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EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

we are delighted to present you a new issue of Pacific Geographies with contributions dealing with a great variety of topics.

The first paper by Antje Missbach and her colleague Wayne Palmer introduces two case studies of underage transporters from Indonesia, who brought asylum seekers to Australia by boat. Both were convicted and jailed for the crime of people smuggling. Antje and Wayne problematise the culpability of underage smugglers, and argue for more lenient treatment by law-enforcement authorities.

The second contribution, a research note by Matthias Kowasch, Simon P.J. Batterbury, Séverine Bouard and Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane provides deeper insights into the circumstances of the recent referendum on political independence for New Caledonia. The authors argue that despite a clear vote against independence from France, the situation is much more complex and that the process of decolonization should be continued.

The third contribution is another a research note. Duy Linh Nguyễn presents his work on the multilevel coping mechanisms of street vendors in Hanoi, and their business strategies. They are branded as informal / illegal, but tolerated by representatives of the local government.

The fourth contribution is a commentary by Gerd Vetter, who spent four years as a teacher at a German school in South Korea. He addresses some of the cross-cultural issues he experienced during that time.

The present issue also contains two book reviews. Britta Schmitz reviews a dissertation investigating the "ant tribe" in China which describes the ever-growing group of rural graduates who try to gain ground in major cities. Elodie Fache reviews a book describing a citizen science trip between Rapa Nui and French Polynesia, an all-female sailing expedition aiming to explore the causes and impacts of, as well as potential solutions to, ocean plastic pollution.

An announcement from the Austrian South Pacific Society (OSPG) completes the present issue. OSPG informs us of the design process for developing a new logo, and the establishment of a new website.

The managing editors, Michael Waibel & Matthias Kowasch

Pacific Geographies



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The PG provides an interdisciplinary academic platform to discuss social, cultural, environmental and economic issues and developments in the Asia-Pacific region.

In order to uphold scientific standards, PG is implementing a peer-review process. Articles marked as „scientific papers“ have been peer-reviewed by two external reviewers. Articles marked as „research notes“ have been peer-reviewed by one external reviewer and a member of the editorial team. All other articles have been reviewed by the editorial team.

The Association for Pacific Studies (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Pazifische Studien e.V., APSA) was founded at the Department of Geography of the University of Technology in Aachen in 1987. Activities include workshops, conferences, public lectures and poster exhibitions. The book series PAZIFIK FORUM was initiated in 1990. In 1992, it was complemented by the journal PACIFIC NEWS (now PACIFIC GEOGRAPHIES). APSA-Members receive this journal at no cost as a membership benefit.

The APSA sees itself as one of the largest scientific networks in Germany for academics and practitioners with an interest in the Asia-Pacific region as well as academic exchange.

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COVER PICTURE

Off-road vehicle and Kanak
independence flag, October 2020
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Scapegoating juvenile ‘people smugglers’ from Indonesia: poverty, crime, and punishment

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Abstract: *This article introduces two case studies of underage transporters from Indonesia, who brought asylum seekers to Australia by boat and thus were convicted and jailed for the crime of people smuggling. In light of the hyper-politicised issue of people smuggling and the need to find punishable perpetrators, transporters have become the main target of anti-people-smuggling law enforcement. Both transporters came from poor families and started working early on in their lives, which also involved their deceptive recruitment into people-smuggling networks. But the outcome of their prosecutions differs substantially, not least, as one of them was convicted in an Australian court and the other in Indonesia. In this article, we problematise the culpability of underage smugglers and argue for more lenient treatment by law-enforcement authorities.*

Keywords: *People smuggling, criminalisation, recruitment into crime, punishment, poverty*

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Introduction

By taking firm action to secure borders (and thus prioritising the privileges of those living within those borders), governments seek to reassure voters that they are in control and that their policies are appropriate. Intensified border protection strategies are accepted by many voters who are swayed by their governments’ persistent fearmongering and exaggerated media accounts of irregular mass migration and potential ‘invasion’ by refugees and migrants (Peterie, 2017). While migration panic helps populist politicians win seats in parliaments and positions in governments, overexploiting such fear can backfire, as might be the case, for example, when a government is no longer considered to be in control. When linking irregular migration to transnational crime, it is convenient for them to blame a scapegoat – in recent times, the ‘people smuggler’. The frequent arrest and prosecution of smugglers – people considered responsible for taking migrants and refugees across borders – serve governments around the globe as a strategy for soothing concerned voters. The international fight against

people smugglers and irregular migration has not only been influenced by populist politicians on the hustings, but has also relied on very simplistic understandings of how the transport of refugees and migrants across borders is facilitated and who is responsible for its organisation. The global fight against people smuggling has filled prisons with these facilitators, who, as we show here, are easily caught and punished. While this might suggest to the wider public energetic state involvement and proper law enforcement, filling prisons with underprivileged juveniles, who carry the least responsibility for organising people-smuggling operations is at best window-dressing and at worst committing new injustices.

Further obfuscating the reality of smuggling operations is the use of state perspectives and language to describe processes and practices. Public debate tends to disregard the complexities of migratory decision-making (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker 2018; Kuschminder 2018). Especially ignored as victims are those facilitators who have joined the smuggling networks less than voluntarily

or have been recruited under false pretences, which is legally equivalent to trafficking in persons. To make matters worse, the accounts that prevail pay little attention to the wider economic and political context in which the recruitment into smuggling networks occurs, such as intergenerational poverty, hyper-precarity and environmental degradation, which drives people to accept risky and dangerous job offers they might otherwise reject (Missbach 2022). In order to counter the prevalent depictions, this essay pays attention to the structural violence and overall vulnerability of juvenile Indonesians who have been punished for people smuggling. With little formal education, limited job prospects where they grew up, and the destruction of their livelihoods by overfishing and maritime pollution, the two young men whose stories we relate here were attracted by apparently generous job offers that gave them some promise of respite from the daily hardship of their lives at home. We give their perspectives, which we have gained from interviews and trial observations in order to present their account of



Figure 1: The fishing village Pepela, Rote Island, saw many of its inhabitants become involved in the transport of asylum seekers to Australia.

the overall story; our portrayal of that story is complemented by publicly available documents from the courts and from human rights organisations. While there were hundreds of underage boys recruited to work as transporters in smuggling networks, we chose these two cases as they allow a cross-country comparison on how courts in Australia and Indonesia have dealt with the issue of underage smugglers. In Australia, there was substantial attention paid by the media to the cases of underage smugglers, which allowed us to collect reports, op eds and court statements rather easily. These findings were complemented by phone interviews with the smuggler. In Indonesia, however, this topic received little to no coverage by the media. For that reason, we conducted face-to-face interviews with the convicted smuggler, his mother and selected law enforcement personnel. A growing body of academic literature has explored the involvement of minors in people smuggling and the sentencing of minors for that involvement (Lelliott, 2017; Palmer and Missbach, 2017; Hirsch, 2013). This essay, however, is primarily interested in the pathway that led to their recruitment into people-smuggling networks. In order to paint a broader picture of how and why young men in Indonesia become involved in people-smuggling networks and are sentenced as smugglers, we scrutinise two case studies: the first is of Ali Jasmin, who was convicted as an adult by an Australian court; the second portrays Syamsir, who was prosecuted

as a minor in Indonesia. After analysing their treatment in court, we take into account their upbringing in deprived environments, the economic situation of their families, and their job prospects amid widespread youth unemployment. Comparing these two case studies not only shows the discrepancies between the Indonesian and Australian legal systems in prosecuting underage people smugglers, but also raises a more important and inconvenient question for states seeking to punish people smuggling at all costs: Is people smuggling the most appropriate offence, given that so much of the juveniles' experience is redolent of other crimes, such as human trafficking, that recast them as victims rather than perpetrators?

As will be discussed in more detail in the two case studies, both Ali and Syamsir hail from Eastern Indonesia, which poverty statistics identify as the poorest area of Indonesia. Not only do young people there face very limited employment prospects and access to state resources, but they are also affected by greater political instability and environmental degradation. In spite of the effects of these structural disadvantages on these young people, their families still expect them to contribute to the family income, at least until they have families of their own. In some instances, young people, especially boys and young men, face enormous pressure to provide for families, particularly if their parents are divorced or unable to work. Constant economic pressure and enduring social

expectation impact their self-perception, risk-taking behaviour and life choices more generally. Many young people like Ali and Syamsir stand little chance of ever finding employment in the formal economy and rely primarily on short-term gigs in the informal economy, which offers no proper contracts, fixed salaries or workers' protection. Around 70 per cent of Indonesians work in the informal sector (Ford and Caraway, 2020). As hired hands in the transport of refugees and migrants, they are usually provided with very little information about a job, its conditions, length of employment or provisions. They are given a small preliminary down payment, or sometimes only some material incentives, and promised a fixed sum at the end. Lucrative offers by middlemen that suggest they will earn much more than what they usually make, for example, by working as a cook on a boat, are very enticing. Rather than suspecting involvement in a crime for such generous salary offers, youngsters hope they have finally struck it lucky (Henschke, 2011). Of course, not every young man ends up in people-smuggling networks, but in our cases it was economic hardship that drove the young men to do so. In this essay, we present four arguments to support our claims in contesting the culpability of underage smugglers vis-à-vis the official perspective of state authorities. First, we argue that minors recruited into people smuggling are often not given correct information about the real destination of their jour-

neys when they are recruited, which constitutes deception. Second, we show that minors are not in a position to make decisions about such matters as the assembly of the crew, the selection of passengers, and preparations for the journey; their exclusion from decision-making means that they cannot be held responsible for organising these irregular journeys. Third, once at sea, the minors have few opportunities to express any objections they might have to the organiser; even if they come to realise on the journey that they are committing, or are expected to commit, a crime, such as entering Australian territory illegally, they have few options but to follow the organiser's instructions. Fourth, minors are often deceived when it comes to their remuneration, as they frequently do not receive the full amount they were initially promised.

Ali Jasmin: lost youth, wrongful imprisonment and lack of compensation

Ali is one of about 180 Indonesians who worked as crew on asylum-seeker boats and arrived in Australia between late 2008 and late 2011, and who claimed to be underage at the time of offence (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012). Ali and his family are from Bala Uring, a remote village on the island of Flores in Eastern Indonesia, one of the poorest parts of Indonesia. Many young men and women leave the village to work either in factories in Batam, in oil palm plantations in Kalimantan, or as housemaids in Makassar. Ali's family were small-scale vendors at a local fish market. Ali attended school for seven years before he started working as fisherman not far away from his home. Aged 13, Ali decided to leave his village after the fishing season for Maumere, the largest city on Flores, hoping to find a job there. On his first night, he went to pray in the mosque and met a preacher who offered Ali and two other boys a job on a cargo boat for Rp15 million (US\$1000). The religious appearance of the preacher made him appear trustworthy to Ali. Together they travelled to Kendari, where Ali and the other boys stayed in the house of Muhimin, whom Ali referred to as 'big boss' for one month. Ali described Muhimin as a very generous person who bought them new clothes and fed them well. No down payment was made, and Ali did not mind. He explained that at that time he would not have been able to send the money home to

his mother, because nobody in the village had a mobile phone or a bank account. While staying at Muhimin's house, an old boat that had been bought was being repaired for the trip. Eventually Ali and the preacher travelled to Surabaya, where, to Ali's surprise, they took foreigners on board. From there the boat travelled to Rote Island in the southernmost corner in Indonesia. When the boat was close enough to the shore, the preacher swam ashore, again to Ali's astonishment. Following instructions, Ali steered the boat on (Phone conversation with Ali Jasmin, 24 September 2019).

