

On Politics

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On Politics is printed on the Coast Salish Territories. The On Politics Team acknowledges with respect to the Lekwungen peoples whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationship with the land continue to this day.

I

The Journal

On Politics is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the University of Victoria Undergraduates of Political Science. The journal aims to both encourage and facilitate undergraduate scholarship by providing students and recent graduates with a unique opportunity to have their work published in a formal medium. The editors of this journal are drawn from the undergraduate student body.

Submissions are welcomed from students during our call for papers each semester. *On Politics* strives to publish student writing from a variety of theoretical perspectives, both intra- and interdisciplinary, with a particular focus on uplifting marginalized voices and to showcase emerging undergraduate scholars at the University of Victoria. While published articles are typically found within the realm of political science, we welcome political work from all fields of study.

The *On Politics* Team especially encourages students from adjacent disciplines to submit work, acknowledging the existence of a vast body of political work that transcends the disciplinary boundaries of academia.

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Editorial Team

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Thomas is in his fourth year, majoring in Honours Political Science. His specialization was in International Relations and his honours thesis explored whether the relationship between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea can be categorized as colonialism.

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Grace is a fourth-year honours student majoring in political science, with a focus on political theory, and minoring in philosophy. Her thesis examines how differing ontologies-particularly Western scientific-materialist perspectives versus phenomenological and indigenous understandings of interconnectedness-shape approaches to productive organization and responses to the ecological crisis, arguing that ontologies can function as deep leverage points for systemic change.

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

It is my absolute pleasure to introduce the nineteenth volume of *On Politics*. This volume is not simply a compilation of undergraduate scholarship, but proof that student voices play an active role in the understanding and critical reflection of the political world. This particular volume displays the broad range of political scholarship by showcasing six different undergraduate voices.

This volume starts with Hanna Solis Perusquia's examination of the US-Mexico border and how its enforcement apparatus violently fractures transnational migrant families. Hanna's work traces the structural roots of Central American displacement, including US foreign intervention and neoliberal economic reform, before analyzing how policies such as the Migrant Protection Protocols and Title 42 have institutionalized family separation.

Then, we go to Natasha Heywood's research on why the process of treaties was executed differently in British Columbia (BC) compared to the rest of the West; i.e., why did BC not negotiate any more treaties after 1854? Natasha seeks to understand why BC made the decisions it did historically, which placed it at odds with the rest of Western Canada.

Next, we have Maria Diana Calara's study of how France's luxury prominence should be understood within a broader export economy marked by uneven manufacturing competitiveness. Maria presents the argument that France's luxury prominence is best understood as the product of historical cultural capital, firm-level strategy, and selective state support rather than a singular, coherent

state-led export strategy.

Afterwards, we present Grace Mercer's exploration of the dual dynamics that have impacted the development of Japanese nationalism, as well as the rise in Japanese neo-nationalism that can be seen today. By contextualizing Japanese nationalism with respect to the overlapping impact of Eastern and Western forces, the writing offers a more robust examination of how nationalism in Japan has been constructed over time.

Then, Claire Beatty talks about the erosion of press freedom in India and its implications on the media's democratic role. While the press is expected to function as a watchdog by holding the government accountable, informing citizens, and facilitating public debate, this role is increasingly constrained. Overall, Claire explores why the media's capacity to act as an effective watchdog for democracy has been limited, as India's case reflects broader global pressures on media institutions, raising concern about the future of democratic accountability.

Finally, this volume presents Kaya Dupuis' work about wartime sexual violence and how it is systematically under theorized in both realist international relations (IR) and mainstream feminist IR frameworks. Additionally, realism's state-centric lens renders gendered violence invisible, while universal feminist approaches fail to account for the complex interactions of race, class, displacement and postcolonial history that shape women's lived experiences of sexual violence. Kaya argues that an intersectional feminist perspective, applied through a multifactorial analytical framework, more adequately addresses wartime rape as a deliberate weapon of war.

This was my first issue as Editor-in-Chief of *On Politics*, and it has been an unforgettable experience. The opportunity to work with the talented editorial team

and collaborate with the authors and their writing has been an honour. This volume would not have been possible without the tremendous work of everyone involved. I would like to thank the editors, proofreaders, authors and other members of the Political Science Department for making this volume possible.

The insightful themes that are examined in this issue are a reflection of the world we live in today, and keeping this in mind, please enjoy the nineteenth volume of *On Politics*.

Thomas Park
Editor-in-Chief
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Borders of Separation:

La Bestia and the Fragmentation of Migrant Families

By Hanna Solis Perusquia

Abstract

This paper examines how the US-Mexico border and its enforcement apparatus violently fracture transnational migrant families, using *La Bestia*—the notorious freight train traversing Mexico—, as a central symbol and entry point. Drawing on documentary film, legal scholarship, and migration literature, the paper argues that borders do not simply restrict movement but actively criminalize it, functioning as instruments of "legal violence" that separate families, endanger children, and perpetuate cycles of trauma and precarity. The paper first traces the structural roots of Central American displacement, including US foreign intervention and neoliberal economic reform, before analyzing how policies such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (Remain in Mexico) and Title 42 have institutionalized family separation. It concludes by calling for an immigration framework that recognizes migration as a fundamental right and reimagines borders as sites of connection rather than exclusion.

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course offered an invaluable lens through which to understand the complex global migration system. From forced displacement and irregular migration to border walls and migrant dissent. Additionally, Dr. Carpenter provided the intellectual foundation upon which this paper was built. Thank you for creating a space to engage critically with these urgent and deeply human issues.

“I’ve always dreamed of going to the United States.” Fourteen-year-old Kevin, from Honduras, clung to this hope as he bid farewell to his mother over the phone, who could only offer prayers for his safety.¹ Like thousands of Central American migrants, Kevin risked his life atop *La Bestia*, the infamous freight train cutting through Mexico, in search of a better future. Kevin’s journey, however, is not just about migration—it is about family separation, forced by borders that criminalize movement and fracture relationships. Driven by violence, political instability, and economic devastation—exacerbated by decades of United States intervention—many migrants leave behind children, parents, and partners hoping to reunite or provide for them from afar. Yet, instead of protection, they face “legal violence”—where immigration and criminal law intersect to exclude, exploit, and permanently divide families.² This paper argues that *La Bestia* symbolizes how borders violently disrupt transnational families. It first explores the violence in Central America that drives migration, then examines how migration is criminalized and influences state policies and public perceptions. Finally, it analyzes U.S. migration policies and their impact on family separation, transnational labour, and the long-term effects on children and future generations.

For many Central Americans, migration is not a choice but a necessity. Violence, economic instability, and political crises in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras leave families with no alternative but to flee.³ Gang violence, corruption, and extreme poverty make staying home as dangerous as the journey

¹ Rebecca Cammisa, “Which Way Home” (Docurama, 2009), 00:04:53.

² Natalia Buiza, “Crossing Mexico on La Bestia,” *Hispanic Research Journal* 19, no. 4 (2018): 415.

³ Buiza, “Crossing Mexico on *La Bestia*,” 417.

itself. Much of this instability stems from U.S. intervention, including support for military regimes like those of former Guatemalan President Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala and the Contras in Nicaragua, as well as the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms under structural adjustment programs. These programs fueled civil wars in the 1980s and imposed economic policies that deepened inequality.⁴

In the 1990s and 2000s, U.S. mass deportations further destabilized communities by exporting gang violence back to the region.⁵ As a result, the people living in these regions become migrants, defined as “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons”⁶. These migrants are forcibly displaced, not only by war and persecution but also by systemic conditions that threaten their survival. Lacking asylum protections, they are compelled to continue moving despite mounting legal barriers.⁷ For those who board *La Bestia*, these structural conditions translate into immediate physical danger — extortion, assault, and death. These risks are exacerbated by restrictive policies that offer few legal migration pathways, forcing individuals into life-threatening alternatives⁸. The militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border has

⁴ Thomas C. Bruneau, Lucia Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

⁵ Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, *Maras*, 2.

⁶ International Organization for Migration, *Migration Factsheet No. 2 – Migrants* (Geneva: IOM, 2023), 1,

https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd12616/files/documents/migration_factsheet_2_migrants.pdf.

⁷ Marja Tiilikainen, Johanna Hiitola, Ahmed Ali Ismail, and Jenni Palander, eds., *Forced Migration and Separated Families: Everyday Insecurities and Transnational Strategies* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 4.

⁸ Ilsup Ahn, Angela Chiu, and William O'Neill, "'And You Welcomed Me?': A Theological Response to the Militarization of the US–Mexico Borders and the Criminalization of Undocumented Migrants," *CrossCurrents* 63, no. 3 (2013): 304.

significantly increased the social injuries (i.e., bodily harm, exploitation, and dehumanization in the form of hyper-criminalization, vigilantism, and human rights abuses) suffered by those crossing without documentation⁹.

Moreover, U.S. government responses to migration often prioritize border enforcement over humanitarian aid. Immigration policy is frequently shaped by fear and stereotype rather than empirical evidence, which helps explain the systematic exclusion of migrants from legal protection. A complex web of laws and enforcement mechanisms has labelled migrants as “criminals,” reinforcing the perception that they pose a threat¹⁰. This process of criminalization is a key feature of legal violence, where immigration laws operate not just as regulatory measures but as mechanisms of exclusion, punishment, and social control. As a result, *La Bestia* has become a symbol of how restrictive border policies do not deter migration but push people toward more perilous journeys. U.S. immigration policies have also made family reunification nearly impossible, severely impacting the family unit in Central America. Strict visa regulations, long asylum wait times, and policies like Remain in Mexico—a Trump-era policy officially known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which requires non-Mexican asylum seekers to wait in unsafe Mexican border cities while their claims are processed—leaves families in legal limbo¹¹. Even when migrants gain status, family sponsorship can take years, further straining emotional and financial ties.

⁹ Ahn, Chiu, and O'Neill, "And You Welcomed Me?" 304–305.

¹⁰ Walter A. Ewing, Daniel E. Martínez, and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States* (Washington, DC: American Immigration Council, 2015), 1–2.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, "Remain in Mexico": Overview and Resources," February 7, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/07/remain-mexico-overview-and-resources>.

