Essaouira Festival of Gnawa and World Music."

Picture 2. Gnawa performance in a March organized by Gnawa world festival in 2023, Essaouira, Morocco. Source: Meryem Madili.

It serves two major purposes: it attracts tourists, and it bolsters Gnawa musicians' engagement in the music industry. A third probable goal of economic development in Essaouira cannot be discounted (Sum 2011:105). The quietness of this city and its particular climate make of Essaouira a target for visitors by both Moroccans and foreigners. This small seaside resort is a landmark for the artists and the musicians especially at the festival of Gnawa. It

is also a lieu for predilection for the surfers coming from all over the world (K'hal-Laayoun 2019).

The music is considered so powerful that at one time it was thought that singing the songs outside of the ceremonial context would incite the wrath of the spirits, who would then exact retribution in the form of afflicting the transgressor (Kapchan). Today, however, Gnawa musicians either aver that they only commercialize the praise songs to dead saints (called the mdah) and not the invocations to the spirits, or that their intention (niya) mediates the relation between sound and spirit, thus neutralizing the effects that the desacralization of the music might cause (Kapchan 2007). Gnawa musicians now commonly perform in clubs, restaurants, and the massive Gnawa and World Music Festival in Essaouira. Indeed, many Gnawa musicians today have never performed at private spirit-possession ceremonies, never worked with a female diviner, and never witnessed spirit possession (Becker 2020).

Success within the Gnawa musical community is increasingly defined by the commercial standards of the music industry rather than by ritual criteria. Most performers and journalists locate ideas of ritual efficacy as the result of an effective command of two distinct sources of authenticity: Muslim piety and African heritage (Witulski 2018).

Ritualizing the sacred

Gnawa was inscribed in 2019 on UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The traditions and beliefs are kept alive for the healing purposes. The beliefs and practices of the Gnawa religious brotherhood represent a fusion of Islamic and West African ideas. The Gnawa claim spiritual descent from *Bilal al-Habashi*, an Ethiopian who was the Prophet Mohammed's first muezzin; they also recognize and respect all Muslim saints. Most aspects of Gnawa ritual, however, clearly come from South of the Sahara, brought to Morocco over the past 500 years or more by merchants, mercenaries and slaves (Schuyler 1981). The history of Islam in Morocco has had profound effects on subcultures like the Gnawa. The predominant influence of Sufism and saint worship that characterizes Moroccan Islam has become part of Gnawa ritual, evident in ways of honouring the ancestors (Eickelman 1976; Cornell 1998). The Gnawa ritual is an event led by and oriented toward the paying host and the present audience of listeners. Although musicians and ritual leaders direct the proceedings, they also defer to the tastes and requests of those present in the room (Witulski 2018).

In Morocco today, clients hire musicians to welcome spirits into a ritual for healing purposes. Other clients, notably concerts producers or promoters, hire musicians to entertain crowds. Both sets of clients might demand performers who are authentic (Witulski 2018). The music the *m'allem* performs fulfills the necessary function for a given situation without much contemplation, leaving it to what they call *hal*: a state of transcendence or "state of oneness with God" (Kapchan 2007:42). Judith Becker defines trance as a state of mind characterized by intense focus) the loss of the strong sense of self and access to types of knowledge and experience that are inaccessible in non- trance states. While Rouget prefers to distinguish between states of "trance" and "ecstasy," I prefer a generic category of "trance" that includes meditative states, possession trance, shamanic trance, communal trance, aesthetic trance and isolated moments of transcendence (Becker 1994).

Trances are gestures towards flow in the sense implied by this verb, employing codified movements to literally create the space of flow. Enacting the ritualized gesture of falling or the movements of trance itself are also ways of moving into other experiences of time (Csikszentmihaly 1990). The ritualized gestures of trance also create a sacred space, but this space is not one of stone, vault, or corridor. Rather the gestures transform existent and

usually interior spaces of domesticity into places of sacred play or ritual drama (indeed the introductory part of the ceremony is called al-la'ba, 'play'). The transformation and sacrilization of space is created in self-conscious gestures at the beginning of the ceremonies, as milk- a pure and purifying substance- is taken from the ceremonial bowl with a ladle and a lightly spilled in strategic places: in the four corners of the room, in the four cardinal directions, on the instruments of the Gnawa, and finally again from the same ladle, into the mouths of Gnawa themselves, offered also by the mqaddem to all those present at the ceremony (Kapchan 2007). Trance states can be of different kinds: there is the trance of the performer who feels herself to be one with the music she plays; the mild trance of the listener whose whole attention becomes focused on the music; possession trance, in which one's self appears to be displaced and one's body is taken over by a deity or a spirit; the trance of Sufi mystics who feel themselves unified with Allah; or the meditation trance of Vajrayana Buddhists, who feel themselves become the deity. Trance is not a digital on- off state. There can be many degrees of trance (Becker Judith 1994).

Picture 3. Another Gnawa group performance in a March organized by Gnawa world festival in 2023, Essaouira, Morocco. Source: Meryem Madili.

The complete ceremony includes seven sections, each controlled by a different saint or family of spirits. In the derdeba (Derdba: The 'lila' or 'derdba', two names for an all-night, trance-based, spirit possession ceremony - Witulski, 2018), a single tune can conjure up a complex set of associations and actions. The saints and spirits each have their own tunes, and a given melody (with or without a sung text) is said both to attract the spirit and to indicate its presence (Schuyler, 1981).

Gnawa diviners describe the experience as having a spirit, as one has an illness, indicating a sense of powerlessness over the experience; during possession the person's actions are determined by the desires of the spirit inhabiting him or her (Spadola 2014, 88). When a spirit resides in that human body, the spirit lives there permanently and expects to be served through that person's daily behaviour, demanding that the possessed wear the spirit's favourite perfume, eat foods that please the spirit, and attend ceremonies that allow the spirit to manifest him- or herself materially (Becker 2020). The possessed in Morocco may be said to inhabit a culture of trance, one with a particular relation to the senses and their expression. This culture of trance is not limited to Gnawa practitioners but permeates Moroccan society at many levels (Kapchan 2007).

Methodology

My analysis draws upon the qualitative research method. In Morocco, Essaouira I began my Anthropological journey to investigate this complex phenomenon and culture. I conducted interviews with Maallem Essedik Laarache who is a Gnawa music master in Essaouira, emphasized on the Amazigh (Amazigh: indigenous people of North Africa also called Berbers, it refer as well to the language used, which is 'Tifinagh' or 'Imazighen') root of the origin of Gnawa as an ethnic community that has some of '*Bambara* (*Bambara:* is the language of the country Mali)' language. He grew up among Gnawa, from his childhood he observed, participated and played

music in the *lila* (Lila: It means night in Arabic. *Lila* is a ceremony in which they held the rituals with the music and dances in order the put the participants in trance for the purpose of healing). He learnt from the old Gnawa masters who passed away and he kept practicing more and more the art of Gnawa, he also added that he doesn't give up his profession as a craft man to make a living! (Madili 2024)

Commoditization

Commercialization made Gnawa reach a wide audience through the festival, the fusion music and tourism. The strongest catalyst for Gnawa comercial popularity was the creation of the Gnawa and World Music Festival in Essaouira, the goal of which was to present Gnawa music as a national heritage and a reflection of Morocco's tolerance of ethnic diversity (Becker 2020).

Picture 4. Gnawa Festival advertisement poster in both languages Arabic and French in Essaouira, Morocoo 2023. Source: Meryem Madili

Becker also added that the increased commercialization of Gnawa culture has prompted some to lament the loss of a pure and authentic Gnawa heritage uncontaminated by the consumptive attention of the non-Gnawa world and the global music scene. The scholar Deborah Kapchan notes that those who identify as Gnawa fear being dispossessed of their culture, an unease that has increasingly caused people to emphasize the idea of tagnawit, translated to mean "Gnawa-ness," to distinguish between what is "authentic" Gnawa and what is "imitation" and "inauthentic" (2007, 22–23).

Scholars, public intellectuals, music producers, and advertisers who are not Gnawa practitioners themselves have flooded the local marketplace with consumable versions of Gnawa traditions, turning "Gnawa" into a consumable brand. Not surprisingly, the profits from such commercialization have not been evenly distributed within the Gnawa community (Becker 2020).

Fusion Music

In the last decades, Western musicians, interested in the African traditional music, have 'discovered' the music of Gnawa. As a result, many collaborations have ensued with famous jazz artists such as Randy Weston, or celebrities as Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana, Led Zippelin, … Thus, Gnawa are modernizing their style to make it more secular and with more commercial appeal. With these recent developments and their appeal to tourists, the Moroccan government established in 1997 the Gnawa and World Music Festival in Essaouira (K'hal-Laayoun 2019).

Don Cherry, the late African American jazz trumpeter who, before he died, cut an album with Gnawa musician *Hassan Hakmoun*, was fond of saying that there are three kinds of music in the world-folk music, classical music and devotional music (Rudolph 2001). In this inception, Gnawa music falls into the latter category; it is sacred music by dint of its words, which praise and solicit blessings from

God, the prophet, particular Islamic saints, as well as pantheon of both sub-Saharan and North African, Islamic and non-Islamic spirits (Kapchan 2007).

From the bewitching voices of the gnaouis, the bewildering sounds and tones derived from the *guembri*, *qraqesh*, and sometimes *tbola*, a melody is emanating from African roots to Western performances turned more and more into the media events. Thus, the aim behind the festival of Gnawa in Essaouira, is to bring this art of Gnawa to modernity by giving to the music of Gnawa issues to other musical kinds that would provide it with a universal dimension, less 'ethnic', but more suitable to be admitted by other cultures without really abandoning neither the magic of its essence nor the depth of its spirituality (K'hal-Laayoun 2019). Gnawa superstars in contemporary Morocco achieve the highest levels of success, appearing on major television features and performing on the country's brightest stages.

Picture 5. Gnawa stage in Moulay Hassan Square in Essaouira, Morocco 2023. Source: Meryem Madili

They record pristine studio versions of the tradition's ceremonial music and play these tunes on world tours with jazz and reggae artists. Their fame within the popular music industries make them influential markers of innovative approaches to this musical tradition and innumerable young musicians follow their lead (Witulski 2018).

Between the myths and dreams which long live in the city of the sun Marrakesh and the towns of winds Tangiers and Essaouira, Gnawa have inspired and made dream many legends of the world music such as Robert Plant, Jimmy PAGE, Led Zeppelin and his legendary group, Brian Jones, Mike Jagger, Randy Weston the New Yorkese Jazz-man who created the first festival of Jazz in Tangiers in 1972, and in 1999 he organized a concert in New York in a church of Brooklyn with Gnaoui maalmin as if he wanted to universalize more and more this music of Gnawa that he has appreciated as his proof in 'Song, Dance and Prayer'. As well as for Santana who has been hypnotized by the magical sonorities found in Morocco, and fascinated and inspired by Gnawa those musicians bearers of the '*baraka*'. Thereby, the genius of the guitar praises *el hajhouj* in its singularity when Santana gave concerts accompanied by *Maallem Guinea* or *Maallem Bakbou* (K'hal-Laayoun 2019).

Conclusion

Internationalization contributed in the popularity of Gnawa community in diverse dimensions which push many people to embrace this culture and art and embrace the magic of the Moroccan culture. Given that Essaouira is home to Morocco's massive Gnawa and World Music Festival, it is no surprise that Gnawa music has impacted the dozens of artists who exhibit in the city's multitude of art galleries (Becker 2020). Authenticity kept Gnawa art and culture alive despite the socio-economic changes.

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POSSESSIONS, PRIDE, AND PRIVILEGE: MARTABAN JAR AND THE VISUAL POWER FROM THREE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM BORNEO

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Abstract

Photographs have become important subjects of study since the early nineteenth century, drawing attention from a wide range of disciplines. In cultural anthropology, photographs function as both pictorial representa-tions and cultural artifacts, providing evidence of social practices and material traces of the past. Clothing, objects, gestures, space, and social relations in photographs communicate collective and historical meanings. Additionally, photographs reveal hidden meanings related to cultural constructions, ideology, and power; as Barthes argued, photography is a system of signs in which meaning is never neutral. This study analyzes three late-nineteenth-century photographs from Borneo to clarify their social, cultural, and ideological significance. Furthermore, the study interprets the historical connection between Dayak communities in Borneo and Martaban jars, valued as indispensable objects. The analysis aims for rigor and neutrality by distinguishing between visible elements (denotation), cultural associations (connotation), and underlying ideology (myth). The three photographs, featuring deliberately arranged scenes, focus on ethnic features with the jar as the principal subject. The jar conveys clear ideas of ownership, strong possessions, pride, and privilege, reflecting a persistent social construct. As depicted, the vase is an integrated element of

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the human world, persisting across different times and places and bringing a unique narrative with each appearance.

Keywords: Photography, Roland Barthes, Mythology, Borneo, cultural anthropology, Martaban
Discipline: Anthropology

Absztrakt

BIRTOKOK, BÜSZKESÉG ÉS KIVÁLTSÁGOK:
A MARTABAN-KORSÓ ÉS A BORNEO-I HÁROM FOTÓ VIZUÁLIS HATÁSA

A fényképek a 19. század eleje óta fontos kutatási tárgyakká váltak, és számos tudományág figyelmét felkeltették. A kulturális antropológiában a fényképek egyszerre képalkotó eszközök és kulturális tárgyak, amelyek a társadalmi gyakorlatokról és a múlt anyagi nyomairól tanúskodnak. A fényképeken látható ruhák, tárgyak, gesztusok, terek és társadalmi kapcsolatok kollektív és történelmi jelentéseket közvetítenek. Ezenkívül a fényképek kulturális konstrukciókhoz, ideológiához és hatalomhoz kapcsolódó rejtett jelentéseket is feltárnak; ahogy Barthes állította, a fotográfia egy jelrendszer, amelyben a jelentés soha nem semleges. Ez a tanulmány három 19. század végi borneói fényképet elemzi, hogy tisztázza azok társadalmi, kulturális és ideológiai jelen-tőségét. Ezenkívül a tanulmány értelmezi a borneói dayak közösségek és a Martaban-edények közötti történelmi kapcsolatot, amelyek nélkülözhetetlen tárgyaknak számítanak. Az elemzés a látható elemek (denotáció), a kul-turális asszociációk (konnotáció) és az alapul szolgáló ideológia (mítosz) megkülönböztetésével törekszik a szigorúságra és a semlegességre. A három fénykép, amelyeken szándékosan elrendezett jelenetek láthatók, az etnikai jellemzőkre összpontosít, az edényt fő témaként kezelve. A korsó egyértelműen kifejezi a tulajdonjogot, az erős birtoklást, a büszkeséget és a kiváltságokat, tükrözve egy tartós társadalmi konstrukciót. A képen látható váz a emberi világ szerves eleme, amely különböző időkben és helyeken is megmarad, és minden megjelenésével egyedi narratívát hoz magával.

Kulcsszavak: fotográfia, Roland Barthes, mitológia, Borneó, kulturális antropológia, Martaban
Diszciplína: Antropológia

Introduction

Photography reflects more than visual reality; it reveals the influence of culture, history, and politics. Early thinkers considered photography to be neutral, but later scholars demonstrated that photographs are shaped by power structures. Susan Sontag (Sontag, 1990) argues that photographs help shape perceptions, while John Tagg highlights their use by institutions, especially in bureaucratic and colonial contexts (Tagg, 1988).

In historical and anthropological research, photographs are now recognized as vital physical links to the past. Elizabeth Edwards (2001) explains that photographs, as both images and objects, travel, change meanings, and foster social bonds. This is especially useful for studying archival and colonial photography, where images act as records and instruments of knowledge creation (Edwards, 2001).

Semiotic analysis provides a foundational method for understanding the meaning of photographs. Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the sign, Roland Barthes developed a two-part framework in Mythologies (1957), distinguishing denotation from connotation. Denotation refers to the literal content, while connotation encompasses broader cultural meanings associated with images.

Barthes' concept of myth deepens semiotic analysis by revealing hidden power structures in images (Barthes, 1972).

Myth works to present certain historical beliefs as obvious or universal. In photography, myth transforms political meanings into seemingly neutral facts, enabling researchers to distinguish between visible content and underlying ideas. Visual Anthropology broadens the understanding of photographs by treating them as both cultural artifacts and physical objects. Christopher Pinney recommends considering how photographs are made, circulated, and interpreted within societies (Pinney, 2011). Instead of focusing solely on images as texts, visual Anthropology emphasizes how photographs fit into social traditions and everyday life. Edwards and Hart note that photographs have distinctive social roles, and that their contents such as clothing and gestures illuminate social relationships and cultural values (Edwards & Hart, 2004).

The study of colonial and imperial periods reveals photography's powerful role in representing and managing populations. Allan Sekula and Anne Maxwell show that colonial photography reinforced differences and hierarchies using images that categorized and controlled subjects (Maxwell, 1990; Sekula, 1984). Visual systems in colonial photography have played a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of race and difference. Deborah Pole (1997) points out that repeated visual strategies helped normalize power structures, while semiotic analysis—especially Barthes' concept of myth—demonstrates how images present beliefs which can be questioned (Barthes, 1972). Before conducting more in-depth research, photographs can serve as a starting point for understanding historical facts and various phenomena from a particular perspective. This article specifically examines how three 19th-century photographs of the Dayak people on the island of Borneo (Kalimantan, Indonesia) illustrate the role of jars across varying backgrounds, using Barthes' theory of denotation, connotation, and myth to reveal underlying cultural meanings that might otherwise seem natural or ordinary.

Problems

In a world that values instant understanding, culture is often simplified and generalized. Yet, culture itself is uniquely complex and contextual a fact frequently overlooked in how groups like the Dayak people are described. (Note: The Dayak are composed of seven major ethnic groups—Dayak Ngaju, Dayak Klemantan (also known as Dayak *Darat* or "Dayak land"), Dayak Ot Danum, Dayak Apo Kayan, Dayak Iban (Dayak laut/Dayak Sea), and Dayak Murut. These major ethnic—together encompassing a total of 405 sub-ethnic groups (Darmadi, 2017). By the 21st century, Dayak people had steadily integrated various Christian traditions, including Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. These religious landscapes coexist alongside the indigenous belief system known as *Kaharingan*, which in contemporary classifications is often grouped under Hinduism, resulting in the hybrid identity of Hindu-Kaharingan, strongly occupied in the central of Kalimantan - Oktaviani & Kurnia, 2023).

Often labeled 'primitive' by outsiders, the Dayak identity is shaped by these imposed social constructs. This article argues that such labels obscure the true complexity of Dayak culture. By analyzing three 19th-century photographs each featuring Dayak jars in different backgrounds this article challenges the alternate meaning of simplistic interpretations and highlights the need for deeper analysis of visual representations of culture behind the captured pictures.

Drawing on visual anthropology, this article asks: Who created these photographs, for what audience and purpose, and how are they interpreted? Using Roland Barthes' framework, the analysis deconstructs the social constructs behind these images, revealing the layered, complex realities of Dayak culture that are often obscured by surface-level

perceptions. The main argument is that such photographs when carefully examined expose deeper complexities behind societal labels and assumptions.

The land of Borneo

Kalimantan, also known as Borneo, is the largest island in Indonesia. Its northern region shares borders with Malaysia and Brunei (Fig. 1). The indigenous people of Borneo, known as the Dayak, derive their name from a term meaning hinterland people or people who live along the upstream rivers. (Note: Dayak people in the interior who embrace Islam are usually called Malay, as their way of life is similar. In West Kalimantan, they are called Senganan in Sintang Regency and Dayak Kebahan in Melawi Regency).

Like any other islands in the Indonesian archipelago, the people of Borneo are predominantly Austronesian speakers, who are believed to have originated from southern China and Taiwan around 4,000 years ago. Over time, they began to adopt external cultural and religious influences, including Hinduism and Buddhism (5 CE), Islam 15 CE), and Christianity (17 CE). Scholar K. Alexander Adelaar even argue that the land of Dayak people may have played a significant role in the very origins and the dispersals of the main Austronesian languages (Bellwood et al., 2006).

In the past, the Dayak people of Kalimantan practiced complex indigenous belief systems that involved reverence for local spirits and animal sacrifices. Intertribal warfare was a frequent occurrence, and headhunting (kayau) became one of the most well-known practices associated with the region, often instilling fear among outsiders, including the Dutch (Darmadi, 2017).

Like other parts of Southeast Asia and Indonesia, Borneo (Kalimantan) began experiencing colonial influence in the 16th century. Initially, its extensive river system supported many local kingdoms. The Dutch East India Company or Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) and later the Dutch government (Nederlandsch Indische) exploited forest products such as rattan, resin, and timber, as well as minerals like gold, while suppressing kingdoms controlling interior trade routes.

Figure 1. Borneo Island

During this time, the term 'Dayak' emerged through ethnic and administrative categorization. Development of mining and plantations also occurred, alongside local resistance such as the Banjar War from 1859 to 1905. Dutch power weakened in 1942 with the arrival of the Japanese, and it ended entirely in 1945.

Unlike Indonesia, the history of the Borneo region in Malaysia (Sarawak) was influenced by the British royal family. Sarawak's colonial era began in 1841 when James Brooke became Rajah after assisting the Sultan of Brunei. The Brooke family's paternalistic rule, known as the White Rajahs, lasted until 1941. Subsequently, Japan occupied Sarawak during the Second World War. After the war, the territory became a British Crown Colony in 1946. Eventually, Sarawak gained self-government and, in 1963, joined to form Malaysia (Cleary, 1996).

The Three Photographs from Borneo

The three photographs analyzed in this article are all from Borneo. Two are from Kalimantan, and one is from Sarawak, Malaysia. All three will be analysed using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which involves revealing denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and uncovering social constructs known as myths. These photos have a photo label (anchorage). In this analysis, the anchorage function i.e., the role of a label or caption in guiding the viewer's interpretation of the image, continues to be used to deepen the contextual analysis without disregarding the critical issues arising from several descriptions that need further exploration and clarification with additional relevant data.

Picture 1. Jar as the valuable thing belongs to Dayak People (Ownership, possession)

Picture 1 shows a group of mature men, women, and teenagers gathered in an open space or courtyard, with trees in the background. Two adult men stand at the front, flanked by two women on one side and three on the other. One man wears a cap (peci) commonly worn by Muslim men; the other does not.

Picture 1. Tajau (jar) used as a dowry by the people of West Kalimantan Sintang – West Borneo, 1900 1938. Source: Tropenmuseum. This picture also displays at Museum Kapuas Raya, Sintang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Both men wear koko shirts, which are long-sleeved and like Chinese men's clothing. These shirts became known as Muslim men's clothing and are commonly worn by Malay men. The man on the left wears a dark-coloured koko shirt. The other man wears a white koko shirt. Three men stand behind them, apparently as escorts. Two men, one on each side, wear white koko shirts. The third man appears to wear a white shirt with a checkered pattern on the chest.

Seven women appear in this photograph. At the front, one woman is seated, dressed in a cloth that covers her chest and wearing a distinctive necklace (usually adorned from boar tusks). She holds a tuma a traditional percussion instrument from Kalimantan, made of bamboo and cowhide (membranephone) (Note: See *tuma* picture at Link). Behind her, two women flank a man wearing a black cap and holding a large black jar adorned with dragons and ropes. Of the two women, one wears a chest-length cloth patterned with white florals, while the other sports a dark-coloured cloth adorned with geometric designs. Both resemble batik cloth from Java. Behind them, another woman's face is partially visible.

Three women are also visible in the photograph, standing to the right of the man in the white koko shirt. One arm of the man in white is draped over the woman next to him. She wears a checkered cloth covering her chest, resembling a sarong (a traditional Malay and Southeast Asia cloth) has presence here since 19 CE, and a bracelet on her wrist. (Note: Traded commodities along the Kapuas River included tobacco, salt, gambier, head coverings, cotton fabrics (white and colored), *sarongs*, copper tools, earthenware produced by the Banjar people, and foreign ceramics from China and Europe - Kiss et al., 2025; Schwaner, 1983).

Unlike the other women, she appears to wear no necklace. Beside her are two women, dressed in checkered cloth (sarongs) and floral patterns, each adorned with boar tusks necklaces and bracelets. The three women, using their right hands, hold jars decorated with dragons and feathers. Denotatively, the core of the photo shows a group of Dayak-Malay people posing with the jars.

The faces in the picture show flat expressions. Most subjects look straight ahead at a single object, likely the camera, except for the woman beside the man in the white koko shirt, who bows her head slightly. The photograph's atmosphere appears directed, with the subjects neatly posed and lined up behind two very prominent jars. The inclusion of the woman holding the tuma musical instrument also seems intentional, with her presence appearing supplementary. Similarly, those in the front row seem to fill the empty space, giving the photograph a compact, dense appearance. Cameras were expensive at the time, introduced by newcomers, and were not widely owned by the public. Only a few people had access to them. It is likely that a foreigner or perhaps a Dutch newcomer deliberately took this photo, possibly intending to show it to other Dutch people or to those outside the Dayak community for a specific purpose.

The caption on the photo reads, 'Tajau (jar) used as a dowry by the people of West Kalimantan.' Although this is acceptable, there seems to be some doubt. Who is the bride? There are two men in the centre of the photo and five women standing close to them. In terms of clothing, there are no wedding outfits, which are usually seen in pairs. The women's clothing and accessories are also almost identical, with nothing more striking to indicate that she is the bride. There is also a significant age gap. The man in the photo appears to be older than the woman. Likewise, the man's arm around the woman does not resemble the gesture of a bride and groom, which is usually seen in an equal, balanced, and proportional pose. The man's hand seems to show subordination. In this context, the woman standing closest to him does not appear to be his wife but rather a child, sibling, or relative (who was deliberately invited to the photo).