On 18 December 2009, Ali was apprehended northwest of Australia's Ashmore Reef, a day trip from the island of Rote. On board Ali's boat were 55 Afghan asylum seekers. In interviews conducted by the members of the Australian Human Rights Commission after his trial, Ali stated that a middleman approached him and offered him a job on a freighter transporting goods between islands. Together with other crew members they travelled to Rote Island, which was often used as departure point for irregular journeys. Some of the crew members left the boat there. Ali continued without any clear indication of where the journey would go. When out at sea again, however, foreign passengers arriving on smaller vessels boarded his boat. In addition to four other crew members on board, Ali worked as a cook for the asylum seekers. Because of bad weather and an unreliable engine, they ran out of food before reaching their desired destination. Not only was the boat generally in poor condition, but it carried no safety equipment or life jackets. The boat started to sink before it was intercepted by HMAS Launceston, an Australian Navy vessel, about eight nautical miles northwest of Ashmore Reef. Ali explained that he 'felt half-dead during the journey because he was so afraid', and that he had no understanding of what constituted people smuggling and why people were claiming asylum in Australia. Upon arrest Ali had Rp3,185,500 (US\$230) in his possession, but explained that he was never paid the amount he had been promised by the preacher.

Questions about Ali's age started to emerge early on. When he was arrested by the Australian Navy, Ali told the officials that he was 16 years old. Upon later interrogation in custody, he gave his age as 14. Because the officials did not believe Ali, they ordered a wrist x-ray assessment, to which he consented, but it remains unclear

that he understood the importance and possible implications of this procedure in his sentencing. The medical test results declared that Ali had a mature skeleton and determined him to be at least 19 years old. Ali disputed this result on several occasions, but often there was no Indonesian interpreter present in court. Even though the x-ray assessment was widely criticised by medical experts as unreliable, Australian authorities treated Ali as an adult. He was charged with migrant smuggling and tried in an adult court.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian Consulate received a birth certificate from Indonesia that indicated that Ali was 13 years old when he was arrested, supporting Ali's claims about his real age. However, this document was not placed into evidence by either the defence or the prosecution. Moreover, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) doubted the birth certificate's veracity, as it was produced much later and could not be verified by further documentary evidence. Instead of substantiating their claim or trying to find other means of verifying the submitted document, the AFP stated they did not have the operational resources to question Ali's family on Flores. Furthermore, the Indonesian Consulate also did nothing more to provide legal aid to Ali and other youths in similar situations, but supplied Ali and other minors with Indonesian food and religious reading materials in prison (Henschke, 2018). All in all, the destinies of the incarcerated minors were of little concern to the Indonesian representatives in Australia, and in light of the generally rocky bilateral relationship, the priorities lay elsewhere.

Almost a year after his arrest, Ali was sentenced as an adult people smuggler to the mandatory minimum sentence of five years imprisonment, with a non-parole period of three years (*R v Jasmin* [2010] WADC 189). His sentence was the outcome of an age determination hearing on 8 December 2010, again with no interpreter, in which the main source of evidence was the x-ray assessment test results. In June 2011, Ali lodged an appeal against his sentence, but his appeal was dismissed (*AJ v The Queen* [2011] WASCA 166).

In April 2012, an Australian journalist travelled to Indonesia to meet Ali's family and village chiefs in Flores and obtained copies of documents corroborating Ali's claim that he was a child. The media report of Ali's case received considerable attention and his case was the catalyst



Figure 2: Since 2013, hardly any refugees left for Australia by boat. Thousands have become stuck in Indonesia and those who have run out of money often end up homeless in the streets of Jakarta.

for an inquiry by the Australian Human Rights Commission into the treatment of children suspected of people-smuggling offences. Ali Jasmin was one of many children the Commission determined to have been wrongfully sentenced as adults on the basis of a widely discredited wrist x-ray test. In total, the cases of 23 people charged with people smuggling were reviewed by the Commission. Following revelations of their true age, at least three were released and sent home at the Attorney-General's instruction. Ali was released from prison in May 2012, along with two other Indonesians convicted of people smuggling, and returned to Indonesia. But by that time Ali had already spent 781 days in a maximum-security adult prison.

Ali's case and the subsequent inquiry by the Australian Human Rights Commission resulted in significant legal and political changes in Australia. From 2012 onwards, Australian law enforcement agencies paid more attention to the vulnerability of juvenile transporters employed in people-smuggling operations. Instead of being punished and detained for smuggling offences, juveniles began to be deported to Indonesia (Australian Embassy, 2012).

Ali returned to his family after his release from Australia. He is now married and has one child. Although happy to be reunited with his family, Ali is aware that he lost a substantial part of his childhood through wrongful imprisonment. In another appeal in June 2017, the Western Australian Court of Appeal found that Ali Jasmin was in fact only 13 years old when he was arrested for people smuggling and sentenced as an adult (Jasmin

v The Queen [2017] WASCA 122). Despite his successful appeal, Ali is yet to be compensated for his wrongful imprisonment by the Australian government (Missbach and Palmer, 2020). The chances of any wrongfully imprisoned minors receiving any financial compensation are small (Missbach and Palmer, 2018). While awaiting the outcome of yet another legal action to gain compensation, Ali works as labourer during the day and goes fishing at night in order to make ends meet (Phone conversation with Ali Jasmin, 17 September 2019).

Syamsir: intergenerational poverty, debt trap and hyper-precarity

Our second case concerns Syamsir, an Indonesian minor from Sulawesi, also in Eastern Indonesia. Unlike Ali, Syamsir was involved in transporting asylum seekers to Australia multiple times, but instead of being prosecuted and convicted in Australia, Syamsir was returned to Indonesia with stern warnings. Although he had learned from his encounters with Australian border forces that people smuggling is a crime in Australia, he seemed to have been unaware that people smuggling had also been criminalised in Indonesia. It was on his fourth attempt to bring asylum seekers to Australia, when Syamsir was still 17 years old, that he was arrested and convicted for people smuggling under Indonesian law. What makes Syamsir's case more complex is that he is known to have been involved in several people-smuggling operations. In these circumstances, he should have at the very

least been informed and made aware of his actions and their consequences after his first arrest.

On 22 September 2015, together with two other Indonesian crew members, Syamsir departed from Java's southern coast in the direction of Australia's Christmas Island. Despite his young age, Syamsir was the captain of the boat. On board were 18 Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian asylum seekers. They did not reach Australia as their boat started taking on water after the engine broke down. When the weather deteriorated, Syamsir, as the boat's captain, had to convince everyone that they needed to return to Indonesia. Against the pleas of his passengers, who were eager to reach Australia, not least because they had paid middlemen high fares for their journeys, Syamsir deemed the risk for his life and the lives of the other people too high and insisted on turning back. Syamsir and the other crew members were arrested upon their return to Java and later sentenced for people smuggling. Under the Indonesian Law on Immigration, failed attempts at people smuggling attract the same punishment as successful ventures – five years imprisonment. Yet, in Syamsir's case the court noted that he was still a minor and sentenced him to one and a half years in prison, a little less than one-third of the minimum sentence for adult perpetrators. The possibility, however, that Syamsir might also have been a victim of re-trafficking, which the prosecution drew to the court's attention, was ignored by the police and the court.

The first time we met Syamsir in August

2016, he was in jail. He had just turned 18, but looked younger. While he was very surprised by our visit at first, he became quite eager to tell his version of his involvement. Syamsir finished his formal education after six years of primary schooling and started working so that he could contribute to the family income. His parents had migrated to their village before Syamsir was born, but had never owned land or even the family's house. His father worked in construction but his poor health forced him to stay at home for extended periods of time, so the family had gone into debt. Syamsir told us of his sadness when the debt collectors came knocking on the family's door asking for money. He felt ashamed because people would keep asking them to pay their debts, which led to his decision to go out and make money.

On a later occasion we visited Syamsir's house and family. The village the family was living in was right on the seashore and many houses still lacked basic sanitation. Most village men worked as fishermen and sailors. Like most of his peers, Syamsir became interested in working at sea. Spending long stretches at sea, sometimes up to six months at a time, helped Syamsir acquire considerable nautical skills. His earnings as a fisherman varied. Sometimes he would make 'Rp500,000 [US\$35] in two weeks, sometimes Rp5 million [US\$350] in a month', but out of this he would have to pay a cut to his agent and to the owner of the boat, leaving him with at least a third less than what he made. Given the low income from fishing, Syamsir became interested in higher-paying jobs.

Syamsir told us that he never met any of the organisers and middlemen who had offered him the jobs to bring asylum seekers to Australia. All transactions and communications were done by phone. For his first trip to take asylum seekers to Ashmore Reef, Syamsir was a deckhand and earned Rp25 million (US\$1770). For his second trip, when he was made captain of the boat, he earned the same amount. For the third trip, which was to Christmas Island and much further away from Indonesia, he was promised Rp40 million (US\$2800), but in the end he was paid nothing. He had no way of contacting the middlemen after he failed to get paid, because they cancelled their phone accounts. After the first trip taking asylum seekers to Australia, Syamsir was detained in Darwin for three months, but eventu-

ally released without being charged and tried. The second and third time he was detained there for about two weeks. Although Syamsir knew quite well by then that people smuggling was a crime and could land him in jail in Australia, he accepted a fourth job, for which he was also promised Rp40 million (US\$2800). The main reason for taking on the job even though he was not paid for the last one was to give his parents Rp30 million (US\$2100) to pay off the debt for the house they were living in. But it became clear during the investigations and his subsequent trial in the Indonesian court that Syamsir had been tricked by the organisers once again. This time he did not even get the first instalment promised by the middlemen.

Having to go to jail in Indonesia came as an unpleasant surprise for Syamsir. Even though the judge gave consideration to the fact that Syamsir was a minor at the time, he did not accept the prosecutor's plea that Syamsir was a victim of trafficking. The main reason for the judge's decision was that this smuggling operation was not the first time Syamsir had been involved in transporting asylum seekers to Australia. In order to limit any future risk of being re-trafficked, the judge insisted Syamsir undertake a full year of vocational training as part of his sentence and for rehabilitation purposes. While in juvenile prison, Syamsir took auto repair, typing and carwash classes. During our interview, Syamsir told us that he planned to go back to day-labouring at sea, because he did not feel that the training in jail would prepare him for better-paid work.

Syamsir was released from prison in early 2017. Back in his village, Syamsir tried to find work, but failed. Although he had learned a few new skills in prison, nobody wanted to offer him a job, partly because he could not provide any official certificates attesting to his skills and because he now had a criminal record. He tried selling meatball soup (bakso), but business did not pick up. By the time we arrived in his village near Takalar in May 2017, he had taken off again. His mother told us that he had been offered a job on a fishing boat 'somewhere in Papua', Indonesia's eastern-most territory. Before he left, he received a down payment of Rp3.5 million (US\$250) from the middleman who recruited him, which he passed on to his family. His mother told us that she was very happy that he had found work, not least because Syamsir's father

had become very ill and could no longer work. From widely available reports and testimonies about working conditions on fishing vessels in Indonesian waters, it is known that workers are frequently exploited and badly treated (Palmer 2018). All subsequent attempts to establish direct contact with Syamsir and check on his whereabouts failed.