Family detention centres exemplify how immigration law functions as a form of state-sanctioned violence, holding parents and children in prolonged confinement under widely condemned conditions including inadequate medical care, psychological distress, and documented reports of abuse.¹² Despite legal challenges, the practice persists, reflecting an enforcement system prioritizing detention over human rights. The framing of migrants as “illegal” and “criminal” justifies these harsh measures, portraying them as threats to national security rather than individuals fleeing violence and economic devastation. This legal rhetoric dehumanizes migrants, facilitating restrictive policies while minimizing public outrage. Title 42, a public health order invoked during the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifies this approach, allowing U.S. authorities to expel migrants without providing the opportunity to seek asylum under the justification of disease prevention. Introduced under Trump administration and continued under the Biden administration, Title 42 bypasses due process, forcing families to choose between remaining in unsafe border camps and sending their children alone in search of safety.¹³ Through detention, deportation, and exclusion, these policies deepen family separations and exacerbate the trauma endured by migrants.

The impact of these policies is particularly devastating for children, who face extreme risks when migrating alone. In the documentary *Which Way Home*, Francisco, a nine-year-old boy from Guatemala, suffers a broken arm while crossing the border on *La Bestia*. Abandoned by his coyote (a smuggler paid to guide migrants across borders) and left vulnerable, Francisco's story is a poignant

¹² American Civil Liberties Union, "Immigrants' Rights and Detention," accessed 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights/immigrants-rights-and-detention>.

¹³ The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights, "What Is Title 42 and How Does It Impact Children and Families?" 2021, <https://www.theyoungcenter.org/stories/2021/what-is-title-42>.

example of how immigration policies not only fail to protect children but actively place them in harm's way. Fortunately, another migrant refused to leave Francisco behind and carried him to safety¹⁴. This act of compassion highlights the stark contrast between the human cost of family separation and the control-oriented approach of border enforcement. Children, whether accompanied or not, bear the heavy consequences of migration policies that prioritize control over protection.

Building on the discussion of *La Bestia*'s symbolism, family separation is a central issue in understanding the broader impact of U.S. immigration policies on transnational families. While many migrants set out together hoping to remain united, kidnappings, deportations, and the need to take separate routes often lead to forced separation¹⁵. Parents may endure the treacherous train ride while their children seek asylum through official channels, leaving families in limbo often facing detention, deportation, or indefinite separation. The emotional and psychological toll is immense, as parents and children navigate the uncertainty of reunification amidst increasingly restrictive policies¹⁶. For transnational families (those with members living in different countries) staying connected is fraught with legal and financial obstacles, including high remittance costs and limited visitation rights. Many attempt unauthorized and dangerous crossings to reunite, risking detention or even death.

The scale of this crisis is significant: approximately 5% of those who ride *La Bestia* are unaccompanied children¹⁷. The documentary *Which Way Home*

¹⁴ Cammisa, *Which Way Home*, 00:18:28.

¹⁵ Mitra Naseh, Yilun Zeng, Eunhee Ahn, Frances Cohen, and Masoud Rfat, "Mental Health Implications of Family Separation Associated with Migration Policies in the United States: A Systematic Review," *Social Science & Medicine* 352 (2024): 116995.

¹⁶ Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Cammisa, *Which Way Home*.

illustrates this harsh reality through the experiences of young migrants like Kevin and Francisco, whose journeys expose the extreme dangers faced by children travelling alone. Beyond physical risks, these stories highlight the emotional and psychological toll of separation, with children experiencing abandonment and resentment while parents endure guilt and distress¹⁸. Financial instability and labour market discrimination in the U.S. further prevent parents from sending remittances, exacerbating family strain. Programs like Remain in Mexico and strict asylum laws prolong family separation, contributing to lasting anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues in children, while parents suffer from chronic stress. These cycles of trauma and displacement, sustained by systemic barriers, have generational consequences that deepen the suffering of migrant families.

Borders do not exist passively; they are actively enforced, shaping the fates of those who cross them. For migrants on *La Bestia*, the US-Mexico border is not just a distant line on a map but a looming force that dictates whether they will find safety or be cast into further danger. The journey itself exposes how borders function—not as neutral demarcations, but as instruments of control that criminalize movement, separate families, and perpetuate cycles of violence and precarity. A just immigration system must recognize migration as a fundamental right, not a crime. This means dismantling punitive policies, addressing the economic and political forces driving displacement, and ensuring legal pathways for reunification. Until borders are reimagined as sites of connection rather than exclusion, *La Bestia* will remain a haunting symbol of a system prioritizing enforcement over humanity. True justice demands an immigration framework that protects, rather than punishes the families whose only crime is seeking a future together.

¹⁸ Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*.

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Ahn, Ilsup, Angela Chiu, and William O'Neill. 2013. "And You Welcomed Me?": A Theological Response to the Militarization of the US–Mexico Borders and the Criminalization of Undocumented Migrants." *CrossCurrents* 63 (3): 303–322. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cro.2013.a783332>.

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Tiilikainen, Marja, Johanna Hiitola, Ahmed Ali Ismail, and Jenni Palander, eds. 2023. *Forced Migration and Separated Families: Everyday Insecurities and Transnational Strategies*. 1st ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24974-7>.

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To Make Or Not To Make:

The Historical Analysis of British Columbia's Treaty-Making Process

By Natasha Heywood

Abstract

This paper interrogated why the process of treaties was executed differently in British Columbia (BC) compared to the rest of the West; i.e., why did BC not negotiate any more treaties after 1854? To answer this question, this paper has offered three answers. First, the differing land history of BC in contrast to the Prairie West, which left BC with differing autonomy to enact its land policy. Second, that the difference in actors and institutions that negotiated the Douglas Treaties (in BC) and the Numbered Treaties (across the Prairies) led to these different outcomes. Finally, it analyzes the defence made by BC in modern-day land claims (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia [1997]* and *Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia [1973]*), that white settlement was enough to extinguish Aboriginal title without treaty, to understand why BC made the decisions it did historically, which placed it at such odds with the rest of Western Canada.

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Introduction

“The imaginary of the Canadian state, like other settler states, is animated in part by the assumption of sovereign uniformity: the idea that the state’s authority is evenly applied throughout its territory.”¹⁹ This imaginary is inherently suppressive to the original inhabitants of the land as it is their disappearance Canadian state sovereignty is built on. This suppression, for the vast majority of Canada, was a path of treaty-making; however, for British Columbia (BC), treaty-making, for the most part, was ignored. This paper aims to interrogate why the process of treaties was executed differently in BC compared to the rest of the West. It draws attention to the differing land history of BC in contrast to the Prairie West, leaving it with differing autonomy to enact its land policy. It explores what can be learned from differences in negotiation between the Douglas Treaties (made in BC) and Numbered Treaties (made across the rest of western Canada). Finally, it interrogates the defenses used by BC in modern-day

¹⁹ Joshua McEvoy and Liam Medzain-Gobin, “Embedded Bordering: Territorial Authority, Indigenous Utilities, and Settler Colonialism in British Columbia.,” *Borderlands Journal* 20, no.1 (2021): 148, doi:10.21307/borderlands-2021-006.

land claims, and what this can tell us, with a focus on *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (1997) and *Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia* (1973).

A Brief Summary of British Columbian and Western Canadian Land Politics

Before the analysis of BC's particular relationship to land and treaty begins, a brief understanding of the *1763 Royal Proclamation*, is needed. The *1763 Royal Proclamation* informed Canadian relations with Indigenous Nations Pre-Confederation in 1867 and still underlies these relationships in Canada modern-day constitution. The *1763 Royal Proclamation* lays out how Canada should treat Indigenous populations, stating,

[a]nd whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to Our Interest and the Security of Our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians, with whom We are connected, and who live under Our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to, or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds [...] [a]nd We do further strictly enjoin and require all Persons whatever, who have either wilfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any Lands within the Countries above described, or upon any other Lands, which, not having been ceded to, or purchased by Us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such Settlements.²⁰

The British Crown clearly states the expectation for procuring lands for settlement across Canada; here, land was considered Indigenous land and thus had to be sold to the Crown before settlers could use it, and failure to do so was a punishable

²⁰ Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "The Royal Proclamation of 1763," abstract; reference material, June 4, 2013, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1370355181092/1607905122267#sec2>.

offense.²¹ The *1867 British North America Act*, adopts this framework, but classifies Indigenous populations as a subordinate group to be wards of the state²² - rather than the previous understanding, which offered more equality between nations. BC, along with the other western provinces, would have been legally required to abide by the *1763 Royal Proclamation* and *1867 British North America Act*, as they were all either territories of the Crown or Canadian provinces.

BC in particular had been a British colony since 1849, ruled and regulated in the day-to-day by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), a private company which had been tasked with setting up a settlement colony on Vancouver Island for a grant of ten-years.²³ After a period of economic downturn and annexation threats from the United States, BC joined Confederation in 1871.²⁴ Unlike what would become Alberta and Saskatchewan, who were given their provincehood by the federal government and had no control over their natural resources until the 1930s; or Manitoba, whose entrance into Confederation was negotiated in part by Métis communities in 1870 in the process of rebellions against the colonial government and its land policies.²⁵ BC, negotiated its own entrance into Confederation with the *1871 Terms of Union*. This allowed space for BC to pursue problematic policies

²¹ Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "The Royal Proclamation of 1763."

²² Eric Adams, "'Equally Applicable to Scotsmen': Racism, Equality, and Habeas Corpus in the Legal History of Japanese Canadians," in *Landscapes of Injustice: A new perspective on the internment and dispossession of Japanese Canadians*, ed. Jordan Stanger-Ross (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 69.

²³ "History of B.C.," Welcome BC, (2024), <https://www.welcomebc.ca/choose-b-c/explore-british-columbia/history-of-b-c>.

²⁴ Hamar Foster, "The Imperial Law of Aboriginal Title at the Time of the Douglas Treaties," in *To Share Not Surrender* ed. Hamar Foster, Neil Vallance and Peter Cook, (University of British Columbia Press, 2021), 92. and Jean Barman, "Distant Oversight," in *The West Beyond the West: a History of British Columbia*, (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 98.

²⁵ Jennifer Reid, "'Setting the Stage' The North-West to 1885," in *Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State*, ed. David Carrasco and Charles Long, (University of New Mexico Press 2008), 11.