The same goes for the other four women. Their presence seems to serve as a backdrop, supporting the photo's theme or topic. The connotation of this photograph suggests that the man and woman are photographed with the vase as a valuable possession (ownership). The woman's hands touching the vase give the impression of something owned and to be protected (the jars).

The photograph appears intentionally staged to evoke a wedding scene, yet the people depicted do not seem to be an actual bride and groom, but rather an unrelated group assembled for a group photo. The clothing suggests a mix of Malay (Muslim) men wearing koko shirts and Dayak women, likely Muslim, whose attire differs from that of traditional, non-Muslim Dayaks, who typically wear loincloths, bark vests, hornbill-feather headbands, and carry traditional weapons (See video documenter of Dayak Kenyah (West Kalimantan and Sarawak area) in the early 19th CE Link). Notably, distinctive motifs are evident in wood carvings, tattoos, and weaving, whereas batik-like fabrics were uncommon among Dayaks until after the 15th century, likely introduced via trade.

The narrative constructed by the photograph thus appears artificial, yet it has become widely accepted, shaping perceptions of authenticity. Jars, now symbolically linked with Dayak identity (including Muslim Dayaks), have been imbued with a narrative of necessity in sacred ceremonies, paralleling their stated role as wedding dowries. This is the narration of myth (naturalized ideological meaning).

This narrative elevates jars to a central and sacred status in perceived Dayak marital tradition, even if it does not reflect historical reality.

Picture 2. Jar as the representation of pride

Picture 2 shows four Dayak men standing in a row, with five jars in front of them, neatly arranged and tied to a long bamboo pole (possibly to lift them), and a boy sitting next to the jar on the far right. At first glance, he is inconspicuous and resembles a sixth jar with his bald head. The four men are well-built, wearing waist-length cloth, with or without patterns, and with their chests exposed. They wear traditional headbands except for the seated boy, who appears not to be wearing one. The man in the center is holding a spear (lonjo/bujak) and a shield (Talawang)(See Bujak and Talawang: Link), traditional Dayak weapons with iron spearheads (usually coated with poison for battle), while the other three are not holding any weapons. The photo's background shows the area around a stilt house, with coconut trees, sugar palms, and shrubs. Denotatively, the core of the photo shows a group of the native Dayak people posing with the jars.

As in the first photo, the pose in this photo also appears deliberate or staged. Their gaze is flat and straight ahead, fixed on a single point (the camera). The jars are neatly arranged in front of them. The photo's powerful aura comes from the central male figure, who holds a spear in his right hand and shield on his left. He gives the impression of being an important person or a prominent figure.

He also appears older than the others, giving the impression of someone strong and respected. The spear in the photo adds an aura of "courage," which is support-ted by the presence of other men on his right and left who appear to be his bodyguards, companion, or supporters. Overall, the pose in the photo shows a more open and challenging exposure.

The jar in the foreground looks very beautiful and perfect. It signifies an association with pride in owning it. Unlike the first photo, where the jar is placed with the Dayak Melayu community (believed to be Muslim), this time it is placed with its supporters from the indigenous Dayak community.

The presence of the jar in the center, the tribal leader with his spear and shield, and his bodyguards, standing tall and defiant, reinforces the jar's connotation as a source of Dayak pride. As a source of pride, it is an integral part of their identity.

Picture 2. Five jars described as sacred from the district head of Pangkoh, a Ngaju village on the Kahayan River (South Borneo, Dutch East Indies), c.1915. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. Coll. no. 10001019 (Photo credit: Sunarningsih, 2024).

The Dayak tribe fiercely defends its territory, resulting in frequent inter-group wars (Note: Communities living along river systems in Borneo often experienced conflicts and rivalries between groups, primarily due to territorial control (Sjamsuddin, 2014). The presence of the jar, placed alongside men who are "ready to fight and wage war," conveys its value as a new myth: a very valuable object that must be owned and risked, and is "non-negotiable.

Picture 3. Jar as an honor and privilege notions

Photo 3 shows a man standing, talking to another man seated. In front of them, two tall vases decorated with flora and dragons are visible. The standing man wears a cloth, a headband, and shoulder decorations typical of the Dayak people. The seated man wears a similar cloth but has a head covering shaped like a full hat, which is unlike the Dayak headbands and somewhat resembles a traditional Chinese hat (cheongsam) without a tail. The background appears to be a wide expanse of white cloth. As with the previous two photographs, it appears this background was deliberately set up. Naturally, buying and selling usually occur in open spaces or crowded markets. However, this may not always be the case. Here, the background looks very neat. Denotatively, the photo centers on two men with two jars.

The expressions in the photograph are very contrasting. The man standing (a Dayak) appears to be speaking, his eyes fixed on the man sitting, his hand outstretched (empty). Meanwhile, the man sitting seems oblivious, his gaze fixed on the jar and the Dayak man, as if waiting for a response. Given this pose and the photo caption, 'Iban bargaining over old jar,' it appears the man sitting may be a pottery merchant with whom the Iban man is trying to negotiate. The seated man's expression also appears calm and not overly enthusiastic.

Picture 3. taken from Plate 48. Ibans (Sarawak, Malaysia) bargaining over old jars. Charles Hose & William McDougall *(1912). The Pagan Tribes of Borneo: A Description of Their Physical, Moral and Intellectual Condition, with Some Discussion of Their Ethnic Relations & The home-life of Borneo head-hunters: Its festivals and folk-lore. William Henry Furness (1902). Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company. Pic. 126. See also at* Link

PLATE 48. IBANS BARGAINING OVER OLD JARS.

He seems confident that his price is already reasonable and will not be lowered easily.

During the spice trade along the spice route up to the Dutch era (7–20 CE), the Dayak people indeed, began acquiring and using Martaban jars, a large stoneware vessel produced in southern China. These jars were traded through the important transit port of Martaban (in present-day Myanmar). Initially, Chinese traders transported these massive, thick stoneware jars often adorned with motifs of dragons, waves, and clouds across Kalimantan. Based on historical data, Chinese traders were the original agents who introduced these goods.

However, the hat worn by the seated man is confusing. If the context is the sale of jars (traditionally traded by ethnic Chinese traders) then it is notable that photographs of Chinese traders do not show them wearing Dayak clothing like that of the seated man, who appears to be Dayak. Does this support the assumption that the seller is also Dayak? Yes, it is possible; he could be a second, third, or another seller. In Sarawak, starting from the early 1840s, James Brooke, the British White Rajah and supreme governor of Sarawak, welcomed Malays, Dayaks, and Chinese from elsewhere in Borneo to trade within his 'quasi-kingdom'(Ji, 2018). This meant interactions among these three ethnic groups Malays, Dayaks, and Chinese were already well established, so anyone, regardless of ethnicity, could sell Chinese jars. The connotation that emerges from this photograph is that the jar is sought after and desired by the Dayaks.

The person in the photograph, who appears to be bargaining, gives rise to another connotation: the jar

is not a cheap item but could be very expensive. Thus, the purchase of it is associated with the honour and privilege attached to the jar. Eva Strober observed that among the Dayak Iban of Borneo, including those in Sarawak and Brunei, the most valuable jars were considered equivalent in worth to a male slave (Strober, 2014).

Renowned for their status and cultural significance, these jars were prized not only as antiques by Europeans (Note: i.e Nanne Ottema, Tjibben van der Meulen, Hendrik Freerk Tillema, Egbert Willem van Orsoy de Flines have the Jars from Kalimantan and Barbara and Tom Harrison had the jar from Dayak Kenyah, Sarawak (Malaysia) -Strober, 2014, but also highly valued in Sarawak, as described in an engaging report by János Xánthus, a Hungarian naturalist. Similarly, to Eva Strober, Xánthus wrote that these jars held a high status. He described two types of large, porcelain jars: one was grey-glazed, over 4 feet tall with a capacity equivalent to 2 akós (a Hungarian unit similar to 53.72 litres), and the other was 6 feet tall, red-glazed, with a capacity of 4 akos. Both types were decorated with dragon motifs and had cylindrical rings called ears.

According to Xánthus, these jars were used to store grains and were easy to carry when war approached, which made them highly valued. The demand for these jars always exceeded the supply. In the 19th century, grey-glazed jars were valued at $50, while red-glazed jars were valued at $1,000. These jars were widely circulated throughout the country, functioning as cash payments, and being accepted as penalty fees in court. Xánthus remarked that he only saw two red-glazed jars, both owned by the Malay Prince. If a defendant could not pay, they had to provide a guarantor and could settle a fine with a grey-glazed jar of equivalent value or with other items such as swallow's nests and copper plates. Thus, Xánthus stated that the confiscated goods warehouse at the Sarawak court resembled a museum or warehouse, highlighting the cultural significance of these jars (Kiss et al., 2025).

From Object to Ideology: The Hidden Narrative of the Jar

Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead (1942) is a groundbreaking ethnographic work that explores the intersection of photography and sociology. The authors view photographs not merely as images or documentation, but as anthropological tools capturing details of life often overlooked. Photographs also serve as tools for intercultural communication. Later, visual anthropology drew on the interpretive school, viewing photographs as texts to be reread, revealing symbolic meanings and cultural constructs, including gestures and expressions.

Using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis, we can see how signs are formed and function to create meaning. To analyze denotation, connotation, and myth, we begin by examining the photo, its expressions, and the broader context, which includes history and ethnography. This investigation leads to identifying the denotative meanings, which all depict a jar surrounded by a group of subjects or people. At first glance, this denotative meaning provides a factual description corresponding to the image in the photo. These general details are readily apparent, as no in-depth analysis is required to uncover their meaning at this stage.

At the connotation stage, new meanings emerge from the presented images. Each photo evokes different interpretations of the jars, as atmosphere, people, and situations combine to create unified meanings. In Photo 1, a group of Malay people holds the jar together, indicating collective ownership. In Photo 2, the jar is placed in a heroic context, the group's posture and weapons suggest strength and pride. In the third photo, the jar is calm and undisturbed as a Dayak man gestures in a bargaining stance, while the seller remains silent. This suggests the jar is a coveted luxury, and in all three cases, jar ownership represents receiving a valued gift or privilege. In the final stage, finding myths is the hardest part.

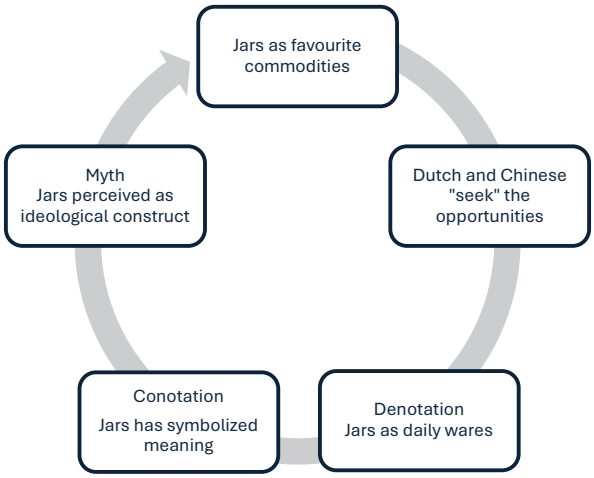
We must deconstruct the social construction behind the photo. The analysis also examines the expressions in the photograph. The Dutch colonial context makes Barthes' analysis in Mythologies especially relevant, as it reveals power relations between indigenous peoples and colonists. (Note: In contrast, Camera Lucida by Barthes is more personal and subjective, focusing less on ideology).

The three photographs, taken in the 19th century, document a period when Borneo was governed by the Dutch in Kalimantan and the British in Sarawak. Colonial powers introduced photography as a tool for documentation. They used it not only to record events but also to construct them. When these photographs are examined collectively, the deliberate arrangement becomes evident. Individuals appear to have been selected and posed alongside jars, suggesting intentional composition. This configuration is reflected in the narrative that emerges from the analysis of the integration of the three images. The images depict a vase accompanied by three ethnic groups: Malay (Muslim Dayak), indigenous Dayak, and Chinese. These groups have historically interacted in Borneo. Their presence can be traced back to the 15th-century maritime spice trade. The narrative and existence of these photographs may represent an initial step that fostered the idea that Borneo is inhabited by three different ethnic groups, all of whom hold jars in high regard. Jars have always accompanied these ethnic groups. However, the photo may not have been taken spontaneously, as photos of this type are usually more natural, authentic, and factual than staged photos.

In Kalimantan nowadays, especially West Kalimantan, there is a slogan called Tidayu/Cidayu that represents the Chinese (Tionghoa/China), Dayak, and Malay communities. This symbol, commemorated in central Pontianak, stands for harmony (Note: Each province of Kalimantan expresses its own unique cultural identity. Despite the dominance of religions Islam in the eastern and southern provinces, Christianity in the northern and central provinces the western region showcases its pluralist character through the slogan *Tidayu*, an acronym for *Tionghoa* (Chinese), *Dayak* (indigenous peoples), and *Melayu* (Malay). This slogan has become a symbol of interethnic tolerance and harmony in the region. Over time, the Dayak have also transformed their identity, evolving from a generalized category of hinterland natives into a more distinct and dynamic cultural group.)

The key question remains: did the perception of the jar's value arise before the arrival of the colonists, or was this image deliberately reinforced (for example, through this photo) as a myth created by the colonists (Fig.2), perhaps by the Dutch at that time? If so, what was their intention?

Fig. 2 The semiosis of the Jars (Author scheme, 2026).



During the Dutch colonial period, many of these jars were transported to the Netherlands by collectors of antiquities and art enthusiasts. The widespread distribution of Martaban jars during the spice trade is remarkable, as they reached nearly every part of the so-called "land below the winds" (Southeast Asia). Yet, determining their true origins remains challenging for archaeologists. While many were produced in southern China, additional production

sites in Burma (Gutman, 2002), Vietnam, Sabah, Sarawak, and Singkawang in West Kalimantan have also contributed to the complexity and confusion surrounding their provenance (Strober, 2014; Toshihiko, 2018).

Eva Strober examined the Martaban collections at the Princessehof Museum in the Netherlands and noted the challenges of accurately dating and naming these vessels. She preferred to use the neutral term "jar" rather than "Martaban (Martavanen-Dutch)," since these objects carry various names, forms, and functions across different contexts. Strober further observed that among the Dayak Iban of Borneo (also reside in Sarawak and Brunei), the most valuable jars were considered equivalent in worth to a male slave, while other Dayak sub-ethnic groups valued them as marriage payments or heirlooms deserving of respect (Cesard, 2013; Strober, 2014) as it also seen in Malaysia and Brunei (Geiger-Ho, 2014).

The most sacred used of these jars probably as burial urns by the Dayak Murut community in Nunukan, North Kalimantan. This is a region where research remains limited, particularly concerning Martaban jars (Sunarningsih, et al, 2017).

These jars became widely recognized and valued across the Borneo Island (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam). The most striking cultural landscape associated with them is found in Central Kalimantan, where the jars are prominently displayed at local gateways and public spaces, welcoming visitors to the region. The Balanga Museum in Palangka Raya further illustrates this legacy, showcasing how the Dayak Ngaju people have maintained a deep and enduring connection with these vessels. These connections are also evident in the preservation of jars within traditional longhouses (rumah betang) in West Kalimantan, including in the homes of community leaders as well as in private and communal spaces.

Another interesting observation is that the use of these jars, both physically and symbolically, extends to other forms and functions. They can be seen as a display at the funeral home where there is a death in central Kalimantan, wooden carved Jar was made for the gravestone in Islamic cemeteries in west Kalimantan, and placed as a decorative element at the top of the mosques in south Kalimantan.

Beyond Kalimantan, fragments of this type of stoneware have been widely discovered across regions such as Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi. However, Kalimantan (Borneo) remains the only place where these jars are still actively preserved and maintained as part of living tradition.

Given the widespread use of these jars at that time, what drove this phenomenon? Did their popularity emerge naturally, or was it shaped by an ideological construct or myth, possibly created and/or reinforced by Dutch or Chinese actors (such as Chinese traders as producers)? Why were Dayak groups, including Malay Dayak (Muslims), the main consumers? Was the myth surrounding these jars deliberately constructed for economic motives? If the jars' high value in Dayak culture was not due to a deliberately created social construct or myth, what alternative consensus elevated their status? Can such a consensus be changed or renegotiated, and how does this dynamic manifest today?

Beyond the questions that have arisen, analysis of three photographs from Borneo using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach has produced an interpretation of the formation of myths (ideologies) as social constructs. The jar is not merely a decorative object that appears in the photograph, but rather a subject that has been deliberately constructed by agents to have its own meaning.

Summary

An analysis of three photographs from Borneo reveals the existence of conditioning. The photographs were deliberately created and reveal deeper semiotic meanings. A cultural construct has emerged where the jar is the result of a deliberately created narrative. This narrative increases its value

within the social structure of Dayak society. This phenomenon persists to this day, with varying degrees of practice among the region's Dayak ethnic groups. Ethnographic research is needed to deepen the assumption of construction (this myth). This is important because the scientific paradigm has evolved. The perception of objects has changed accordingly. Objects are no longer seen as "extra-somatic" means of production, or as the result of "generative grammar." Instead, they are seen as produced by and productive of existing relationships, meanings, and contingencies. These as Victor Buchi (2007) said, are contested, open-ended, and socially negotiated.

Acknowledgement

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MATERIALIZING DEVOTION: EXPLORING IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN PARAÑAQUE CITY'S *SAYAW NG PAGBATI*

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Abstract

Catholics in several Southern Tagalog towns in the Philippines express the joy of Christ's resurrection through a ritual dance called *Sayaw ng Pagbati* (Dance of Greeting). In Parañaque City, children in elaborate costumes and holding flags perform the dance ritual in the cathedral early Easter Sunday morning and in their corresponding neighborhoods throughout the day. This study intends to frame the Easter dance through material culture by exploring how ritual objects relate to both performers and the community. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 respondents and unstructured observation of the ritual dance in San Dionisio, Parañaque. The study identifies that ritual objects in the Easter dance mediate and materialize the sacred and entangle both performers and the community in networks of obligation, reception, and identity. As prestige goods, ritual objects function as social markers for the performers and their families.

Keywords: Sayaw *ng Pagbati*, *pagbati*, Easter Sunday, Easter dance, Parañaque City, Philippines
Discipline: cultural anthropology

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Absztrakt

A JÁMBORSÁG MATERIALIZÁLÁSA: AZ IDENTITÁSTÁRGYALÁS VIZSGÁLATA PARAÑAQUE VÁROS *SAYAW NG PAGBATI* RÍTUSÁBAN

A Fülöp-szigetek déli tagalog régiójának több településén a katolikus közösségek Krisztus feltámadásának örömét a *Sayaw ng Pagbati* („köszöntő tánc") elnevezésű rituális tánc keretében fejezik ki. Parañaque városában a gyermekek díszes, gazdagon ornamentált viseletben, zászlókat tartva adják elő e rituális táncot húsvétvasárnap kora reggel a székesegyházban, majd a nap folyamán saját lakókörnyezetükben is. Jelen tanulmány célja, hogy a húsvéti táncot a materiális kultúra perspektívájából értelmezze, különös tekintettel arra, miként viszonyulnak a rituális tárgyak az előadókhoz és a közösséghez. A kutatás kvalitatív módszertani keretben zajlott: tíz válaszadóval félig strukturált interjúk készültek, továbbá strukturálatlan megfigyelés történt a Parañaque-i San Dionisio negyedben bemutatott rituális tánc során. Az elemzés rámutat arra, hogy a húsvéti tánc rituális tárgyai mediáló szerepet töltenek be a szent és a profán szférák között, miközben materiális formában jelenítik meg a transzcendens jelentéstartalmakat. E tárgyak egyúttal kölcsönös kötelezettségek, befogadási aktusok és identitáskonstruáló folyamatok hálózataiba ágyazzák mind az előadókat, mind a közösséget. Presztízsjavakként funkcionálva a rituális objektumok társadalmi markerként szolgálnak az előadók és családjaik számára.

Kulcsszavak: *Sayaw ng Pagbati*, pagbati, húsvétvasárnap, húsvéti tánc, Parañaque város, Fülöp-szigetek
Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

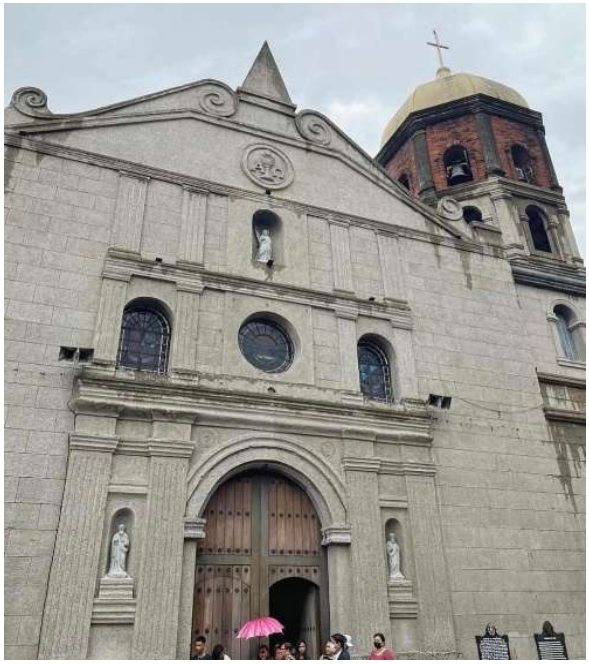
The sustained interest among Filipino scholars in examining historic texts and archaeological artifacts provides a rich tapestry for understanding the significance of material culture in early Philippine society. In the study of burial goods in the Philippines, funerary objects were found resting with the deceased. These were identified as prestige goods symbolizing the elite's power and affluence. For early Filipinos, prestige goods included various objects that were hard to procure and made of uncommon materials such as gold, silver, ivory, beaded ornaments, iron and bronze weaponry, ceramics, among others (Tesoro, 2003). In Cebu, glazed ceramics used during feasts between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries served as symbols of administrators' socio-political status (Nishimura, 1992). The Spanish colonization of the Philippines from the 16th to the 20th century extended the impact of prestige goods among the natives. Clothing, for example, became a marker of class, ethnicity, and sophistication. What lacked in physical traits was overshadowed by one's attire. The *mestizos* – those born out of interracial marriages between the natives and Spaniards or Chinese – not only became a racial identifier but also a coveted social status (Coo, 2017). Filipino anthropologist Stephanie Marie Coo (2017) highlights, "the inclusion of the term Tagalog to refer to the attire emphasized the dichotomy between the urbanized Tagalogs of the capital city (*taga-bayan*) and those from the countryside (*taga-bukid*) ." By the middle of the nineteenth century, towards the end of the Spanish colonial period, the Tagalog mestizos gained prosperity. They were able to establish a social hierarchy that distinguished them from the rest through their manner of dressing (Coo, 2017).

Spanish colonization of the islands also meant the imposition of Christianity among the native population. The conversion of the natives did not

produce immense psychological difficulty, as Christianity had characteristics parallel to precolonial beliefs (Macaranas, 2021; Elesterio, 1989). The new religion also brought with it ritual objects that can be classified as prestige goods, which made their way to the dwellings of the local elites. During the Spanish occupation, the Catholic Church introduced sponsorship systems – such as *santo* sponsorship and the custom of *hermano mayor* – which gave rise to ritual objects that have endured into the contemporary period. Caretaking and funding religious images or *santos* used during processions and associated rituals were assigned by parish priests to prominent individuals or families. Later on, given the affordances brought by the galleon trade and the opening of the Suez Canal in the nineteenth century, the local elites started commissioning religious images in classical or baroque style, which were fashioned from a combination of valuable materials such as wood, ivory, gold, silver, imported textiles, bullion threads, and precious stones (Tamayo, 2020). Religious feasts or *fiestas* centering on the town's patron saint were highly anticipated events. As these feasts consumed expenses, the burden was placed on prominent individuals who assumed the role of *hermano mayor* (*fiesta* sponsor). The affluent clamored to attain this honor, as it led to the expansion of their social prestige in the community. Moreover, the social stature of *hermano mayor* in various religious and secular events during the *fiesta* time was not only determined by their monetary contributions but also by their elaborate attire and religious accoutrement (Tamayo, 2022).

This article examines the Easter dance sponsorship system known as the *Sayaw ng Paghati* (Dance of Greeting) or *Bati*, practiced in Parañaque City in Metro Manila. For clarity, the author uses the former term for consistency. The ritual dance is performed on the dawn of Easter Sunday at the Cathedral and Parish of St. Andrew, also known as the Parañaque Cathedral (Picture 1).

Picture 1. The façade of Parañaque Cathedral, also known as the Cathedral and Parish of St. Andrew. Photo by Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo (2025).



With their own set of performers, several *barangays* (neighborhoods) participate in this annual event: La Huerta, Don Galo, Tramo, San Dionisio, and Sto. Niño. In the book "Palanyag to Parañaque: A History," Dulce Baybay (2001) notes that the term *bati* is derived from the Tagalog word *pagbati,* which means to greet. The dance requires little girls between the ages of nine and thirteen to dance before the image of the Risen Christ and to the Virgin Mary after the customary *salubong* ritual, where the two images meet in the church plaza complex during the dawn of Easter Sunday. In the *barangay* of Don Galo, the dance is customarily performed by both male and female dancers. Choreography consists of "sway balance steps in a waltzy manner with one arm placed on the waist and the other holding a white flaglet" (Baybay, 2001). Dancers who are seen as angels wave the flaglets, serving as an allegory to the joy brought by Christ's resurrection. The beginnings of this Easter dance are unclear; however, the two

oldest surviving participants, Emilia Rodriguez Hernandez and Avelina Rodriguez Carabeo, mention that it was already practiced in the early twentieth century. At the time, there were only two dancers who could perform for several years. Traditionally, the dance was performed as part of two coordinated religious feasts: in La Huerta on Easter Sunday and in Don Galo on Ascension Sunday. For reasons of impracticality, it was decided later to perform the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* only on Easter Sunday. In the 1970s, other *barangays* organized their own dance troupes. Participation grew as parents undertook a *panata* (devotional pledge) and sought divine intervention for favors or the cure of illnesses (Baybay, 2001).