Juvenile smugglers

There is evidence that children are involved in facilitating irregular journeys globally, fulfilling a number of roles in the smuggling process, such as guiding migrants and serving as crew members of smuggling vessels. Some children and youth may participate willingly in such activities; others may be intentionally misled or otherwise coerced into certain roles (Lelliott, 2018). Despite growing attention to people smuggling and trafficking in persons, the inability of law enforcement agencies to properly identify victims of human trafficking remains a perplexing obstacle to its prevention, retribution and restitution (Jones, 2012). Legally speaking, the distinction between trafficking in persons and people smuggling is set out clear in law. For good reasons, people smuggling and trafficking in persons are generally treated as separate issues, legally, sociopolitically and morally (Munro, 2012). Nevertheless, the reality is often murkier, as smuggling and trafficking can occur concurrently along the same routes and even within the same operations. More importantly, the main focus has largely been paid to the people being moved: the victims of trafficking or the clients of smugglers (e.g. Kneebone, 2010). Much less attention has been paid to the recruitment of the transporters themselves, which as our two case studies clearly illustrate, can amount to trafficking into people-smuggling operations (Palmer and Missbach, 2017).

When smuggling and trafficking offenders are prosecuted in court, precise age determination remains a challenge for law enforcers, because offenders frequently lack legal documents. Courts have often commissioned medical experts to determine their ages using x-rays of bones or teeth, but these methods are generally very questionable as they do not take into account variables such as malnutrition, long-term deprivation, or untreated health issues that predate their involvement in migratory journeys. Declaring young smugglers to be older than they are has had serious negative conse-

quences for them, including longer prison terms, no compensation as victims of trafficking, and no rehabilitation services.

When it comes to determining the degree to which people voluntarily participate in migratory services, the main focus is usually on the customers – that is, the migrants who wish to take up the services of an organiser, facilitator, guide or driver. Those able to pay the full fee in advance tend to be at lower risk of financial dependency on their facilitators at the end of the smuggling operation, whereas those who do not have the money pay at the time they need the services and must pay the facilitator later on or work off their debts by other means are more vulnerable to exploitation and potential trafficking.

While facilitators, including underage boat crew members, such as the two in our case studies, might transport refugees and migrants who are voluntary customers across borders in a one-way interaction, they themselves may become victims of trafficking because of their involuntary or deceptive recruitment into the smuggling operation. It is not uncommon for the most dangerous and risky aspects of smuggling operations, such as the actual crossing of land or sea borders, to be outsourced to third parties, particularly to actors considered disposable by more powerful figures in the smuggling networks (Missbach, 2016). Compared with adult transporters, underage deckhands and crew members are cheaper and generally considered more compliant in carrying out orders. In many jurisdictions, young offenders, particularly those under 18, receive more lenient sentences when found guilty of people smuggling – a fact that some recruiters exploit. In the best scenario, underage transporters who are arrested and prosecuted might count on leniency in the courts, but there are exceptions, as the case of Ali has shown.

The findings of previous research have generally been inconclusive in determining either the extent to which juveniles participate voluntarily in smuggling operations or the extent of their awareness of the legal implications of their involvement. Some youths participate willingly in people smuggling and may be aware of potential legal consequences, while others are deceived or forced into complying (Sanchez, 2018; Lelliott, 2017). Questions about whether children and young people participate voluntarily or involuntarily in committing the crime

need to be examined in greater depth, not least because of their relevance in consequent litigation. Determining that their participation is voluntary is only of any real significance in legal proceedings if viable alternatives to opt out of participating were available at the time of their recruitment. Thus, scrutinising the circumstances and conditions under which underage and young males are recruited into people-smuggling networks is of fundamental importance.

Rethinking choices, voluntariness and blame

The urge to punish as many perpetrators of people smuggling as possible, both to deter potential smugglers from committing the crime in the future and to demonstrate a firm commitment to halt people smuggling to the voting public, is politically driven. Consequently, Australian courts have not paid sufficient attention to the plight of minors who have been deliberately recruited into smuggling networks. While Australian officials have ignored the fact that many people smugglers, including Ali, were minors and have sentenced them as adults under the full force of the law, the case study from Indonesia showed that the judiciary held greater respect for the rights of children and took Syamsir's status as a juvenile offender into consideration when determining his sentence. But neither the Australian nor the Indonesian judge had much understanding of how organisers recruited minors into people-smuggling operations. In the cases of both Ali and Syamsir, the courts failed to see any evidence of human trafficking in their recruitment as minors into people smuggling, even though the organisers had clearly exploited the young transporters' status as children.

Given the political atmosphere, it is not perhaps surprising that punishment is sought for people smugglers, with little regard for collateral damage and unintended consequences of that punishment. People smuggling has become a highly politicised issue in several election campaigns over the last twenty years; however, more so in Australia than in Indonesia. Because of media frenzy surrounding the issue, the voting public have wanted evidence of quick solutions for a sensationalised problem. Achieving convictions for a large number of perpetrators has become a presentable deliverable that, in turn, justifies high levels of government expenditure on border protection and



Figure 3: During our interview, Syamsir's mother showed us a photo of her son, who had been jailed for people smuggling.

reinforces policies that essentially restrict immigration.

These political developments and punitive policies are, however, thwarting established mechanisms to protect people from trafficking, especially those for the protection of male victims of trafficking. Most attention has in the past been directed towards female victims of trafficking, with sexually-exploited women and children receiving the lion's share of services from state and non-state organisations which have sought to 'rescue', 'rehabilitate' and 'reintegrate' victims of trafficking back into society (Schloenhardt, Astill-Torchia and Jolly, 2012). In contrast, the coerced or deceptive recruitment of men and boys for forced labour and for smuggling has generally been ignored (Jones, 2010). As the stories of Ali and Syamsir have shown, people are not only being recruited to work in very poor conditions; they are also recruited to commit crimes, such as people smuggling. These victim/perpetrators are often overlooked in academic analysis, because they do not fit comfortably into the category of the piteous victim. They continue to hold an uneasy position in the spectrum of deservability, not least because the media likes to portray smugglers as reckless, irresponsible, hyper-masculine, greedy and dangerous (Achilli, 2018), which hinders outpours of sympathy or compassion for them. The details of their recruitment into smuggling networks are often of little interest to the wider public, or even the courts, as they are often prejudged long before the actual judgement in court is

rendered. The widespread demonisation of people smuggling as the main enabling force or even trigger of irregular migration is particularly relevant in the two case studies presented here, as it discourages a full understanding of who the young crew members from Indonesia were and why they did what they did.

In the Australian context, people smugglers have been vilified to the extent that little attention is given to the necessities of why asylum seekers look for the services of smugglers. Yet, even less attention is directed at the context within which people smuggling has evolved. Not only are the complex and fluid structures of people-smuggling networks ignored, but, in the search for punishable perpetrators, drivers and boat crew have become the main target of anti-people-smuggling law enforcement. Their involvement in smuggling operations tends to be more visible, thus attracting media attention and the bulk of anti-smuggling law enforcement measures. The fact, however, that most of the people prosecuted for smuggling offences in Australia and Indonesia are poor and powerless individuals, rather than the greedy racketeers that policy-makers would have their voters believe them to be, should make us question the humanity of the laws under which they are prosecuted. Throwing underage smugglers into prison is one example of collateral damage that is too easily accepted in the struggle against people smuggling and irregular migration. Smuggling networks have clearly benefited from exploiting the vulnerability of Indonesian youth in meeting high demand from refugees and migrants wanting to get to Australia. Poor boys from Indonesia are easily recruited and pay a high price for their transgressions.

In this essay we have tried to contest the culpability of underage smugglers vis-à-vis the official perspective of state authorities, arguing for more lenient treatment by law-enforcement authorities. Our intervention arises from four causes: First that minors recruited into people smuggling often were not in the possession of full and true information about the real destination of their journeys, which constitutes deception. Second, minors who were sentenced

for people smuggling operations never made any substantial decisions about what crew to assemble, where to find passengers and how to prepare for the journey, which means that they should not be held responsible for organising such journeys. Third, minors have little chance to opt out from those operations once they have accepted an initial down-payment or are at sea and come to realise that something might not quite be right. Fourth, we have shown that minors from Indonesia were not only recruited to commit crimes, but they were also cheated in regard to the earnings they were promised by their recruiters, which could be seen as double exploitation.

At the time of writing (December 2021), asylum seekers on their way to Australia no longer seek the services provided by people such as Ali and Syamsir. The number of asylum seekers arriving by air has overtaken those coming by boat to Australia. Consequently, for the time being, Australia's public enemy No. 1 are asylum seekers rather than smugglers (Peterie 2017). It is, however, safe to assume that the organisers of irregular travel through Indonesia are not yet out of business, but remain dormant until demands for boat journeys to Australia grow stronger again. The risk that young men and minors, such as Ali and Syamsir, will be recruited into smuggling networks is very low at the moment, but that does not necessarily mean that they will not end up in other 'dirty', unsafe or un(der) regulated sectors.

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Figure 1: „Modified” loyalist campaign poster in the city district of Montravail (Nouméa), in which a large pro-independence population is concentrated. Second referendum in October 2020.

Source: Theo Rouby (Hans Lucas Photography).

The third independence referendum in New Caledonia – a fallback to colonialism?

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Abstract: The third and final referendum in the French overseas territory New Caledonia on December 12, 2021, was wasted. Although the vote was legal and the result was clear (96.5% voting against independence), we argue – along with various international observers – that the schedule did not respect Kanak cultural traditions and the vote should be considered as undemocratic. As engaged scholars with different scientific backgrounds (geography, agronomy, education) and of different origins (German, British-Australian, French-Caledonian and indigenous Kanak), we critically examine the circumstances of the third referendum and analyse the reasons for the non-participation of the majority of independence supporters. We offer a number of observations on future prospects for the interrupted decolonization process and recommend the consideration of new forms of partnerships between France and New Caledonia.

Keywords: New Caledonia, referendum, decolonization, conflict, Covid

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Introduction

On December 12, 2021, the third and final referendum on political independence was held in the French overseas territory of New Caledonia. The result was clear, with 96.5% against independence. But in contrast to the first referendum in November 2018 and the second held in October 2020, the third had a very low turnout of only 43.87%. In the 2020 referendum, the turnout was 85.69% – a record – with 53.26%

voting against independence. The gap between the “yes” and the “no” vote had narrowed, compared to the first referendum in 2018 (56.67% voting “no”, with a turnout of 81.01%). In 2021, independence supporters felt the long struggle towards decolonisation from France had a strong chance of success. However, a series of events in late 2021 led them to call for “non-participation” in the referendum by their supporters,

who are overwhelmingly Kanak, and this explains the anomalous result. In this brief commentary article, we question the reasons for the widespread refusal of the independence supporters to go to the polls, set within a much longer and more complex history of geopolitical relationships and events.