(such as not making treaties) without much consequence. BC's lackluster treaty-making was foretold in the *1871 Terms of Union* with Clause Thirteen, that laid out that land policy in BC would happen in a manner "as *liberal* as that hitherto pursued by the British Columbia Government."²⁶ The manner that BC previously pursued land policy was deeply conservative, and this clause ensured this pattern would continue. This conservative pattern regarding land policy was spearheaded by Joseph Trutch, who was appointed as Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works by James Douglas (who negotiated the Douglas Treaties) in 1864, and he worked endlessly to reduce the reserve allotments for Indigenous nations which had been previously negotiated by Douglas.²⁷ The reserve system in BC was a constant source of contestation between BC and the Dominion government, with BC pushing back against extending or enlarging reserves, arguing it was a waste of space that could be otherwise used for settler farms.²⁸ This type of conflict, was common throughout the early BC-Dominion relationship, where BC tested boundaries laid out by the Dominion, the Dominion offered pushback, and BC pushed back against this response – a vicious cycle.

Another example of this cycle was BC's brutal treatment of Asian Canadians and Indigenous populations. BC has an extensive history of anti-Asian and anti-Indigenous racism to the point the dominion government had to intervene:

²⁶ Department of Justice Government of Canada, "Final Report of the French Constitutional Drafting Committee, 1871 British Columbia Terms of Union" November 3, 1999, n.p. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/pl1t42.html>.

²⁷ Robin Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land" in *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, ed J. Friesen, (Mc-Gill-Queen's University Press 1976), 257 and 261 and Patricia Burke Wood and David Rossiter, "The Invention of British Columbia" *Unstable Properties: Aboriginal Title and the Claim of British Columbia*, (University of British Columbia Press 2022), 43-44.

²⁸ George Abbott, "A Royal Commission Frustrates Hopes" in *Unceded: Understanding British Columbia's Colonials Past and Why it Matters Now*, (Purich Books, imprint of UNB Press 2025) 88-89.

[i]n 1871, the British Columbia legislature disqualified “Chinese or Indians” from voting in provincial elections, a list expanded to include Japanese Canadians in 1895. British Columbia enacted more than one hundred pieces of legislation in the ensuing decades imposing racist restrictions on mobility, additional taxes, and work prohibitions on Indigenous peoples, Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, and an undefined larger category of Asians alongside them. The federal government disallowed a number of these laws as unconstitutionally invading the federal government’s exclusive jurisdiction over “Naturalization and Aliens,” and courts struck down several others as either contrary to the division of powers or in conflict with existing federal law.²⁹

While the Dominion government’s intervention in such matters was not from a place of progressive moral standing, it does indicate tension between what was considered “acceptable” behaviour for the time and what policies BC was pursuing. BC was a province that “toed the line” of appropriate politics of the era for its own goals; in the case of land for agriculture and settlement futures of the province.³⁰

Coast versus Plains: The Making of the Douglas and Numbered Treaties

Comparison of the two major sets of treaties negotiated across Western Canada, used to govern relationships between Indigenous Nations and the Crown, provide helpful insights into how this treaty-making process came to be so different. The Douglas Treaties are the fourteen treaties signed in on Vancouver Island by James Douglas between 1850 and 1854.³¹ Whereas the Numbered Treaties are eleven

²⁹ Adams, “Equally Applicable to Scotsmen’: Racism, Equality, and Habeas Corpus in the Legal History of Japanese Canadians,” 70.

³⁰ Abbott, “A Royal Commission Frustrates Hopes,” 88-89.

³¹ Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, “Treaty Texts - Douglas Treaties,” agreement, November 3, 2008, <https://www.rcaanc-https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100029052/1581515763202>, n.p.

Figure 2

The Douglas Treaties were negotiated prior to both the Confederation of Canada in 1867 and BC's entrance into Confederation in 1871, thus, they were negotiated when BC was a direct colony of the British Empire. In contrast the Numbered Treaties were made after Confederation, meaning Indigenous Nations were not entering into deals with the British directly, but rather the Dominion of Canada, which, saw Indigenous nations as becoming wards of the state. This difference is crucial as it shows that Indigenous Nations entered treaty relationship with different entities in different eras, who expected entirely different outcomes from these negotiations. Treaty-making in BC took place at the time where Indigenous Nations were extended a more equal hand (though still deeply violent and paternalistic) under the guiding principles of the *1763 Royal Proclamation*. Conversely, treaty-making in the prairies after Confederation immediately placed Indigenous peoples in subordinate positions, possibly making that path more appealing to colonial officials.

Furthermore, the Douglas Treaties were negotiated over the span of four years with a consistency of authorities who negotiated them; Joseph William McKay and Alfred Robson Benson.³⁵ Oppositely, the Numbered Treaties were negotiated over a much longer period of fifty years, and thus, see less regularity of colonial authorities.³⁶ The primary colonial signatory to the Numbered Treaties in each case was the then -current Indian Affairs Commissioner.³⁷ The Numbered

³⁵ Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Treaty Texts - Douglas Treaties," n.p.

³⁶ Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, "The Numbered Treaties (1871-1921)," reference material, February 15, 2013, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1360948213124/1544620003549>.

³⁷ Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, "The Numbered Treaties (1871-1921)."

Treaties were negotiated by an official who was part of a larger colonial institution – the Indian Affairs Commission – whereas as the Douglas Treaties were negotiated under the authority of one government and one man who did not have whole infrastructure supporting him. Douglas had struck out and begun treaty-making on his own without template.³⁸ Thus, this treaty-making process was less formal and more reliant on one man, leading to the more important influence of a central authority. Thus, when officials came to power after James Douglas who saw treaties as less central to British Columbian land policy, they already had more control over treaty-making and thus could shape it as they saw fit.

This is how officials such as Joseph Trutch could end treaty-making hopes in BC in his 25-year long position as Governor of the province after James Douglas. Douglas and Trutch had differing opinions of the Indigenous peoples whose lands they were occupying that informed their approach. Douglas abided by the *1763 Royal Proclamation* to some extent, making the 14 treaties still present on Vancouver Island today; and Douglas in both public and private correspondences, painted a picture of Indigenous peoples as being rational, thinking beings who could become respectable members of the Commonwealth.³⁹ Douglas was by no means a paragon of Indigenous rights, he regularly referred to Indigenous peoples as “savages” and “barbarians” in “primal states”⁴⁰ but he saw treaty-making as the appropriate response for settlement in BC, leading to the negotiations of the Douglas Treaties.⁴¹

³⁸ Hamar Foster and Neil Vallance, “Treaty Timeline,” In *To Share Not Surrender*, ed. Hamar Foster, Neil Vallance and Peter Cook, (University of British Columbia Press, 2021), 8.

³⁹ Perry, “Indigenous Land, Imperial Travels and James Douglas,” In *To Share Not Surrender* ed. Hamar Foster, Neil Vallance and Peter Cook, (University of British Columbia Press, 2021), 42.

⁴⁰ Perry, “Indigenous Land, Imperial Travels and James Douglas,” 43.

⁴¹ Perry, “Indigenous Land, Imperial Travels and James Douglas,” 43.

Trutch, on the other hand, stood for a less egalitarian view of Indigenous peoples and thus treaty-making in the province. Trutch was appointed Chief Commissioner of Land and Works and then Governor of BC after Douglas' retirement in 1864, and had previously been a land surveyor and farmer and was confident in his superiority as an Englishman in Canada, seeing Indigenous populations as "lawless and violent."⁴² These views informed his approach to governance; land was needed to amass a fortune, and suppression of Indigenous populations without treaty was the way to do it.⁴³ Trutch, unconstrained by the likes of Douglas, rapidly reduced reserve allotments after his appointment, opening an estimated 40,000 acres of reserve land to settler use, primarily for farming and agriculture.⁴⁴ Additionally, he regularly re-wrote and re-defined Douglas' proposals for reserve allotments, in one case claiming that Douglas had approved 10 acre reserves, when the reality was that Douglas had *required* 10 acres to be given, even if nations had asked for less.⁴⁵ Trutch denied any hopes of treaty-making both on Vancouver Island and mainland BC, with his violent attitudes toward Indigenous peoples which ended in quick reductions to any sort of guarantees previously offered. This ended Douglas' short-lived attempt to treaty the land. The centralization of treaty-making in BC around one primary figure made it easy for one man's opinions to shape the path of history.

Moving eastward across the plains in the era of the Numbered Treaties, two things were happening. The first was the need of the dominion government for land for settlement in modern-day Alberta and Saskatchewan. This need was met via the First National Policy, which attempted to clear the prairies of Indigenous peoples

⁴² Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land Policy," 256-257.

⁴³ Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land Policy," 257.

⁴⁴ Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land Policy" 261.

⁴⁵ Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land Policy," 265.

through violence. The North-West Mounted Police (now RCMP) was created to drive Indigenous peoples from their lands via violence, starvation, and then treaty-making.⁴⁶ Here treaty-making was an imperative to open the vast swaths of land required for the wheat economy.

Second was the tension between BC, the prairies and the Dominion over BC's lack of treaty-making, sometimes going so far as to express fears of a war breaking out over land policy in BC.⁴⁷ In this era, feelings of honouring the Crown and following legal sources (such as the *1763 Royal Proclamation*) were well referenced and well respected.⁴⁸ Aboriginal title was seen as alive and well on the Prairies and thus needed to be extinguished post-haste by colonial officials, and BC was not performing their duties to the crown.⁴⁹ The Numbered Treaties were negotiated because colonial authorities in Western and Central Canada viewed it as the way to keep in consistency with British law while creating the settler colonial state of Canada. Whereas BC, under the leadership of Trutch, did not.

Land-Claims and Treaty-Making in the Courts in Modern Day British Columbia

The bulk of this essay has looked at the possible historical reasons for differences in treaty-making between BC and the rest of Canada. It will now turn to the more modern era and examine land claims cases that were brought to the courts and how they were argued on both sides. Specific attention is paid to the cases of *Calder v. BC (1973)* and *Delgamuukw v. BC (1997)*. However, despite this focus, these are

⁴⁶ Janine Brodie, "The New Political Economy of Canadian Regionalism," in *Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy*, ed. Wallace Clement (McGill-Queen's Press, 1997), 250.

⁴⁷ Perry, "The Imperial Law of Aboriginal Title at the Time of the Douglas Treaties," 105.

⁴⁸ Foster, "The Imperial Law of Aboriginal Title at the Time of the Douglas Treaties," 105-106.