Specifically, this article focuses on the material components of *Sayaw ng Pagbati*. While Baybay's (2001) excerpt provides a background regarding the Easter dance ritual, the lack of empirical sources that deal with the collective experience of the community inspired the author to analyze the dance ritual based on materiality. German cultural anthropologist Birgit Meyer (2008) emphasizes that the sacred becomes tangible through rituals, images, bodily techniques, and aesthetics, which she termed "sensational forms." For Meyer, these sensational forms do not simply transmit meaning but shape experience. Closely related to sensational forms, David Morgan (2016), professor of religious studies and art history, indicates that material objects do not merely express belief, but they aid in constructing it. He discusses the "reception" of material objects, which he identified as "the uses to which objects are put by devotees that may vary from original or designed intent." The way the community uses ritual objects helps in structuring devotion and shared religious worlds. Moreover, Webb Keane (2013), an American anthropologist, says that written words and signs make spirits materially present. The transformations of these texts give them power, while their durability and portability shape their authority. In his book "*Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things*," British archaeologist Ian Hodder (2012) proposes the concept of entanglement, a dialectic of dependence and dependency in which humans depend on things that, in turn, depend on humans. He adds that cycles of dependency, maintenance, and social obligation equate to human-thing entanglement. For Filipino archeologist Grace Barretto-Tesoro (2003), prestige goods signal devotion, people's identity, and alliances, which are valued beyond utility. Non-utilitarian objects, such as those used in rituals, gain meaning through the difficulty of acquisition and cultural associations. Meanwhile, clothing historically reflects status and identity. It likewise mediates social perception, especially in the Philippines (Coo, 2017).

Through the lens of materiality, the author argues that *Sayaw ng Pagbati* demonstrates that material culture is not peripheral or merely decorative but a central component of the people's religious devotion and identity in contemporary Parañaque City. Drawing on the concepts of mediation (Meyer, 2008), materializing the sacred (Keane, 2013), entanglement and obligation (Hodder, 2012), reception (Morgan, 2016), prestige goods (Tesoro 2003), and social markers (Coo, 2017), the present study poses the following questions: (1) How does *Sayaw ng Pagbati* use costumes, props, and gestures to mediate and materialize the sacred? (2) In what ways do material objects entangle performers and communities in networks of obligation, reception, and identity? (3) How do the costumes and ritual items function as prestige goods and social markers that shape communal identity and religious participation?

Methodology

Data gathering for this empirical study employed qualitative approaches. Ten respondents were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Additionally, the respondents signed an informed consent form and agreed to be named in this study. The interviews were done in phases, either online (e.g., Zoom) or in person (e.g., café or residence),

between October 2024 and April 2025. The respondents were divided into three categories: performers (Eloisa Espeña, Bernadine Bernardo, and Abigail Eunice Carabeo), choreographers (Dr. Soledad Santos, Judith Marcelino, and Evelyn Mago), and a local family who descended from the line of the oldest *Sayaw ng Pagbati* dancers and were active in local church affairs (Dr. Erwin Carabeo and sons Andre Joseph Carabeo and Anton Maria Francesco Carabeo). Moreover, the respondents were selected through purposive sampling. Eloisa Espeña and Andre Joseph Carabeo helped in referring the author to other respondents. By email correspondence, the author also interviewed Prof. John Paul Domingo, a dance teacher at De La Salle University, regarding the origins of the Easter dance ritual. In addition to conducting interviews, the author visited the centuries-old chapel of *San Dionisio* (St. Denis), whom locals fondly call '*Tata Dune*,' on the afternoon of Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025, to observe the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* in Barangay San Dionisio. During the dance ritual, the author imposed unstructured observation to document the locals' behavior and practices in their natural social and cultural environment. To analyze data from the interviews and observations, the author conducted thematic analysis to generate themes, compare data, and interpret meanings.

Sayaw ng Pagbati in Parañaque City

Sayaw ng Pagbati, as an Easter ritual dance, is not solely practiced in Parañaque City. It is a dance tradition that can be categorized as regional and exclusively practiced in the Southern Tagalog Region. Other variants of this Easter dance can be found in Angono, Rizal; Ibaan, Batangas; Boac, Marinduque; and other towns (Tamayo, 2023; Viray, 2019). In Angono, the ritual dance is performed exclusively by two female dancers, the *kapitana* and *tenyenta*. The choreography is distinguished by a dance step called *bali*, which involves bending the torso. The one in Ibaan is performed by a female dancer, the *kapitana*, and two gentlemen, the *kapitan* and *bise kapitan*, who execute a routine inspired by the polka dance (Tamayo, 2025). In contrast, the performance in Boac is reminiscent of a waltz conducted by a pair of female and male dancers (Viray, 2019). Despite the variations, a common aspect of all the performances is the use of a flag.

According to Dr. Soledad Santos, choreographer of *Sayaw ng Pagbati* in Barangay San Dionisio, around 22 to 24 dancers perform the ritual dance in their group. The same number of performers is visible in other *barangays* in Parañaque City. Dr. Erwin Carabeo, a descendant of pre-war dancer Avelina Rodriguez Carabeo, notes that ten rows are required in the formation, as it involves a sequence with a group of three dancers. Anton Maria Francesco Carabeo, the son of Dr. Carabeo and a folk dancer who has witnessed the tradition for a long time, adds that the routine follows the waltz but "at a faster pace." In an email correspondence, Prof. John Paul Domingo recounts that the choreography of *Sayaw ng Pagbati* is influenced by a Spanish dance called *Los Bailes de los Años Pasado*. While there is still contention as to which *barangay* the choreography originated, an excerpt written after the war by Philippine National Artist for Dance, Dr. Francisca Reyes-Aquino, shared by Prof. Domingo, indicates that the dance ritual was already performed in La Huerta and Don Galo at the time. Dr. Carabeo stresses, "If you consider La Huerta being the original, as the pure form …Anything outside this is a modification." In the contemporary period, while each *barangay* follows the traditional dance pattern derived from the one documented by Aquino, they have incorporated certain steps that identify them from other dance troupes. Meanwhile, the tune accompanying the choreography is attributed to the composition of Francisco Rodriguez (Baybay, 2001). Anton notes that local brass bands, including the City Band of Parañaque, the San Nicolas Band, and the Magsikap Band, are well acquainted with the piece.

Preparations for this annual tradition start as early as December, when the list of potential performers is drafted and finalized. Eloisa Espeña, who performed the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* in 1991 and has since passed the tradition to her daughter, recounts that the organizers in San Dionisio announce the call for participants to the mothers of former dancers who remain willing to take part. Participation is completely voluntary, and interested performers may request that their names be included. In addition, practices vary per dance troupe.

Bernadine Bernardo's experience as a performer for nine consecutive years recalls that the practices in San Dionisio depend on the day of Easter. If Easter falls in March, practices usually begin in late December; if it falls in April, practices start in January. She adds that since her family has a spacious garage, they conducted the practices at their residence. In La Huerta, Abigail Eunice Carabeo, a performer for four years, mentions that they usually start practicing after Ash Wednesday in a small area near the river. During the technical dance rehearsal, which happens at five in the afternoon on Black Saturday, all dance troupes convene for the first time to conduct the general rehearsal in the cathedral's plaza. While each *barangay* has its own choreography, the cathedral imposes a uniform dance routine for all the performers. Bernadine notes that there is a separate practice for this purpose. Meanwhile, the distinct choreography of various *barangays* can only be performed once they return to their neighborhoods.

At around 4:30 on Easter Sunday morning, the local community, along with the performers, gathers for a dawn procession in which images of the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary are paraded through the streets. The procession ends at the cathedral's plaza, where the traditional *salubong* ritual is performed. After the *salubong*, the performers conduct their first *Sayaw ng Pagbati*. A mass is then offered inside the cathedral after the performance. As the sun gradually shines and the mass ends, the performers return to formation to conduct another round of the Easter dance ritual. Once the performance concludes, each dance troupe walks in procession towards their respective *barangays* to start a series of dances. Each *barangay* sets specific stops where the dancers perform the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* until midday. This is usually held along the road in front of private residences. Several respondents recounted how, along the route, families would halt the performers on the spot and spontaneously request them to perform in front of their houses. Such instances create moments of lively interaction between dancers and the community. Anton also elaborates that these families would often provide food and refreshments to the dancers after their performance.

On Easter Sunday in 2025, the author was invited to witness the performance in San Dionisio, a nearby neighborhood adjacent to La Huerta, where the cathedral is located. While other *barangays* conduct the street dancing right after the per-formance in the cathedral, the one in San Dionisio happens late in the afternoon. According to the choreographers, the reason behind this is to avoid the intense summer heat, which may lead to dehydration and untoward health risks for the children. The meeting point was the old chapel of San Dionisio.

By three in the afternoon, all the performers and their parents were already seated inside the chapel, while the band was gathering and practicing their instruments outside. Before starting the program, a series of pictorials was taken in sequence: the dancer, the dancer with Dr. Santos, the dancer with their parents, and seve-ral group shots (Picture 2).

This was then followed by a preliminary performance of *Sayaw ng Pagbati*, which the choreographers note as a salutation to San Dionisio, the patron of their *barangay*. The congregation gradually moved outside the chapel to perform another round of the Easter dance ritual. Here, the locals were already flooding the vicinity as they awaited the street dancing. If the performance in the chapel was in salutation to the patron saint, the performance

outside was the customary *bati* to the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Picture 2. The San Dionisio pagbati dancers posed with their choreographer before the main event. Photo by Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo (2025).

Two sets of small *andas* (shoulder-borne platforms), adorned with bright artificial flowers and bearing images of the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary about two feet tall, were carried by groups of men. As the dancers performed, the images appeared to be dancing as well, given that the men carrying them swayed the *andas* intensely.

Once the performance concluded, several men appeared holding long ropes that formed two lines along the processional route. The dancers walked to the barrier, followed by the two images and the local band. The long ropes secured and guided all the participants to the designated points where the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* were performed. Meanwhile, the congregation, as well as the parents, could be seen walking beside the barriers or following the band. The dancers performed at various locations within the jurisdiction of their *barangay*. Since the streets were narrow, the parade consequently caused heavy traffic. Still, the community seemed to be understanding, given that most residents went out of their homes to observe the performances. Locals riding jeepneys leaned out of the windows as their curiosity was piqued by the gathering. By the time the parade reached the main road leading to the cathedral, which was wider, a loud siren emanating from an ambulance stuck in traffic could be heard. As the ambulance tried to navigate the road, the organizers signaled the congregation to halt the parade and make way for the ambulance to pass by. Everyone immediately returned to formation to continue the parade once the ambulance passed by. When all the performances were over, the children and their parents, as well as the band members, headed to a nearby fast-food restaurant to rest and dine. Dr. Santos notes that it was through the sponsorship and generosity of her sister that the supper was possible.

Mediation and materializing the sacred

Philippine culture and art scholar Nicanor Tiongson's (1983) landmark work, "Four Values in Filipino Drama and Film," discusses the value of "*Masaya ang May Palabas*" (Shows are the Best), which explains the Filipinos' obsession with "*bakbakan*" (quarrel), "*iyakan*" (simultaneous crying), "*sayawan*" (dancing), "*kantahan*" (singing), and "*tawanan*" (merriment). While Tiongson contextualizes these obsessions in terms of drama and film, they are also distinguishable in the conduct of Catholic rituals in the Philippines, particularly in public performances that occur in major festivities. Material objects in these rituals do not only become a conduit for the sacred to be felt, but they also add spectacle that triggers the sensibilities of Filipino devotees. The *Sayaw ng Pagbati* in Parañaque City and other towns in the Southern Tagalog Region is an example of what Tiongson notes *Masaya ang May Palabas*. In the context of folk Catholicism, this Easter dance ritual is the devotees' response to the story of Christ's resurrection in the gospel. While priests proclaim the good news of the resurrection in the pulpit, devotees translate the gladness they feel into both drama (*salubong*) and dance (*Sayaw ng Pagbati*).

Moreover, the tradition's connection with the written narrative of the resurrection in the gospel iterates Keane's (2013) idea on the materialities of language in spirit writing: "Writing lends itself to appropriation within activities that deal with the invisible world by virtue of the way in which it lends to language some of the properties common to physical artefacts." Meyer's (2008) concept of mediation and sensational forms is also helpful in understanding why *Sayaw ng Pagbati* remains a permanent fixture in the Easter celebration in Parañaque City. Through ritual objects such as flaglets and costumes, together with sacred images, choreographed movements, and the resonant sounds of music, the Easter dance ritual surrounds participants in a sensory environment that makes the sacred tangible and immediately perceptible to devotees. These are sensational forms that structure the devotees' sensibilities (e.g., sight, hearing, touch, movement) and allow the divine to feel immediate and actively present in their lives.

The gospel message of Christ's resurrection is continually expressed throughout Parañaque City's *Sayaw ng Pagbati*. The most important ritual objects are the two *andas* bearing the images of the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary, which impose and resonate the theme of Easter (Picture 3). For the devotees, the two images allude to two important rituals in town: the *salubong,* which happens in the cathedral at dawn, and the performances of *Sayaw ng Pagbati* in various *barangays*. While the images belonging to the *barangays* can be categorized as smaller replicas, there are larger images exclusively used in the *salubong*. Despite this, the images owned by the *barangays* are visually present in both settings and convey a sense of hierophany during the dance parade. The author observed several ways in which the images were given proper veneration and spotlight during the ritual dance. Some devotees approached, prayed before the images, and touched them even before the street parade started. Furthermore, the images of the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary always come after the dancer. During the street performances, these images are gently swayed by men ferrying them as if joining the performers in their *sayawan* (dancing).

Picture 3. The most important ritual objects during pagbati are the statues of the Virgin Mary and the Resurrected Christ. Photo by Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo (2025).

Dr. Carabeo also points to an important component of the choreography, in which a specific step towards the end requires the dancers to face the image of the Risen Christ. The dancers also wave in salutation to the two images. He specifies, "*the underpinning meaning is yung greeting and well-wishing*" (the underpinning meaning is the greeting and well-wishing). While this pattern is noticeable in all dance troupes, other *barangays* inserted unique steps to highlight religious iconography. Bernadine explains that a "Tridentine sign" is a feature of San Dionisio's dance routine, which she also considers the hardest step, given the fast body coordination it requires. The Tridentine sign originates from the "Sign of the

Cross," with the first three protruding fingers symbolizing the Holy Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), and the remaining two signifying the two natures of Christ: divine and human (Agolia 2016). The feeling of gladness is conveyed not only through the dancers' swift movements but also through their facial expressions. In Eloisa's experience, the choreographers always remind the dancers to smile, as it signifies the feeling of "*galak*" (joy) in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The dancers' costumes also contain religious connotations. In the contemporary period, there is a preference for white gowns. White iconography fills churches during the Easter season: the Risen Christ is depicted in white garments, and the Paschal candle, likewise, bears the same color. However, Dr. Carabeo explains that white costumes are not strictly traditional, since her sister, who performed for six years in the early 1970s, had yellow, orange, blue, and pink gowns. He notes that a preference for white gowns emerged in the late 1970s to early 1980s, when popular fashion designers such as Christian Espiritu, a certain Dandan, and Feliciano began creating gowns for the performers. In San Dionisio, Eloisa explains that the choreographers discuss the symbolism associated with the costumes. White is associated with the Virgin Mary, while the ribbon and veil symbolize the religious dimension of the event.

The conservative nature of the occasion, as imposed by Catholicism, also influences the costume. While the gowns are above or below the knee, a white stocking is required for the perfor-mers. "*Kailangan balot na balot pa din. Conservative*" (Everything should be covered. It must be con-servative), Eloisa adds. An important element of the performers' costumes is the flaglet, a 60-centimeter staff adorned with a white cloth, synthetic flowers, and ribbons. According to Anton, it signifies the resurrection banner of Christ, which alludes to His victory against sin and death.

Obligation, reception, and identity

Religious events in the Philippines, particularly those commemorated by the Catholic Church, incur plenty of expenses. This paved the way for sponsorship systems to flourish in many localities in the archipelago. Evidence from studies on *santo* sponsorship (Tamayo 2020) and *hermano mayor* (Tamayo 2022) underscores the central role of individuals and families of considerable means. These people are obligated to sponsor the entirety or a portion of certain rituals to sustain them. Compared to the cited sponsorship systems, sustaining the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* is less costly; however, the practice remains considerably gentrified, as it continues to cater to a particular social class. In *Sayaw ng Pagbati*, this gentrification is highlighted by the material elements in the dance ritual, which are reliant on the financial capacity of the performers' families. Hodder's (2012) theory of entanglement supposes that both humans and things depend on each other. A thing can become a bridge that can be explored in terms of its usefulness and how it functions in "bringing different components together." He adds that humans have various dependencies on things (e.g., physical, economic, social, psychological), which pose constraints and limits. In Parañaque City, the way locals devote time, labor, and resources to sustain the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* and its material forms shows a mutual dependence between the community and the ritual objects and, in turn, gives rise to particular obligations that, as per Hodder (2012), are bounded by rules, systems of management, and care. Morgan (2016) also points that the concept of reception can be the basis of material analysis, where forms of circulation offer evidence of an artefact's appeal. From the interviews and observations gathered, it becomes clear that ritual objects actively shape how the Easter dance ritual continues to thrive in the contemporary period. Entanglement and reception create an identity, wherein participants and spectators recognize themselves as part of a community through ritual objects. Certainly, *Sayaw ng*

Pagbati is not merely a spiritual practice, but also a social contract that is sustained materially.

The author's field notes reveal that most children perform for several years. Once the parents enlist their children, both are subjected to specific obligations. Parents are obligated to finance the expenses, particularly the costumes, while their children are expected to attend the practices and participate in actual performances on Easter Sunday. More than anything, the costume is a crucial element that exemplifies both constraints and reception (Picture 4). Since *Sayaw ng Pagbati* is performed annually, costumes are commissioned from the *barangay*'s chosen couturier. The performers or the parents must take care of the costumes. As long as the costumes fit the performers, they can be reused, as in the case of Abigail, who wore the same set for four consecutive years. The choreographers in San Dionisio and Bernadine elaborate on how the cos-tume can become a form of constraint. They recount an instance before the declaration of quaran-tine protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein the organizers had already commissioned costumes for the performers. However, since all forms of gathering, including religious activities, were prohibited, the costumes were unused. Two years later, when Easter activities were allowed, the costumes were already unusable, as the performers had outgrown them. The expenses doubled for the parents as they commissioned new ones and ballet shoes for their children. In contrast, Eloisa shares how the costumes successfully depict the concept of reception, which paves the way for the tradition to survive and continuously attract the younger generation. She admits that her motivation to join the dance tradition when she was a child was her desire to wear a gown. Surprisingly, the same reason became the driving force for her daughter to become a performer. She recalls in verbatim what her daughter said, "*Mommy, ang gaganda ng gown! Gusto ko magsuot ng ganun. Isali mo ako*" (Mommy, the gowns are beautiful! I also want to wear one of those. Let me join).

Picture 4. The pagbati dancers wear elaborate costumes that match the mood of the occasion. Photo by Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo (2025).

The music used in *Sayaw ng Pagbati* is another component that also mirrors the reception. Dr. Carabeo explains that the music has taken a life of its own. There are times when it is hard to get a band to play the music because all of them are booked. As the musical composition is easy to learn, it leads some communities to study the music. In addition, the music has been incorporated into another local tradition, *komedya* (play). There is a section in *komedya* that features a *balse* (waltz) in front of the king, where the music in the *Sayaw ng Pagbati* is played. Given the costumes and festive music used in the Easter dance ritual, these have become potent symbols in Parañaque City. Andre emphasizes that it is part of the city's cultural fabric: "*Pag sinabi mong bati, Parañaque kaagad. At pag sinabi mong bati sa Parañaque, ibig sabihin nun Easter*" (When you say *bati*,

it recalls Parañaque. And when you say *bati* in Parañaque, it means Easter). While other towns in the Southern Tagalog Region have their own renditions, he maintains that Parañaque's version will always be part of the choices. The local government came to recognize the significance of this Easter tradition and eventually assumed responsibility for its preservation. Aside from inscribing it in the tourism calendar, it is now maximized to promote tourism in the city. Dr. Carabeo notes that City Hall produces dolls modeled after the performers, which are both exhibited and sold. The local government also invites all the dance troupes to perform *Sayaw ng Pagbati* during the celebration of the City Charter every February.

Prestige goods and social markers

The previous section showed that *Sayaw ng Pagbati* functions as a form of sponsorship that appeals to a particular social class. While the tradition is open to any children who want to perform, the financial investment of parents, the elaborate costumes, and accessories are clearly markers of prestige. Barretto (2003) indicates that the prestige value of a cultural object depends on several factors, including the raw material, its source, the time and energy required for its creation and procurement, and its cultural meaning. She adds that the value ascribed by society to cultural objects is dependent on what it perceives as "worthy, desirable, and important." Within Parañaque's Easter dance ritual, the costumes and accessories function as non-utilitarian objects whose prestige value arises not only from their ornate design but also from the difficulty of acquiring them. Moreover, Coo (2017) reinforces the idea that clothing is a marker of status. Clothing communicates one's class, ethnicity, and sophistication. It can also be manipulated to express identity, devotion, and respectability. Through their costumes and accessories, the performers in *Sayaw ng Pagbati* become ritual actors, which sets them apart from spectators. Coo also indicates that the perceptions of beauty during the Spanish colonial period were strongly influenced by "white supremacy," wherein beauty was "associated with the fair skin and sharp features of the Spanish and Europeans." As the following discussion illustrates, this perception continues to influence Filipinos' standard of beauty, a phenomenon that is clearly observable in the practices of Parañaque's Easter dance ritual. Barretto's (2003) notions on prestige goods and Coo's (2017) assertions on clothing and fair skin as a social marker position the material culture in *Sayaw ng Pagbati* as an indicator of communal and religious identity. The costumes and accessories are not merely decorative; they are active symbols of prestige, devotion, and social status.

Picture 5. As the procession navigates the streets of the barangay, the dancers' costumes offer a stark contrast to the surroundings.

Anton shares that one set of costumes, including the gown, accessories, and flaglets, costs PHP5,000 (USD85.93). All barangays, except San Dionisio,

commission their costumes from Alex Borja, a local fashion designer based in Don Galo. In San Dionisio, parents pay PHP5,500 (USD94.52) for the same set of costumes. According to Dr. Santos, they order these costumes from Edward Teng, a couturier whose atelier is based in Sampaloc, Manila (Figure 5). She notes that, beginning next year, the cost of the costumes will rise because of increasing raw material prices, a change that may affect how performers and their families plan and participate in the ritual. The participation of local couturiers adds to the prestige of the Easter dance ritual. It also resonates an air of exclusivity among the community's elites. In the case of La Huerta, Dr. Carabeo explains that most families in the neighborhood are affluent and can afford to commission gowns every year. Performers with fewer resources may be perceived as "*kawawa*" (pitiful) if they are unable to secure gowns from the period's reputable designers. This highlights the social nuances embedded in the ritual. To curb such social perception, the parish priest in the late 1970s decided to standardize the color of the costumes. All dance troupes were mandated to wear white costumes from then on. Despite this mandate, the perception of the dance ritual's exclusivity persists, as many performers come from families of doctors, engineers, and other prominent professions.

Several respondents re-count local social behavior. They note that the townsfolk of the city are unreserved in expressing their thoughts. Derogatory remarks are abundant and infiltrate even in *Sayaw ng Pagbati*. Most of these degrading remarks refer to the skin color of the performers, which proves that locals still perceive a fair complexion as something beautiful. Eloisa recalls an instance when two elderly women remarked on her daughter during a practice. One of them said, "*Ay ano ba yan! Bat napasali yan ang itim-itim naman?*" (Oh, what's that! How did she get included when she's so dark?). When Eloisa confronted them, one of the ladies stressed, "*Ay nako hija kung hindi ka mapuna, hindi ka taga Parañaque*" (Oh my, daughter, if you don't notice these things, you're not really from Parañaque). Dr. Carabeo also shares that there is a derogatory term in La Huerta called "*rosas ibayo*." *Rosas* means fuchsia pink, and *ibayo* refers to the outskirts. People usually say this in reference to other locals who live outside the *población* (city center). In particular, well-to-do individuals make this remark when they see a performer from the *ibayo* with a darker complexion wearing a bright fuchsia pink gown.

Conclusion

The *Sayaw ng Pagbati* of Parañaque City illustrates the vibrant heritage of Philippine folk Catholicism. It is not a static cultural tradition, but a dynamic practice that is continuously reshaped through its material forms. This study employed material culture as an analytical lens to demonstrate how ritual objects (e.g., costumes, props, music, choreography) are not peripheral embellishments. They constitute several elements: religious meaning, communal identity, and social prestige. Meyer's (2008) concept of "sensational forms" is actively present in the Easter dance ritual. They aid in structuring sensory experience and mediating the sacred to the community. The sacredness of the occasion and the divine presence of the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary become recognizable to the locals through the waving of flags, elaborate costumes, festive music, and symbol-laden choreography. This idea connects with Keane's (2013) concept of "spirit writing," wherein a text, in this case the story of Christ's resurrection in the gospels, has been reinterpreted. Ritual objects are part of this reinterpretation that binds the performers and the audiences in a shared religious atmosphere.