From the perspective of independence supporters in New Caledonia, the third referendum was undemocratic and



Figure 2: Meeting of independence supporters at Fayard Parc in Dumbéa, South Province, New Caledonia, October 2020.

a breach of faith by the French state towards the Kanak people. The French government, however, confirmed that the vote was legal and it passed off without incident (Fisher et al. 2021; NC la 1ière). Different commentators have agreed that the vote had been announced and was conducted legally, but nevertheless it was unjust (ibid; Trépiéd 2021). The honorary magistrate Christian Belhôte and the historian Isabelle Merle (2022) have called it a Pyrrhic victory. Kanak student Marylou Mahé wrote in a piece for Radio New Zealand on December 11: “I have the impression that my culture is being ignored, that my Kanak identity is being denied. We are being set back more than 30 years, to a time when our voice did not count. It is as if we do not exist.” (Mahé 2021)

The Matignon and Nouméa Accords

New Caledonia has, as readers of this journal will be aware, experienced ‘historic dualism’ since its colonisation and occupation by France in 1853 (Bouard et al. 2020), the material advance of settler colonialism and mining onto the lands of Kanak clans since then, and the symbolic divisions that have persisted to this day (Batterbury et al. 2020;

Bensa and Leblic 2000). The violent upheavals of the 1980s, now more than 30 years ago, were triggered by the marginalisation of the indigenous Kanak and euphemistically known as “les Événements” (the Events). Two political and economic agreements resulted: the Matignon Accords in 1988 and the Nouméa Accord in 1998. Since then, the French overseas territory has for the most part embraced an ongoing process of “decolonization,” the term used in the Nouméa Accord (Fisher 2022 forthcoming; Gagné 2015). The first paragraph of the Accord recognizes the shadows of the colonial period and notes that New Caledonia was not a “terra nullius”. France thus recognized Kanak cultures and languages and traditions, which were previously denied in the early land grabs and violence of the late 1800s and early 1900s. The form of decolonization that the territory could follow would give Kanak the right to self-determination, and should allow new relations to be established between the different communities living in New Caledonia, which includes other Pacific peoples today, with their own political parties and institutions, as well as a substantial population of European descent (Chauchat 2007). In addition, the Nouméa Accord contributed to

the recognition of the cultural identity of Kanak people by establishing a customary senate (Forrest and Kowasch, 2016). The Customary Senate, created on the base of linguistic spheres, must be consulted on draft laws of the country where they concern or are related to Kanak identity (Garde 2001).

Covid-pandemic and mourning traditions

In the pre-referendum period in 2021, pro-independence representatives argued that the timeframe of the election campaign and the date of the referendum itself did not respect Kanak cultural traditions. Firstly, they called for a postponement of the referendum until after August 2022 – i.e. after the French presidential and parliamentary elections – as had been promised by former French Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe (Belhôte and Merle 2021). Despite protests from Kanak politicians and communities, the French government refused a postponement – the independence referendum was scheduled and held on Saturday 12th December. The December 12th deadline was indeed problematic for a second reason (and highlighted as the main reason) – the severe impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the end of



Source: Theo Rouby (Hans Lucas Photography).

Figure 3: Campaign posters for the second referendum in October 2020.

August 2021, New Caledonia was virtually Covid-free. But a fierce outbreak of the virus resulted in nearly 300 deaths in just three months, particularly in Kanak communities – out of a total population of 271,000. Compared to other countries, the infection rate was not high, but the sudden epidemic was a stunning shock that Jean-François Merle, veteran negotiator of both the Nouméa and Matignon accords, compares to a plane crash, which seems to be more dramatic than “regular” illness and deaths over a year (in September ISEE recorded an 81% increase of mortality, compared to an average September). The pandemic halted almost all political campaigning among Kanak communities, with no large-scale rallies or meetings held in each Kanak village with time for deliberation and exchange, as occurred with the previous referenda. There was, instead, traditional mourning. Kanak people accompany their losses to their final resting place, and the funerals that are attended by hundreds of family members continue for several weeks. The funerals thus represent important cultural events that bring together Kanak communities to mourn their loss and to transmit traditional knowledge to the younger generations. Mourning rituals are important for well-being, for

social cohesion, and they have social meaning. Due to the high number of deaths and because many Kanak people lost or continue to lose at least one family member, the customary senate declared a one-year mourning period to commemorate the deceased. The French government and the loyalist political representatives, however, dismissed these cultural issues. Therefore, Kanak communities saw the holding of the December 12 referendum as a sign of contempt for their culture – not only by the French government but also by the loyalist proponents across the territory.

Moreover, given the restrictions and measures imposed, democratic frameworks for fair and legitimate electoral campaigning became extremely difficult. In previous votes, the independence movement had mobilised strongly, with large political rallies. From September 2021 onwards, such gatherings were no longer possible. People also rightly feared the possibility of contagion at polling stations. A “fair” online election campaign was always an illusion, because New Caledonia has a digital divide, with better internet connection in the capital Nouméa than in outlying regions and particularly in Kanak communities.

New Caledonia as an issue of French internal politics

The reference to the words of Edouard Philippe, and his announcement that the third referendum should be kept out of the period from September 2021 and August 2022, refers back to a statement after the Matignon Accords when then Prime Minister Michel Rocard stated in June 1988: “I do not know where each of us, we are in 3, 5 or 10 years, but we should make a solemn commitment. New Caledonia never should again become an issue of French internal politics” (ART19, Interview with Jean-François Merle, former adviser of Michel Rocard). New Caledonia has indeed suffered negative experiences where French metropolitan geopolitics have influenced political election campaigns. Such an instrumentalizing effect led to the Ouvéa tragedy in April 1988 where, in between the two rounds of the presidential elections, independence fighters attacked and occupied a French police station and took 26 police hostage. The killing of four policemen in a panic situation during the attack and the hostage-taking led to a forceful French counter-strike on May 5, resulting in the deaths of 19 Kanak and two military personnel. Eye-witness accounts and human rights

organizations noted the excessive brutality, including torture and executions, exercised by French army forces (Fisher 2022 forthcoming). Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, who was a French presidential candidate at the time, used the hostage-taking to show determination and to dissent from the position taken by French President François Mitterrand. For more than thirty years since, the promise not to imbricate New Caledonia affairs with French internal politics has been respected.

Although the French state presents itself as the arbiter, rather than being deeply implicated in the decolonization process, it is historically the coloniser and remains the colonial power. In 2021, the Macron government broke the “neutrality” promises established in earlier decades and that it had observed for the previous 2018 and 2020 referenda. In early 2021, the French government commissioned a study to shed light on the effects and consequences of possible New Caledonia independence (Ministère des Outre-Mer 2021). This 104-page study was hardly objective, in the sense that it focused on the financing granted by France over the last 30 years and offered only historical reminders (now rather dated) to illustrate the effects of independence in its most visible aspects, for example on nationality. The effort to account for transfers to the territory deserves to be made. Many researchers and economists have indeed tried to clarify the effects of these transfers, but the exercise turns out to be very complex with a lot of difficulty in accessing the data (Bouard et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the “neutrality” of the document could have been supported with more attention to renegotiating interdependencies between the archipelago, its Pacific neighbours, and France, and the symbolic importance of self-determination. In an August 2021 speech in Tahiti, Macron announced that France would be “less beautiful” without New Caledonia, but stopped short of further geopolitically charged statements at that time.

The calls for a postponement of the referendum date were supported worldwide. Some 64 academics from France, Australia and other countries published an open letter in the French newspaper “Le Monde” (Trépiéd et al. 2021): France should respect the right to self-determination for colonised peoples. The French government, with its

political decision to stick to the date of December 12, has led New Caledonia into a political impasse and deepened the political gulf between pro-independence and loyalist proponents (Batterbury and Kowasch 2021).

A referendum on independence without the indigenous Kanak people?

In the aftermath of the third referendum, loyalist politicians have expressed satisfaction with the referendum results and declared that the Nouméa Accord has now run its course. In their view, a page has been turned, and it is now time to imagine and plan for a new future for New Caledonia within the French state. Contrary to their electoral arguments, however, the Nouméa Accord remains in force (Belhôte and Merle, 2021; Calédonie 1ière 2021). To avoid any risk of a legal vacuum, the Accord indeed stipulates the maintenance of the political organisation in place pending a new status. And 170 years of colonial history will not disappear from one moment to the next, with an agreed “final political status”. Moreover, the question that loyalist politicians and the French government have not answered is, how can the referendum be considered legitimate when almost half the eligible subjects either refused to or could not vote? The political and moral legitimacy of this independence referendum on changing the terms of government for a colonial territory is negligible in our view, without the participation of the colonised peoples themselves. The French state, with the support of its loyalist proponents in New Caledonia, undermined the decolonisation process started 30 years ago and the construction of a “destin commun” (common future) that was widely expressed as a conciliatory form of political discourse from that time.

Future prospects

The dialogue between the supporters of independence on the one hand and the French state and loyalists on the other, has been interrupted. New compromises, and other ways of decolonisation – for example the creation of an associated state – have yet to be explored in the fragile and shell-shocked political environment. The antagonism between independence proponents and their opposition within in the territory seems to have increased. This binary

opposition of Kanak versus non-Kanak feeds local and neighbourhood conflicts. In an interview on Radio ART19 on December 19, 2021, Jean-François Merle stated that the real problem for France is that it has never imagined another colonial vision than the binary of “I possess” or “I do not possess”. Other forms of partnership have never been discussed.

New Caledonia is currently in a situation of uncertainty. The 3rd referendum was wasted: it lacked legitimacy. To revive the discussions on decolonisation and a “common future”, the French government would be well advised to imagine new forms of partnership, and to re-negotiate face to face, at eye level, and with humility. In Kanak and other Pacific cultures, things cannot be pushed through with force and haste. Back in 1981, charismatic Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou highlighted that the matter is not to return to the past, but to take from the past the strength and references that will support “our words in the present and in the future” (1981: 82).

Neighbouring countries such as Vanuatu and Fiji are observing closely what is happening in this French overseas territory. Like other Pacific powers, Australia aside, they have always supported the self-determination and independence claims of Kanak people. France’s ambition, embraced by President Macron, to keep a presence in the Pacific region and to direct potential revenues from its vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with unknown seabed and hydrocarbon resources must not involve renegeing on earlier commitments to decolonization and the development of new political visions for New Caledonia. Similarly, the large mineral resources of Grande Terre, the main island with around 25% of worldwide nickel reserves¹ (Batterbury et al. 2020), should not become geopolitical pawns in the Presidential election campaign, or captive to the aspirations of that regime in metropolitan France. The military, political and economic influence of France is historical, but it has been reasserted in recent months in a Pacific Ocean that is almost wholly decolonised and politically independent, with just a few nations and territories retaining colonial links by choice. The fact that China is investing heavily and trading with neighbouring countries has been used all too often to justify a continued French presence in

New Caledonia, without due consideration of how a future independent government might actually choose to direct its foreign relations. In particular the expressed wish of independence leaders has been to continue to associate with France rather than China (Interview with Roch Wamytan in Oct. 2020, NC la 1^{ière} 2020; see also Batterbury and Kowasch, 2021).

The dialogue between France and independence parties in New Caledonia is currently interrupted. To imagine new forms of partnership in the future, it is probably most appropriate to look at social, economic and environmental issues as priorities. This requires implementing policies now that will make it possible to address an increase in social inequalities, to better share the benefits of major nickel resources, and to innovate socially and technically to deal with the climate crisis. Only on this basis will the process of decolonization be able to take shape in the daily lives of the inhabitants of New Caledonia and in the texts that will form the basis for governance of a future partnership.

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Endnote

¹ Becoming important for e-mobility, with commitments by Tesla to purchase it for battery manufacturing (NYT 2021).

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Figure 4: Independence supporter.