⁴⁹ Foster, "The Imperial Law of Aboriginal Title at the Time of the Douglas Treaties," 106.

not the only efforts by Indigenous Nations to gain title or land related rights in BC. The Nisga'a endured 110 years of non-recognition for their lands, their struggle beginning in 1890 and not seeing the fruits of their legal efforts until May 11th, 2000 after repeated hampering by BC and Canada⁵⁰. Other cases in BC such as *Guerin v. The Queen* (1984), *R. v. Sparrow* (1990), and *R. v. Van der Peet* (1996) also represent ongoing struggle for land and rights recognition. While these cases did not directly address the issue of Aboriginal title and its possible extinguishment, they did advance questions of Aboriginal rights (*Sparrow* and *Van der Peet*) and the Crown's responsibility to Indigenous Nations (*Guerin*) prior to *Delgamuukw* in 1997. Additionally, Indigenous nations are working their way through the courts for appropriate land rights and self-government in BC, often done in partnership with the BC Treaty Commission established in 1992.

As a primer, Aboriginal title is found in English Common Law, and presumes that, "[I]ndigenous people occupied and controlled the land in accordance with traditional laws and customs prior to the introduction of British sovereignty."⁵¹ Thus, this title was a recognized as a threat to British control of Canada and needed to be extinguished. As laid out in the *1763 Royal Proclamation* Aboriginal title can be extinguished via sale or secession to the Crown or explicit extinguishment by the Crown.⁵² As Yurkowski notes, paradoxically the Crown always holds an underlying title to the land, and can override Aboriginal title, but

⁵⁰ Abbott, "A Royal Commission Frustrates Hopes" 97-98.

⁵¹ Rachel Yurkowski, "'We Are All Here to Stay': Addressing Aboriginal Title Claims after *Delgamuukw v British Columbia*," *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 31, no. 3 (2000): 473.

⁵² Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "The Royal Proclamation of 1763."

in order to do so, the reason must be, explicitly made and, “compelling and substantial”⁵³. This extinguishment clause becomes key in modern court cases.

BC has faced numerous land claims in recent decades. The first of interest is *Calder v. BC (1973)*, which was launched by the Nisga’a against the BC government around the right to land and Aboriginal title. The Nisga’a argued that BC had never directly extinguished Aboriginal title, as required in the 1763 *Royal Proclamation*, and thus the actions taken by the British Columbian government since have been unlawful.⁵⁴ This resulted in the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruling on both – whether Aboriginal title still exists and if it had been extinguished in BC. BC provided a counterargument to these accusations of unlawful land seizure, arguing that they had implicitly extinguished Aboriginal title to the land,

that this right [Aboriginal title], if it ever existed, had been lawfully extinguished, that with two societies in competition for land—the white settlers demanding orderly settlement and the Indians demanding to be let alone—the proper authorities deliberately chose to set apart reserves for Indians in various parts of the territory and open up the rest for settlements. They held that this had been done when British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871 and that the Terms of Union recognized this fact.⁵⁵

Here BC acknowledges that it has never been done explicitly, but that the existence of white settlement was enough for title to transfer to the Crown. Despite these arguments, *Calder v. BC (1973)* was thrown out by the SCC for improper filing.⁵⁶ However, despite no direct ruling in the continued existence of Aboriginal title and if it has been extinguished it did in a roundabout way confirm its existence, as six

⁵³ Yurkowski, “We Are All Here to Stay,” 473.

⁵⁴ *Calder et al. v Attorney-General of British Columbia*, Supreme Court of Canada, 1973, <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/5113/index.do>, 318.

⁵⁵ *Calder et al. v Attorney-General of British Columbia*, 329.

⁵⁶ Foster, “The Imperial Law of Aboriginal Title at the Time of the Douglas Treaties,” 94.

out of the seven Supreme Court Justices recognized that title has always been part of Canadian law through the *1763 Royal Proclamation*, but were hung on if it had been extinguished in BC.⁵⁷

The landmark case of Aboriginal title in BC was still to come. While Calder had cracked open the conversation around BC's claim to land, *Delgamuukw v. BC* (1997) blew it open. Similarly to Calder, Delgamuukw claimed title to 58,000 square kilometers of land in the province for all the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples.⁵⁸ Again they claimed that they had never ceded their territory, and thus the actions of the BC government were infringing on their traditional lands and rights.⁵⁹ BC once again cited implicit extinguishment to defend their lack of treaty-making, claiming, "there was no [A]boriginal title in British Columbia because settlement had extinguished any pre-existing systems of [A]boriginal law and introduced British law in its place".⁶⁰ Again BC argued the existence of settlement was enough to replace explicit reinstatement of title through treaties. However, in this case the SCC definitively ruled that BC had not legitimately, and explicitly extinguished title, ruling, "[a] provincial law of general application cannot extinguish aboriginal rights. First, a law of general application cannot, by definition, meet the standard 'of clear and plain intention' needed to extinguish [A]boriginal rights without being *ultra vires* the province."⁶¹ This ruling resulted in the legal and colonial reconfirmation and re-recognition of Aboriginal title in BC, explicitly ruling BC's previous actions as unlawful.

⁵⁷ Foster, "The Imperial Law of Aboriginal Title at the Time of the Douglas Treaties," 94.

⁵⁸ Yurkowski, "'We Are All Here to Stay,'" 474.

⁵⁹ Yurkowski, "'We Are All Here to Stay,'" 474-475.

⁶⁰ Yurkowski, "'We Are All Here to Stay,'" 475.

⁶¹ *Delgamuukw v BC*, S.C.R. 1010. Supreme Court of Canada, 1997, 1022.

Both Calder (1973) and Delgamuukw (1997) allow for the opportunity to investigate BC's historical decision-making processes around treaty-making in the modern-day. What was uncovered is a clinging-to of conceptions around land use which stem from this historical period. BC defended itself in both cases by claiming that Indigenous forms of land use and governance that existed long before colonization, were extinguished with the implementation of British legal, land and governance traditions. The understandings of "good" and "waste" land that empowered Trutch, were replicated in the 1973 and 1997 court cases where BC defended itself, by proclaiming settler society won the battle for settlement of BC, and thus Aboriginal title was considered an irrelevance in the governing of the province.⁶²

Conclusion

BC has historically been a province deeply resistant to ideas of Aboriginal title and treaty-making on "its" lands and has done its best to minimize policy that relates to questions of land for and around Indigenous nations. Despite this, Indigenous peoples have never stopped resisting dispossession, and land claims have slowly worked their ways through the courts (along with other resistance and resurgence movements). I conclude that treaty-making in BC was left undone and ignored by colonial officials until recent decades, as BC (in comparison to the remainder of the Canadian west) had different entry into Canadian Confederation under different circumstances that left it with significantly more autonomy and differing conceptions of land than its neighbours. Additionally, when comparing the historic treaties in BC (the Douglas Treaties) to the Numbered Treaties, numerous

⁶² Calder et al. v Attorney-General of British Columbia, 329 and Yurkowski, "We Are All Here to Stay," 475.

differences become apparent, particularly those of colonial officials involved in land policy. Finally, modern-day court cases (Calder and Delgamuukw) reveal how BC conceptualizes and defends its past actions. What is gleaned from this paper's exploration is that colonial conceptions of land, flow though and inform BC's treaty-making decisions from 1850 to 1997.

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Luxury, Identity, and Economic Power: *Rethinking France's Export Strategy*

By Maria Diana Calara

Abstract

This paper examines how France's luxury prominence should be understood within a broader export economy marked by uneven manufacturing competitiveness. Although France is widely associated with high-end sectors such as fashion, wines and spirits, and cosmetics, existing scholarship tends to separate the historical foundations of luxury, the competitiveness of premium exports, and the decline of manufacturing. I argue that France's luxury prominence is best understood as the product of historical cultural capital, firm-level strategy, and selective state support rather than a singular, coherent state-led export strategy. The paper first reviews three bodies of scholarship: historical studies of luxury, empirical work on luxury exports and global value chains, and research on industrial decline. This paper then examines the issue empirically by assessing the relative significance of luxury within France's export structure, distinguishing between state support and firm-led success, and comparing France with Italy across key export indicators. The findings show that luxury-related sectors occupy a meaningful but not all-encompassing place within France's export economy. French luxury benefits from selective public reinforcement, but much of its global strength depends on firm-level organization and the commercialization of historical prestige. The comparison with Italy further shows that France's luxury prominence is concentrated rather than universal, reinforcing the argument that French luxury is

best understood as a specialized area of high-value competitiveness and symbolic visibility within a broader and more uneven export economy.

Keywords: France; luxury goods; export strategy; comparative advantage; global value chains; industrial decline; political economy; Italy

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1. Introduction

France is recognized as a global hub for luxury production; it is home to fashion houses Hermès, Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton, and includes high-value cultural goods such as Cognac (i.e., a type of brandy produced in Charente and Charente-Maritime departments in France) and fine wines. These high-value products earn remarkable export margins and are seen as national symbols of craftsmanship and identity; however, France's industrial structure has been declining, especially when it comes to other strong manufacturing sectors such as automotive and aerospace. Automotive production has been impaired by offshoring⁶³ and aerospace competitiveness increasingly depends on regional integration⁶⁴. For reference, offshoring refers to the relocation of production to either affiliated or non-affiliated companies in foreign locations⁶⁵. Industrial policymaking in France has also been characterized by institutional fragmentation, including conflicts between ministries and multi-level coordination failures, as well as structural weaknesses from policy capture and inconsistent strategic direction⁶⁶. The combination of flourishing luxury markets and eroding manufacturing poses a question for the international political economy: how should France's luxury prominence be understood within a broader export economy in which manufacturing remains significant but unevenly competitive? This question is important for three reasons: (1) France's luxury goods sectors combine culture,

⁶³ Raphaël Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance in the European Automotive Industry," *Competition & Change* 16, no. 4 (2012): 334.

⁶⁴ Fabien Candau and Serge Rey, "The Effect of the Euro on Aeronautic Trade: A French Regional Analysis," *Economic Modelling* 41 (2014): 355.

⁶⁵ Bernhard Dachs, Bernd Ebersberger, Steffen Kinkel, and Bruno R. Waser, "Offshoring of Production – A European Perspective," *Bulletin* no. 2 (2006): 2.