Hodder's (2012) theory of entanglement is also observable in *Sayaw ng Pagbati*. The dependency between humans and things in the ritual is clearly apparent. Obligations permeate the practice, which require parents to shoulder the expenses in line with the costumes, and in turn, obliging the children to

perform for several years. By imposing obligations, it facilitates the shaping of social behavior, the perpetuation of communal memory, and ensures the transmission of the Easter dance ritual across generations. While the respondents are motivated by *panata* or the allure of wearing a gown, their Narratives exemplify that the obligations they carry are both material and social in nature. In terms of reception, Morgan's (2016) concept depicts how the community reinterprets and revalues the ritual objects. This is exemplified by how future partici-pants aspire to wear costumes, how the music gains life of its own beyond the ritual, and how devotees venerate the images of the Risen Christ and the Virgin Mary. Such forms of reception ensure that the ritual remains relevant in contemporary religious life, which continually renews its symbolic force each Easter.

The material culture in *Sayaw ng Pagbati* also aligns with the framework of prestige and social status. Through Tesoro's (2003) analysis of prestige goods and Coo's (2017) study on clothing, this article reveals that costumes and accessories function as markers of wealth, devotion, and social standing in the community. The respondents' narratives demonstrate how costumes can become an indicator of social belonging. It also reinforces boundaries between insiders and outsiders, as well as between participants and spectators, and between the affluent and families from modest means. The study also highlights the significance of local couturiers. Their craft elevates the status of the costumes into prestige goods. Moreover, these ritual objects also indicate the ongoing contesting and negotiating of identity. Despite issues of exclusivity among members of the local elite, the expanding involvement of performers from various social classes makes the Easter dance ritual culturally relevant. *Sayaw ng Pagbati* has also become a source of local pride in Parañaque City. As the local government recognizes it as a cultural heritage and promotes the tradition as part of its tourism calendar, this institutionalization highlights the dual character of the Easter dance ritual: it is both a religious expression and a cultural symbol.

As this study reveals, material culture has the power to shape religious and social life. Reflecting on how *Sayaw ng Pagbati* materializes the sacred, entangles performers and their families in cycles of obligation, and signifies prestige and social status, the author affirms that folk Catholicism in the Philippines is not only a spiritual experience but something embodied, mediated, and sustained through ritual objects. While this Easter dance ritual commemorates Christ's resurrection, it is also a celebration of the local community's ongoing redefinition of faith, identity, and social bonds, which are expressed through its material culture. The sacred then becomes tangible to all devotees from diverse backgrounds.

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PROMISES AND PRACTICALITIES: THE EVOLUTION AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF EU ROMA POLICY

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Abstract

The historical development of Roma policy in Europe has been characterized by discrimination, assimilation and some would say failure. Other see an attempt in recent years by Europe to reflect solidarity through Roma inclusion policies. Progress has been made towards a social Europe, but policy on the Roma minority remains on the margins. This paper deals with the historical development of EU Roma policy. The EU Youth Guarantee would be a powerful tool for young Roma, but the necessary institutions are often lacking. The same applies to the new EU Strategic Framework for Roma, which is a positive development compared to its predecessor, adding three new pillars. An interview with Dr. László Andor, former Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, on Roma policies was conducted, adding to the existing literature on the subject. Inclusive targeting proves to be the best measure for effective Roma policy making. In the future, a re-evaluation of the migration issue, a move away from the securitization approach, or the enlargement of the EU to include the Balkan countries could breathe new life into the importance of Roma policy. But the practical relevance of EU policies is often limited, as they struggle to adapt to social realities on the ground. Although the article deals primarily with recent history, attention is made to early policy dating back to the arrival of the Roma in Europe in the late Middle Ages.

Keywords: Roma policy; social inclusion; European Union policies; marginalization;
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Absztrakt

ÍGÉRETEK ÉS GYAKORLATI MEGVALÓSÍTHATÓSÁG: AZ EURÓPAI UNIÓS ROMA POLITIKA FEJLŐDÉSI PÁLYÁJA ÉS JÖVŐBELI IRÁNYAI

A roma politikák európai történeti fejlődését alapvetően a diszkrimináció, az asszimilációs törekvések, valamint – egyes értelmezések szerint – a kudarc jellemezte. Más megközelítések ugyanakkor az utóbbi években az európai szintű szolidaritás megnyilvánulásaként értelmezik a roma inklúziós politikák erősödését. Noha a „szociális Európa" irányába történtek előrelépések, a roma kisebbséget érintő szakpolitikák továbbra is periférikus helyzetben maradnak. Jelen tanulmány az Európai Uniós roma politika történeti fejlődésének vizsgálatára irányul. Az Európai Unió Ifjúsági Garancia programja potenciálisan hatékony eszközt jelenthetne a roma fiatalok támogatásában, azonban a szükséges intézményi feltételek gyakran hiányoznak. Hasonló megállapítás tehető az új EU Roma Stratégiai Keretrendszer vonatkozásában is, amely előrelépést jelent elődjéhez képest, különösen három új pillér bevezetésével. A kutatás keretében interjú készült Dr. Andor László, az Európai Bizottság korábbi foglalkoztatásért, szociális ügyekért és társadalmi befogadásért felelős biztosával a roma politikák témájában, amely kiegészíti a rendelkezésre álló szakirodalmat. Az inkluzív célzás módszertana a vizsgálat alapján a leghatékonyabb megközelítésnek bizonyul a roma politikák kialakítása során. A jövőre vonatkozóan a migráció kérdésének újraértékelése, a biztonsági megközelítés meghaladása, valamint az Európai Unió nyugat-balkáni bővítése potenciálisan új lendületet adhat a roma politika jelentőségének. Mindazonáltal az uniós szakpolitikák gyakorlati relevanciája gyakran korlátozott, mivel azok nehezen alkalmazkodnak a helyi társadalmi viszonyokhoz. Bár a tanulmány elsődlegesen a közelmúlt fejleményeire koncentrál, kitekintést nyújt a roma népesség késő középkori európai megjelenéséig visszanyúló korai szakpolitikai előzményekre is.

Kulcsszavak: roma politika; társadalmi befogadás; európai uniós szakpolitikák; marginalizáció;

Diszciplína: politikatudomány

Introduction

The complex interplay of domestic and international influences shaped Roma policies in Central Europe from 1989 to the early 2000s. The post-1989 transition brought democratic transition and political liberalization which led to the formation of Roma advocacy groups and recognition of Roma as an ethnic group. Attempts to fight economic discrimination and social exclusion started to be made, however, the progress was rather uneven (Tamás, 2007, 165–167).

The 1990s can be considered as a major change as Central European states were looking for integration into the European Union. The European Union has demonstrated a commitment to addressing human rights and anti-discrimination concerns through the adoption of several key measures. These include the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) and the Race Equality Directive (2000). These policies pressured the candidate countries to tackle the problem of Roma exclusion as one of the conditions for joining the EU. Roma issues were increasingly considered in the discourse on European integration by the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the momentum for reform began to falter after Central European countries joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 (Tamás, 2007, 171–173).

It appears that the EU was prepared to make a strong formal commitment, but was confronted with the practical realities of accession, particularly regarding structural challenges such as economic

and social exclusion and inequalities, which would have required more comprehensive action.

In times of rising Euroscepticism, the efforts to give young people a sense of belonging and identity with the EU are probably more relevant than ever before. The focus on Roma is specifically important as they make up the largest minority which is marginalized in many societies and therefore often live in poverty or are at risk of social exclusion. This article focuses on the development of the European Policy on Roma since 1990. It comprises three principal sections. The first delves into the history of the Roma in Europe. The second section offers an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform policy-making practices regarding marginalized communities. These are theories on social exclusion, community development and participation. The third part of the article focuses on an analysis of the policies themselves. The Youth Guarantee and the EU Roma Frameworks are the two policies discussed in the paper. Policy-making goes hand in hand with the debate between mainstreaming and targeting policies.

In January 2024, an interview was conducted with Dr. László Andor, the former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion from 2010 to 2014. During this period, he addressed the policies pertaining to the Roma population at the EU level. He continues to do so presently in a Brussels-based think tank. I posed questions regarding European policy on young Roma to him. His responses in this article are intended to supplement existing literature on the subject and to address the question of the future trajectory of EU Roma policy.

History

Present policy needs to be viewed in light of policies of ethnic cleansing, forced assimilation and genocide. This chapter delves into the History of the Roma in Europe, with a focus on Hungary. Today they make up the largest minority in the EU and are often pushed to the margins of societies. But their History in Europe is older than the one of nation states we know today. The Roma arrived in Europe already hundreds of years ago.

Linguistic and historical evidence indicates that the ancestral speakers of Romany, the Roma, originated in India as it is mostly agreed that their language is part of the so-called Indo-European (Dvořáková, 2022) or Central Indo-Aryan Family (John, 2013). Thus views on the reasons of their exodus diverge. Vijay George John identifies two principal arguments presented in existing literature. The first posits that the group belonged to a low caste, unified by their language, and traversed the region as a mobile community. The second suggests that the exodus was a response to military actions in Asia, a perspective that the author also espouses (John, 2013, 1). He builds on the scholarship of Turner (1926), Hancock (2006) and Fraser (1995) to propose that Romani language originated as a koine, that is to say, a mixed linguistic variety which developed within the Indian armies that were incurporated into the Ghaznavid Army following the invasions of India in the year 1000.

These soldiers, originating from an area where Central Indo-Aryan languages are spoken, later were incorporated into the Seljuk Turks' army after they defeated the Ghaznavids. In 1071 they were allowed to settle in what is eastern Turkey today, from where they later migrated westwards. John concludes that this understanding of the exodus is strengthened by linguistic, sociohistorical, and genetic evidence in his analysis (John, 2013, 25–28, 50).

The first documentation of Roma in Hungary can be traced back to 1416, when a municipal record from Brassó mentions a donation to an 'Egyptian, and his companions', equating Roma with Egyptians. It is also believed that they were in Transylvania around 1400, at the same time as other groups from the Balkans and Wallachia were migrating to Central Europe. In several regions of Hungary, the Roma were settled in the early 15th century. While Roma were often persecuted in Western Europe,

the political realities of Hungary offered a more tolerant environment. The Ottoman threat called for all able-bodied men to be recruited to build fortresses and make weapons, which led to Roma being recruited for important communal and military roles. By the 16th century, Roma communities continued to grow. The growing population was protected by local lords and nobles through legal safeguards. In the west, Roma faced a lot of persecution, prejudice and oppression as they settled down in Western Europe. They were accused of being spies and the first expulsion orders were given to them as early as 1479 by the Holy Roman Empire. More such orders for their expulsion were given in the 16th century across Western Europe, but the implementation of these orders was rather haphazard. The Roma faced a largely monocultural, Christian Europe in which they were alien (Kemény, 2005, 1–8).

During the era of Ottoman occupation of Hungary, the Roma population was engaged in a range of roles and activities, including musical performance, blacksmithing, bullet casting, and military service within the municipal structures. By the mid-16th century, Roma communities, including a "Roma town" in Buda, had emerged (Kemény, 2005, 8–10).

The 18th century brought attempts at forced assimilation under Habsburg rule. A series of decrees aimed to settle the Roma permanently, prohibit their nomadic lifestyle, and encourage their integration into Hungarian society. Measures included bans on speaking the Romani language, prohibitions on intermarriage, and the forced removal of children from Roma families for re-education. However, these policies largely failed due to resistance from both Roma communities and the Hungarian nobility, who were reluctant to allocate land and resources for their settlement. By 1787, Habsburg had given up the attempts to control the Roma popularion. The governing council eliminated the Department for Roma Affairs and ceased the funding of the re-education of Roma children (Dvořáková, 2022; Kemény, 2005, 15–17).

This can be considered as the Empire's step back from the active management of the Roma, leaving them marginalized within society. By the end of the 19th century Hungary had become a home to an increasing Roma population. Nevertheless, Roma people experienced numerous social and economic issues despite their population increase. Many of them were day-laborers and a big amount lived in bad housing conditions. This is evident from the 1893 Roma census. As for the cultural aspect, Roma musicians played an important role in the shaping of Hungarian music during this time, as they accounted nearly 12% of the wage earners (Kemény, 2005, 32–33).

Policies against Roma reached their peak in the Nazi era. Backed with their racist ideology, seeing the Roma as racially inferior, the Nazis killed them systematically. Thus, their fate was slightly differently handled in the occupied and allied countries of the German Reich (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2023). The Roma Holocaust, today mostly referred to as Porrajmoss, in Hungary reached its peak in 1944 and 1945, where there was a strong collaboration in the persecution and extermination with the Hungarian Arrow Cross party (Katz, 2007, 70–71). Their persecution could partially be based on so called 'Gypsy legitimation cards', which were introduced in Hungary in collaboration with Interpol already before the war. Their ghettoization began in 1943. 'Gypsy Work Battalions' were introduced by decree of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior in 1944. In February 1945, the fascist Arrow Cross government ordered mass deportations of Roma after the deterioration of the Horthy government(Baumgartner, n.d.).

After the war, discrimination continued. Katz analyzes how the narratives of Roma have been marginalized in the holocaust narratives, she pointed out that prejudice and discrimination has played a role

in the exclusion of their narratives from the collective memory. Roma's oral traditions, the dislocation of the Roma during the war coupled with a lack of centralized leadership or state representation have also contributed to the fragmentation of their testimony (Katz, 2007, 72–74).

Communism did not bring liberation for Roma. Assimilation policies started to be introduced. The aim was to achieve their complete proletarianization. This forced assimilation is explored by Tamás Hajnáczky. In 1961, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party passed a law aimed at improving the situation of the Roma population, particularly in the areas of education, employment and housing. This key resolution outlined a policy of assimilation, rejecting the recognition of Gypsies as a separate nationality and advocating their integration into wider Hungarian society. The minority was considered in categories such as integrated, integrating and non-integrated. Implementation of the policy was carried out by force, such as the elimination of settlements as a tool of forced assimilation (Hajnáczky, 2020, 57, 59). The author concludes that the policies were grounded in prejudices and a superficial understanding of the Roma population, which led to systemic marginalization rather than integration. The governments' approaches often reinforced segregation rather than dismantling it, as the policies focused excessively on controlling and regulating the Roma population rather than addressing their systemic disadvantages. The progress seen in statistics concerning employment, housing, and education was inherently flawed. Many children were enrolled in school but did not complete elementary education, most of the workers were confined to unskilled labour and segregated modern settlements replaced slums. Hajnáczky concludes that the central contradictions in the policies, aiming for assimilation while neglecting systemic inequalities and cultural preservation, led to their ultimate ineffectiveness (Hajnáczky, 2020, 81–83). After the dissolution of the Soviet system, the forceful assimilation came to its end.

The transition resulted in significant challenges for Roma populations, including elevated unemployment rates and the tendency to be held responsible for societal problems. Chapter Four will also consider more recent policies, introduced since 1993, as they are still relevant to current policy. This chapter concludes that the historical policies towards the Roma population have been characterized by expulsion, discrimination, forced assimilation, genocide and ethnic cleansing, persecution, re-education and marginalization. The history of the Roma in Hungary is characterized by waves of migration, a diverse range of social roles and shifting policies that have sought to integrate and control them. When protection was provided or positive attempts were made towards the Roma, these policies were driven by the economic value of Roma labor and their contributions to local economies. In the opinion of some, the EU Policy attempts to change the narrative, while others may say it has traits of past polies. The following chapters deal with theories of social exclusion, community development and participation as well as the recent and current EU policy towards the minority.

Social exclusion, community development and participation

Ruth Levitas defined concepts from which poverty and social exclusion can be assessed. She defines three different concepts. First, the redistributive discourse (RED), which sees poverty as the core problem for social exclusion. This concept is surely oriented towards a more equal society and sees problems in prevailing inequalities. Second, the social integration discourse (SID), which focus on paid work, usually employment (Levitas, 1999). It connects the people to the labor force, which is the viewpoint of the European Union. Third, the moral

underclass discourse (MUD). Here, the focus is not primarily on the individual and its labor market involvement, but rather much more on embedding the individual into a group, which get attributed moral and cultural causes for being poor (Levitas, 1999). The EU's approach is,

> "to work on the social integration question primarily through the labor market. In Hungary, since 2010, the main policy through which the government has been addressing the long-term unemployment and exclusion of Roma people is the public employment scheme. And that in fact matches the main approach which the EU is engaged in, which is to acknowledge that if you increase the employment rate in a disadvantaged community, then poverty and social exclusion on aggregate is also reduced and addressed." (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

In their introduction, the editors of the Book 'Romani Communities and Transformative Change: A New Social Europe' take a multidimensional approach with a focus on recognition and redistribution to achieve social justice (Ryder et al., 2021, 13). Poverty and social exclusion must be seen as multidimensional, on a basis of radical understanding of human rights. They base their arguments on theories of redistribution and recognition of Nanzy Fraser (1995, 2007) as well as the critical race theory, which sees dominant and hegemonic 'races' maintaining racial inequality for their own sake (Ryder et al., 2021, 18). Their perspective shares a clear RED approach.

As different approaches on the meanings of social exclusion exist, this is also the case for methods of community development. The following sections summarize the discourse on Romani community development: inclusive community development and participation, and the debate between targeted projects and mainstreaming.

Inclusive community development and participation

Inclusive community development aims to give citizens an active role in the development process, based on existing skills and cultural practices (Acton et al., 2014, 13). The three main steps within the concept of inclusive community development are the participation of Roma in public affairs to raise their voice, the fight against discrimination and an interplay between the fight against prejudices and socio-economic disadvantage (Rostas, 2019b, 94). The issue of Roma participation can be best assessed with Arnstein's Participation Ladder (Table 1). Iulius Rostas provides a detailed description in the fourth chapter of his book on pages 174 to 176.

Table 1. Arnstein's (1969, p. 217) ladder of participation

1	Citizen control	Degrees of citizen power
2	Delegated power	
3	Partnership	
4	Placation	Degrees of tokenism
5	Consultation	
6	Informing	
7	Therapy	Non participation
8	Manipulation	

With a focus on the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania, he provides evidence that the participation of Roma ranks in the bottom four rungs between manipulation and consultation (Rostas, 2019c, 176–184). The lack of participation which suppresses the voice of Romani communities, the insufficient fight of discrimination and the inadequate combating of socio-economic differences manifests itself in Policies. A crucial element of inclusive community development is empowerment. Roland Ferkovics et al. point out that empowerment can be viewed from different perspectives, liberal and liberating. In contrast to liberal empowerment, liberating empowerment can be understood as structure-changing (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 36).

The lack of the impact of Roma communities on policy progresses is one of several issues which are criticized. Furthermore, the rationale of Romani inclusion policy in the EU is called into question. Members of the communities are seen as cheap workforce who can be employed in low-skilled work (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 40.). The economic arguments for the empowerment of Roma are powerful, but they are not significantly inspired by social justice. To summarize the main points of the text, bottom-up policies with an approach of social accountability, minority targeting through affirmative action, social justice accompanied with just distribution of resources, and understanding the multidimensional aspects of the communities and giving them a loud voice are the core aspects on the way to a sustainable empowerment of Romani communities.

László Andor pointed out another problem, which can be called representation by the elite. Mainly privileged Roma make it to the stage of representation and participation, who are hardly capable of speaking for severely disadvantaged groups (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). Questions of how a promising quality of representation and participation of disadvantaged Romani communities can be achieved must be part of future research. However, there are fundamental challenges along the way. These relate primarily to the level of education, which serves as a contradiction at the EU level. Educated people are needed to deal with EU funds and governments programs.

At this point, László Andor underscores the significance of access to quality education and presents two explanations for enhanced Roma involvement.

Firstly, this could be achieved through the implementation of local programs designed to enhance the capabilities of local municipal leaders and activists, enabling them to collaborate in the delivery of programs.

Secondly, the establishment of a body comprising a certain number of educated officials could prove beneficial in addressing the policy issues concerning the Roma population and their partici-pation (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024).

Targeted or mainstreaming policies?

The debate between targeted projects and mainstreaming deals with the question of whether Romani community development must happen through direct assistance or could be part of broader policies. An example for mainstreaming are the EU policies prior to 2011. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy for 2011 to 2020 specifically targeted Roma, which means that it "deviates from the EU's general approach when it comes to the racial and ethnic neutrality of its policies (Rostas, 2019c, 149)." In the analyzed literature, many authors see mainstreaming as insufficient, because of the risk not to reach the most deprived who are forced to compete with others for funding (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 43; Rostas, 2019a, 122).

For reasons of diversity, in its 'roadmap to facilitate consultation on a new Roma initiative' in 2020, the European Commission pointed out the need to consider the specific needs of young people. This should be seen against the background that Roma youth does not have access to the benefits of measures aimed at youth in general, such as the Youth Guarantee (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 41, 44). In other words, there is a need for a special policy on Roma youth, because youth policy in general fails to address the complex issues concerning the hugest European minority. 'Structural racism' in Europe against Roma communities prevails which hinders the process of active support (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 38–39). Special support for Roma, as forms of affirmative action face anchored obstacles.

The importance of inclusivity of targeted policies, programs and projects without artificial separation was emphasized by the expert:

> "You cannot genuinely desegregate the Roma from 'the others' […]. I think the point exactly is to avoid any kind of artificial separation in a village […]. Because in reality there is a mix. There are different types of families in different places. I think the point is not to separate in an EU program, some kind of training program, or kindergarten development program for the Roma. But to say, in a village, where the majority is Roma, everybody should benefit. Because there would be a greater cost and damage if you just want to promote the Roma. As opposed to a policy which is inclusive. And already in the kindergarten, already in your training program, the people are together and then you help developing their opportunities together." (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

During his time as Commissioner, people turned to him with good intentions of promoting the case of the Roma and started counting and estimating the population. Or in other words, aimed to create this artificial separation of the population, which he opposes (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024).

It is usually necessary to tailor the program to the target group to meet their needs. In conclusion it can be said that targeted opposed to mainstream policies are needed and that targeting should generally be inclusive if possible.

EU Policies on Roma

The way towards a Social Europe encompasses a systemic view-change, seeing Romani communities as "victims of an unfair system". It's about a change from a charity- to a duty-perspective (Ryder et al., 2021, 18). The eastern enlargement and the subsequent economic crisis prompted the EU to direct attention towards the Roma population in its member states. Up until the present moment, two frameworks have been in place, which have provided the coordinating mechanism for member states to establish national integration strategies. This part focuses on the development of the EU Roma framework and assesses the value of the Youth Guarantee for young Roma.

The National Roma Integration Strategies and the New EU Roma Strategic Framework

The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (New EU Roma Framework) for the years 2020 to 2030 (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2020) follows the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) for the years 2011 to 2020. Due to the time frame, the used literature mainly focuses on the older EU Framework, which is criticized from different angles. Roma activists would have preferred an EU strategy directly coordinated by the commission, and not a Framework through the Open Method Coordination (OMC). They see the framework as insufficient to target discrimination, harassment, hate speech and violence (Rostas, 2019c, 153). The OMC is a soft form of governance, which aims to achieve its goals with peer pressure and persuasion (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 35). In other words, member states that achieve the common goals put pressure on all members to reach them as well. They can offer support with mandatory reports which describe how the goal is reached. However, as indicated by the interviewee, this is, in fact, an effective mechanism:

> "Since 2000 and 2011 it's been what we call the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester, which has been the main transmission of the EU policy towards the Member States. And that's also the channel for the European Commission to install specific issues in national reform programs. And the European Semester is a forceful policy. It's based on annual checklists, consultation and on delivery." (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

Before the NRIS was adopted, the Council of Ministers advised the member states in 2009 to consider the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion (2010), which are a tool for both policy-makers and practitioners managing programs and projects for Roma. Of course, the problem of non-legal obligation remains. Stronger legal commitment by Member states may help, but this is difficult to achieve. Still, both frameworks are considered a very strong instrument.

The EU Roma Civil Monitor (2012-2025) supervises the quality and the imple-mentation of the national Roma strategical frameworks, which can also be considered a strong mechanism. The NRIS is mostly focused on education, health, employment, and housing. These accounts are measurable, which is of importance when analyzing the impact of a policy (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). In the New Framework, a three-pillar approach, focusing on Equality, Inclusion and Participation is added.

Chapter four of the New EU Roma Framework presents the EU actions which should complement the national strategies (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2020). These are summarized in table 2.

The EU actions mainly deal with the added three pillar approach of the Framework, which is desirable. Participation can be described as on the levels between consultation and placation. Representatives are asked for their opinions and are working together with the Commission. But in the end decision-makers have the final say. But a strong influence by the representatives remains. Here comes again the critique mentioned in the previous chapters, that mainly privileged people become representatives. The question of whether disadvantaged Romani communities are represented at the EU-level at all arises, which can be the scope of another study. The dimensions of education, health, employment, and housing are not found on the level of EU-Actions. Overall, the focus of the Framework is on mainstreaming. The Framework very much takes a SID approach towards social exclusion.