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Street vending - a perpetual hustle: How street vendors in Hanoi's Walking Street negotiate their existence

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Abstract: *Street vendors make up an important part of the Vietnamese informal economy and carry a trait of the country's urban DNA. However, they have long been the target of many regulations to create a modern and civilized city of Hanoi. By revisiting the discourse about formality and informality, private and public space, this paper discusses how street vendors negotiate their existence in Hanoi's public space. With a case study at the Hoan Kiem Lake Walking Street in Hanoi, the findings shifted the focus of previous works from the discussion about what is informal and what is not, to how informality expands itself economically, socially, and politically in an urban environment. In addition, the public perception of street vending was considered to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation. This research also dedicates a part of it to shed a light on the informal sector during the global pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2.*

Keywords: *Street vendor, informality, informal workers, public space, public policy, urban, Vietnam*

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Introduction

Hanoi is a city full of contradictions that is trying to mould its identity in the globalized era while struggling to maintain its values. Walking the streets of Hanoi, either in the bustling narrow lanes of the Old Quarter or between skyscrapers in the South-eastern districts, we can easily find street vendors on every corner, selling all different types of goods. Street vendors provide a wide range of products and services to citizens from different classes, hence make up an important part of the supply chain of goods and services for the urban population. Besides, the image of street vendors has appeared in commercial videos promoting Hanoi tourism and is often depicted in literature and music. It is so ubiquitous, and thus iconic for this city's culture.

Despite the convenience that they provide to the urban folks, street vendors usually struggled to navigate their existence in Hanoi where their business practice has been considered illegal by the municipality. Understanding how Vietnam's informal economy workers work and socialize helps enrich

the contextual picture of a diverse economy. Furthermore, understanding informal workers' livelihood should be an important focus of governance. Recognizing this uncomfortable juxtaposition between the old and the new images of Hanoi, this study deconstructs the myth of street vendors by deciphering their negotiation process for existence and tracing the new perception of this group of workers among Hanoi citizens.

Empirical research was carried out for the case study at the Hoan Kiem Lake Walking Street in Hanoi or Phố đi bộ Hồ Hoàn Kiếm Hà Nội (will be referred to as the Walking Street in this article) which was established initially as a pilot project in September 2016 by the People's Committee of Hanoi. This experiment of the public space was to achieve the following goals to "[...]build and maintain community spaces, improve the living environment, promote the value of tangible and intangible cultural heritages, contribute to preserving, honoring, and introducing history, culture, and people of Hanoi," as

stated in Plan 159/KH/UBND. The Walking Street (WS) covers 16 streets around and adjacent to the Hoan Kiem Lake and is closed to all vehicles from 7 PM on Friday until midnight on Sunday every week. Citizens coming to this area on the weekend can expect public sport and art events and book fairs. Hoan Kiem Lake, also known as Sword Lake among foreign tourists, forms the historical and cultural centre of Hanoi lying right next to the Old Quarter. Hence, this is the number one destination for leisure and cultural activities not only for tourists, both domestic and international, but also for locals. The WS remained a pilot until January 2020, when Hanoi People's Committee finally decided to make it official, taking into account the impressive impact it has on the local economy, especially the tourism sector (14/QĐ-UBND). However, WS was shut down twice from February 7, 2020 until May 15, 2020 and from August 21, 2020 until September 18, 2020 to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The empirical research for the case



Figure 1: Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục Square on a busy Friday night. “Long live the Social Republic of Vietnam - Long live the Vietnamese Communist Party” on the LED banner

study in this thesis was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, shortly after Vietnam ended the first national lockdown in 2020, during which no trading activities were allowed to operate. At the time of the field research, even though almost all restrictions had been lifted, the Vietnamese border remained close for international tourists. Hence, street vendors' lives were turned upside down and left with dreadful outcomes, like many other branches of the economy. Therefore, a part of this study is also dedicated to shedding a light on the informal sector during these difficult times.

This research adopted the qualitative approach to gain new insights into the operation and negotiation process that street vendors must perform to secure their business and understand the general perception of street vending activities. To collect data for this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with street vendors and an expert interview with the local security. These interviews were accompanied by participant observation to provide complementary evidence to gather additional descriptive information to fill the gaps of knowledge gained from the interviews. Finally, a survey was conducted with visitors at WS to gain their perspectives.

Informality and street vending in Vietnam

Since street vending is a part of the larger informal economy, the study revisited the academic discourse of informality and formality. Three main concepts of informality are widely accepted in academia. The first concept argues that informality was born out of necessity to employ workers who fail to integrate into the formal economy, making the informal economy the residual economy (Cling et al. 2010). Hart (1973) drew the line between the two equivalent groups: wage-earning and self-employment to differentiate formal workers and informal workers accordingly. The second approach of informality sees this sector as a part of the capitalist system, together with formality. However, informality is subordinate to formality by providing cheap labour and product supplies to enhance the productivity of the latter (Portes and Haller 2005). The third concept of informality was introduced by de Soto in 1989. He argued that informality was the choice of entrepreneurs to break away from the centralized bureaucracy and interfere with the formal economy. What endows the notion of formality is the centralized state with its hierarchy and legal system that tries to regulate all economic activities. The formal sector, in its true

form, is the collection of all economic activities that conform to the prescribed rules. The non-conformist economic activities then fall into the category of informality. Simply put, there exists no informality without formality (Portes and Haller 2005). Roy (2009) also stated that “[Informality does not] lie beyond planning; rather it is planning that inscribes the informal by designating some activities as authorized and others as unauthorized (cited in McFarlane & Waibel, 2012: p. 4)”.

State control and regulation of the economy lay the ground for the informal economy's formation and development. Here lies a paradox of state



Figure 2: Hoan Kiem Lake Walking Street



Figure 3: Vendors popping up like mushrooms after rain selling drinks and snacks on a scorching and crowded Saturday night.

control that “official efforts to obliterate unregulated activities through the proliferation of rules and controls often expand the very conditions that give rise to these activities” (Portes and Haller 2005). Without a formal regulation, the informal economy relies heavily on social ties by virtue of social networks or mutual trust. Under a socialist regime, where the state is deeply involved in the market, informal activities must be even more socially embedded to avoid malfeasance by business partners and to remain “underground”. In this kind of environment, solidarity bonds among partners are strengthened with the threat of state surveillance and repression (ibid.).

In Vietnam, despite the lack of comprehensive studies and statistics regarding informal workers, it is undeniable that this sector employs an outstanding share of the labour market and contributes a significant part to the national GDP, up to 26,9% in 2019 (Hao 2019). Out of many different types of informal economy businesses, street vending is among the most com-

mon types. Statistics regarding the number of Hanoi’s street vendors are still lacking due to the limited studies and the nature of their business. After Doi Moi, the economic transformation in 1986, a significant influx of rural-urban migration resulted in an increasing number of street vendors in big cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Mitchell 2008). Doi Moi is the set of policies that marked the critical transformation of the country’s centralized state socialism to a market economy or “market socialism”, manifested in the layoffs at state-owned enterprises and an open-door policy for foreign investment and joint ventures (Drummond 2000; Jensen & Peppard 2003). Simultaneously, it opened up opportunities to engage in the informal sector, especially in urban areas (Earl 2010; Drummond 2000; Jensen & Peppard 2003). Most street vendors in Hanoi are female, married with children, and have an average age ranging from 30 to 45 years and an average educational attainment of pre-secondary school (Truong 2017, p: 7; Turner & Schoenberger, 2012: p: 10; Jensen & Peppard,

2003; p: 73). While fixed-stall vendors are mostly permanent residents of Hanoi, most itinerant vendors commute every day from Hanoi’s outskirts or areas adjacent to Hanoi. Street vending is subject to income insecurity (Truong 2017). Street vendors interviewed by Turner and Schoenberger (2012) typically earned VND35 000 (US\$2 in 2009) a day, roughly equating to VND10 million (US\$570) annually. However, this number fluctuates strikingly due to weather conditions, the number of the days worked, access to products, and so on (Turner & Schoenberger 2012). Studies in the past pointed out some common motivations for people to trade on the streets. Being underemployed in rural areas is one of them. Vendors from rural areas stated that they could not rely on agriculture to provide for the family because they did not possess much cultivable land and had time outside of the crop season. The acquisition of agricultural land for industrial and commercial purposes has also been a problem in rural areas, which pushed these workers out of agriculture. Nev-



Figure 4: The guerrilla style of a tea stall setting up right next to benches around the lake.

ertheless, while it seems to many people that street vending is the last resort to secure their livelihoods, this type of work is also a choice for many others who pursue independence and flexibility (Truong 2017).

Street vending is often associated in state media with lawlessness, as being disorderly and uncivilized, as causing a bad influence on the city image, or as a marker of underdevelopment. Since 2008, various regulations have been promulgated to wipe out street vendors from Hanoi's public space and strengthen the control of businesses operating on the sidewalk and housefronts. In 2017, Hanoi authorities started a campaign to "liberate" pavements from street vending and spill-outs of stores and businesses to restore the "modern and civilized" image of the capital city. "Modern and civilized" are the most common terms used by the authority to denote the ultimate goal of city planning along with "green-clean-beautiful" (Báo chính phủ 2020; Người lao động 2020). Nevertheless, the implementation has never been exhaustive and, hence, the

outcome has only been temporarily effective and constantly challenged by the coping mechanism of the street vendors. This mechanism, with the core formed by the negotiation process, has been the motivation for further discoveries in the setting of the Walking Street around Hoan Kiem Lake.

A multilevel coping mechanism for existence

From an economic point of view, the reality in the case study confirms what many scholars suggested, that street vending activities are involved with minimum investment and commodity (ILO 1972; Hart 1973); yet demonstrate a certain degree of strategic planning through their daily operation. This planning was manifested through their choice of goods and services, their choice of location regarding market competition, and the effect of clustering. Each seller only sold one or one type of products with the most common types being toys, snacks, and beverages along with various services like sketching, riding hoverboards,

and electric cars. These street vendors' setup was diverse, highly flexible, and reflected the typical "guerrilla" style of street traders in Vietnam. In this regard, street vendors can be divided into three groups: itinerant, semi-itinerant, and static. The itinerant group is made of traders who carry their commodity with them and are always on the move, mostly on foot or on bicycles. The semi-itinerant group comprised of vendors who owned a mobile setup but remained static most of the time. There are a few fried snack sellers who carry their stoves around on a bicycle or a trolley allowing them to move quickly if the patrol comes. The fixed group includes vendors who always stayed static. These are tea stalls with many seats operated on a large premise or small ones popping up right next to benches around the lake. The simplest setup comprised of just a cooler box or a mat to display souvenirs and toys.

The decision of location is not just random but rather a strategic decision. All street vendors interviewed chose their location due to the high traffic of visitors. During the day, areas with



Figure 5: Itinerant vendors selling toys having a break together on Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục.

more shade naturally lure more pedestrians and hence, more traders. During the evening, large streets like Đinh Tiên Hoàng become the venue for various activities and are packed with visitors and sellers. Despite the high density, there was always a certain distance between them to avoid conflict and minimize competition. These tactics were calculated and experimented thoroughly in order to maximize profit and improve productivity.

Interviews and observation indicated that there is a social bond between street vendors. “People are mostly somewhat friendly to each other, there haven’t been real problems between us even though sometimes things get spicy if one thinks the others want to interfere on her territory or steals away her customers”, said one female vendor selling drinks, which sums up perfectly the social aspect of the scene. Vendors were seen having lunch together, keeping their eyes on each other’s goods when one was off for a break, and alerting each other when the police are on patrol. Nevertheless, conflicts of interest are inevitable. From time to time,

there are quarrels between vendors selling the same types of products due to competition or disputed territories.