⁶⁶ Samuel Klebaner and Anaïs Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking," *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy* 4, no. 1 (2023): 55.

identity, and strategy, showing that comparative advantage can also be shaped by historically accumulated reputation, symbolic value, and high-value market positioning; (2) the contrast between strong premium exports and the declining industrial performance highlights broader structural shifts within advanced capitalist economies; and (3) observing France's export strategies offers insight into how states maneuver through globalization, offshoring production, and domestic industry decline, contributing to debates on global value chains – the cross-border organization of production – as well as market competitiveness, and economic prestige. In this paper, “luxury” refers to a heterogeneous set of export sectors including the fashion industry, wines and spirits, cosmetics, and other premium branded products associated with French heritage, reputation, and high value-added production. This category is not treated as a unitary industry, but as a cluster of sectors linked by premium positioning, symbolic value, and export performance.

In this paper, I argue that France's luxury dominance reflects a combination of historical cultural capital, firm-level strategies, and selective state support, rather than a singular, coherent state-led export strategy. Existing scholarship remains divided: empirical studies explain the competitiveness of luxury exports, historical scholarship explains the cultural foundations of French luxury, and research on industrial decline focuses on manufacturing sectors such as automobiles and aerospace without relating them to luxury. This separation leaves unresolved the broader political significance of luxury within France's export strategy.

To address this gap, the paper proceeds in two stages: a literature review and then an empirical analysis. The literature review groups three bodies of scholarship. The first group looks at the historical and cultural foundations because it is

important to provide initial context about French luxury to understand the argument's basis. This background analysis shows how luxury, morality, political economy, and national identity formed before the global markets did today.⁶⁷ The second group analyzes competitiveness in luxury exports and France's overall position in global value chains. This includes empirical works in Cognac and wine,⁶⁸ brand equity;⁶⁹ corruption in luxury consumption;⁷⁰ geographical indications and the politics of gastronationalism – the cultural and political salience of regional food products in trade negotiations;⁷¹ high-end European comparative advantage;⁷² and global commodity chains.⁷³ Lastly, the third group of scholarship looks at France's industrial decline, industrial policy, and export systems. Such scholarship includes offshoring production in the automotive sector,⁷⁴ the effect of

⁶⁷ Walter Eltis and Shelagh M. Eltis, "The French Debate on the Morality and the Political Economy of Luxury: From Boisguilbert to Quesnay," in *Economic Development and Social Change*, ed. Y. Stathakis and G. Vaggi (London: Routledge, 2006), 218–49; Jeremy Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 1 (2007): 79–105; Aida Ramos, "Luxury, Crisis, and Consumption: Sir James Steuart and the Eighteenth-Century Luxury Debate," *History of Economics Review*, no. 53 (2011): 55–72; John Shovlin, "Commerce, Finance, and the Luxury Debate," in *The Political Economy of Virtue* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 13–48.

⁶⁸ Antoine Bouët, Charlotte Emlinger, and Viola Lamani, "What Determines Exports of Luxury Products? The Case of Cognac," *Journal of Wine Economics* 12, no. 1 (2017): 37–58; Charlotte Emlinger and Viola Lamani. "International Trade, Quality Sorting and Trade Costs: The Case of Cognac." *Review of World Economics* 156, no. 3 (2020): 579–609.

⁶⁹ Amanda J. Blair et al., "Assessing Brand Equity in the Luxury Wine Market by Exploiting Tastemaker Scores," *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 26, no. 5 (2017): 447–52.

⁷⁰ Reza Tajaddini and Hassan F. Gholipour, "Control of Corruption and Luxury Goods Consumption," *Kyklos* 71 (2018): 613–41.

⁷¹ Martijn Huysmans, "Exporting Protection: EU Trade Agreements, Geographical Indications, and Gastronationalism," *Review of International Political Economy* 29, no. 3 (2022): 979–1005.

⁷² Valérie Duchateau, Jeannot Rasolofoarison, and Romain Sautard, "Do High-End Goods Represent a Comparative Advantage for Europe?" *Trésor-Economics*, no. 118 (September 2013).

⁷³ Jennifer Bair, "Global Capitalism and Commodity Chains: Looking Back, Going Forward," *Competition & Change* 9, no. 2 (2005): 153–80.

⁷⁴ Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance," 323–42.

the euro in aerospace,⁷⁵ structural policymaking weaknesses,⁷⁶ industrial transition challenges,⁷⁷ and the internationalization strategies of French firms.⁷⁸

Each group offers meaningful insights; however, these insights also have limitations. Historical studies explain how luxury industries became significant, but do not show how they relate to contemporary export strategies. The empirical studies highlight the strength and performance of luxury exports but do not account for the broader decline of manufacturing in other sectors. Industrial policy research explains this manufacturing decline but ignores the luxury products. Taken together, these gaps suggest that current scholarship does not examine the political significance of luxury exports within France's broader export strategy.

Subsequent to the literature review, the empirical section analyzes data about France's exports relative to the broader export economy. This analysis includes three subsections: one evaluating the relative significance of luxury goods within France's export structure; one distinguishing between state support and firm-led success in shaping the global position of French luxury; and one placing France in comparative perspective with Italy across key export indicators. Together, these sections show that luxury goods are best understood as a concentrated area of high-value specialization and symbolic visibility within a broader and more uneven export economy.

⁷⁵ Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro," 345–55.

⁷⁶ Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking," 49–74.

⁷⁷ Bob Hancké and Jasper Kanitz, "The Role of Industrial Policy in the Transition of the French Automotive Industry," in *Is Electromobility Made in Europe Still Possible?*, ed. Béla Galgóczi (Brussels: ETUI, 2025), 95–112.

⁷⁸ Grégoire de Warren, "The International Strategies of France's Business Sector," *Trésor-Economics*, no. 267 (September 24, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical Foundations: Luxury as Moral Economy, Social Order, and Statecraft in France

The term *statecraft* is used in this sub-section's title to refer to the strategic use of economic and cultural tools by France to establish authority, structure social order, and maintain national power. Across historical literature, luxury in France emerged as a political, moral, and economic framework which created debates about social hierarchy, national identity, and state governance. Scholars such as Eltis and Eltis; Jennings; Ramos; and Shovlin consistently show that the French elites used luxury to identify and judge the health of the state. For example, how French citizens consumed luxury goods was a signal of problems between virtue and excess, productive work versus wasteful spending, and national strength versus moral decline.⁷⁹ Instead of the general assumption that luxury is merely an economic phenomenon, these scholarly works put luxury within a "moral economy" in which consumerism either secured or undermined the social order. Across this literature, luxury's perceived excess was associated with economic strain and political anxiety.⁸⁰ However, luxury was also tied to France's cultural supremacy: refinement, taste, and artisanal experience were markers of national

⁷⁹ Walter Eltis and Shelagh M. Eltis, "The French Debate on the Morality and the Political Economy of Luxury: From Boisguilbert to Quesnay," in *Economic Development and Social Change*, ed. Y. Stathakis and G. Vaggi (London: Routledge, 2006), 201; Jeremy Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 1 (2007): 95; Aida Ramos, "Luxury, Crisis, and Consumption: Sir James Steuart and the Eighteenth-Century Luxury Debate," *History of Economics Review*, no. 53 (2011): 59; John Shovlin, "Commerce, Finance, and the Luxury Debate," in *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 14.

⁸⁰ Eltis and Eltis, "The French Debate on the Morality and the Political Economy of Luxury," 224; Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury," 90; Ramos, "Luxury, Crisis, and Consumption," 65.

prestige and soft power.⁸¹ This duality of luxury being a threat to material stability and also a symbol of cultural authority shows luxury's significance in French political thought.

A major theme across these works is the interdependence of luxury and governance. For example, luxury was not viewed as a private matter of consumers' preferences, but important to the state which shaped foreign trade, demographic patterns, and a balance of power against rival empires.⁸² French elites believed luxury consumption had political effects: it shaped people's behaviour and values, removed workers from agricultural production, and overall weakened the state's financial and military strength.⁸³ These effects were more intense relative to Great Britain, where their ideology was more positive as they saw luxury for economic support in trade, creativity, and industries.⁸⁴ In contrast, both Jennings and Shovlin agreed that the French blamed their lost wars and lower geopolitical standing on moral and economic weakness tied to luxury.⁸⁵

Another shared theme in this literature is that luxury operated as a system of social ordering instead of solely expensive items. In turn, this arrangement created visible social hierarchies that showed who belonged to the elite class and who did not. Eltis and Eltis, and Ramos, show that luxury was a political language: displays of taste communicated loyalty, proximity to power, and entitlement, while the rules

⁸¹ Shovlin, "Commerce, Finance, and the Luxury Debate," 48.

⁸² Eltis and Eltis, "The French Debate on the Morality and the Political Economy of Luxury"; Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury"; Ramos, "Luxury, Crisis, and Consumption"; Shovlin, "Commerce, Finance, and the Luxury Debate."

⁸³ Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury," 81, 85; Shovlin, "Commerce, Finance, and the Luxury Debate," 18.

⁸⁴ Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury," 97.

⁸⁵ Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury," 92; Shovlin, "Commerce, Finance, and the Luxury Debate," 46–47.

for luxury access (i.e., taxation, regulation, or court rules) supported the state's role with reinforcing further inequality.⁸⁶ Therefore, instead of luxury as an economic category, these works frame it as a tool in governance through which elites organized society, stabilized hierarchy, and embedded power within daily life.

Despite the shared themes thus far, these historical analyses do not explain why modern France appears to promote luxury industries as a major export sector. They highlight the cultural and ideological bases of French luxury but do not fully address how these foundations shape modern economic policy or the state's support for luxury conglomerates. Thus, while historical perspectives provide essential foundations, they cannot alone account for why and how France transformed luxury from a moral and social dilemma to contemporary economic strength.

2.2. Competitiveness and Global Value Chains: Luxury as High-End Export Strategy

From an empirical trade analysis – meaning studies that measure export performance, trade costs, competitiveness – and global value chain perspective, scholars (i.e., Bouët, Emlinger, and Lamani; Duchateau, Rasolofoarison, and Sautard; Emlinger and Lamani) position luxury exports as a set of economic processes that involve reputation support, improving products' quality, using place-based branding, and overall situating French goods at the top of global markets.⁸⁷ So rather than competing based on cost, France's luxury goods sectors function within premium market segments that shape comparative advantage with

⁸⁶ Eltis and Eltis, "The French Debate on the Morality and the Political Economy of Luxury"; Ramos, "Luxury, Crisis, and Consumption."