Table 2.EU Actions withing the EU Roma strategic framework

Action	**Concrete Measures**
Enforcing EU Legislation	○ Monitoring and enforcing the Racial Equality Directive ○ Infringement proceedings ○ Reinforcing recording and reporting of hate crimes ○ Counter illegal hate speech
Mainstreaming Roma equality in EU policy initiatives and mobilizing EU funds for Roma	○ Guidance and training on mainstreaming ○ Support targeted programs through monitoring
EU action and support to promote Roma participation, inclusion, and diversity	○ Dialogue meetings with Roma civil society organizations ○ New cycle of Roma civil society capacity-building ○ Election of a platform representative for engagement of women and youth ○ Traineeships or junior positions for Roma youth in national Roma platforms
EU action and support to promote equality and fight antigypsyism	○ Campaign with UNESCO ○ Series of seminars and communication activities

The value of the Youth Guarantee for Romani communities

The reinforced Youth Guarantee today ensures young people up to and including the age of 29 an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. The estimated proportion of NEETs reached by the Youth Guarantee in Hungary is around 10,6% for the years 2008 to 2017 (Factsheet: Youth Guarantee & Youth Employment Initiative in Hungary, 2019). As a comparison, this proportion counts 66,8% in Germany (Factsheet: Youth Guarantee & Youth Employment Initiative in Germany, 2019). The Youth Guarantee has been criticized. It lacks quality standards that prohibit unpaid internships. Young people must be given good long-term opportunities, as opposed to short-term ones. The Commission could develop a protective legal instrument for this (Muraille, 2022, 3).

In a council recommendation from 2020 all EU member states committed to the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee (European Council, 2020). The council recommendation does not mention Roma at all.

According to the former Commissioner, the policy should be one of the most important ones for young Roma. To ensure the effective implementation of the policy, it is essential to establish a comprehensive network of labor market organizations at the national level. The absence of such a network in Hungary makes it difficult for disadvantaged groups to benefit from the policy as there is no network to support them in taking advantage of it (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). The practical value of the Youth Guarantee thus depends on the nature of the member state's social support system.

My interview partner acknowledges the practical obstacles for young Roma to benefit from the EU's policy. The Youth Guarantee prerequisites vocational training, which already excludes many young Roma. This is why he says that it *should* be an important policy but does not make it to be one on the ground. It would be about providing a bit of assistance and advice to find a decent job. But it fails first because of the social realities of the Romani population, and second because of the insufficient social service systems. There would be much more to do (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). The Youth Guarantee must thus be adapted to the specific circumstances of each locality. It can be one of the most important tools to target young Roma in a mainstreaming policy, if the implementtation can be based on a strong network of institutions and agencies.

Both the New Roma Framework as a targeted and the youth guarantee as a mainstreaming policy must therefore be tailored to local realities. When my interviewee speaks about the social realities, he also means the ways in which poverty shapes the daily lives of segregated Romani communities. They are often absolutely deprived of main capabilities (Sen, 1983), such as having a good vocational training and a decent job. Because of their lower chances in education, marginalized communities also develop less skills, which would be needed for a successful implementation of the EU's policies. From a relative poverty-perspective (Townsend, 1985) Romani communities are relatively poor and have relatively less chances to enter quality jobs compared to the rest of society. The absolute deprivation of not being disfavored for well-paid quality jobs is related to the relative deprivation of not having the same skills as others. These realities must be addressed, if the EU's policies aim to be successful. Understanding Romani communities' social realities remains significant in the future.

Where is the EU's Policy on Roma heading to?

Today, the EU is often criticized for being too far away from its citizens. My interviewee also sees this problem. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the

way the Structural Funds in the EU work out. The EU must find its ways to connect the local level with the EU level much more, instead of having several layers. Although the problems of young Roma and their communities in Eastern Europe are recognized and addressed in the Roma Framework, not much progress has been made on the ground. The east enlargement and the aftermath of the financial crisis brought the topic onto the EU's agenda. As a reaction, in 2011 the first Framework concerning Romani issues was adopted. Today, their issues are increasingly marginalized (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024).

This contradicts with the Unions attitude towards Human Rights. Roma issues matter. It cannot be in the interest of member states with a growing Roma population to have them on the margins of society.

> "If you ignore the social exclusion of the Roma, but this population pattern continues, it means there will be an ever-increasing share of a disadvantaged community vis a vis, the let's say white majority society. And that would be some kind of ticking bomb. It would not only be unfair and unpleasant, but it would at some point threaten with some kind of social breakdown." (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

This work aimed to highlight the importance of engaging with marginalized communities. Embedded in times of rising euroscepticism, I think that it could otherwise undermine the cohesion of the European Union. Migrating poor Roma from east to west can be a future scenario that will feed into criticism of the EU which questions the freedom of movement. László Andor sees only two possible scenarios for how the issue can be brought back to a higher level of attention. The first can be the integration of the Western Balkans, because of their large Romani population. They may bring it back to the agenda of the EU. The second emerges from migration policy, if it can be accessed not through just the security lens:

> "Contrary to the stereotypes, most of the European Roma are not mobile. They're not migrants, they are a settled population. […] But there comes the similarity that even if the Roma are not mobile anymore, there is a comparison between the lack of adequate integration of recent migrant populations and the Roma population. So, it would help if migration would not be looked at just through the security lens." (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

Both are unlikely, leading to pessimism about the future of EU Roma policy. The current situation represents a marginalization of the issue, given that it was addressed from 2011 onwards and a framework is in place until 2030. The interviewee indicated that the prevailing view within the EU is that if the policy has not produced the desired outcomes, the responsibility lies with the local authorities. The subject remains dormant in the background, with reference being made to the current framework for the Roma community. Furthermore, there is a paucity of discourse on Roma issues in Brussels, with László Andor's think tank representing one of the few entities engaged with this topic. From his life experience as Commissioner, he knows that very much depends on the people in office, especially when a policy gets marginalized. It really depends on whether the people in office want to pursue a specific policy or not. It today looks like, that they don't care about the issues of Romani communities anymore. He acknowledges that The EU policies don't have much influence and competences to change the social realities in the member states on the ground (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). This conversely means that even if the topic would be on the EU Agenda, it can't make a big difference on the ground.

Conclusion

The Social Policy of the EU is in general a marginal policy, which is especially the case concerning Romani communities. Nevertheless, their issues made it onto the EU's political agenda at the turn of the millennium. This historic achievement could be repeated with further EU enlargement to include the Balkan countries. In this way history can repeat itself. We need to learn from past mistakes and try to apply inclusive targeting. The Youth Guarantee would be one of the most important tools if its implementation could be based on a strong network of institutions and agencies that supports people in need. The New Framework is an improvement on the old one because it considers three additional new dimensions. The first Roma Framework's success was limited, also because of the eurozone crisis and introduced austerity measures. From the interview we know that the EU policy on Romani communities won't be able to change social realities on the ground if continuing as they are, and that their issues are not even present in Brussel's debates today.

It very much seems that in today's Europe, inclusion depends on a growing and stimulatory economy. The New Framework's impact is questionable, as still much relies in the hands of the member states and their national strategies. Targeted policies are needed as opposed to mainstream policies, and the former should be generally inclusive where possible. As the largest minority is pushed to the margins of society and remains in isolation, it underlines the importance of targeted policies.

As I mentioned at the end of the chapter on history and then in the chapter on the current policies, views on the current quality of the EU policy diverge. EU Policy shows attempts to change the narrative on Roma towards a more egalitarian and justice-based approach. Thus, the focus on the economic aspect remains. Inclusion depends on the economy. The EU works on the social integration question primarily through the labor market. There is not much room for justice-based and egalitarian practice, however it cannot be neglected that EU policies are very much influenced by those. But it seems that on the field, the aim is to integrate Roma as workforce to boost the economy. This approach bears resemblance to the policies adopted during the defense against Ottoman attacks, when the Roma were incorporated into military roles, or the ottoman occupation where they started to be integrated into the economy. Concluding this article, I would argue, that current policies on Roma have similarities to past policies on the ground, but progress has been made in the intention, especially in policies at the EU level.

About the Interviewee

Dr. László Andor was EU-Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion from 2010 to 2014. He is currently working in and managing a think tank with focus on social Europe. They are promoting research, for example about the implementation of the pillar of the social rights. They are one of the unique organizations which still pays attention to Roma. At the same time, he receives a variety of invitations as an ex-Commissioner. The interview took place in a café in Budapest, in January 2024. Consent to the use of his name and the content of the interview for this research was given in the audio recording and by email.

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NEGOTIATING CHANGE: MISSIONARY ENCOUNTERS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN'S ROLES AMONG THE BUKUSU IN BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Although internal influences existed within Bukusu society, women largely remained stable within, and responsive to, established cultural expectations. However, exposure to external interventions, particularly Christian missionary activity, marked the beginning of new male and female role dynamics. This study examines the influence of Christian missionary activity on the roles of Bukusu women in Bungoma County, western Kenya, from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. It proceeds from the observation that many internal social transformations became more visible in the context of missionary encounter. Drawing on oral narratives, archival materials, secondary sources, and ethnographic interpretation, the study argues that missionary engagement with Bukusu society produced neither wholesale cultural rupture nor straightforward continuity. Rather, Bukusu women selectively appropriated missionary education, religious practices, and health interventions to renegotiate domestic authority, moral legitimacy, and social visibility. By foregrounding women's voices, the study demonstrates how missionary influence

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was mediated through locally embedded sex-based logics, kinship obligations, and moral economies, revealing a process of cultural negotiation rather than passive reception.

Keywords: Bukusu women, Religious transformation, Women's agency, Christian missions, Kinship
Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

A VÁLTOZÁS TÁRGYALÁSA: MISSZIONÁRIUSI TALÁLKOZÁSOK ÉS A NŐI SZEREPEK ÁTALAKULÁSA A KENYAI BUNGOMA MEGYÉBEN ÉLŐ BUKUSU KÖZÖSSÉG KÖRÉBEN

Noha a bukusu társadalmon belül is léteztek endogén hatóerők, a nők helyzete alapvetően stabil maradt, és nagyrészt a rögzült kulturális normákhoz való alkalmazkodás jellemezte. Mindazonáltal a külső beavatkozásoknak – különösen a keresztény misszionáriusi tevékenységnek – való kitettség új nemi szerepdinamikák kialakulását indította el. Jelen tanulmány a keresztény misszió hatását vizsgálja a bukusu nők társadalmi szerepeire Nyugat-Kenyában, Bungoma megyében, a 19. század végétől a 20. század közepéig terjedő időszakban. Elemzésünk kiindulópontja az a megfigyelés, hogy számos belső társadalmi átalakulás a misszionáriusi találkozás kontextusában vált különösen érzékelhetővé és artikulálhatóvá. A kutatás orális narratívákra, levéltári forrásokra, szekunder szakirodalomra, valamint etnográfiai interpretációra támaszkodva amellett érvel, hogy a misszionáriusi jelenlét nem eredményezett sem totális kulturális diszkontinuitást, sem pedig lineáris kontinuitást. Ehelyett a bukusu nők szelektív módon sajátították el és internalizálták a misszionáriusi oktatás, vallásgyakorlat és egészségügyi intervenciók elemeit, hogy újratárgyalják a háztartáson belüli autoritást, a morális legitimációt és a társadalmi láthatóság kereteit.A női perspektívák előtérbe állításával a tanulmány rámutat arra, hogy a misszionáriusi hatás közvetítése lokálisan beágyazott nemi logikákon, rokonsági kötelezettségeken és morális gazdaságokon keresztül valósult meg, feltárva egy olyan kulturális tárgyalási folyamatot, amely aktív újraértelmezést, nem pedig passzív befogadást implikál.

Kulcsszavak: bukusu nők, vallási átalakulás, női cselekvőképesség, keresztény missziók, rokonsági rendszerek
Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

The Bukusu people inhabit Bungoma County, formerly Bungoma District, in Western Kenya. A number of them have since missionary and mainly after independence spread across other Counties such as Trans, Nzoia, Kakamega, and Vihiga. In pre-missionary times, these people lived in small communities made of villages, usually consisting of clans. A clan was the largest basic unit. To date, the Bukusu community is known to be one of the most culturally rich communities in Kenya. This owes to its strict cultural observation and adherence to cultural practices such as death, initiation, and marriage rituals, among others. We would, in this case, use the term "culturality" to mean the strictness of cultural values and practice observation by the Bukusu. Therefore, the culture of the Bukusu people was put to the test upon its exposure to the external factors that were largely evident when the region experienced an influx of missionaries. However, before focusing on the influence of missionaries on the Bukusu, it is imperative to discuss the

roles of women in the community regarding spirituality in the Bukusu's traditional setting. This paper examines the influence of missionaries on the roles of women among the Bukusu people. Due to the scarcity of knowledge or scholarship on the presence of women's lived experiences at the time, we deemed it necessary to delve into unearthing the missing links and the silent voices of women in this historical phenomenon. While we understand that missionary activities and colonialism are intertwined, we treat them separately due to the fact that the former deals with social and moral frameworks, while the latter deals more with administrative matters, which are more political. Handling them separately offers a solid and comprehensive analysis of the sex-based and distinct experiences and responses to the interventions. This highlights the lived experiences of men and women who experienced this historical phenomenon. The study adopts an ethnographic research approach as its primary method of investigation through active participant observations, interviews, and discussions, informal conversations with interlocutors who, through their collective memories gives tales and accounts of the male and female role dynamics of the missionary activities. In addition, it makes use of secondary sources to corroborate the primary data. With a thick descriptive design, the study unravels the nuances in men's and women's feelings, expressions, reactions, and judgments from their experiences, with a distinct comparison with men's experiences.

Bukusu Male-Female Relations before Missionary Intervention

Before the missionary contact, Bukusu women's roles were anchored in subsistence production, child-rearing, and household organization. Although stateless, without a specialized common political organization, its authority was publicly male-centered; women exercised significant informal power through control of food resources, moral regulation, and kinship mediation (Makila 1978; Nasimiyu, 1984). Other sources have pointed to the traditional spiritual practices that the Bukusu believed in the Supreme Being known as *Wele*. Also known as *Wele Khakaba (God the creator/Provider),* who was believed to be the creator of the world and men. *Wele* formed the top of a kind of hierarchy of ancestral spirits, who is *Wele* himself were helpers and protectors of the living (De Wolf, 1971). The ancestral spirits were a fundamental force in the well-being of the Bukusu society. They were a constant and compulsory frame of reference for all social activities. The belief in ancestral spirits was based on the concept of the Bukusu belief that there was life after death. Ancestor veneration was considered an intermediary between the dead and the living.

The key aspects of the Bukusu traditional worship included a Trinitarian view of God that consisted *of Wele Mukhobe, Wele Mwana, and Wele Murumwa,* comparable to the Biblical Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, they also believed that *Wele Kumali* (black god) was the benevolent creator, as the god of misfortunes and witchcraft. Meanwhile, the shrines were spaces of worship, prayers, and rituals. These shrines included rivers, springs, caves, and mountains. With regards to the obligation of women, the Bukusu women worshipped through practices such as ancestral veneration and mourning, where they played a crucial role in mourning rituals and ancestral worship. Often, they led in the wailing and lamentation during the funerals to appease the spirits (Wandibba, 2013). For instance, the widowhood rituals entailed women's cleansing ceremonies to signify the end of mourning and re-entry or reintegration into the community.

Communal and household rituals are particularly the roles reserved for Bukusu women. For instance, women played a key role in prayers and food preparations for traditional ceremonies such as *Khukhwingisia enju* (the house warming) ritual when a new

house had been built. The housewarming ritual, mainly, they would prepare *ugali* (corn or millet pounded meal and chicken stew. Since they were food security custodians, women were in charge of collective agricultural activities that included singing harvest songs. From this, it can be concepualized that the Bukusu religion was generally a communal rather than an individualistic practice with women focusing on fostering social cohesion, maintaining food security, and ensuring cultural traditions continuity.

Traditional education of the Bukusu people was holistic, informal, and intertwined with daily living. The traditional education system of the Bukusu community during the period from 1850 to 1894 was deeply rooted in their cultural values and indigenous beliefs. The oral traditions and social mentorships were intended to prepare girls for womanhood, marriage, and household management, which were meant to fulfill their female roles in society. The informal system of education was largely practical, centered on child-rearing, caregiving, agriculture, and maintenance of family cohesion, and these were passed down through generations within home settings (Wilson & Ngige, 2006). For example, the traditional education through mentorship by the elderly women, where girls were mentored by their mothers, grandmothers, and other senior clan relatives. The essentials of life, such as morals, respect, and wifely and motherly responsibilities, were instilled. Having mentioned that education was practical, more or less an apprenticeship form of learning skills, girls learned by doing domestic tasks such as cooking, cultivating, cleaning, gathering food, and managing the home.

In addition, another essential part of traditional education was sexuality education, in which grandmothers guided girls about their sexuality, personal hygiene, and the im-portance of maintaining their virginity until marri-age. This instruction was delivered mainly through songs, dances, and word-of-mouth mentorship by elderly women, preparing girls for the emotional and physical aspects of adulthood. Since women lived and carried out most of their duties collectively, the knowledge of proper socialization and conduct needed to be passed down through oral tradition, ensuring that cultural values and expectations were preserved across generations. These comprised storytelling, folktales, and folklore that helped socialize girls into the community's cultural expectations (Moyia et al., 2023). In essence, this traditional education system of the Bukusu played a key role in passing down cultural values and sustaining the community's social structure with a focus on their role as mothers and wives.

As for the traditional healthcare system, the Bukusu women practiced it through a comprehensive, community-embedded system that creates a blend with herbal medicine, midwifery, spiritual care, and nutrition management. Owing to their responsibility as keepers of domestic knowledge, they were primarily in charge of the health of children, mothers, and the elderly. Bukusu elderly women often acted as herbalists who were rich in extensive knowledge of local plants, shrubs, and herbs used to treat ailments. The midwives *(nabweli)* managed pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal care. They offered care for mothers and newborns, including assistance with birth and providing specialized post-natal care to ensure the mother's health and the safety of the baby. They were in charge of nutrition and disease prevention through preparing nutritious foods such as sorghum, millet, and maize, as well as managing food security. With the communal responsibility of caregiving, women served as the primary caregivers for the sick within the family, tending to them until they recovered.

In this context, knowledge of healthcare was closely intertwined with spirituality rather than treated as a separate domain, and women actively participated in rituals, including those asso-ciated with caring for the deceased. Similar to traditional education, traditional medicinal know-ledge was

acquired through apprenticeship and was often passed down from elderly women to younger generations. However, despite their central role in healing practices, certain cultural constraints existed. For instance, women who were breastfeeding or menstruating were forbidden from practicing, as it was believed that these conditions conflicted with the strict ritualistic and spiritual requirements of traditional medicine.

Introduction of the Missionary Interventions in Bukusuland

The onset of missionary activities in western Kenya and Bungoma regions, which was historically referred to as North Nyanza in the early 20th century, can be termed as complex, multifaceted, and pivotal. It brought rapid social, cultural, and political change. The missionary activities converged with spiritual, educational, health, and later colonial efforts that marked the beginning of transformations of the traditional way of life for the Bukusu people and their neighboring communities. These changes were tied to Western missionaries' perception on Africa native customs and traditions with abhorrence (Kaplan, 1986). Their mission was threefold in the sense that their role was not simply to preach; rather, they brought a holistic approach that is often known as Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization (Cs) (Sunquist, 2013). Furthermore, the 3Cs were evangelism through which they established churches to introduce a new monotheistic faith, largely focusing on converting people from traditional spiritual practices.

The Bukusu people had their traditional way of practicing their spirituality. However, this was deemed paganistic, and the missionaries were on a mission to have them abandon such practices (Hassan, 2015). On the other hand, it was difficult for them to convert people to Christianity, as local people were illiterate and thus needed education to teach them how to read, write, and perform arithmetic, which was perceived as crucial for converting the local people. The missionaries faced challenges that included resistance, illiteracy, poverty, and diseases with a high mortality rate and poor health conditions (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020). They introduced healthcare to offer modern medici-ne that, in some respects, helped improve health and reduce mortality, thereby gaining the local people's trust. Notwithstanding, Missionary activity formed one of the earliest sustained encounters between the Bukusu society and external power institutions. While cognizant that colonial administration formalized political domination, which is not the focus of this work, missionaries intervened more intimately in the day-to-day lives of women through education, health care, domestic instruction, and religious moralization. Missionary influences ensued within pre-existing complex sex-based systems rooted in kinship, age hierarchy, and moral obligation (Green & Kabata, 2021).

This text examines how missionary activities reshaped the roles of women without completely eroding the indigenous norms governing men and women in Bukusu society.

Rather than portraying women as passive recipients of missionary influence, it highlights them as active agents who interpreted, negotiated, and reworked new ideas within culturally meaningful frameworks. By centering oral narratives, the study recovers women's perspectives that are largely absent from missionary and colonial archives. In doing so, it builds on and moves beyond existing studies on Christianity in Africa and Kenya, which have often emphasized themes of conversion, resistance, or cultural disruption, by foregrounding women's lived experiences and agency within these transformative processes (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; Hastings, 1994). However, such approaches risk obscuring women's lived experiences and interpretive agency. This article changes the analytical lens by mirroring Bukusu women as active cultural interlocutors**,** rather than passive subjects of missionary agendas.

Interplay between Religion, Education, Health Interventions, and Bukusu Women's Roles

Fundamentally, missionaries in Kenya were not always enthusiastically received once it became clear that they despised many aspects of African cultures and practices (Kanogo, 1994). The key argument here is that missionary influence among the Bukusu was filtered through pre-existing cultural norms and moral logics**,** resulting in selective adoption and hybridization. Women used missionary resources pragmatically to strengthen household welfare, moral authority, and social legitimacy, even as they resisted or reinterpreted teachings that conflicted with indigenous values. For instance, some oral narratives reveal that although women appreciated certain Christian ideals, such as individualized faith, this shift also contributed to the erosion of their socially and communally forged identities. In highlighting these tensions, this approach responds to the systematic absence of women's voices in missionary archives, which overwhelmingly privilege the perspectives of male converts, chiefs, and Europeans. Following Vansina (1985), oral traditions are therefore treated not as static records of the past, but as interpretive historical sources through which social experience is narrated, evaluated, and given meaning. Women's accounts are particularly valuable for accessing domains of domestic life, caregiving, and moral negotiation that were rarely documented in written sources. Referring to Portelli (1991), the oral narratives are analyzed not solely for factual reconstruction but for their symbolic and moral content. Women's recollections of mission schools, churches, and hospitals are embedded in broader reflections on respectability, hardship, and social change. Apparent inconsistencies are therefore understood as expressive rather than erroneous, revealing how women situate missionary encounters within longer life histories. Their experiences include their lived encounters at all stages of their lives.

The influence was not only reflected in adult women but also began in childhood. In fact, young girls were the best targets for conversion owing to the psychological fact that children are quick at learning. As opposed to boys, girls had limited enrolment as they were not given priority by the authority. This was reinforced by the preexisting traditional patriarchal system, where men are in control of every sphere of the community. Girls could access church, school, and training through social mobility by virtue of their relation with the male kin already enrolled (Ochwada, 2007). Those from a higher social status in the community were more privileged than those who were poor. The local leaders who helped in the recruitment also played a key role in determining girls and women who gained access to the church, school, and healthcare services. Nonetheless, girls who accessed education, for instance, attested to a rise in their social mobility, such as gaining employment in schools, hospitals, and churches (Ochwada, 2007). Even with that, young girls continued to get informal traditional teaching through apprenticeship from elderly women. This included cultural morals on marriage, sexuality, and their position in the family, clan, and community at large. For instance, while Christian teachings abhorred early marriages, the girls delayed marriage while seeking education (Adhiambo et al., 2022). The literacy skills gained from school were combined with the informal cultural teachings, creating a hybrid learning experience and adoption. Senior women were particularly influential as custodians of cultural knowledge and moral propriety (Taiwo, 2010). These pre-existing forms of authority shaped how missionary teachings were received, contested, or selectively integrated.

In the author's interaction with men and women from the Bukusu community, there were emerging themes that included gendered knowledge or education. On a general note, missionary education represented a key site of engagement with Bukusu women. While early schooling prioritized boys, girls'

education expanded gradually, often framed around domestic science, hygiene, and Christian morality (Harnes, 2014). Further, educational opportunities were expanded only insofar as women needed to provide fitting and accomplished marriage companions for educated men seeking to advance their careers in the new meritocratic society (Leach, 2008). Missionary discourse portrayed education as preparation for "Christian wifehood," but women's narratives reveal more ambivalent outcomes. An elderly woman respondent uttered that while the missionaries taught them how to read and pray, her mother told her that the essence was to know how to manage a home, and that she learned both. From her literacy, she attests that Western education enhanced women's ability to engage with church activities, manage household resources, and participate in emerging social networks. Her revelations reveal that education thus extended women's domestic authority rather than displacing it. Although their limited access indicates the selective nature based on the social cadre in which the girls and women came. This owes to other revelations pointing out their inability to attend school since no one advocated for them.

Seen in this light, from domestic authority extension, Christian conversion introduced new moral discourses that condemned Bukusu practices on marriage, such as polygyny, indigenous rituals, and certain gendered practices (Shamba, 2022). While missionaries framed these reforms as universal moral truths, women's narratives reflect selective compliance. Case in point was a woman in her 90s, who illuminated that the church ruled that some customs were sinful, but people knew which ones protected the family, and they followed God and their customs. For example, rituals such as those surrounding marriages are important to date (Alber et al., 2008). Equally, church spaces comprising choirs, women's fellowships, and prayer groups provided women with new platforms for collective identity and moral leadership. Synthetically, these spaces became important arenas for female visibility, even as formal ecclesiastical authority remained male-dominated.