“I know that this is illegal and they (police officers) are just doing their job, but there is no other way for me,” said one tea vendor when being asked about his opinion on security units. On the one hand, security officers must impose a fine on a certain number of vendors to meet their assigned target. There are unspoken rules of how to behave when they come and where to hide commodities. “If you are unfamiliar around here, chances are you will get caught,” the police officer explained the common practice. On the other hand, security officers also consumed goods from these vendors and accepted to be a part of this negotiation process. Older street vendors rarely got fined. They are more vulnerable and often ask for “*sự thông cảm*” (compassion) from officers who are mostly in the age group of their children and grandchildren. “We all know each other, you know, we are also close to each other in a way,” said the police officer towards his relationship with street vendors. Other types

of agreements happening in the “grey zone” tie security and street vendors together with their personal interests. The fixed stall vendors operating on a large premise with significantly higher revenue pay a bribe towards the ward security unit monthly. “The higher the revenue, the higher the bribe,” goes the common understanding. Sometimes, these sellers are family and friends of someone within the security unit. Some of these vendors also act like “secret agents” for the security unit and have the responsibility to inform of any suspicious activities or individuals in their areas. In exchange, they are allowed to operate peacefully with a monthly “fee.”

Regarding the public perception of street vendors, most citizens expressed a positive view on the subject with a demand for more organization and order in the future. Despite being ruled illegal in this space, street vending activities contributed to a certain degree to the creation of a vibrant and welcoming public space. The fact that some street vending activities, such as selling twisted balloons, to hē, and portrait drawing services, as well as flea mar-

kets, were planned strategically in this area indicated a positive influence on the overall objectives of the Walking Street. In fact, the first pedestrian zone of Hanoi, Hàng Ngang - Hàng Đào, is a night market. Moreover, street vending is widely seen and known as an iconic trait of Vietnamese urban life. Regarding hygiene concerns, considerate regulations should be implemented properly. The findings from the survey takes issue with the vision of “modernity and civilization” that Hanoi authority strives for. If the future means the pushback of street vendors out of the public space, public order in terms of hygiene and traffic regulations might be restored to a certain degree. However, the cultural values and appreciation of an inclusive community, which are difficult to measure, will be put under threat. The phase-out of street vending is a crisis for the street vendors because, on the one hand, it takes away their livelihoods. On the other hand, it causes damage to the public and the unique trait of the city.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

For many own-account street vendors, the pandemic has left them with devastating consequences. In March 2020, before the lockdown worldwide, the number of foreign visitors coming to Vietnam dropped by a whopping 68,1% compared to March 2019 and 63,8% compared to February 2020 (General Statistics Office cited in Tạp chí tài chính 2020). Having always been living hand-to-mouth, they were left with no income whatsoever and minimum saving when the national lockdown came. According to their observation and estimation, the number of vendors dropped by half after the lockdown. The lack of foreign tourists hit the street sketchers and souvenir sellers the hardest as this group had always been their most prominent set of customers.

The second reason for the decrease in income is visitors’ hesitance upon spending money in the WS. 28,2% of people asked said that they came to the WS less often after the lockdown, and 24,7% cut down on their consumption in this area. Despite the area being remarkably busy on some evenings, visitors were less likely to spend money on goods from street vendors. The reasons mentioned mainly touched on hygiene concerns and decreased income.



Figure 6: Local police confiscating electric toy cars on Trang Tien street during a sudden patrol.

The security units apparently took that matter into consideration and approached vendors with more tolerance after the lockdown, as reported by both sides. A financial aid package of 62.000 billion VND was granted by the government to aid the heavily impacted groups during the pandemic. According to Resolution 42/NQ-CP, street vendors who were not allowed to work during the lockdown are eligible for financial aid of 1 million VND per person per month for up to three months. The resolution should be implemented by the ward level authority for people who reside in their area. However, no one interviewed had received this aid despite being confirmed by the ward authority beforehand. Until August 19, 2020, 100.916 informal workers in Hanoi, including street vendors, motorbike taxi drivers, waste pickers, etc., had been granted aid with the total

amount of 102 billion VND, according to the Hanoi Department of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (Tuổi trẻ 2020).

Discussion

The multilevel coping mechanism born out of the necessity of the informal workers constantly transforms and adapts itself to current regulations and the enforcement thereof, which was created to maintain the dichotomy of informality and formality, or to keep this economic group on the informal side. This finding is in harmony with Roy’s view on informality as a deregulated system, which “indicates a calculated informality, one that involves purposive action and planning, and one where the seeming withdrawal of regulatory power creates a logic of resource allocation, accumulation, and authority” (Roy 2009). Nevertheless, the case study

did not point out a complete withdrawal of regulatory power but rather a space of negotiation where both regulatory power and informality co-exist. It is in this sense that “informality, while [being] a system of deregulation, can be thought of as a mode of regulation” (ibid.).

Socially speaking, the negotiation process involved a huge effort to establish and maintain a support system among street vendors, other workers, registered business owners, and house owners within Walking Street and the adjacent area. Through these social connections, they were able to cut down certain expenses on transport and paying fines, save time significantly, secure the stability of their business, and protect each other from the threat of local police. Despite the difficulty of assessment, the social connections certainly provide mental support for street vendors throughout their perpetual hustle. This finding emphasizes what Portes and Haller (2005) stated about the solidarity bonds under a socialist regime.

Like many other regulations applied for public space in Vietnam, the law for the WS regarding street vending is not only fuzzy but also not exhaustive in practice. The contested nature of public space in Hanoi, together with the decentralized approach in regulation implementation, gives space for mediation and negotiation to street vendors. Koh (2016) argued that even though the ward local administration was set up for effective mobilization of people on the micro-level, because of the power mechanism, it becomes a daily tool of mediation that allows society to negotiate state policies and laws. “In Vietnam, local officials often have to play dual roles of being party-state agents and of being a part of the local community. When the values of these two roles clash, mediation of state power often occurs” (Koh 2006: 9). The lack of solemn and exhaustive implementation of regulations combined with bribery and social bonds open a huge gap for informal economic activities to thrive. Street vendors are generally banned from operating but able to get financial aid from the state to help them when not being able to work during the pandemic time. This contradictory reality indicates the inconsistency of the legal framework and serves as an argument to challenge

the informality and formality divide.

This study argues that the difficulty of policymaking and implementation of such in the informal sphere arises with the ambivalent nature of public and private space in the Vietnamese urban context, which is not recognized in the language of the law. In Vietnam, public space is produced by the party-state, the citizens, and the private economic sector (Kürten 2008). Hence, it is also a space where different values and conceptions of its stakeholders collide. Gramsci’s ideological hegemony dictates that the ruling group presents ideas and values that are perceived as “natural” or “common sense” by the rest of the society (cited in Kürten 2008). In Hanoi, the capital of a party-state, the implementation of public orders in public space partly reinforces this ideological hegemony serving the undeniable interest of a group of citizens, to which the street vendors do not belong. The political and economic space, in which the street vendors are located, gives them very limited legal means to influence decision-making (Turner & Schoenberger 2012). However, there is a saying in Vietnamese that explains the reality quite precisely: “phép vua thua lệ làng”, which literally means that the laws of the king must surrender to the rituals and culture of the village. The saying applies to many cases where centralized laws fail to triumph over local unspoken yet long-lasting and well-practiced rules. Trading, religious festivals, performances, music, gambling, and family events have been performed historically on the streets, on pavement, or in alleyways of Vietnam (Thomas 2001). Street vending, in this sense, is a cultural practice that shapes Hanoi’s urbanity, weaved in the city’s social fabric. Thus, street vending cannot be easily eliminated by the rules made by the people who sit in their ivory tower, imagining a public order for a more “modern” and “civilized” image of the city.

Conclusions

This study deconstructs the myth of street vendors by deciphering their negotiation process for existence and tracing the new perception of this group of workers among Hanoi citizens. The findings challenge and extend the previous framework of the formality/informality dichotomy pioneered

by the works of Hart (1973), de Soto (1989), Castells and Portes (1989) and Roy (2009). The field research finding shifted the focus from the discussion about what is informal, and what is not, to how informality expands itself economically, socially, and politically in a contested environment with a connection to the discourse of public space.

The representativeness of this study might be restricted due to some limitations and shortcomings. The small sample size of street vendors and visitors could limit the insights gained from the field research. Due to its diverse and ever-changing nature, street vending is difficult to keep track of and to be depicted exactly and holistically. Being seen as illegal, some street vendors hesitated to share all the details about their day-to-day hustle. “Sometimes the good intention might lead to unfortunate outcome,” said one vendor about her experience with a journalist. Regarding local police, local public security, and the Hoan Kiem Lake Area Management Board, the contact was just minimum, leaving many laws implementation processes unexplained.

This study hopes to contribute to a growing body of literature concerned with urban informality in contemporary Vietnam. Moreover, it aims to bring more compassion, what many street vendors often wish from the authorities to the discourse about informality and the law-making process. Looking further into the future, an inclusive and welcoming urban environment, in which all citizens can contribute and prosper, should be considered the crucial goal for Hanoi development plans.

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Figure 7: A section of the Walking Street with relatively low street vending activities on a Saturday afternoon.

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Living and working as a teacher in Seoul

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Abstract: *This commentary addresses some of the cross-cultural issues of teaching abroad in the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Germans can apply directly to teach at 'German schools abroad', which are private schools around the world, or can sign up with the Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA). The ZfA provides assistance and professional quality management. The German schools abroad are often a hub for German speaking communities, easing entry into new cultural contexts and institutions. I discuss teaching in such a school in the megacity of Seoul. Advantages are lifestyles, ease of travel and personal safety. Leisure and sports activities are good, especially at the River Hangang. Traffic and multi-lane highways traverse the city, affecting the riverside. South Korea has a mixed record in terms of sustainability, with a strong reliance on fossil fuels, although southwest of Seoul is the world's largest tidal power plant, and waste separation is very strict. Seoul suffers periodically from bad air quality, for which China is partially blamed. Songdo is an exemplary smart city near Seoul, but construction required the draining of valuable tidal flats. The close proximity to North Korea is omnipresent.*

Keywords: *Seoul, Megacity, Republic of Korea, (German) School Service Abroad, sustainable development, Hangang, Songdo*

Submitted: 22 December 2021, acceptance of the revised manuscript: 06 January 2022]

Introduction

After several job applications, interviews with school heads from Pretoria and Seoul in hotel lobbies in Hamburg und Berlin, I had several early morning phone calls from Germany to South Korea (each with a 7–8-hour time difference) at the end of 2015. In early 2016 I finally received an offer for a teaching position at the Deutsche Schule Seoul International (DSSI)¹ in the heart of Seoul, which I gladly accepted. My family and I forwarded our belongings, sold our car and deregistered our place of residence. On the plane to our new destination, feelings of unease were combined with those of independence and of new beginnings.

Relocating to South Korea did have institutional support. The Central Agency for Schools Abroad (Zentrale für das Auslandsschulwesen, ZfA) offered preparatory courses for those about to undertake an overseas placement. The Deutsche Schule Seoul International eased settling into a new country, including help with finding accommodation and many administrative matters. My wife was born in South

Korea, which meant that the language barrier of less concern for us than other potential migrants to the country.

German School Service Abroad

Between 2016 to 2020 I spent four years with my family in Seoul. The job at the Deutsche Schule Seoul International (DSSI) was to be a biology and geography teacher. I was also acting deputy headmaster, and had responsibility for chairing the educational quality management of the school.