⁸⁷ Bouët et al., "What Determines Exports of Luxury Products?"; Duchateau et al., "Do High-End Goods Represent a Comparative Advantage for Europe?"; Emlinger and Lamani, "International Trade, Quality Sorting and Trade Costs."

high entry barriers, quality certification, and brand prestige.⁸⁸ Duchateau et al. further illustrate that high-end goods create trade surpluses even with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries –markets in which France otherwise runs account deficits – suggesting that luxury exports remain a structurally competitive sector with limited foreign competition.⁸⁹

Across this literature, scholars (i.e., Bouët et al., Emlinger and Lamani) argue that France’s competitiveness in luxury markets rests on premium quality and reputation rather than price-based competition. Evidence from wine and spirits shows that luxury exports benefit from “quality sorting” in which trade costs, distance, and tariffs favour high-end goods, allowing French producers to get more value in export markets.⁹⁰ Cognac provides a particularly strong example within this literature. Emlinger and Lamani treat Cognac explicitly as a luxury product and show that its quality designations are objectively differentiated by ageing and perceived as distinct by foreign consumers, making it an especially useful case for analyzing the relationship between trade costs and quality mix.⁹¹ Their findings further suggest that greater distance increases the share of higher-quality Cognac exports, reinforcing the broader argument that French wines and spirits compete through premium positioning rather than price alone.⁹² Bouët, Emlinger, and Lamani likewise show that Cognac exports became a booming sector of the French economy, with more than 95 percent of production exported annually and shipment values exceeding €2 billion by 2013, underscoring the international importance of

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Duchateau et al., “Do High-End Goods Represent a Comparative Advantage for Europe,” 1.

⁹⁰ Bouët et al., “What Determines Exports of Luxury Products,” 2; Emlinger and Lamani, “International Trade, Quality Sorting and Trade Costs,” 600.

⁹¹ Emlinger and Lamani, “International Trade, Quality Sorting and Trade Costs,” 581.

⁹² Ibid., 581, 592.

this premium spirits sector.⁹³ In this framework, quality sorting refers to high-productivity firms displacing lower-quality competitors and consolidating premium positioning. Complementing this empirical trade perspective, separate scholarship on brand equity and geographical indications (i.e., Blair, Atanasova, Pitt, Chan, and Wallstrom; Huysmans) shows that origin labels and cultural reputation generate price premiums by transforming symbolic value into economic returns.⁹⁴ Therefore, France's comparative advantage in luxury is not merely production-based; it is symbolically embedded in heritage.

Additionally, the role of global value chain positioning is a common theme. High-end sectors allow France to maintain control over high-value nodes like design, branding, and marketing even when production is dispersed internationally.⁹⁵ The ability to retain control over high-value functions such as design, branding, and marketing distinguishes luxury production from mass manufacturing, where France has experienced declining competitiveness, specifically in the automobile sector discussed later in this paper. Luxury operates in value chains where scarcity, craftsmanship, and symbolic capital determine economic outcomes. Studies on corruption and luxury consumption further illustrate that these goods behave differently from other basic commodities; for example, demand is shaped by social signalling and quality of governance systems instead of income or prices.⁹⁶ Together, this scholarship suggests that luxury

⁹³ Bouët et al., "What Determines Exports of Luxury Products," 38.

⁹⁴ Blair et al., "Assessing Brand Equity"; Huysmans, "Exporting Protection," 980–82.

⁹⁵ Bair, "Global Capitalism and Commodity Chains," 168; Duchateau et al., "Do High-End Goods Represent a Comparative Advantage for Europe."

⁹⁶ Tajaddini and Gholipour, "Control of Corruption," 614, 620.

functions as a highly competitive export sector shaped by cultural reputation, origin-based value, and control over high-value nodes in global markets.⁹⁷

Even though these works explain how French luxury firms succeed abroad, they do not account for why France elevates luxury to the forefront of export strategies. The literature focuses on competitiveness specific to the sector; however, it does not explore how luxury became a national economic priority in the context of other sector-decline or changing global manufacturing processes. Therefore, scholars such as Bair; Bouët et al.; Duchateau et al.; and Huysmans clarify how luxury competes internationally, but not exactly why France continues to depend on it as an important factor in exports.⁹⁸

2.3. Industrial Decline, Structural Constraints, and the Limits of France's Export Model

Across the literature about France's manufacturing decline, a shared theme is that the weakening of industrial sectors does not come from temporary shocks; instead, it is from structural pressures which alter how French firms compete on the global scale. Scholars such as Candau and Rey, Chiappini, Hancké and Kanitz, Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, and de Warren note that globalized production networks, institutional limits on economic policy, and fragmented industry governance all

⁹⁷ Bouët et al., "What Determines Exports of Luxury Products"; Blair et al., "Assessing Brand Equity"; Duchateau et al., "Do High-End Goods Represent a Comparative Advantage for Europe"; Emlinger and Lamani, "International Trade, Quality Sorting and Trade Costs"; Huysmans, "Exporting Protection."

⁹⁸ Bair, "Global Capitalism and Commodity Chains"; Bouët et al., "What Determines Exports of Luxury Products"; Duchateau et al., "Do High-End Goods Represent a Comparative Advantage for Europe"; Huysmans, "Exporting Protection."

undermine France's ability to sustain the manufacturing sectors at a competitive level.⁹⁹

For example, a key theme in the literature is the displacement of domestic production within global value chains. In the automotive sector, competitive pressures in mid-range vehicles have encouraged firms to offshore assembly and component production – that is, to relocate final stages of vehicle manufacturing to lower-cost foreign locations – contributing to the long-term deindustrialization of France's domestic automotive base and its declining export performance.¹⁰⁰ A similar dynamic appears in firms' strategies on a broader scale: large French firms expand internationally to remain competitive in the market, often prioritizing foreign investment and globalized production structures over national industrial development.¹⁰¹ These works present a model where firms integrate into global markets successfully, but at the cost of national manufacturing capacity.

Candau and Rey, and Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, also highlight that structural constraints on France's overall industrial capacity are traced to the combined effects of eurozone integration, weakened industrial policy, and disruptive technological shifts.¹⁰² The loss of exchange rate autonomy with the euro limits France's ability to protect export manufacturing from international cost pressures, which in turn, reduces the macroeconomic tools needed and available to remain

⁹⁹ Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro"; Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance"; Hancké and Kanitz, "The Role of Industrial Policy in the Transition of the French Automotive Industry"; Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking"; de Warren, "The International Strategies".

¹⁰⁰ Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance," 334-38; Hancké and Kanitz, "The Role of Industrial Policy in the Transition of the French Automotive Industry," 95.

¹⁰¹ de Warren, "The International Strategies," 1.

¹⁰² Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro"; Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking."

competitive.¹⁰³ Institutionally, industrial policy has continually been fragmented. Instead of organized, long-term focused strategies, France relies on broad horizontal measures that favour short-term financial profit¹⁰⁴. By focusing on short-term gains, firms are exposed to constant global competition which limits France's implementation of effective frameworks to counter overall structural decline.

Simultaneously, the industrial decline is uneven across other sections. Candau and Rey show that even though France's trade balance has deteriorated since the 1990s, a handful of sectors such as luxury goods and aerospace continue to generate trade surpluses¹⁰⁵. Aerospace, specifically, has remained a solid and growing positive trade balance despite economic crises, which suggest that it depends on highly specialized capabilities instead of broad industrial strength¹⁰⁶. This point reinforces the broader literature's idea in which France's industrial base is not declining all around but is becoming narrow as competitiveness is concentrated in few high-value sectors. In addition to the aerospace industry, Candau and Rey argue that the competitiveness is linked to European integration¹⁰⁷. For this reason, France participates in cross-national production systems in Airbus where technological capabilities and export performance depend on cohesiveness across European Union (EU) partners. This dependence on coordinated structures illustrates how France's industrial strengths operate within EU-level production networks where supranational coordination increasingly shapes competitiveness (a pattern common across high-tech sectors).

¹⁰³ Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro," 350.

¹⁰⁴ Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking," 50.

¹⁰⁵ Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro," 345.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 348–49.

The shift toward electrification in the automobile sector further reveals weaknesses in French industrial competitiveness. Electrification reorganizes the value chain around batteries, power electronics, and software components (which are dominated by countries with concrete technological advantages), while France comes in with relatively weak domestic capability.¹⁰⁸ Scholars, such as Chiappini; Hancké and Kanitz; and Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, note that this technological reconfiguration removes some domestic interests that resisted reform historically, but it also reinforces France's reliance on foreign suppliers for the technology.¹⁰⁹ Simply, the shift to electric vehicles creates a paradox: France's government gains room to rethink industrial strategies as old ones weaken, but they lose autonomy because rising value chains are now controlled outside the country.¹¹⁰

Together, these scholarly works frame France's manufacturing decline as the outcome of globalization, institutional rigidity, and weakened state intervention, not just lower competitiveness. Although, the current literature does not account for why France elevates luxury as an alternative for a strategic export sector, especially in the midst of industrial erosion. Furthermore, the literature does not examine what fills the economic void created by industrial decline, or how luxury products function as national comparative advantage within the broader political economy.¹¹¹ Therefore, the following step is to move beyond the literature review and examine

¹⁰⁸ Hancké and Kanitz, "The Role of Industrial Policy in the Transition of the French Automotive Industry," 95, 103; Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance," 331, 334.

¹⁰⁹ Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance"; Hancké and Kanitz, "The Role of Industrial Policy in the Transition of the French Automotive Industry"; Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking."

¹¹⁰ Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro"; de Warren, "The International Strategies."

¹¹¹ Candau and Rey, "The Effect of the Euro"; Chiappini, "Offshoring and Export Performance"; Hancké and Kanitz, "The Role of Industrial Policy in the Transition of the French Automotive Industry"; Klebaner and Voy-Gillis, "The Political Economy of French Industrial Policymaking"; de Warren, "The International Strategies."

whether France's luxury prominence is empirically significant within its export structure, whether it reflects state strategy or primarily firm-level strength, and whether this pattern appears unusual in comparison with similar economies such as Italy.

3. Empirical Context: Luxury, Manufacturing, and the Question of Strategy

The literature reviewed above suggests that luxury occupies an important place in France's export profile, but it does not clearly establish how significant that place is relative to the broader export economy, nor whether luxury's prominence should be attributed primarily to state strategy, firm-level strategy, or a combination of both. To address these gaps, this section examines three issues. First, it considers the relative weight of luxury products within France's export structure. Second, the international strength of French luxury is further analyzed to determine if that strength reflects direct state support or is better understood as the outcome of firm-led strategies rooted in reputation, branding, and historical prestige. Third, this section places France in comparative perspective by using Italy as a brief comparative study, a country that also combines strong manufacturing with globally competitive premium sectors. Together, these empirical observations help clarify whether France's luxury prominence reflects a particular national strategy or a broader pattern within advanced European political economies.