In addition, the missionary health initiatives engaged women directly as mothers, caregivers, and reproductive subjects (Thomas, 2003). Clinics and maternity services were often welcomed for addressing childbirth complications, yet women did not abandon indigenous medical knowledge. Although some women expressed their dissatisfaction, citing a lack of agency in offering practical traditional forms of health knowledge due to the perception that their practices were harmful, they were confident in the African traditional values, which, accordingly, are implicitly religious (Obuhatsa, 2000). While some pointed out that their freedom of communal healthcare was infringed upon when healthcare services were centralized and individualized, others expressed their satisfaction that it helped reduce the infant mortality rate and improved maternal health. From one of the respondents, it was noted that whenever birth was difficult, women went to the hospital. Although elders still guided us at home, they needed both traditional and modern healthcare. From this revelation, we infer that indeed, Bukusu women acted as brokers of medical pluralism, integrating biomedical and indigenous practices within household care systems. Further, their admissions corroborate that indeed, the Christian missionary movement provided both opportunities and challenges for socially conscious women (Prevost, 2008)

From field observations, the narratives pointed to domesticity, discipline, and gendered negotiation where missionary promotion of Christian domesticcity reshaped ideals of cleanliness, obedience, and female modesty. Having imposed new forms of discipline, it appears that women mobilized Christian respectability creatively and strategically to enhance their moral position. This suggests that Christian identity could function as a resource for negotiation, rather than a simple mechanism of control, as several sources indicate. Alongside this, the experiences

of men and women who have lived through generations from the missionary epoch to the contemporary times show a generational variation and the temporal layering of the missionary influence (Webb, 2024). For some elderly men and women, missionary engagements were intrusive but valuable, whereas the younger generations, mostly the millennial generation, who have experienced modern formal schooling and church life, perceive it as a pathway to social mobility. On the contrary, Generation Zs are selective on religion, with the majority pointing to individual spirituality as opposed to neither traditional nor modern religions.

Building on the preceding discussion, the Bukusu case exemplifies missionary influence unfolding through selective acculturation and cultural appropriation, consequently, producing hybrid gender roles. Women neither rejected nor uncritically adopted missionary teachings; in their place, they reworked them within indigenous moral economies, thereby demonstrating that since the 19th century, there has always been a conflict between indigenous and exotic (western) values and institutions in African societies (Nduka, 1980). This supports broader anthropological arguments that cultural change under missionization is dialogic and gendered rather than linear (Bhaba, 2012; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). About religion and women's roles, this paper establishes the commitment of women to the inculturation and negotiation, incorporating certain indigenous practices into worship and developing culturally relevant religious activities, finding that this is in tandem with that of Armstrong (2025). Bukusu women depict their cultural sensitivity in their religious practices. Just like Viera (2007) avers that adoption of Christianity and the process of cultural exchange were shaped by African choices, needs, and efforts to Africanize Africa's Christian experience by securing the roots of Christianity in the African context. In this vein, the Bukusu women made personal choices in how they practiced their roles in the midst of missionary interventions.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the missionary engagements in the Bukusu society reshaped women's roles in complex and ambivalent ways. Unlike habitual perception, women were not passive recipients of missionary agendas; they were active agents who negotiated new ideas within existing moral and social frameworks. Education expanded domestic competence, church spaces enabled collective female identity, and health initiatives intersected with indigenous caregiving practices owing to their preexisting traditional cumulative body of knowledge on health, while professional trainings empowered a fraction of women while constraining another. These institutions acted as spaces of socialization for women where others gained access to employment and social mobility, though the very access remained uneven and controlled. This article establishes that Bukusu women played a key role in mediating missionary influence, ensuring cultural continuity while accommodating change. The oral narratives divulge missionary engagement as a dialogic process, shaped as much by women's agency as by institutional intent. There are instances of women's agency being enabled in one way while limited in another.

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ETHNIC ECONOMY, DEBTS, AND THE UNEVEN PATHS OF MOBILITY AMONG VIETNAMESE MIGRANTS IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the experiences of Vietnamese migrants in Hungary, which specifically puts a focus on their ethnic economy. Using qualitative data and an intersectional perspective, it explores the ways ethnic economy, debt, and related ethnic apparatus shape how people live their everyday life and how they navigate through options of future opportunities. This paper finds that ethnic businesses, especially restaurants and shops, together with the debt factor, form a powerful duo in shaping the paths towards upward mobility that is arguably limited in most of the cases. Ultimately, the findings show that while migrants show strong effort and resilience, deep structural barriers continue to restrict full integration and upward mobility.

Keywords: migration, social mobility, ethnic economy, debt, Vietnamese
Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

ETNIKAI GAZDASÁG, ADÓSSÁGOK ÉS A MOBILITÁS EGYENETLEN ÚTJAI A MAGYARORSZÁGON TARTÓZKODÓ VIETNAMI MIGRÁNSOK KÖRÉBEN

Jelen tanulmány célja a Magyarországon élő vietnámi migránsok tapasztalatainak vizsgálata, különös tekintettel az etnikai gazdaság szerepére. Kvalitatív adatok felhasználásával, valamint interszekcionális

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megközelítés alkalmazásával elemzi, hogy az etnikai gazdaság, az eladósodás, valamint az ezekhez kapcsolódó etnikai intézményi struktúrák miként formálják az egyének mindennapi életvilágát, illetve azt, ahogyan a jövőbeli lehetőségek különböző opciói között navigálnak. Az elemzés rámutat arra, hogy az etnikai vállalkozások – különösen az éttermek és kiskereskedelmi egységek – az eladósodás jelenségével összekapcsolódva olyan erőteljes strukturális tényezőegyüttest alkotnak, amely meghatározza a felfelé irányuló társadalmi mobilitás pályáit, amelyek a legtöbb esetben korlátozottak maradnak. Az eredmények összességében azt mutatják, hogy noha a migránsok jelentős erőfeszítéseket tesznek és számottevő rezilienciát tanúsítanak, a mélyen beágyazott strukturális akadályok továbbra is gátolják a teljes társadalmi integrációt és a felfelé irányuló mobilitást.

Kulcsszavak: migráció, társadalmi mobilitás, etnikai gazdaság, eladósodás, vietnámiak

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

The ethnic economy has shaped Vietnamese life in Hungary since state socialism ended. What started in the early 1990s as market trading and small-scale selling soon developed into restaurants, corner shops, nail salons, and import-export activities (Marosi & Van, 2014). For migrants, the ethnic economy became both a tool of survival and a limit to mobility. It gave families income, collective support, and space in a labor market that was often closed to them. But it also tied many to insecure and labor-heavy work (Tran, 2025).

This paper hopes to shed light on the ethnic economy closely, looking at its historical growth, daily practices, gender and generational labor, its links to legality and informality, and its impact on social mobility. It also attempts to explore debt, placing it in dialogue with studies on migration and mobility.

Ethnic Economy (Restaurants, Shops, Informal Work)

Historical Trajectories of the Ethnic Economy. The Vietnamese ethnic economy in Hungary began in the early 1990s after the fall of state socialism. When contracts ended and support disappeared, many former workers and students turned to informal trade for survival. The Four Tigers market in Budapest, often called the "Chinese market," became the main center (Marosi & Van, 2014). Here, Vietnamese sellers joined Chinese, Arab and other groups to trade clothes, shoes, electronics, and household goods. These markets were easy to enter, needed little starting capital, and offered quick income through transnational supply networks. As time passed, migrants expanded into new areas. Some opened permanent retail shops in Budapest's working-class neighborhoods, while others moved into gastronomy by starting Vietnamese restaurants that attracted both migrants and curious Hungarians. In the 2000s, nail salons appeared as another important field, mostly run by Vietnamese women. Together, these businesses became visible parts of Hungarian cities and placed the community within the service economy.

Everyday Life in the Ethnic Economy. Daily life in the ethnic economy involves hard work and family cooperation. Shops usually stay open from early morning until late evening, with relatives sharing the shifts. Children are expected to help once school finishes, doing tasks like cleaning or helping customers. This mixing of household and business life shows how family relations hold the shop together. The shop is both an economic space and a social one, where family relations are built and sometimes

tested (Tran, 2025). Debt is common in this system. Families often borrow from kin, friends, or private lenders to keep shops running or pay legal fees. Because profits are usually small, businesses often survive on the edge. Even so, families see the effort as a necessary sacrifice for their children's education and future. In this way, the ethnic economy is also moral, shaped by values of sacrifice and duty as much as by trade.

Gendered Divisions of Labor. The ethnic economy is strongly shaped by gender. Women often appear as the public faces of shops and nail salons to work with customers attempting to make the family more visible in Hungarian society. Men usually take care of supply chains and finances. This pattern reflects Vietnamese cultural norms as well as practical needs in small business. At the same time, it keeps gender inequalities alive since women carry both economic work and domestic duties. Ethnographic accounts show how women manage these pressures. Some say their role brings empowerment, giving them income and influence in family decisions (Tran, 2025.) Others stress the heavy load of long shop hours combined with childcare and housework. A few women register businesses under their own names, which challenges male dominance, but such examples are rare. For most, their labor in the ethnic economy is vital but not fully valued.

Generational Roles and Youth Participation. Generational differences shape the life of the ethnic economy. Many children of shopkeepers work after school and on weekends. Their parents see this as a way to teach their kids a sense of hard work and duty, the children however often complain since they prefer studying or leisure. The shop is a place where these different views meet: parents value sacrifice, while children want freedom and careers outside. For some, the shop is only temporary until they continue to university and new professions. For others, especially in poorer families, it has become a permanent path that reduces chances to pursue education and exacerbates inequalities. In this way, the ethnic economy helps families survive but also limits future possibilities.

Informality, Legality, and Precarity. The Vietnamese ethnic economy often stands somewhere between the formal and the informal. Many shops are legally registered and follow tax rules, but informal practices are also a part of everyday life. These include not reporting some income, hiring people without documents, or skipping receipts. Such practices are not simply cheating but ways to manage thin profit margins and complex regulations. The mix of legality and informality shows the uncertain position of migrants in Hungarian capitalism. Police checks add to this pressure. Traders often face sudden inspections for licenses, records, or taxes. Penalties are often heavy and can destroy profits of many months. To reduce these risks, the migrants usually rely on their own strategies such as making contacts with local officials, sharing warnings and advice, or collecting money together to pay fines. Informality therefore creates both danger and protection, and thus shapes survival under precarious conditions.

Ethnic Economy as Enabler and Barrier. The ethnic economy works as both a support and a limit. It gives families a way to earn income, some independence, and chances to build savings (Portes and Zhou, 1992). Those who succeed in business can invest in housing, education, or even projects in Vietnam. At the same time, staying in narrow sectors such as shops and restaurants reduces opportunities for change. These businesses are sensitive to crises, shifting consumer interests, and strong competition. Many families therefore continue with long hours and small returns, without clear ways to move upward. This mixed role shows larger patterns of how migrants are included in society. The ethnic economy gives space for agency, where families can control their work and plans. However, it also leaves

them on the edge of the national economy, often reinforcing ideas of them as outsiders. For Vietnamese in Hungary, the ethnic economy is at once a source of survival and a barrier, shaping identity, mobility, and family hopes for the future (Tran, 2025.) The ethnic economy is key to understanding Vietnamese migration in Hungary. It developed out of the crisis of the postsocialist years and has supported families for decades. It gave space for entrepreneurship and placed the community inside Hungarian society. At the same time, it is marked by insecurity, inequality, and limits. Gender roles, tensions between generations, and unclear legal status show the complexity of daily life within it. In the end, the ethnic economy reflects the paradox of migrant mobility: strength against exclusion, but also restriction in full integration.

Debt, Brokerage, and the Mirage of Factory Jobs

A key part of the new Vietnamese migration to Hungary is the system of labor brokers and migration debts. For poor families, the chance to work abroad is imagined as a way out of hardship and a chance to earn remittances. To reach this dream, migrants often borrow 10,000 to 20,000 USD (Hoang, 2020), an amount far above the reach of most rural households, to pay intermediaries who promise them factory work in Hungary. But when they arrive, many see that the reality is different. Some jobs do not exist, or conditions are worse than promised. Instead of steady factory positions, they work in restaurants, nail salons, or other low-wage services. This part examines brokerage, debt, and how these shape the lives and futures of migrants.

The Rise of Migration Brokerage. Labor brokerage is now a common part of global migration. In Vietnam, both agencies and small brokers advertise Hungary as a place of opportunity. Posters, local offices, and personal contacts promise factory jobs, steady income, and even the chance to settle. For rural families with little work and low farm earnings, these promises are attractive. But the cost is very high: between 10,000 and 20,000 USD in fees (Hoang, 2020), usually borrowed from relatives, neighbors, or lenders. This creates a cycle of debt migration, where paying back loans shapes all decisions once abroad. The growth of these agencies comes from bigger forces. Vietnam promotes labor export as a way to develop, while Hungary needs cheap, flexible labor. Agencies take advantage of this situation, earning profits from workers' needs and unclear immigration rules. Many migrants know the risks but feel they cannot refuse because options at home are so limited. Brokerage turns migration into something that can be bought and sold, a market of hope and survival.

Expectations and Promises. The promises made before leaving Vietnam are powerful. Recruitment agencies speak about stable jobs in factories, fair wages, and contracts that guarantee security. They show pictures of dormitories, machines, and workers in neat uniforms. Families dream of their children working in Europe's industries, sending money home, and making the family proud. These promises raise expectations and frame migration as a safe bet. In practice, many of these claims are false or only partly true. Factory positions are few and often given to migrants from countries with better agreements. When Vietnamese workers arrive, they often find the jobs gone, the wages low, or the contracts unstable. Agencies usually avoid blame, saying things changed after the workers left. Migrants, already burdened by debt, have no choice but to accept whatever work is offered.

Arrival and Disillusionment. The arrival often brings deep disappointment. Instead of stable factory contracts, many Vietnamese migrants are pushed into restaurants, nail salons, or small grocery shops. Some find work informally in construction or ware-

houses; these jobs are unstable, poorly paid, and very demanding, and especially with little protection. For migrants already carrying heavy debt, learning that wages barely cover interest is a bitter shock. The feeling of failure is also social. Families in Vietnam still imagine their relatives in secure factory jobs, proud of their success. Migrants, however, often feel shame and avoid telling the truth. The dream of factory dignity clashes with the reality of service labor, creating not just economic but also symbolic loss.

Debt as a Structuring Force. Debt follows many migrants like a shadow. Every month, they must send payments to moneylenders or relatives, which creates heavy pressure to earn as much as possible. To meet these obligations, migrants often accept very long hours and/or bad working conditions. The fear of falling behind is strong, because not paying can mean shame, conflict with family, or even losing land or property in Vietnam. Debt is both a push and a weight: it gives migrants reason to endure, but it also keeps them trapped in unstable jobs. Debt also shapes how migrants see themselves. They are not only workers in Hungary but also debtors tied to families back home. This obligation creates strength but also deep vulnerability. Employers and landlords sometimes use migrants' debts against them, knowing they cannot easily refuse. In this way, debt becomes more than money—it is a form of control that connects brokers in Vietnam to everyday labor in Hungary.

Intersectional Implications. Not all migrants feel the impact of brokerage and debt in the same way. Class makes a big difference: richer families can sometimes avoid risky channels or cope better with losses, while poorer households take on heavy debt. Gender also matters. Many women are pushed into nail salons or domestic work, jobs where they rely on employers and brokers and have little freedom. Even when they are tired or underpaid, families expect them to keep sending money home. Young people, especially from rural villages, face disappointment when the factory work they were promised turns into low-paid service labor. Together, these experiences show how debt and brokerage increase inequality inside the community.

Coping Strategies and Agency. Migrants do not only suffer; they also adapt. Some rely on solidarity, sharing apartments, pooling income, or helping each other repay debts. Informal credit inside the community gives short-term relief, even if it adds pressure later. A small number manage to leave unstable jobs behind and start their own businesses, but this path is difficult and open to very few. Agency also appears in how migrants interpret their lives. Instead of seeing restaurant or shop work as a failure, some frame it as training for the future. Others take pride in learning Hungarian, handling money, or serving customers. These small acts of reframing help them keep dignity and create identity in a difficult system.

Structural Analysis. The brokerage system makes clear that barriers are structural, not just personal. It begins in Vietnam, where poor families face few chances and are targeted by recruiters. It continues in Hungary, where migrants are limited by visa rules and weak job protections. Brokers, agencies, and employers benefit at each stage, while migrants take on debt and risk. What is promised as mobility often becomes immobility, locking people into the same inequalities they tried to escape. Anthropology helps us see this as the selling of hope. Migration is turned into a business, with dreams of Europe advertised and sold. Failures are hidden, while the few success stories are told again and again. This keeps the cycle alive, showing how brokerage depends on both need and aspiration. Debt-financed migration through brokers shows the hidden side of the Vietnamese story in Hungary. It reminds us that the limits of mobility start not only in Hungary but already in

Vietnam. Families borrow large sums for jobs that may never exist, arriving with debt that controls their choices from the beginning. Their later struggles in restaurants, shops, or informal work are not just bad luck but the product of this system. Migration here is not only incorporation into Hungary but also a process sold as a commodity, shaped by inequalities across borders. To see the full picture, we must include how debts, hopes, and identities mix to create both strength and constraint.

Structural Barriers and Enablers

The Vietnamese migrants' experiences in Hungary cannot be understood without looking at the wider structures that shape mobility. Personal effort, family strategies, and community support are important but they always work within institutions that can either limit or support outcomes. The aforementioned institutions may include immigration law, labor market, schools, public opinion, and state policy. This section seeks to examine the barriers that restrict incorporation and mobility, as well as the factors that make stability and success possible. By paying attention to both limits and opportunities, we can see more clearly how intersectional dynamics work and why chances are unevenly shared within the community.

Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers. Legal precarity has been one of the most important barriers for Vietnamese migrants. The end of state contracts and the rise of a postsocialist immigration system left many without a stable legal position. Residence permits tied to jobs or businesses require money and paperwork, which many families struggle to provide. Constant inspections, shifting laws, and high fees deepen the problem. Even those with long-term permits may lose security because of policy changes or errors in administration (Hárs, 2016). This insecurity limits confidence, discourages business growth, and creates ongoing anxiety. These legal difficulties are not the same for everyone. Families with wealth can pay for lawyers or brokers to handle documents, while poorer households depend on informal advice that may not work under closer checks. Gender also matters: women who enter as dependents remain tied to their husbands' status, facing risk if marriages end or if businesses collapse. For youth, the move from study to work visas is uncertain, as missed deadlines or minor mistakes can block progress. Legal systems therefore divide the community by class, gender, and generation.

Labor Market Barriers. Labor market exclusion is one of the clearest structural barriers for Vietnamese migrants. Discrimination appears both subtle and overt. Second-generation youth describe being treated as outsiders in job interviews, their abilities doubted despite fluent Hungarian. Employers often imagine them as reliable workers but not leaders, channeling them into service roles. For their parents' generation, the issue was different: their Vietnamese diplomas and vocational training were rarely accepted. Many migrants who had been professionals in Vietnam ended up working manual jobs or in small businesses. The lack of recognition of skills not only produced deskilling but also pushed the community toward self-employment, reinforcing dependence on the ethnic economy.

Educational Barriers. Structural limits in Hungarian education play an important role in shaping opportunities. Tracking into different streams happens early. Children from families with money to afford tutoring and preparation usually enter academic gymnasiums, while those from poorer households, especially those who must help in family businesses, often end up in vocational schools. This creates barriers to higher education and reproduces social inequality. Racialization makes these barriers heavier. Teachers often describe Vietnamese students as disciplined but not assertive, which understandably blocks them from being seen as leaders. Peer relations can also bring exclusion or teasing,

reminding students they are outsiders. These experiences of marginalization influence self-esteem and may restrict ambitions.

Public Discourse and Racialization. Public stories about migrants in Hungary often show Vietnamese as a model minority. They are admired for being industrious and quiet in public life (Hárs, 2016; Tran, 2025). However, this label is not neutral. It hides inequality, reduces them to one image, and keeps pressure on them to conform. It also stresses their foreignness. They are often recognized as "good" migrants but rarely accepted as Hungarians, even if they speak the language and hold citizenship. The rampant xenophobia deepens this tension. Though Vietnamese are not the main target of hostility, they still feel the suspicion that shapes Hungarian politics (Kallius, Monterescu and Rajaram, 2016; Hárs, 2016; Tran, 2025). In this context, many choose selective invisibility—avoiding politics, limiting exposure, and keeping low profiles. While this reduces risks, it also limits civic voice and weakens possibilities for integration.

Structural Enablers. Public views of Vietnamese migrants in Hungary often rely on the model minority image. They are admired for discipline and silence in public life. But this stereotype comes with costs. It hides inequality, erases diversity, and puts pressure on people to act in certain ways. It also stresses that they are outsiders. Even with fluent Hungarian and citizenship, they are not always seen as part of the nation. The wider mood of xenophobia makes this more difficult. Vietnamese are not targeted as openly as some groups, but they still feel the suspicion that shapes Hungarian politics. Many respond by withdrawing from public life, avoiding political debates, and limiting visibility. While this reduces risk, it also narrows their civic voice and makes integration harder.

Intersectional Dynamics of Barriers and Enablers. Understanding barriers and enablers requires an intersectional view. Class defines who can afford resources that ease obstacles, for example through paid brokers or tutoring. Gender organizes roles of dependence, public visibility, and recognition, influencing how men and women handle work, family, and bureaucracy. Generation also plays a role. Young people may gain advantages from education, yet they continue to face racialization and family expectations. These layers interact, so that barriers and supports are never experienced equally but depend on each person's social position. Structural barriers and supports shape the field in which Vietnamese migrants in Hungary seek survival, mobility, and belonging. Legal insecurity, workplace discrimination, school tracking, and racialized images in society restrict their chances. At the same time, community networks, small business niches, and heavy investment in education open partial paths forward. These combined forces create very different outcomes. Some families manage stability and upward steps, while others stay locked in precarious situations. Seeing these dynamics is necessary to understand both the limits and the meanings of the so-called success story of the Vietnamese in Hungary.

Comparative Reflections with Other Migrant Groups

To understand the Vietnamese in Hungary, comparison with other migrant groups is necessary. Although they are often presented as a special case of success, their experience makes sense only when placed beside that of others. This section looks at four points of comparison: Chinese migrants, post-socialist groups such as Romanians and Ukrainians, refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa, and larger European diasporas.

By studying where these cases overlap or diverge, we see how policy, stereotypes, and structural con ditions create different paths of adaptation and mobility.

Chinese Migrants in Hungary. Chinese migrants are arguably the largest non-European community in Hungary, and their experience offers a contrast with the Vietnamese. Both came after the end of socialism, but the Chinese arrived with stronger resources. With more capital, larger networks, and transnational ties, they built wholesale markets and big distribution hubs. The Vietnamese, with fewer resources, remained in retail shops and restaurants. These differences in scale show how resources shape opportunities. Public opinion also sets them apart. The Chinese are often imagined as rich, powerful, and separate, which raises suspicion (Nyíri, 2003; Nyíri, 2007). The Vietnamese are described as modest, diligent, and law-abiding, forming a model minority image. These images matter: Chinese migrants are seen as rivals, while Vietnamese migrants are tolerated. Yet both groups remain vulnerable to xenophobia, administrative barriers, and legal insecurity.

Romanians and Ukrainians. Romanians and Ukrainians provide useful comparisons for understanding migration in Hungary. Romanians, protected by EU citizenship, move freely and work without the paperwork that constrains Vietnamese migrants. This freedom highlights how EU integration divides migrants by nationality, granting some groups privyleges while others face barriers. Ukrainians live in a more precarious position. Many work under temporary or guest-worker arrangements in low-paid sectors such as care, construction, or seasonal farming. Their nearness to Hungary and shared cultural references sometimes eases their reception, but their work remains insecure (Hárs, 2016). Like the Vietnamese, they face exploitation and few chances to move upward. These comparisons underline how nationality and geopolitics shape different paths in Hungary's migration system.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa face a much harder situation in Hungary. Since 2015, politicians and media have presented them mainly as a problem, not as contributors. They are shown as risks for security and culture (Kallius, Monterescu and Rajaram, 2016; Cantat, 2017). As a result, asylum rules became very strict, and detention was often used. Compared with them, the Vietnamese look very different. They are also foreigners but are seen as disciplined and useful. This comparison shows that belonging depends not only on work but also on how the state and society imagine different migrant groups.

Broader European Comparisons. Looking at the Vietnamese in Hungary together with other European cases shows both similarities and differences. In France, the community has a long history, starting from colonial times and later through education and elite migration. In Germany and the Czech Republic, many arrived as contract workers during socialism, but their situation developed differently. For example, in the Czech Republic, the state recognizes Vietnamese as an official minority and gives support for cultural groups (Szczepanikova and Svašek, 2008). In Hungary, there is little such recognition, and most institutions depend on their own community. These comparisons show how national policies change migrant lives. Where there is support, communities can integrate more formally. Where there is little support, like in Hungary, migrants must rely more on ethnic economy and internal networks.

Intersectional Comparisons. Looking at different groups through intersectional analysis shows more details. Gender roles are not the same. Vietnamese women often work in shops and nail salons, while many Ukrainian women work in domestic care.

Class also makes a difference. Chinese migrants started with more capital, but Vietnamese had to build slowly with small steps. Generational paths also vary. Second-generation Vietnamese often deal with mixed identities, while Romanians, as EU citizens, face less racial exclusion. These examples show how structures and personal positions mix to create different outcomes.

Implications for Hungarian Society. A comparative view gives a clearer picture of Hungary. Migrants are not included in the same way. Vietnamese are praised as hardworking but never fully accepted. Chinese are seen as useful in the economy but also distrusted. Romanians enjoy EU rights but still meet stereotypes. Refugees are often seen as dangerous and pushed away completely These examples show that inclusion in Hungary depends on conditions, not equality.