The DSSI is a small school. It includes a kindergarten and a school with about 160 students (grade 1 to 12). The teaching staff consisted of approximately 25 teachers. This gives it a small community atmosphere, almost like a family experience, since it offers a full-time education.

German schools abroad are privately run by a school association and receive institutional support from the Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA) following a vetting and inspection procedure. This includes the pre-selection of

school management positions by the agency, as well as the placement and support for, and financing of, teachers working abroad (a so called *Auslandsdienstlehrkraft*, also known as ADLK). In addition, the schools employ local teachers. Teachers with civil servant status in Germany must take a leave of absence to work on secondment overseas.

The parents pay relatively high school fees and as a consequence, a high degree of pedagogical guidance and counselling is demanded of teachers. The professional quality management of German schools abroad is exacting. They are subjected to regular school inspections and offer qualified further training. This degree of quality management sets a good example for schools in Germany itself.

We felt at home quite quickly, since my two sons (who at the time were aged 7 and 9) attended the school, and the German community is strong. However, the boundaries between work and free time sometimes became blurred. My family and I joined the great Taekwondo



Source: Cerd Vetter, 2010

Figure 1: Panorama view from our apartment. On the left side in the background is the landmark N Seoul Tower, a television tower on Namsan mountain.

courses at the school. At weekend we were part of school soccer matches, which the parents organized. Teaching one's own child was unavoidable. Reprimanding my own child with an "... I guess I'll have to have a word with your father!", would provoke an outbreak of laughter. On the other hand, it was possible to know all pupils attending the school by name, and supervise a class trip with only 6 pupils. Admirably, class trips would take place once a year in every class. Every year in February the whole school goes to a nearby ski resort for several days. During this trip, the senior grades are assisted with preparation for Abitur final exams.

Parents, largely German or bi-national, often with a German-Korean background, helped with school parties, Korean celebrations and other events. Parents of other nationalities enrol their children because they want them to benefit from the German school system and from the opportunity to learn German. Language learning is prioritised, benefitting students of differing abilities. Korean language classes are offered on a voluntary basis, both for students and staff.

'German schools abroad' are community schools and are committed to a holistic, inclusive approach. In Korea, access to foreign schools is highly regulated. Korean families must have lived abroad for three years in order to enrol their children at an international school rather than a national one. A high school diploma like the Abitur or an equivalent international school qualification obtained at an international school in Korea does not grant direct

access to a Korean university. There is an enormous pressure within the Korean school system to perform well and the parents are quite results-oriented. Centralised final examinations decide on the all-important entrance to the domestic elite universities. Attending these universities almost guarantees future professional success. The international schools in Korea are allowed to operate independently from this performance-oriented Korean school system. This explains their attractiveness to some families.

Life in the megacity

Seoul has about 10 million inhabitants, as well as being part of one of the largest and richest metropolitan areas in the world. It is a modern and rapidly changing metropolis, that coexists with a distinctive historical legacy, including the historic royal palaces, city gates and walls, and Buddhist temples. Its mountainous setting is particularly impressive.

By Western standards, it is a 'safe' megacity. There are many security cameras and a visible police presence. Attitudes towards the community and private property are distinctive. There is no graffiti, no vandalism and you can even leave a bicycle unlocked once in a while - a circumstance unimaginable to anyone living in my hometown, Hamburg. The Seoul subway is safe and pleasant to use. Each platform has an additional security wall. Everyone behaves considerably, except rowdy tourists.

The fact that you live in a megacity is not always noticeable, because of the complex hilly terrain, and a dis-

persed urban structure. Most people live in large housing complexes, which helps to reduce sprawl, but eventually leads to the displacement of traditional housing areas with a preponderance of elderly residents. Modern complexes are accommodating and offer shopping centres and leisure facilities, and their apartments can be very comfortable. Housing prices are generally very high, so less wealthy residents live in small and older flats or seek cheaper options on the outskirts of the city.

Every high-rise complex has its own guard who keeps an eye on what's going on, and sometimes residents too, for example if the rubbish hasn't been sorted properly. We lived on a 16th floor, close to the centre, with a great view over the city. A quaint market centre with small restaurants, coffee bars and shops were nearby. There is a sociality to eating, and food in Korea is a whole culinary universe that is very healthy (although with few vegetarian options). Restaurants serve you rapidly, soon after you order. Traditional food is cheap, but meat and foreign cuisine are very expensive.

The city meanders along the great river Hangang. Owing to its close proximity to the North Korean border, shipping has diminished. Instead, the river offers water skiing and windsurfing courses. During our time we were amazed by the range of sports and leisure facilities. Cycling is popular, with professional sportswear and modern racing bikes. There are excellent cycle lanes along the river. Unfortunately, there are none anywhere else in the city. There are basketball and soccer



Figure 2: Bicycle Lanes along the Hangang River.

itches, and public fitness equipment parks, popular with older residents. Along the river some sports facilities are under motorway bridges.

Seoul is designed to be a very car-friendly city. Multi-lane highways criss-cross the entire urban area. In Korea, people are on the road a lot. You are entitled to only a few holidays; on the other hand, there are numerous public holidays and on these occasions all streets in Seoul are blocked by traffic. Overall, it is easy to travel throughout the country - and also by fast trains and buses although infrastructure is still being improved. You have the impression that almost all mountains have now been perforated by motorways and train tracks. There are many interesting regions to visit and accommodation is easy to find, although communication in English is much more difficult outside the metropolitan area. Many local hotels offer *ondol*, sleeping on futons on the floor. The word means underfloor heating, and has its origin from there.

Close to North Korea

The close proximity to North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) is an omnipresent factor of life in the city, thrilling and frightening,

Seoul is just 50 km from the border. The urban area of Seoul has military installations, and there are fenced and monitored coastal areas throughout the country. There is an emergency SMS system and frequent testing of emergency systems. During our time, the mood fluctuated between war scenarios and the hope of an early reunification. It was the time of threats and 'expressions of love' between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un, and a memorable meeting took place with President Moon Jae In in the demilitarized zone between the two countries in 2018. During this time the German School stocked up on hundreds of water bottles and giant amounts of huge ravioli cans for a possible emergency.

Sustainable Development

When it comes to environmental pollution and sustainability, South Korea has a mixed record. A high level of airborne particulate matter is often blamed on China. In Seoul, the air quality or particulate matter (PM) is a daily preoccupation and wearing FFP2 masks is unfortunately quite normal. Domestic industry and energy production based predominantly on fossil fuels, as well as car traffic, are certainly a major source of pollution. Energy

prices are relatively low, with renewable energy systems in their infancy.² On the other hand, South Korea is probably the world champion in waste separation, especially from climate-damaging organic waste.³ The current government is beginning to decommission its nuclear energy plants, particularly as a result of the Fukushima meltdown in Japan.⁴ The country is innovative, and a good example is the world's largest tidal power plant that was built southwest of Seoul. Another is the ultra-modern smart city Songdo, which hosts the headquarters of the Green Climate Fund.⁵ It is built on unique East Asian tidal flats, however, habitat for migratory waterbirds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.^{6&7}

The inter-border Korean Demilitarized Zone has become a valuable near-wilderness for flora and fauna. As part of a student field trip we were able to meet the rare large Manchurian Cranes as well as to experience several ghost towns and a creepy Cold War atmosphere. The German Hans-Seidel-Foundation has worked on environmental protection in the Zone, and across into North-Korea.⁸

Seoul even has a very small Fridays for Future movement among students and youth, fighting for climate justice



Source: Gerd Vetter.

Figure 3: Friday for Future event at Seoul 2019, with as many press than demonstrators.

and lowered emissions. I joined a meeting with my 7th grade class after school without really demonstrating. Students are not allowed to engage in politics and politically active Korean teachers will be suspended.⁹

Addendum

My family and I returned to Hamburg in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life in both countries, but we were able to resume contact with great friends and neighbours with whom we have always been in contact. We miss our new-found friends and Korean relatives. I didn't manage to learn Korean during my time in South Korea. At some point, my Korean relatives gave up hope of having a moderately comprehensible conversation with me, and after the second bottle of soju (traditional rice liquor) during a Korean barbecue, the language almost didn't matter anymore. Today, when we see pictures of street scenes in Seoul, we feel transported back to the special atmosphere

there. We miss life in Korea and certainly some unique features of working as a teacher in German schools abroad. Due to our contacts with Korean relatives and explorations of rural Korea we had the chance to look beyond a more exclusive kind of life as expats. The opportunity to live and work in Korea has been an enriching experience for my family and I.

Acknowledgements

At this point, I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks to Ann-Katrin Dafflis, Simon Batterbury and to Martha Macintyre for their profound language editing.

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¹⁾ www.dsseoul.org

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BOOK REVIEW

Das Phänomen »Yizu« Migrantische Hochschulabsolvent*innen als Chinas Wendepunktgeneration? (Suda, K., 2021)

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Abstract: *In China, where one is born can have a huge impact on opportunities for social mobility. The so called hukou-system defines a person's status either as rural or urban inhabitant. The system was originally intended to monitor and control the mechanisms of population migration but now it practically impedes equal opportunity. However, recent decades saw an ever-growing number of people moving from China's countryside to bigger cities and an increasing percentage of these migrants are highly educated. Kimiko Suda's newly published book "Das Phänomen »Yizu«" provides an in-depth analysis of urban transformation processes, social stratification, and social mobility with focus on the life prospects of migrant graduates from China's rural areas.*

Keywords: *Social mobility, highly educated migrants, megacity, urban villages, "Chinese Dream",*

The Chinese people have a variety of terms for domestic migrants: Floating population, migrant workers, or 外地人 waidiren (outsiders) are just a few of them. While many of these labels are associated with unskilled workers slaving in the factories and on the construction sites of China's metropolitan areas, another group has come into the focus of public debate during the past decade: the so called "ant tribe" (蚁族 yǐzú).

Chinese is a very figurative language and new buzzwords for social phenomena are being coined all the time. In 2009 the term "ant tribe" made it into the top-ten of China's internet slang. It was created by the economist Lian Si to describe the ever-growing group of rural graduates which try to gain ground in major cities. In the eyes of the public, this group is as numerous and industrious as ants. Likewise, they are seen as working extremely hard, facing fierce competition and enduring rough living conditions. Moreover, the ant tribe represents a kind of paradox: in a society which believes that education and hard work is the guarantee for social advancement, college degrees are suddenly no longer an entry ticket to middle class. Thus, it seems that highly educated migrants are among the ones

left behind in the race for chasing the "Chinese Dream".

The yizu-phenomenon has been a recurring topic in China's public debate since 2010, but it didn't get any significant attention in the West so far. Only a few studies on this topic have been published outside of the People's Republic. Kimiko Suda, a German sinologist and sociologist with a focus on research on migration, racism, and social inequality wanted to close this gap and chose it as the topic for her PhD thesis. The results of her dissertation project were now published in the book *Das Phänomen »Yizu«* (the "Yizu" phenomenon).

Suda's work provides an extensive theoretical and analytical background on the living conditions and everyday strategies of the so-called "ant tribe". Besides, the author delivers a thorough analysis of the social fabric in contemporary China. However, as the work is based on the author's PhD thesis it is of course not light reading. Furthermore, one must be proficient in German, as there is no English translation of the book available.