3.1. The Relative Significance of Luxury in France's Export Structure

Any claim that France meaningfully relies on luxury exports must first be grounded in the broader composition of its export economy. Although France is strongly associated with luxury in global markets, this reputation does not by itself demonstrate how large or economically central luxury-related sectors are relative to

manufacturing exports more broadly. Examining the relative significance of luxury within France's export structure therefore helps distinguish between symbolic prominence and measurable economic weight.

At the sectoral level, French premium exports are not merely symbolically prominent but also economically measurable. Evidence from the champagne industry provides one useful historical illustration: France exported €1.87 billion of champagne to 176 countries in 2005, demonstrating the broad international reach of at least one major French high-end export sector.¹¹² Champagne is also an analytically useful case because it functions as both a single appellation and a trade classification, with relatively stable quality characteristics compared to more subdivided French wine regions such as Bordeaux and Burgundy.¹¹³ Firm-level evidence from the same sector further shows that higher quality increases prices, the probability of export-market entry, and export values.¹¹⁴ In this sense, premium French exports derive part of their strength from observable trade advantages rather than from reputation alone. As discussed in the literature review sub-section titled *Competitiveness and Global Value Chains: Luxury as High-End Export Strategy*, similar dynamics also appear in Cognac. Emlinger and Lamani's findings show that Cognac's quality grades are defined according to the age of the youngest eau-de-vie (a category of brandy that is unaged) used in the blend and correspond to different perceived qualities on export markets.¹¹⁵ Their analysis further highlights that distance increases the share of higher-quality Cognac exports¹¹⁶,

¹¹² Matthieu Crozet, Keith Head, and Thierry Mayer, "Quality Sorting and Trade: Firm-Level Evidence for French Wine," *The Review of Economic Studies* 79, no. 2 (April 2012): 619

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 616–617.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 622.

¹¹⁵ Emlinger and Lamani, "International Trade, Quality Sorting and Trade Costs," 589.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 590, 592.

suggesting that premium differentiation structures the international performance of French spirits in ways similar to champagne and other high-end goods.

This broader pattern is not limited to champagne alone. Research based on world trade-flow data finds that high-quality French goods are relatively less sensitive to distance and more sensitive to the income level of destination countries, suggesting that premium French products benefit from wider geographic reach and stronger demand in wealthier markets.¹¹⁷ The economic significance of French premium sectors also extends beyond wines and spirits. Citing a 2016 report from the Institut Français de la Mode (IFM), Frans and Aryani report that France's fashion sector generated €150 billion in annual sales, €37.5 billion in value added to French GDP, and contributed 670,000 jobs, suggesting that fashion, too, forms part of the broader cluster of high-value sectors associated with French luxury.¹¹⁸ The same discussion also notes that, in 2016, this sector generated more sales than the country's aerospace and automobile industries, reinforcing the extent to which premium sectors occupy a prominent place within the broader French economy.¹¹⁹ Additionally, the fashion industry contributed €21.2 billion in indirect value added and 277,000 jobs in other sectors such as real estate, legal services, architecture, transportation, and the chemical industry.¹²⁰ In 2022, this overall high-end sector had a turnover (i.e., the total amount of sales made over a given period) of €154 billion and contributed 615,000 direct and indirect jobs ranging from fashion design to digital marketing.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Bouët et al., "What Determines Exports of Luxury Products," 40.

¹¹⁸ Riris Parada Elisa Frans and Maria Indira Aryani, "The Influences of Fashion as a Soft Power Towards France's Economic Growth," *WIMAYA* 1, no. 02 (2023): 36–37

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²¹ Atout France, "France – the Undisputed Benchmark for Fashion, Luxury Goods, Perfume and Cosmetics," (January 23, 2025).

Taken together, these examples suggest that luxury-related exports occupy a meaningful, but not all-encompassing, place within France's broader export economy. Their importance lies not only in aggregate value, but also in their ability to command price premiums, access distant markets, and reinforce France's reputation for high-end production. Luxury, therefore, appears less as a replacement for manufacturing than as a concentrated area of competitive strength within a more diversified export structure. In this sense, the significance of luxury lies in the combination of economic value and symbolic visibility that makes it disproportionately prominent in how France is represented in global markets.

3.2. **State Support or Firm-Led Success?**

The international prominence of French luxury should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of a unified state-led export strategy. A central question is whether this prominence reflects direct state support, firm-level strategy, or the longer historical advantages of French prestige and reputation. Distinguishing among these possibilities is important because what appears to be a national economic strategy may instead reflect the organizational strength of firms, the symbolic value attached to French origin, and historically accumulated cultural capital. This subsection, therefore, evaluates the relative roles of the state and firms in shaping the global position of French luxury.

On one hand, French luxury does benefit from selective forms of public support and institutional reinforcement. Recent official material highlights several examples, including the Living Heritage Company label created by the French State to recognize firms with exceptional artisanal savoir-faire (i.e., specialized craft "know-how"), state support for apprenticeships in traditional luxury crafts,

and the Comité Stratégique de Filière Mode & Luxe (“The Strategic Committee for the Fashion and Luxury Industry”), a government-piloted body designed to maintain the competitiveness of the fashion and luxury goods sector.¹²² More broadly, these initiatives show that the state contributes to the preservation of artisanal skills, the training of new workers, and the coordination of sectoral strategy in the face of international competition. This official framing also appears in public rhetoric: in 2022, President Emmanuel Macron described fashion as France’s leading export sector and emphasized the economic importance of luxury crafts and related employment.¹²³ In this sense, French luxury is supported not through a single centralized export plan, but through a selective institutional framework that helps preserve reputation, transmission of skills, and global competitiveness.

On the other hand, much of French luxury’s global strength appears to stem from firm-level organization and strategy rather than from direct state planning alone. For example, the Fondation Chanel and LVMH Métiers d’Arts (a specialized division within the LVMH Group) both support projects to preserve luxury arts and crafts and to ensure the passing down of skills and expertise.¹²⁴ As noted in the previous subsection, Crozet, Head, and Mayer show that higher quality goods are associated with stronger export performance.¹²⁵ To show this particular link, Deloitte’s Global Powers of Luxury Goods 2018 report (which ranks companies based on luxury goods sales) highlighted that top luxury brands such as LVMH,

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Mimosa Spencer, “Macron touts French fashion industry as economic motor ahead of election,” *Reuters*, (January 24, 2022).

¹²⁴ Atout France, “France – the Undisputed Benchmark for Fashion, Luxury Goods, Perfume and Cosmetics,” (January 23, 2025).

¹²⁵ Matthieu Crozet, Keith Head, and Thierry Mayer, “Quality Sorting and Trade: Firm-Level Evidence for French Wine,” *The Review of Economic Studies* 79, no. 2 (April 2012): 622.

L'Oréal, Kering, and Hermès accounted for one-quarter of the total sales of the fashion industry, with LVMH ranking first in revenue.¹²⁶ This contribution highlights these luxury houses' influence through control over distribution, branding, and the commercialization of their reputation. Additionally, these results indicate that France's global luxury position depends not only on government support, but also on the capacity of firms to transform historical prestige into durable commercial performance.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that the global prominence of French luxury is best understood not as the product of a singular, coherent state-led export strategy, but as the result of selective state reinforcement layered onto firm-level competitiveness and historically accumulated prestige. The state helps sustain the institutional, educational, and cultural conditions under which luxury can flourish, while firms remain central actors in transforming those advantages into global market power. French luxury, therefore, reflects an interaction between public support and private strategy rather than a straightforward state decision to privilege luxury over manufacturing.

3.3. **France and Italy: A Comparative Perspective**

To evaluate the relative importance of luxury within national export structures, this subsection compares key indicators across France and Italy, including sectoral export composition and the weight of high-end industries relative to manufacturing. This comparison highlights differences in the relative weight of luxury-related sectors and manufacturing within each country's export structure. Rather than treating luxury as an isolated category, this approach allows

¹²⁶ Frans and Aryani, "The Influences of Fashion as a Soft Power Towards France's Economic Growth," 36.

for a more structured assessment of economic significance relative to other sectors, helping to distinguish between symbolic prominence and measurable export weight.

Sector/Indicator	France (2023)	Italy (2023)
Total exports (US\$ billions)	640.2 billion	677.1 billion
Manufacturing share of exports (%)	80.41%	76.21%
Champagne and sparkling wine exports (US\$ billions)	5.0 billion	2.4 billion
Textiles and clothing exports (US\$ billions)	21.2 billion	40.8 billion
Perfumery and cosmetics exports (US\$ millions)	498.8 million	219.4 million
Trade balance (US\$ billions, exports – imports)	–136.9 billion (deficit)	37.2 billion (surplus)

Table 1. France and Italy: Comparative Export Indicators (2023)

Source: World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), World Bank

The comparison suggests that France’s luxury prominence is concentrated rather than universal. France clearly leads in champagne and sparkling wine exports and retains a high manufacturing share of exports; however, Italy surpasses

France in total exports, textiles and clothing exports, and overall trade balance. These patterns imply that France's reputation as a luxury power is real, but sector-specific, and should not be interpreted as evidence of uniform export dominance. Italy's stronger overall trade position shows that a country can remain highly competitive across broader export categories while also sustaining strong premium industries. The comparative evidence, therefore, supports a more nuanced conclusion: French luxury goods' strength reflects particular areas of high-value specialization and symbolic visibility, not a simple national superiority across the entire export economy.

4. Conclusion

This paper has argued that France's luxury prominence is best understood as the product of historical cultural capital, firm-level strategy, and selective state support rather than a singular, coherent state-led export strategy. The literature review showed why this question has remained unresolved. Historical scholarship explains how luxury emerged in France as a moral, political, and social concern before becoming associated with prestige and national identity. Empirical trade scholarship demonstrates how French premium sectors compete internationally through quality differentiation, reputation, branding, and control over high-value nodes in global value chains. Research on industrial decline, by contrast, shows how structural pressures such as offshoring, fragmented industrial policy, and technological change weakened important parts of France's manufacturing base. Yet these bodies of scholarship rarely speak directly to one another, leaving the broader political significance of luxury within France's export structure insufficiently explained.