Even so, migrants are not only passive. In every group they create networks, open businesses, and survive difficult times with resilience. They help Hungary's society and economy, even when opportunities are unequal. Understanding both the structures and the efforts of migrants gives a more balanced view than simple ideas of success or failure.

Comparative reflections show that migrant incurporation is always relative. The Vietnamese story in Hungary is not fully unique, but one path among many, shaped by history, economy, law, and discourse. When placed next to Chinese traders, Romanian EU citizens, Ukrainian workers, or Middle Eastern refugees, we see how each group fits into different layers of belonging. These layers are influenced by Hungarian politics and wider European systems, making mobility uneven. For Vietnamese, incorporation has meant survival in ethnic business, being called a model minority, but also living with uncertain belonging. Looking at it this way helps us see how migration changes societies, and how societies rank migrants.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to show the complex reality of Vietnamese migrants in Hungary by taking a closer look at work and debt in relation to the migrants' everyday struggle. While migration is often thought of as a direct road to upward social mobility, this road is rather broken, slow, and filled with obstacles for many people. In the beginning, Vietnamese migrants arrived with hopes and dreams to settle, plus the desire to support their families. But once in Hungary, they entered a world where opportunity exists together with restriction, and effort exists together with deep inequality.

The ethnic economy takes the center stage of this experience. For many families, working in shops, restaurants, and nail salons becomes the main way to survive. These spaces provide income, community, and protection from exclusion in the wider labor market. Inside them, family bonds grow stronger, but also more strained. Long working days, limited rest, and economic insecurity slowly shape both body and mind. Life becomes focused on endurance rather than choice. The same place that offers safety also becomes the space where dreams slowly narrow.

Legal precarity and migration brokerage deepen these limits. Many migrants arrive already in debt, bound to financial obligations that shape every decision. Work becomes not a choice but a necessity. Long hours and poor conditions are accepted because there is no space to refuse. Visa procedures, inspections, and paperwork often create anxiety. Life is heavily influenced by the specter of legality: safety becomes temporary and never fully secure. Planning for the future has become more difficult when stability itself is uncertain.

The migrants have shown to be rather resilient, nevertheless. With communities being built, they share resources, and support each other on a daily basis. Small networks provide emotional comfort and practical help. Through daily acts of care and cooperation, the Vietnamese migrants create

meaning and dignity. These everyday strategies allow survival and sometimes slow improvement. However, survival should not be confused with justice or equality, and hard work does not automatically generate fair results.

The Vietnamese experience in Hungary has also expressed the paradox of migrant mobility. Movement across borders does not guarantee upward movement in society. Instead, migrants often exchange one form of insecurity for another where their lives reveal how social structures shape opportunity and limit possibility.

In the end, this study does not tell a simple story of success or failure. Instead, it offers a glimpse to stories of persistence and of the way families persist through uncertainty. Of young people navigating between cultures, hopes, and pressures. Of everyday endurance in a system that offers limited space for belonging. Their experience offers an opportunity to rethink what mobility actually means, and to question who truly has access to stability, dignity, and social inclusion.

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KONFERENCIA/ CONFERENCE

XI. KÜLÖNLEGES BÁNÁSMÓD NEMZETKÖZI INTERDISZCIPLINÁRIS KONFERENCIA
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XI. INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ABOUT SPECIAL TREATMENT

Dr. Katalin Mező

A KONFERENCIA PROGRAMJA/ THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

9.00-10.00	**Regisztráció/ Registration**)	
10.00-10.15	**MEGNYITÓ/ OPENING CEREMONY** (Helyszín/Venue: Konferencia terem/Conference Hall A DE GYGYK gyógypedagógia szakos hallgatóinak és a DE Gyakorló Óvoda gyermekeinek meglepetés műsora A Surprise Performance by University Students of Special Education from DE GYGYK and Children from the DE Practice Kindergarten	
10.15-10.30	**KÖSZÖNTŐK/ WELCOME ADDRESSES**	
	PLENÁRIS ELŐADÁSOK/ PLENARY LECTURES	
10.30-11.00	**Dr. Belényi Emese-Hajnalka** docens, Partiumi Keresztény Egyetem, Nagyvárad	A hiány narratívájától a kölcsönös gazdagodásig: a fogyatékosság értelmezési keretei az inkluzív közösségi terek kialakításának folyamatában From Deficit-based Narratives to Paradigms of Mutual Enrichment: Interpretive Frameworks of Disability in the Development of Inclusive Community Spaces
11.00-11.30	**Mikó F. László** EyeQ lnnovations Kft., Magyarország	Szoftveres megoldás az olvasástanuláshoz kapcsolódó részképességek feltérképezésére, és fejlesztésének támogatására Software Solution for Mapping and Supporting the Development of Subskills Related to Learning to Read
11.30-11.45	**Dr. Mező Ferenc** Különleges Bánásmód Folyóirat alapító-főszerkesztő	A Különleges Bánásmód Interdiszciplináris Folyóirat bemutatkozása Introducing the Special Treatment Interdisciplinary Journal
11.45-12.00	**Péter Csaba** Gitárművész/Guitar Artist, DE GYGYK	J. S. Bach BWV 995. a-moll lant szvit courante tétele
12.00-12.15	**A MEGNYITÓ PROGRAM ZÁRÁSA/ CLOSING OF THE OPENING PROGRAM**	
12.15-13.00	**POSZTER SZEKCIÓ/SZÜNET** **POSTER SESSION / BREAK TIME**	
	Kísérő program (Helyszín: A épület folyosó) Kiállítás megnyitó: „Együtt, egymásért” szemléletformáló rajzpályázat képeinek kiállítása Szervező: Vilmányi Judit mesteroktató és a hajdúszoboszlói Éltes Mátyás Általános Iskola és Kollégium, EGYMI **Accompanying Program** (Venue: Building A Corridor) Exhibition Opening: Display of the “Together, For Each Other” awareness-raising drawing competition entries Organizers: Judit Vilmányi and Éltes Mátyás Primary School and Boarding School, EGYMI, Hajdúszoboszló	

A KONFERENCIA ELŐADÁSAI
(2026.04.24)

1.SZEKCIÓ
A FELSŐOKTATÁS TUDOMÁNYOS VIZSGÁLATÁNAK ELMÉLETI ÉS EMPIRIKUS MEGKÖZELÍTÉSEI

Szekcióvezető: Dr. Gortka-Rákó Erzsébet
Helyszín: C épület 13. (107) terem (1. emelet)

13.00-13.15	**Vassné Figula Erika** (Prof., PhD), Miskolci Egyetem és Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem	Az integrációtól az inklúzióig – befogadás az oktatásban és a társadalomban From Integration to Inclusion – Inclusion in Education and Society
13.20-13.35	**Szecskó János, Nemes Magdolna** (PhD) DE GYGYK	A nemzetköziesítés lehetőségei a pedagógusképzésben Opportunities for Internationalization in Teacher Training
13.40-13.55	**Pap Ferenc** (Prof. , PhD), Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Pedagógiai Kara	Befogadó intézmények és református szellemiség – egy nemzetközi kutatás tapasztalatai a református pedagógusképzés tükrében Inclusive Institutions and Reformed Spirituality – Experiences of an International Research in the Light of Reformed Teacher Training
14.00 14.15	**Podlovics Éva** (PhD), Tokaj-Hegyalja Egyetem, **Kondé Zoltán** (PhD) Debreceni Egyetem	Egyetemisták (gyógypedagógus, egyéb pedagógus és gazdász) tanulási viselkedésének vizsgálata egy lezárt vizsgaidőszakot követően Survey of the Learning Behavior of University Students (Special Education Teachers, other Teachers and Economists) After Closing the Academic Term
14.20-14.35	**Horák Rita** (Prof., PhD), **Major Lenke** (PhD), **Grabovac Beáta** (PhD), **Pintér Krekić Valéria** (PhD) Újvidéki Egyetem, Magyar Tannyelvű Tanítóképző Kar, Szabadka (Szerbia)	Fenntarthatóság és attitűdformálás a felsőoktatásban: vajdasági magyar hallgatók környezeti attitűdjeinek feltérképezése Sustainability and Attitude Formation in Higher Education: Mapping the Environmental Attitudes of Hungarian University Students in Vojvodina
14.40-14.55	**Bocsi Veronika** (Prof., Habil., PhD), DE GYGYK	Miben más egy első generációs diplomás? How is a First-Generation Graduate Different?

KÁVÉSZÜNET

2. SZEKCIÓ
SPORT- ÉS EGÉSZSÉGTUDOMÁNYI KUTATÁSOK

Szekcióvezető: Prof. Habil. Dr. Müller Anetta
Helyszín: C épület 13. (107) terem (1. emelet)

15.20-15.35	**Szerdahelyi Zoltán** (PhD), **Bencze Ádám** (PhD hallgató) **Gortka-Rákó Erzsébet** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Egészségmagatartási klaszterek a Debreceni Egyetem Gyermeknevelési és Gyógypedagógia Karának hallgatói körében Health Behavior Clusters among Students at the Faculty of Education for Children and Special Educational Needs at the University of Debrecen
15.40-15.55	**Müller Anetta** (Prof., Habil.,PhD), Debreceni Egyetem, Gazdaságtudományi Kar, Sportgazdasági és -menedzsment Intézet	A gerincdeformitások és a lúdtalp megjelenése és tendenciái iskolai szűrővizsgálatok alapján The Occurrence and Trends of Spinal Deformities and Flatfoot Based on School Screening Examinations
16.00-16.15	**Faragó Ildikó** (PhD), **Egri Tímea** (PhD) Miskolci Egyetem	SNI gyermekek a kiemelt figyelmet igénylő tanulók között: szájegészség és esélyegyenlőség Children with Special Needs among Students Requiring Special Attention: Oral Health and Equal Opportunities

16.20-16.45	**Hevesi Tímea Mária** (PhD), Szegedi Tudományegyetem Juhász Gyula Pedagógusképző Kar Szakképzési Felnőttképzési és Tudásmenedzsment Intézet	Esély az egészségre – az SZTE JGYPK Esélyegyenlőségi Napjai A Chance for Health – Equal Opportunities Days at the University of Szeged Juhász Gyula Faculty
16.50-17.05	**Laoues-Czimbalmos Nóra** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Az inkluzív testnevelés és az SNI gyermekek mozgásfejlesztésének vizsgálata Investigation of Inclusive Physical Education and the Motor Development of Children with Special Educational Needs
17.10-17.25	**Szalánczi Zoltán** (PhD), Debreceni Egyetem Gazdaságtudományi Kar Sportgazdasági- és Menedzsment Intézet	A magyar labdarúgó utánpótlásnevelő sportszervezetek stratégiájának vizsgálata Examination of the Strategy of Hungarian Youth Football Sport Organizations
17.30-17.45	**Szilágyi Zsófia Mária**, Debreceni Egyetem Egészségtudományi Kar	A digitális világ és a testtartási eltérések összefüggéseinek vizsgálata serdülőkorú gyermekeknél Examining the Relationship Between the Digital World and Postural Deviations in Adolescents

3. SECTION
INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH (English Language Section)
Section Leaders: Anikó Varga Nagy (PhD) és Magdolna Nemes (PhD)
Section Room: C building 208.(2nd floor)

13.00-13.15	**Ingeborg Trappe-Butzbach** (Prof. Emeritus) Deutchland	Why do we Need a Family School? Miért van szükségünk családi iskolára?
13.20-13.35	**Fatemeh Faroughi** (PhD), **Foroozan Hajian**, **Ilona Dabney Fekete** (PhD) University of Debrecen	The Dominance of English or Multilingual Ideas in Monolingual Practices Az angol nyelv dominanciája vagy a többnyelvű elképzelések egynyelvű gyakorlatokban
13.40-13.55	**Marcin Cziomer** (PhD) Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University (Poland)	Challenges in Polish art education in focus on kindergarten and early education A lengyel művészeti nevelés kihívásai az óvodai és kisiskolai nevelés fókuszában
14.00-14.15	**Ágnes Jordanidisz** (PhD) Hátország Egyesület / NILD Hungary, **Kornélia Vukman, Orsolya Mihály**, University of Pécs	The Examination of Narrative Skills in Children with Mild Intellectual Disorder Narratív képességek vizsgálata tanulásban akadályozott gyermekeknél
14.20-14.35	**Anikó Varga Nagy** (PhD), DE GYGYK	The Use of Artificial Intelligence and Its Impact on Early Childhood Education A mesterséges intelligencia használata és hatása a kisgyermekkori nevelésre
		COFFEE BREAK
15.00-15.15	**Andor Szőcs** (PhD), Nyíregyházi Egyetem	Is there a Relationship between University Students' Financial Situation and their Academic Motivation? Van kapcsolat az egyetemi hallgatók anyagi helyzete és tanulmányi motivációjuk között?
15.20-15.45	**Foroozan Hajian** (PhD Student), **Aniko Varga Nagy** (PhD), **Veronika Bocsi** (Prof. Habil. PhD) University of Debrecen	Beyond Words: Supporting Communication for Non-Verbal Learners in Early Childhood SEN Education Szavakkal leírhatatlan: a kommunikáció támogatása nem beszélő gyermekek korai fejlesztésében

15.50-16.05	**Asmar Ibadova** (PHD Student), University of Debrecen	AI Use Among Language Teachers in Higher Education Mesterséges intelligencia használata a felsőoktatásban tanuló nyelvtanárok körében
16.10-16.25	**Fatih Mutlu Özbilen** (PhD), Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University/Çanakkale Vocational School of Social Sciences (Türkiye)	Evaluation of Child Development Program Students' Attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence A gyermeknevelési program hallgatóinak mesterséges intelligenciával kapcsolatos attitűdjeinek értékelése

4. SZEKCIÓ
NEVELÉSTUDOMÁNY: PERSPEKTÍVÁK ÉS GYAKORLATOK
Szekcióvezetők. Dr. Németh Nóra Veronika és Dr. Szerepi Sándor
Helyszín: A épület emeleti előadó

13.00-13.15	**Balogh Jenifer** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem, Humán Tudományok Doktori Iskola	Család és iskola kapcsolata - Roma szülők aspirációi Relationship between Family and School - Roma Parents' Aspirations
13.20-13.35	**Godó Irén** (PhD hallgató), **Weisz Dávid** (PhD hallgató) Debreceni Egyetem	Segítő gyakorlatok roma életutakban a motivációk tükrében Helping Practices in Roma Life Courses in the Light of Motivations
13.40-13.55	**Kőrösi Mária** (PhD), Szalárdi János Általános Iskola (Románia)	A kulturális identitás, mint a roma tanulók oktatási inklúziójának erőforrása Cultural Identity as a Resource for the Educational Inclusion of Roma Students
14.00 14.15	**Torhán-Bartha Erika** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem Humán Tudományok Doktori Iskola, Neveléstudományi Doktori Program, **Ceglédi Tímea** (PhD), Debreceni Egyetem	Két világ között? A szakkollégiumok hídképző szerepe oláhcigány pedagógusok reziliens életútjában Between Two Worlds? Colleges for Advanced Studies as Bridges in the Resilient Life Paths of Oláh Roma Educators
14.20-14.35	**Fügedy Anikó Erzsébet** (PhD), Horváth János Elméleti Líceum Margitta/Bihar megye (Románia)	A román nyelv elsajátítását befolyásoló társadalmi tényezők a helyi magyar kisebbségi közösséghez tartozó diákok esetében Social Factors Influencing the Acquisition of the Romanian Language by Students Belonging to a Local Hungarian Minority Community

KÁVÉSZÜNET

15.00-15.15	**Stajer Anita** (hallgató), **Halasi Szabolcs** (PhD, Habil.), **Borsos Éva** (PhD) Újvidéki Egyetem Magyar Tannyelvű Tanítóképző Kar, Szabadka	Alvási szokások és életmódbeli tényezők vizsgálata a 9-11 éves korosztály körében Sensory Theatre as a Reflective and Inclusive Pedagogical Practice in Special Education
15.20-15.35	**Rétháti Csilla** (PhD hallgató), **Rákó Erzsébet** (PhD) DE GYGYK	A szakiskolák lemorzsolódással veszélyeztetett fiatalok esetében alkalmazott hátránykompenzációs gyakorlata The Disadvantage Compensation Practice Applied by Vocational Schools to Young People at Risk of Rropping out
15.40-15.55	**Németh Nóra Veronika** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Tanulási menü, azaz a differenciálás új lehetősége Learning Menu as a New Opportunity for Differentiation

	KORA GYERMEKKORI KUTATÁSOK	
16.00-16.15	**Czipczerné Bartók Erika**, Miskolci Integrált Óvodai Intézmény Szilvás Sport Tagóvodája	Paradigmaváltás az óvodai inkluzív nevelés területén Paradigm Shift in the Field of Inclusive Preschool Education
16.20-16.35	**Bocsiné Percze Andrea**, Bélapátfalvai Százszorszép Óvoda, Bölcsőde és Konyha	Kora gyermekkori fejlesztés kihívásai az óvodában Early Childhood Development Challenges in Kindergarten
		KÁVÉSZÜNET
17.00-17.15	**Szilágyi Barnabás** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Elméletvezérelt, digitálisan támogatott fejlődésértékelés a kora gyermekkori nevelésben Theory-Driven, Digitally Supported Assessment of Early Childhood Development: Conceptual Foundations and Pedagogical Implications
17.20-17.35	**Szőllősi Tamás**, **Németh Nóra Veronika** (PhD), **Szerepi Sándor** (PhD), DE GYGYK	A csecsemő- és kisgyermekkori nevelés három pillére: életkori sajátosságok, érzelmi-szociális kompetencia, az életkor tevékenységrendszere Three Pillars of Infant and Toddler Education: Age-Specific Features, Socio-Emotional Competence, and the Age-Appropriate System of Activities
17.40-17.55	**Rábai Dávid** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Munka jellegű tevékenységek óvodai alkalmazásának gyakorisága – hallgatói megfigyelések elemzése Frequency of Work-related Activities in Kindergarten – Analysis of Student Observations
18.00-18.15	**Balogh Beáta**, DE Gyakorló Óvoda	Az óvodapedagógus pedagógiai változásmenedzsment gyakorlata The Practice of Change Management in Early Childhood Education
18.20-18.35	**Szecskó János**, DE GYGYK	Az óvodai és iskolai szociális segítők együttműködési tapasztalatai a köznevelési intézményekben The Experiences of Cooperation between Kindergarten and School Social Workers in Public Educational Institutions
18.40-18.55	**Zágonyiné Nagy Szilvia**, DE Gyakorló Óvoda	"Fogadj örökbe egy nagymamát és egy nagypapát!" "Adopt a Grandma and a Grandpa!"

	5. SZEKCIÓ **FÓKUSZBAN A SAJÁTOS NEVELÉSI IGÉNY** **Szekcióvezető:** Dr. Pető Ildikó és Dr. Szabó Ágnes **Helyszín:** A épület földszinti előadó	
13.00-13.15	**Kostyák Eszter** (PhD hallgató), Pécsi Tudományegyetem Egészségtudományi Doktori Iskola, **Pusztafalvi Henriette** (PhD), Pécsi Tudományegyetem	Integrációs kritikus pontok és pedagógus-attitűd az SNI gyermekek oktatási pályájában a magyar közoktatásban - Az SNI Integrációs Pályamodell alkalmazása az oktatási folyamatok és intézményi döntések elemzésére Critical Points of Integration and Teacher Attitudes in the Educational Pathways of Students with Special Educational Needs in the Hungarian Public Education System
13.20-13.35	**Hajdú Valéria** (PhD hallgató), Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola	A fogyatékossággal élő szülők által nevelt gyermekek pszichés fejlődésének sajátosságai Psychological Development of Children Raised by Parents with Disabilities

13.40-13.55	**Miksó Zsuzsanna** (PhD hallgató), **Keller Veronika** (PhD, Habil.), Széchenyi István Egyetem	A fogyatékossággal élő személyek foglalkoztatása, mint társadalmi felelősségvállalási CSR stratégia a vállalatok körében Employment of Persons with Disabilities as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Strategy among Companies
14.00 14.15	**Tóth Eszter** (PhD), Debreceni Egyetem	A kultúrához való hozzáférés lehetőségeinek vizsgálata a debreceni múzeumok és kiállító terek esetében Examining the Possibilities of Accessing Culture in the Case of Museums and Exhibition Spaces in Debrecen
14.20-14.35	**Kozup Sándor** (dr. Jur.) Csillagfürt EGYMI, Ózd	Jogforrások a gyógypedagógia köréből: Rendszertani áttekintés és gyakorlati alkalmazás Legal Sources in the Field of Special Education: A Systematic Review and Practical Application
		KÁVÉSZÜNET
15.00-15.15	**Szanati Dóra** (PhD), ELTE BGGYK, GYMRI, SE Szülészeti és Nőgyógyászati Klinika - Koraszülött Utánvizsgálati Ambulancia, **Imre Angéla** (PhD), ELTE BGGYK	A koraszülöttség és alacsony születési súly logopédiai rizikótényezői Speech Therapy Risk Factors for Prematurity and Low Birth Weight
15.20-15.35	**Csányi Andrea Mária** (PhD hallgató), EKKE Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola	Nyelvi profil vizsgálatával kapcsolatos tapasztalatok értelmi akadályozottság esetén – egy komplex művészetpedagógiai program tükrében Experiences in Examining Linguistic Profiles in the Context of Intellectual Disabilities – In the Light of a Complex Arts Education Program
15.40-15.55	**Hadházi Renáta** (PhD hallgató), EKKE Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola	Bernstein nyelvi kódelméletének aktualitása és a transzlingváló pedagógia The Contemporary Relevance of Bernstein's Theory of Language Codes and Translanguaging Pedagogy
16.00-16.15	**Szabó Ágnes** (PhD), DE GYGYK	A GMP-diagnosztika legújabb eredményei Latest Findings from GMP Diagnostics
16.20-16.35	**Hegedűs Roland** (PhD, Habil), Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem	Modellek alkalmazásának lehetőségei enyhe értelmi fogyatékos tanulók természettudományos óráin Possibilities of Using Models in Science Lessons for Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities
		KÁVÉSZÜNET
17.00-17.15	**Szalai Erzsébet** (PhD hallgató), DE GYGYK	Informális tanulás az inkluzív pedagógiai gyakorlatban: autista tanulókat oktató pedagógusok tanulási folyamatai egy scoping review alapján Informal Learning in Inclusive Educational Practice: The Learning Processes of Teachers Educating Students with Autism, according to a Scoping Review
17.20-17.35	**Szabó Ágnes** (PhD), DE GYGYK, **Drénné Molnár Erika** (Dr. Molnár István EGYMI)	Egyéni TSMT® terápiában részesülő autizmus spektrumzavarral érintett óvodás gyermekek fejlesztési tapasztalatai Individual Developmental Experiences of Preschool Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Receiving Individual TSMT® Therapy
17.40-17.55	**Nagy Erika** DE GYGYK	Társas képességek hatékony fejlesztése Én-könyv használatával autizmus spektrum zavarban érintett alsós tanulóknál Effective Development of Social Skills in Lower Primary Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder through the Use of the 'Self-Book'
18.00-18.15	**Müller Anetta** (Prof., PhD), **Mező Ferenc** (PhD), **Mező Katalin** (PhD) Debreceni Egyetem	Az autizmus spektrum zavarban érintett tanulók előfordulása, tendenciái és trendjei Magyarországon Prevalence, Trends, and Patterns of Students Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Hungary

6. SZEKCIÓ
EMBERI POTENCIÁL ÉS MESTERSÉGES INTELLIGENCIA
Szekcióvezető: Dr. Mező Ferenc és Dr. Mező Katalin
Helyszín: Díszterem (Kollégium épülete)

	A KIEMELKEDŐ KÉPESSÉGEKKEL, TEHETSÉGGONDOZÁS KAPCSOLATOS KUTATÁSOK	
13.00-13.15	**Mező Ferenc** (PhD), Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem	A kognitív teljesítőképesség fokozásának lehetőségei a köznevelésben Possibilities for Enhancing Cognitive Performance in Public Education
13.40-13.55	**Kovács Elvira** (PhD) **Ábrahám Gréta** (PhD hallgató), Újvidéki Egyetem Magyar Tannyelvű Tanítóképző Kar, Szabadka	A logikai–matematikai intelligencia azonosításának lehetőségei és szerepe a differenciált matematikaoktatásban The Possibilities of Identifying Logical-mathematical Intelligence and its Role in Differentiated Mathematics Education
13.20-13.35	**Erdei Róbert** (PhD), **Nagyné Kondor Rita**, Miskolci Egyetem	Matematikai attitűdök, teljesítmény és változásmenedzsment Attitudes toward Mathematics, Performance and Change Management
14.00 14.15	**Tóth Etelka** (PhD), Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Pedagógiai Kar	Anyanyelvi tehetséggondozás az innováció jegyében Innovative Approaches to First Language Talent Development
14.20-14.35	**Dominek Dalma Lilla** (PhD), Tanuláskutató Intézet és Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem	A tanuláshoz való viszony mintázatai tehetséggondozási kontextusban Patterns of Attitudes Toward Learning in the Context of Talent Development
14.40-14.55	**Balogh Dávid** (PhD), Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Pedagógiai Kar	A tehetséggondozás szerepe református hittanoktatók hivatásában és képzésében The Role and Importance of Talent Development in the Profession and Training of Reformed Religious Education Teachers
	KÁVÉSZÜNET	
	A SZEMÉLYISÉG DIMENZIÓINAK TUDOMÁNYOS VIZSGÁLATA	
15.20-15.35	**Egri Tímea** (PhD), **Faragó Ildikó** (PhD), **Kovács Mihály** (PhD) Miskolci Egyetem	A tanulók között megjelenő iskolai agresszió School Aggression among Students
15.40-15.55	**Szabó Stefánia** (PhD), Babeş-Bolyai Tudományegyetem	A vallásosság szerepe a nehéz élethelyzetekkel való megküzdésben The Role of Religiosity in Coping with Difficult Life Situations
16.00-16.15	**Tóth József** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem, Pszichológiai Intézet, Humántudományok Doktori Iskola, Pszichológiai Program, **Molnárné Kovács Judit** (Prof., Habil, PhD), DE Pszichológia Intézet	Rizikómagatartások és eszképizmus állami gondozott és családban nevelkedő serdülők körében Risk-Taking Behavior and Escapism Among Adolescents in State Care and Those Raised in Family Environments
16.20-16.45	**Mészárosné Gupcsó Tímea** DE GYGYK	Személyiségfejlesztés és önreflexiós mintázatok gyógypedagógus hallgatók körében Personality Development and Patterns of Self-Reflection Among Special Education Students
	KÁVÉSZÜNET	
	IKT ÉS MESTERSÉGES INTELLIGENCIA KUTATÁSOK	
17.00-17.15	**Barnucz Nóra** (PhD hallgató) **Dominek Dalma Lilla** (PhD) Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem	Az Észak-alföldi pedagógusok számítógépes ismereteinek forrásai Sources of Computer Knowledge among Teachers in the Northern Great Plain
17.20-17.35	**Kalmár Laura** (PhD hallgató), Magyar Tannyelvű Tanítóképző Kar Szabadka (Szerbia)	A transzhumanizmus és mesterséges intelligencia kapcsolata The Relationship between Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence

17.40-17.55	**Túri Ibolya** (PhD), Semmelweis Egyetem Pető András Kar	Játékos tanulás és digitális kompetenciák a konduktív nevelésben – új módszertani perspektívák a fejlesztésben és a konduktorképzésben Digital Skill Development and Gamification in Conductive Education: Methodological Opportunities in Student Development and Conductor Training
18.00-18.15	**Juhász Anna** (PhD hallgató), Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem, Neveléstudományi Program, **Hegedűs Roland** (PhD, Habil), Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem	A mesterséges intelligencia a logopédiai és pedagógiai tervezésben: hatékonyság és szakmai dilemmák AI in Speech-Language Pathology and Educational Planning: Effectiveness and Professional Challenges
18.20-18.35	**Demeter Zsuzsa**, Szent Efrém Görögkatolikus Óvoda, Általános Iskola és Alapfokú Művészeti Iskola - Faraktár utcai Tagintézmény	Az asztali robotasszisztenstől az AI-alapú oktatási segédeszközig: a Loona és a LOOI mesterséges intelligencia alapú robotok funkcionális összehasonlítása a gyógypedagógiai fejlesztés szempontjából From a Desktop Robot Assistant to an AI-Based Educational Support Tool: A Functional Comparison of the Artificial Intelligence-Based Robots Loona and LOOI in Special Education Development

7. SZEKCIÓ
TÁRSADALOM ÉS MŰVELŐDÉS
Szekcióvezetők: Dr. Balázs-Földi Emese és Dr. Kiss Gábor
Helyszín: A épület 7 (027) terem

	SZOCIOLÓGIAI, SZOCIÁLPEDAGÓGIAI KUTATÁSOK	
13.00-13.15	**Ternyik Daniel** (PhD hallgató), ELTE Budapest, Szociológia Doktori Iskola, Nemzetközi Tanulmányok PhD Program	Ígéretek és gyakorlati szempontok: Az EU roma-politikájának fejlődése és jövőbeli irányai Promises and Practicalities: The Evolution and Future Direction of EU Roma Policy
13.20-13.35	**Miklódi-Simon Zsófia** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem, Humán Tudományok Doktori Iskola, Kovács-Nagy Klára (PhD.,Habil.) Debreceni Egyetem	Nevelőszülői motivációk, családi erőforrások és társadalmi beágyazottságuk Foster Parent Motivations, Family Resources, and Their Social Embeddedness
13.40-13.55	**Balázs-Földi Emese** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Befogadó iskola? - Sajátos nevelési igényű tanulók oktatási integrációja szülői szemmel Inclusive school? - The Educational Integration of Students with Special Educational Needs from the Parent's Perspective
14.00-14.15	**Laki Ildikó** (PhD), Milton Friedman Egyetem	Speciális célcsoportok közösségi kapcsolódásának lehetőségei Opportunities for social engagement among specific target groups
	KÁVÉSZÜNET	
	AZ OLVASÁS ÉS AZ OLVASMÁNYÉLMÉNY TUDOMÁNYOS VIZSGÁLATA	
15.00-15.15	**Galán Anita** (PhD), **Kis Gábor** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Harry Potter gyermekkori traumái a szocializáció és az ACE-kutatások tükrében Harry Potter's Childhood Trauma in the Light of Socialisation and ACE Research
15.20-15.35	**Kis Gábor** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Mágikus megküzdési módok a Harry Potter-regénysorozatban Magical Coping Mechanisms in the Harry Potter Novel Series
15.40-15.55	**Bódis Zoltán** (PhD), Szent József Katolikus ÓÁGK – DE-GYGYK	A "lenyelt gyermek" - A különleges bánásmódot igénylő gyermekek interperszonális kapcsolati metaforái a mesei narratívák tükrében

		The Swallowed Child: Fairy-Tale Narratives and Interpersonal Metaphors of Children with Special Needs
16.00-16.15	**Bujdosóné Papp Andrea** (PhD), DE GYGYK	A történetmesélés szerepe a figyelemfejlesztésben The Role of Storytelling in Attention Development
16.20-16.35	**Tóth Kinga** (PhD hallgató), Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem, Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola	A korai olvasásélmények és a lexikális hozzáférés kapcsolata hátrányos helyzetű óvodások körében The Relationship between Early Reading Experiences and Lexical Access among Socio-economically Disadvantaged Preschool Children

8. SZEKCIÓ
MÚLT ÉS JELEN
Szekcióvezető: Dr. Fenyő Imre
Helyszín: C épület 4. (102) terem (1. emelet)

NEVELÉSTÖRTÉNETI KUTATÁSOK

13.00-13.15	**Frank Tamás** (PhD), Semmelweis Egyetem	Dr. Pető András és a konduktív pedagógia sajtóreprezentációja az Orvosi Hetilapban, a Köznevelés és a Tanító című szakmai periodikában Dr. András Pető and the Press Representation of Conductive Pedagogy in the Orvosi Hetilap, in the Professional Periodical Köznevelés and the Tanító
13.20-13.35	**Pornói Imre** (CsC), DE GYGYK	Gyógypedagógiai osztályok Magyarországon 1945-öt követően Special Education Classes in Hungary after 1945
13.40-13.55	**Fenyő Imre** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Normaközvetítés és gyermekkép a szocialista pedagógiai diskurzusban – A Család és iskola folyóirat elemzése (1950–1970) Normative Mediation and the Image of Children in Socialist Pedagogical Discourse – An Analysis of the Journal Család és Iskola (1950–1970)
14.00 14.15	**Inántsy Pap Ágnes** (PhD) Szent Atanáz Görögkatolikus Hittudományi Főiskola	Egyházi identitás és pedagógiai gyakorlat a magyarországi görögkatolikus népoktatásban (1877–1948) Ecclesiastical Identity Formation and Pedagogical Practice in Greek Catholic Elementary Education in Hungary (1877–1948)
14.20-14.35	**Csizmárné Gede Erika Judit** (PhD hallgató), Wesley Theológiai és Valláspedagógiai Doktori Iskola	A fogyatékosság teológiai és pedagógiai értelmezése a középkori keresztény gondolkodásban The Theological and Pedagogical Interpretation of Disability in Medieval Christian Thought
14.40-14.55	**Fógel-Veres Anett** (DLA), DE GYGYK	Az Éneklő Ifjúság Mozgalom kialakulása The Emergence of the 'Singing Youth' Movement
15.00-15.20	**Elek Ágnes**, Semmelweis Egyetem Pető András Kar	Művészettörténet határok nélkül: Egy komplex vizuális alkotóműhely tapasztalatainak adaptálása a konduktív pedagógiában Art History without Borders: Adapting the Experiences of a Complex Visual Art Workshop in Conductive Education

KÁVÉSZÜNET

A KONFERENCIA ELŐADÁSAI
(2026.04.25, SZOMBAT)

9. SECTION
CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
(English Language Section)
Section Leader: Norbert Tóth (PhD)
Section Room: C building 208.(2nd floor)

9.00-9.15	**Efilina Kissiya** (PhD), Pattimura University, (Indonesia)	Etymology, Cosmology, and Marine Stewardship: The Socio-Ecological Significance of Hygeralai in Luang Island Etimológia, kozmológia és tengeri gondnokság: a Hygeralai társadalmi-ökológiai jelentősége Luang szigetén
9.20-9.35	**Damaris Werunga** (PhD Student) University of Debrecen (Kenya) **Gábor Biczó** (Prof., Habil, PhD) University of Debrecen	Influence of Missionaries on Women's Roles among the Bukusu A misszionáriusok hatása a nők szerepére a Bukusu környékén
9.40-9.55	**Lakni Prasanjali Kumarasiri** (PhD Student) University of Debrecen (Sri Lanka)	The Transformation of Veddha Identity into a Modern Myth in Sri Lanka A veddha identitás átalakulása modern mítosszá Sri Lankán
10.00-10.15	**Rusyanti Rusyanti** (PhD Student)University of Debrecen (Indonesia)	Beyond the Sea and Rivers: The Martaban's Voyage and Chronicles in Indonesia Túl a tengereken és folyókon: A martabán útja és krónikái Indonéziában
10.20-10.35	**Tran Manh Khan** (PhD Student)University of Debrecen (Vietnam)	Ethnic Economy, Debts, and the Uneven Paths of Mobility among Vietnamese Migrants in Hungary Etnikai gazdaság, eladósodás és a mobilitás egyenlőtlen pályái a Magyarországon élő vietnámi migránsok körében
	COFEE BREAK	
11.00-11.15	**Maram Alshawabkeh** (PhD Student)University of Debrecen (Jordan)	Informal Social Networks and Ethical Leadership: A Business Anthropology Study of Moral Ecology and Intercalary Leadership in Jordan's Water Governance Informális társadalmi hálózatok és etikus vezetés: üzleti antropológiai vizsgálat a morális ökológia és a köztes vezetés szerepéről Jordánia vízgazdálkodásában
11.20-11.35	**Milena Medojevic** (PhD Student)University of Debrecen (Montenegro)	Belief in Mythological Creatures in the 21st Century: Evidence from South Slavic Folklore Interviews A mitológiai lényekbe vetett hit a 21. században: Dél-szláv folklórinterjúk elemzése
11.40-11.55	**Yossri Jallouli** (PhD Student) University of Debrecen (Tunis)	Beyond the Public Sphere: The Household as a Site of Cultural Persistence and Adaptation A nyilvános szférán túl: A háztartás mint a kulturális fennmaradás és alkalmazkodás tere
11.55-12.10	**Ibrahim Mustafa Muhammed Ibrahim** (PhD Student) (Sudan) **Gábor Biczó** (Prof., Habil, PhD) University of Debrecen **Vinkovits Balázs** (PhD)	War as Commandment: Anthropological Perspectives on the 2023-2026 Current Sudan Civil War and African Political Modernity A háború mint parancsolat: Antropológiai perspektívák a 2023–2026-os jelenlegi szudáni polgárháborúról és az afrikai politikai modernitásról

12.15-12.30	**Mungunchimeg Batsaikhan** (PhD Student) University of Debrecen (Mongolia)	Khatgal Village Then and Now: Tourism and Cultural Impact in the Khuvsgul Lake National Park Khatgal falu régen és ma: a turizmus és a kulturális hatások a Hövszgöl-tó Nemzeti Parkban
12.40-12.55	**Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo** (PhD Student) University of Debrecen	Materializing Devotion: Exploring Identity Negotiation in Parañaque City's Sayaw ng Pagbati Az áhítat megtestesülése: az identitásalakítás folyamatának vizsgálata Parañaque város Sayaw ng Pagbati hagyományában
13.00-13.15	**Meryem Madili** (PhD Student) University of Debrecen	Commoditised the Sacred: Gnawa from Rituals and Traditions to Stardom A Szent kommodifikációja: a Gnawa rituáléktól és hagyományoktól a nemzetközi elismertségig

10. SZEKCIÓ **MŰVÉSZETI KUTATÁSOK** **Szekcióvezető:** Dr. Árkosi Julianna **Helyszín:** A épület 7. (027) terem		
9.00-9.15	**Mátó-Buchholcz Katalin** (PhD hallgató), Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola	Ének-zene oktatás a mesterséges intelligencia korában: egy pilot vizsgálat eredményei Music Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Results of a Pilot Study
9.20-9.35	**Tamásiné Dsupin Borbála** (PhD), DE GYGYK	„Hangszínvarázs" – Gyermekfüllel "Magic of Timbre" – Through the Ears of Child
9.40-9.55	**Árkosi Julianna** (PhD); **Tamásiné Dsupin Borbála** (PhD), **Fógel-Veres Anett** (DLA), DE GYGYK	Játsszunk a zenével! – az élményszerű zenetanítás lehetőségei Let's Play with Music! – The Possibilities of Experiential Music Education
10.00-10.15	**Péter Csaba** (DLA), DE GYGYK	Sajátos nevelési igényű gyermekek hangszeres zeneoktatása: Az inkluzív pedagógiai megközelítések elméleti áttekintése Instrumental Music Education for Children with Special Educational Needs: A Theoretical Overview of Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches.
		NYITOTT HORIZONTOK I.
10.20-10.35	**Juhász Gréta Zsanett** (hallgató), **Árkosi Julianna** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Az énekes játékok és a gyermektánc szocializáló ereje óvodáskorban The Socializing Power of Singing Games and Children's Dance in Preschool Age
10.40-10.55	**Kiss Edina** (hallgató), Árkosi Julianna (PhD) DE GYGYK	Népi gyermekjátékok, néphagyományok az óvodában jeles napokhoz kapcsolódva Folk Children's Games, Folk Traditions in Kindergarten Related to Special Days
11.00-11.15	**Kovács Katalin** (hallgató), **Tamásiné Dsupin Borbála** (PhD) DE GYGYK	A népi játékok személyiségfejlesztő hatása az óvodáskorú gyermekek életében The Personality-Developing Effect of Folk Games in the Lives of Preschool Children

	11. SZEKCIÓ **NYITOTT HORIZONTOK II.** **Szekcióvezető: Miklódi-Simon Zsófia** **Helyszín: A épület 6. (026) terem**	
9.00-9.15	**Kudron-Bohos Dóra** (DETEP hallgató), **Szabó Ágnes** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Az extrém koraszülöttek beszédfejlődése Speech Development in Extremely Premature Infants
9.20-9.35	Hajzer Erika (DETEP hallgató) Szabó Ágnes (PhD), DE GYGYK	Néphagyományok a logopédiában Folk Traditions in Speech and Language Therapy
9.40-9.55	**Szabó Róbertné** (DETEP hallgató) **Szabó Ágnes** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Iskolaérettség, iskolaérettség vizsgálata a 90-es években különös tekintettel logopédia megközelítésből School Readiness and Its Assessment in the 1990s with a Focus on a Logopedic Approach
10.00-10.15	**Agárdi-Elek Ágnes** (DETEP hallgató), **Szabó Ágnes** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Fogyatékossággal élők a turizmusban - rövid betekintés People with Disabilities in Tourism – A Brief Insight
10.20-10.35	**Farkas Helga,** **Fucskó Mónika** (PhD) Nyíregyházi Egyetem	Gyámok és sorsok – Végleges sorsrendezések a gyermekvédelmi szakellátásban Guardians and Life Paths – Permanent Placement Outcomes in Child Protection Residential Care
	KÁVÉSZÜNET	
11.00-11.15	**Petri Bálintné**, Nyíregyházi Egyetem Alkalmazott Humántudományok Intézete, **Fucskó Mónika** (PhD) Nyíregyházi Egyetem	Iskolai lemorzsolódás - megelőzése és kezelése a Bökönyi Barota Mihály Általános Iskolában School Dropout - Prevention andTtreatment at Bökönyi Barota Mihály Primary School
11.20-11.35	**Kajdiné Virág Katalin**, **Fucskó Mónika**, Nyíregyházi Egyetem	A gyermekbántalmazási esetek kivizsgálásának eljárásrendje a gyermekvédelmi szakellátásban- Gyermekvédelmi gyám feladatainak vizsgálata Hajdú-Bihar Vármegyében Procedures for Investigating Child Abuse Cases in Child Protection Services - Examination of the Tasks of Child Protection Guardians in Hajdú-Bihar County
11.20-11.35	**Fegyveres Mirtill** (DETEP hallgató), **Galán Anita** (PhD) DEGYGYK	Kisgyermekes anyák visszatérése a munkaerőpiacra The Return of Mothers with Young Children to the Labor Market
11.40-11.55	**Csapi Loréna Georgina** (DETEP hallgató), **Kis Gábor** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Roma tanulók iskolai beilleszkedésének támogatása egy vidéki kisvárosban – egy pedagógussal készült interjúra épülő mikrokutatás drámapedagógiai megközelítésben Supporting the School Integration of Roma Students in a Rural Small Town – A Micro-Study Based on an Interview with a Teacher Using a Drama Pedagogy Approach.
12.00-12.15	**Kiss Viktória** (DETEP hallgató), **Miklódi-Simon Zsófia** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem Humántudományok Doktori Iskola Neveléstudományi Program, DE GYGYK	A művészeti nevelés, mint hátránykompenzációs tényező összefüggései a szülői bevonódással Investigating Victim-Blaming Attitudes in the Perception of Intimate Partner Violence
12.20-12.35	**Nagyné Ádámszki Tímea** (DETEP hallgató), **Fenyő Imre** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Kelet-Magyarországi óvodák Pedagógiai Programjában megjelenő idegen nyelvi tevékenységek Foreign Language Activities Appearing in the Pedagogical Program of Kindergartens in Eastern Hungary

12. SZEKCIÓ **INTERDISZCIPLINÁRIS MEGKÖZELÍTÉSEK** **Szekcióvezető**: Dr. Mező Katalin **Helyszín**: C épület 13. (107) terem, első emelet		
9.00- 9.15	**Csorba Mónika**, **Juhász Orchidea** (PhD) Miskolci Egyetem	Jó gyakorlat: iskolai közösségi szolgálatos diákok bevonása a Miskolci Egyetemen Good Practice: Involving Students in School Community Service at the University of Miskolc
9.20- 9.35	**Juhász Orchidea** (PhD) Miskolci Egyetem	Hallgatói kezdeményezések és egyetemi közösségépítés: egy intézményi fejlesztési folyamat tapasztalatai Student Initiatives and University Community Building: Experiences from an Institutional Development Process
9.40- 9.55	**János Eichardt**	Magyarországi és külföldi természettudományos oktatás fejlesztési lehetőségei középiskolai keretek között Development Opportunities for Science Education in Hungary and Abroad within Secondary School Frameworks
10.00- 10.15.	**Gyuris Pálma**, **Czapné Makó Zita** (PhD) Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem	A matematika tanulásának nehézségei alsó tagozaton, a diszkalkulia The Difficulties in Learning Mathematics in Primary School, Dyscalculia
10.20- 10.35	**Dalanics-Molnár Ágnes** (HBV Pedagógiai Szakszolgálat) **Pető Ildikó** (PhD) DE GYGYK	A Dinamikus Szenzoros Integrációs Terápia (DSZIT) alkalmazásnak a lehetősége a korai fejlesztésben The Potential of Dynamic Sensory Integration Therapy (DSZIT) in Early Development
	KÁVÉSZÜNET	
	NYITOTT HORIZONTOK III.	
11.00- 11.15	**Pták-Petró Borbála** (DETEP hallgató) **Pető Ildikó** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Gyógypedagógiai szolgáltatások, marketing és szakmai standardok Special Education Services, Marketing, and Professional Standards
11.20- 11.35	**Hegyes Zsuzsa** (DETEP hallgató), **Pető Ildikó** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Az értelmi fogyatékos felnőttek életminősége a lakhatás függvényében The Quality of Life of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Depending on their Housing
11.20- 11.35	**Tóth Kamilla Zsófia** (DEGYGYK - Lippai Balázs Roma Szakkollégium hallgató) **Mező Katalin** (PhD) DE GYGYK	A Rejtélyek városkája című sorozat elemzése a gyógypedagógiai normalitás és a szubverzív narratívák szempontjából Analysis of the Series Gravity Falls from the Perspectives of Special Educational Normality and Subversive Narratives
11.40- 11.55	**Kovács Boglárka** (DETEP hallgató) **Mező Katalin** (PhD) DE GYGYK	Tanulásban akadályozott és értelmileg akadályozott személyek interperszonális kapcsolatainak összehasonlító vizsgálata a keresztény hit tükrében Comparative Study of the Interpersonal Relationships of Persons with Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Disabilities in the Light of Christian Faith
11.55- 12.10	**Bundzik Blanka** (DETEP hallgató) **Mező Katalin** (PhD) DE GYGYK	A református hit- és erkölcstan és az etika tárgyak összehasonlító elemzése a sajátos nevelési igényű tanulók számára kidolgozott Kerettantervek szempontjából A Comparative Analysis of Reformed Religious and Moral Education and Ethics from the Perspective of the Framework Curricula Developed for Students with Special Educational Needs
12.15- 12.30	**Falucskai Veronika** (DETEP hallgató) **Mező Katalin** (PhD), DE GYGYK	„Viharos Húszasok” – egy történelmi projekt megvalósításának tapasztalatai a tanulásban akadályozott tanulók 7. osztályában „The Roaring Twenties”: Experiences from the Implementation of a Historical Project in a Seventh-Grade Class of Students with Learning Disabilities and Difficulties
12.35- 12.55	**Karsai Fanni Judit** (DETEP hallgató), **Mező Katalin** (PhD), DE GYGYK	Digitális eszközök alkalmazása a történelemtanításban tanulásban akadályozott tanulók esetében

	The Use of Digital Tools in History Education for Students with Learning Disabilities

13. SZEKCIÓ
POSZTER SZEKCIÓ
A poszterek kiállítására az A épület 6. (026) teremben van lehetőség.
A poszterek kihelyezése és megtekinthetősége a konferencia alatt folyamatos.

A poszterek tartalma röviden és vizuálisan:

- kutatási kérdés / cél
- módszerek
- főbb eredmények
- következtetések
- A poszterek mérete: A1 (594 × 841 mm)

Poster pitch: a szerzők a saját poszterük mellett tartózkodnak és szabadon beszélgetnek az érdeklődőkkel.

Poszter pitch (szóbeli összefoglaló ideje): 2025. 04.24. 12.15-13.00

Gazda Dorottya, (PhD hallgató) Debreceni Egyetem Humántudományok Doktori Iskola, Neveléstudományi Program	Nem deficit, hanem erőforrás. A drámapedagógia és a kulturálisan releváns pedagógia közös szemlélete Not a Deficit, but a Resource. The Common Approach of Drama Pedagogy and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
Trixler Bettina (PhD hallgató), Pécsi Tudományegyetem, Egészségtudományi Kar, Egészségtudományi Doktori Iskola **Pusztafalvi Henriette** (PhD) Pécsi Tudományegyetem	Szülői életminőség és pszichoszociális tényezők bevándorló hátterű, autista gyermeket nevelő családok körében Parental Quality of Life and Psychosocial Factors Among Immigrant Families Raising Children with Autism
Major Lenke (PhD), **Horák Rita** (Prof., PhD), Újvidéki Egyetem Magyar Tannyelvű Tanítóképző Kar, Szabadka (Szerbia)	A tanulási motiváció vizsgálatának többdimenziós modellje a digitális oktatási átmenet időszakában A Multidimensional Model for the Examination of Learning Motivation During the Period of Digital Educational Transition
Dan Beata Andrea (PhD), **Wagner Andrea**, Partiumi Keresztény Egyetem (Románia), **Árkosi Julianna** (PhD), DE GYGYK	A szenzoriális színház reflektív és inkluzív pedagógiai lehetőségei a gyógypedagógiában Sensory Theatre as a Reflective and Inclusive Pedagogical Practice in Special Education
Katonka Fruzsina Sára (DETEP hallgató), **Miklódi-Simon Zsófia** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem Humántudományok Doktori Iskola Neveléstudományi Program, DE GYGYK	Az áldozathibáztató attitűdök vizsgálata a párkapcsolati erőszak megítélésében Investigating Victim-Blaming Attitudes in the Perception of Intimate Partner Violence
Csók Cintia (PhD), **Miklódi-Simon Zsófia** (PhD hallgató), **Harsányi Gabriella** (PhD hallgató), Debreceni Egyetem	Most először érzem, hogy valaki hazavár." A lakásotthoni és a nevelőszülői gondozás összehasonlító vizsgálata egy kvalitatív kutatás alapján "For the First Time, I feel that Someone is Waiting for Me at Home." A Comparative Study of Residential Care and Foster Care Based on Qualitative Research.

A konferenciaszervezők a változtatás jogát fenntartják!

Kérjük, hogy a konferencia megkezdése előtt ellenőrizzék a legfrissebb konferenciaprogramot a honlapon: https://e-konferencia.unideb.hu/KB-2026

Kontakt: kb@ped.unideb.hu

The conference organizers reserve the right to make changes!

Please check the latest conference program on the website before the start of the conference: https://e-konferencia.unideb.hu/KB-2026

Contact: kb@ped.unideb.hu