Nevertheless, "*Das Phänomen »Yizu«*" is recommended for all readers who want to know more about China's young generation. Everyone who enjoyed reading Alec Ash's *Wish Lanterns – Young*

Lives in New China (see book review in: *Pacific Geographies* #52) and who wants to complement the topic from a more scientific perspective should read it.

Changes in mainland China are fast, complex, and often asynchronous, with large areas lagging behind in regard to modernization, infrastructure and education. This makes it virtually impossible to capture the country's social transformation using only one theoretical and methodological approach, as Kimiko Suda explains in the preface of her book. She therefore applied a multi-perspectivity approach trying to answer the central questions in her research: How do individuals influence the urban spaces they move in? And what challenges do they encounter when seeking access to urban space?

While the book provides an extensive theoretical framework, it is the interview part which gives the reader unique insights into the life of China's young migrants. This part of the book part is based on 30 semi-structured interviews which the author conducted between 2011 and 2012 in Guangzhou.

All of Suda's interviewees lived in one of Guangzhou's urban villages - places where the vast majority of migrants end up staying. And while



Source: Suda, Kimiko.

Figures 1&2: Impressions from a urban village in Guangzhou.

the term “village” might sound romantic for Westerners in the 21st century, China’s urban villages couldn’t be farer away from the traditional, agricultural lifestyle. These areas are for the most part built without any centralized urban planning, resulting in a maze of dark, narrow alleyways and conglomerations of hastily built apartment blocks.

For the “ants” and other migrants, the urban villages are often the only places offering affordable rents. Normally this doesn’t mean much more than a place to sleep- either in shared apartments, shared rooms, or a bunk bed in a company dormitory. But this doesn’t make the urban villages mere bedroom communities; they normally have complete infrastructures with shops, restaurants, hairdressers, and so on, with most of the businesses run by migrants.

Kimiko Suda’s ambition was to meet the Chinese graduates at eye level and to avoid any patronizing approaches which are frequently found in the public debate about the “ant tribe”. Through the interviews, the reader gets a glimpse on what the daily life of the rural graduates looks like: waking up and falling asleep in tiny rooms without air conditioning or sunlight, sharing dirty bathrooms with several roommates, commuting in crowded public transport and

eating cheap meals in university canteens. These accounts might sometimes seem downright depressing, with only a few opportunities for recreation and leisure. Nonetheless, many of the interviewees focus on the positive aspects like their hope for a better future, the love for their jobs or the open atmosphere Guangzhou has to offer.

The results of Kimiko Suda’s case study are already a few years old, however the “ant people” still make it to the headlines in Chinese media and social media today. And China is still waiting to see any significant improvements of equal opportunities for rural graduates. What is interesting though, is that the Chinese government recently started a nationwide crack-down on the country’s extensive education industry. The commercialization of education has been identified as one of the main reasons for inequality. However, the reason for the crack-down was not the desire to create a fairer access to education and jobs, but rather to increase the alarmingly low birth rate. Many parents complain that they can’t afford adequate education for just one child - not to mention two. Only time will tell what this development will mean for future generations. It is therefore a work like Suda’s *Das Phänomen »Yizu«* is so important as it

unravels the various social strands China’s society is made of and gives us a ground-level understanding about it as an emerging power.

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Figure 3: Cover sheet of the book

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BOOK REVIEW

Sea Sisters: Un équipage féminin à l'épreuve de la pollution dans le Pacifique. (Le Roux, G. 2021)

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Keywords: Pacific, ocean plastic pollution, citizen engagement, citizen science, Sea Sisters

Sea Sisters relates the eighth voyage leg of an all-female sailing expedition (or 'eXXpedition') aiming to explore the causes and impacts of, as well as potential solutions to, ocean plastic pollution. It offers an ethnography at sea of what the author presents as a 'citizen science' project, as carried out in March-April 2020, between Rapa Nui (or Easter Island) and French Polynesia. However, it is not a scientific publication dedicated to an academic audience. It is rather an easy-to-read text, in the first person narrative mode and accompanied by many photographs with descriptive captions, which offers various levels of reading. This book therefore appears to me as accessible to a large readership, including students and laypersons interested in learning about ocean plastic pollution, citizen science and/or Oceania. It also reflects how alternative modes of writing can be used to report on scholarly experiences at the crossroads of research fieldwork and citizen engagement.

In addition to its introduction and conclusion, this book is composed of six thematic chapters. The first one introduces Rapa Nui, the starting point of the voyage leg, and contrasts the objectives of the Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park with an assessment of land-based plastic pollution carried

out by the newly-formed crew before boarding S.V. TravelEdge. The second chapter presents the 'citizen science' protocol that was the main *raison d'être* of this 'eXXpedition', as well as the challenges of implementing it at sea. The third chapter portrays the women who engaged in this venture, their backgrounds and objectives, while also including a focus on persistent organic pollutants (or POPs). The fourth chapter takes us off the Pitcairn Islands, located in the South Pacific subtropical gyre where plastic debris accumulate, and therefore described as "an isolated archipelago revealing the plastic crisis" (p.67; my translation). The fifth chapter relates how this voyage leg was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the cancellation of the next voyage legs, replaced by 'virtual voyages'. The last chapter comes back to the crewmembers and their role of 'plastic pollution ambassadors'. Throughout the book, the reader is immersed in life on board and discovers the relationships that develop between these 'sea sisters' or 'seasters'.

It might be argued that plastic pollution is not as great a threat to our oceans as climate change, overfishing and biodiversity loss (Stafford & Jones 2019). Yet, in the South Pacific region, plastic pollution impacts Oce-

anians' cultural, social and economic ties to the ocean in a disproportionate way compared to their own contributions to this global issue (Farrelly et al. 2020). This is particularly well illustrated in the first thematic chapter of *Sea Sisters*, which brings us to a beach on Rapa Nui where a resident shared with the all-women crew his concerns about the macro-waste from fishing activities as well as the myriad of microplastic particles that cover the island's seashore. Yet, the book does not frame ocean plastic pollution in a 'negative' way. As noted by Neimanis et al. (2015), environmental issues are often framed in such a 'negative' or even 'apocalyptic' way, which "may not lead to effective citizen participation and may stifle opportunities for innovative thinking around environmental challenges", whereas "alternative narratives [...] can inspire more creative problem solving and a strong sense of participation and involvement" (Neimanis et al. 2015: 77). I believe that the main strength of *Sea Sisters* is that it provides such an alternative narrative about ocean plastic pollution. It indeed offers a constructive and hopeful focus on a group of women of various ages, nationalities and backgrounds, who endeavoured to gain first-hand experience of this environmental issue so





Figure 1: An all-female sailing expedition or 'eXXpedition'.

that they can then contribute to tackle it, in their own ways and at different levels, for instance through actions in the field of awareness-raising, recycling, fashion, or even tattooing. This focus is also encapsulated in the book's final words, which are those of a crewmember from Rapa Nui: "I understand that if I can do it, anyone can do it. [...] We have to do better." (p.113; my translation).

Another aspect of the book that I found particularly interesting is that it gives an account of how the author, who is an anthropologist, progressively became familiar with a citizen science protocol designed by other scientists, as part of the daily routine on board. However, the author does not take a reflexive stance on what this participant observation has brought to her practice of ethnography and, vice-versa, what her ethnography brought to the way this protocol was thought and applied by the crew. On a broader level, she does not discuss the relevance and value of the incorporation of such an ethnographic approach into future citizen science endeavours. It is therefore hoped that

an article on these issues will follow, for instance based on the footnote p.10 that describes the author's participation in this 'eXXpedition' as a specific form of citizen science that combines crowdsourcing and crowd-funding.

Overall, I personally found this book very inspiring. A translation into English (and possibly in other languages) would be welcome to make it accessible to the many non-French speakers in Oceania and beyond.

Endnotes

¹ See <https://exxpedition.com/> (Accessed on 4 November 2021).

² To Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean and the Arctic.

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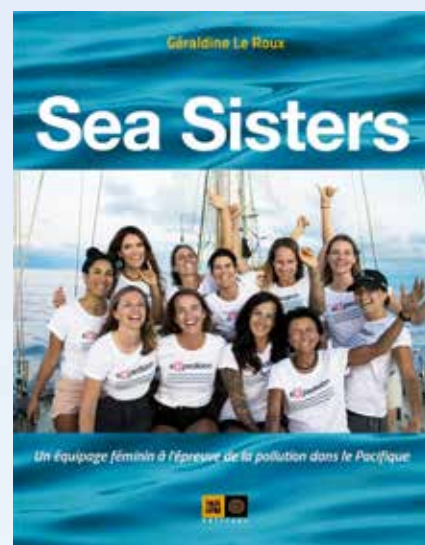


Figure 2: Cover sheet of the book

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The year 2022 marks a new milestone for the OSPG: we proudly present our new logo and our new website! Both has been work in progress for quite some time, and we are happy to share the results with you now.

Our old logo has served well for 26 years, we found that it was time for a makeover, while keeping the initial identification. Since our association focuses on the Pacific Islands, we absolutely wanted a design from a Pacific Islander that represents the spirit of what we do. We are glad that we found Papua New Guinea artist Philemon Yalamu (together with Philemon Yalamu jun.), who took on this challenge with his company (<http://www.artech.com.pg>). In this regard, virtual collaboration is a blessing; the exchange with Phil went smoothly, he listened carefully to our requests and brought in his own ideas.



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Welcome to the Austrian South Pacific Society (OSPG)!

NEW LOGO DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In the process, he and his son took into consideration how to represent the link between Austria and the Pacific Islands, identifying the ocean as the connecting element, hence the oceanic blue theme. The logo integrates local design (such as the spearhead) and the southern cross - a stellar constellation in the Southern hemisphere that is of high importance in navigation and can also be found in some of the Southern countries' flags. "Kasaeli" is the term used to designate canoes in the Northern part of PNG. The canoe is used as the main mode of transport all over the Pacific Ocean and connects people. The circular form represents the global connection, as do the ocean waves.

Phil shared a video with us where he explains thoughts and processes behind the creation, we highly recommend to watch it!

We are more than happy with the result and we believe that this new and modern logo will accompany us for a long time and will enhance our visual recognition. It will add value to all our activities and publications.



QR-code linking to explanation video of the new OSPG logo design process!

NEW OSPG WEBSITE

The other issue that has been troubling us for some years now was our website. Requirements change, and a makeover was also necessary here. Through the support of the City of Vienna and of John D. Marshall, we were able to launch this overdue activity. Kaleb Warnock, an independent web designer, brought the OSPG virtually into the 21st century. The new look is easier to use, and it represents how the OSPG has evolved over time, who we are and what we do. It includes some new sections, such as a direct way to order our publications and a section entirely dedicated to book reviews.

Do not hesitate to take a look and browse through our new Website: www.ospg.at



Figure: New logo design process

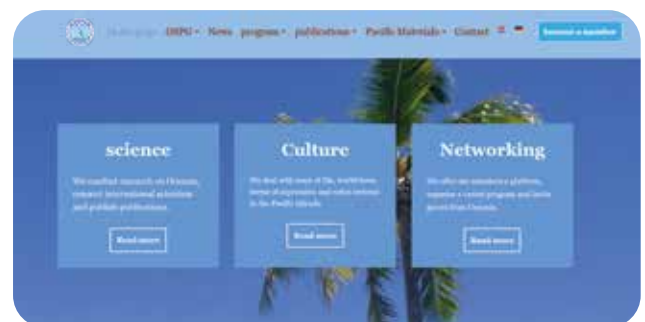


Figure: Excerpt from new OSPG website

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