The empirical section helped clarify this gap. First, it showed that luxury-related sectors occupy a meaningful but not all-encompassing place within France's broader export economy. Their importance lies not only in aggregate value, but also in their ability to command price premiums, access distant markets, and reinforce France's reputation for high-end production. Second, the paper showed that French luxury benefits from selective forms of public support, including heritage labels, apprenticeship support, and state-backed sectoral coordination, while much of its global strength still depends on firm-level organization, branding, and the commercialization of historical prestige. Third, the comparison with Italy demonstrated that France's luxury prominence is concentrated rather than universal. France leads in champagne and sparkling wine exports and retains a high manufacturing share of exports, but Italy surpasses France in total exports, textiles and clothing exports, and overall trade balance. France's global image as a luxury power is therefore real, but sector-specific, and should not be mistaken for uniform superiority across the broader export economy.

Taken together, these findings suggest that French luxury functions less as a replacement for manufacturing than as a concentrated area of competitive strength within a more diversified and uneven export structure. Its prominence reflects not a simple state decision to privilege luxury over industry, but an interaction between long-standing reputational assets, selective institutional reinforcement, and firm-level capabilities. In this sense, luxury remains central to how France is represented in global markets, even as the broader political economy of French production continues to be shaped by industrial fragmentation and uneven competitiveness. Future research should also examine the social and political costs embedded within luxury's success. Further work could explore how modern luxury

industries intersect with class reproduction, exclusion, labour relations, and the colonial histories that underpin many forms of wealth, prestige, and cultural value. Expanding the analysis in this direction would help situate French luxury not only as an export strategy, but also as a site of inequality and historical power.

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Between East and West:

The Neo-Nationalism of an Enduringly Nationalist Japan

By Grace Mercer

Abstract

Japan has a longstanding history of nationalism, influenced by their geo-political position between the global East and West. This paper explores the dual dynamics that have impacted the development of Japanese nationalism, as well as the rise in Japanese neo-nationalism that can be seen today. To contextualize this discussion, this paper first examines the phenomenon of nationalism and its linkage to right-wing political ideology from a Western lens. Following this, an overview of the Eastern origins of Japanese nationalism is provided. In reflection of the common rhetoric deployed by Japanese neo-nationalists, this paper argues that ignoring the significance of Japan's relation to neighbouring Eastern states throughout history is a grave error. By contextualizing Japanese nationalism with respect to the overlapping impact of Eastern and Western forces, this paper offers a more robust examination of how nationalism in Japan has been constructed over time.

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With the changing tides of global relations, technological innovations, and intercultural communications, nationalism has evolved into a new, fragmented form: neo-nationalism.¹²⁷ Neo-nationalism is a global phenomenon, plaguing democracies with the threat of returning to a world that normalizes discriminatory regimes.¹²⁸ As will be later discussed, neo-nationalists select aspects of classical nationalism to uphold while ignoring others, creating a stream of identity politics that is highly discriminatory and most often associated with the right-wing of the political spectrum.¹²⁹ Thus, the rise in neo-nationalist sentiments proves extremely troubling for coexisting national identities.¹³⁰ Classical theories of nationalism, such as Ernest Gellner's definition that is utilized in this work, are written from a Western-centric worldview.¹³¹ Though this is not an automatic flaw, one must take care to understand the unique contexts within which non-Western states also developed nationalism.¹³² To theorize nationalism as a Western-born, Western-caused concept in totality would obscure the ways in which non-Western nations have conceptualized their own state national identities, thereby obscuring fuller understandings of nationalism around the world.¹³³

The case of Japan proves interesting for this topic, as the nation-state's continued position between the Global East and West differs when compared to the positions of power that Europe and the United States enjoy.¹³⁴ This paper will first discuss its key concepts of nationalism, neo-nationalism, and right-wing populism

¹²⁷1. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, "Making neo-nationalist subject in Japan," 16.

¹²⁸2. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 16.

¹²⁹3. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 16-19.

¹³⁰4. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 24.

¹³¹5. Ichijo, "Kokugaku and the emergence of nationalism in Japan," 267; Kawai, "Neoliberalism, Nationalism, and Intercultural Communication," 18; O'Leary, "On the Nature of Nationalism," 206.

¹³²6. Ichijo, 267; Kawai, 18.

¹³³7. Ichijo, 265.

¹³⁴8. Ichijo, 270; Kawai, 18.

as it arose in the West. From there, the history of Japanese nationalism will be analyzed using these concepts in reference, moving through mid-war and post-war examples of nationalist study and policy. An examination of the rise of right-wing politics in contemporary Japan will conclude this historical analysis, providing a twenty-first century update on the state of neo-nationalism in the country. In doing so, this paper will look at how nationalism has been intrinsic to the Japanese identity before and throughout Western interference, and that the current surge in right-wing neo-nationalist sentiments in Japan can be understood in terms of the country's historical relations with the East and West, together.

Nationalism, Neo-Nationalism, and Populism in the West

An understanding of classical nationalism is needed to later contextualize the concept of neo-nationalism. As Ernest Gellner explained, nationalism holds at its core the belief that a state's political unit and national majority should operate as one.¹³⁵ The national majority of said state is defined by collective customs, language, and worldview, with the principal expectation being that the state's polity will be reflective of these elements.¹³⁶ Nationalism at its very core is not inherently a harmful ideology according to Gellner, who noted how the principle of nationalism could be used to argue for preserving cultural diversity by making a clear distinction between members and non-members.¹³⁷ However, Gellner acknowledged the central principle of a singular unified polity and nation has been used to exclude "foreigners" in the name of cultural homogeneity.¹³⁸

¹³⁵9. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

¹³⁶10. Gellner, 40-42.

¹³⁷11. Gellner, 1-2.

¹³⁸12. Gellner, 1.

Nationalism as an ideology came into play, according to Gellner, as states across the globe made the shift from feudal to industrial societies.¹³⁹ Beginning in eighteenth century Europe, this period of nationalism's development was associated with the rapid creation of new cultural, geographical, and economic boundaries, best understood using the label of globalization.¹⁴⁰ The relatively stable borders that states had once used to define themselves were replaced as overseas migration and international trade rapidly increased.¹⁴¹ This revolution urged states and their populations to reinforce a sense of unity within themselves, looking to define a central identity.¹⁴² Though Gellner discussed nationalism's development from a Western-centric perspective, he did not completely ignore the colonization of many non-Western states by European powers. European conquest, Gellner noted, "was the fruit of economic and technological superiority" enacted through industry and trade between the European states and the non-Western nations.¹⁴³ Gellner has earned a fair amount of criticism for diminishing the extents to which militarization played a part in European colonization and by proximity, contributed to nationalism.¹⁴⁴ However, Gellner's basic definition of nationalism and its relation to globalization are sufficient for the purposes of this paper.

Globalization and its values stemmed from liberalism, an ideology built upon economic values of deregulation and market competition, alongside cultural sentiments of individualism and freedom from state support or intervention.¹⁴⁵ The worldview that liberalism informed was one that oriented failure at the individual level, mystifying the systemic economic woes that arose from mass deregulation as

¹³⁹13. Gellner, 40.

¹⁴⁰14. Gellner, 42.

¹⁴¹15. Gellner, 42.

¹⁴²16. Gellner, 40.

¹⁴³17. Gellner, 43.

¹⁴⁴18. Conversi, "Should we still read Ernest Gellner?", 380-387.

¹⁴⁵19. Joppke, "Populism and Cultural Majority Rights," 249-250; Kawai, 17-19.

the fault of the citizen and the citizen alone.¹⁴⁶ In this way, liberalism informed very polarizing outlooks on financial inferiority.¹⁴⁷ While liberalism's key goal was to marketize the economy, its successor differs. Neoliberalism is unique in its extremism, looking to marketize all sectors of life, including the individual.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the polarization that liberalism validated has been diffused into other non-economic aspects of living through neoliberalism, fostering notions of failure in state citizens.¹⁴⁹ As globalization has evolved and broadened since the time of Gellner's writing, neoliberalism and its influence upon expressions of extremist ideologies has become paramount.

Built upon the groundworks of classical nationalism and neoliberalism is neo-nationalism. Neo-nationalism is uniquely fragmented, subjective, and volatile, selecting values of classical nationalism and taking them to the extreme.¹⁵⁰ In particular, neo-nationalists will revisit the classical nationalist principle of protecting the collective and excluding the outsiders as a justification for historical and ongoing forms of discrimination.¹⁵¹ It is because of this discriminatory selectivity that neo-nationalism has earned its association with right-wing exclusionary politics, including but not limited to neo-conservatism, cyber-nationalism, and most notably, right-wing populism.¹⁵²

Christian Joppke's text, "Populism and Cultural Majority Rights: An Uneasy Relationship," provides an analysis of Western populism which is useful

¹⁴⁶20. Joppke, 249-250; Kawai, 17-19.

¹⁴⁷21. Kawai, 19.

¹⁴⁸22. Joppke, 249-250; Kawai, 19.

¹⁴⁹23. Kawai, 19.

¹⁵⁰24. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 16.

¹⁵¹25. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 16-19.

¹⁵²26. Joppke, 253-255; Kawai, 20; Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 20.

for understanding the discriminatory ideology of neo-nationalism. Populists believe their national populations to be divided into the “pure people” and the elite class, better understood as the corrupt politicians, business owners, and lawmakers who only have their own corrupt agendas in mind.¹⁵³ The dream for populists is for their state’s politics to represent the pure people’s values.¹⁵⁴ This is reminiscent of the core principle of classical nationalism, showing the linkage between the two ideologies. Joppke further broke down populism into left-wing and right-wing streams.¹⁵⁵ Left-wing populism differentiates solely between the pure people and the elite class, whereas right-wing populism adds a third dimension: the immigrant minority.¹⁵⁶ The troubles that the majority population of neoliberal states face as a result of the rescinding of state welfare and protections are blamed on both the elite politicians, for their failure to act in the people’s favour, and on the immigrant minority for seemingly taking away the little available supports that the pure people have.¹⁵⁷ The frustrations of right-wing populists can land upon the elite, the immigrants, or both, reflecting the volatility of neo-nationalist sentiments.

Joppke highlighted both the economic strains and cultural uncertainties consistent with neoliberal Western nations as being the dual motivations behind the uptake of right-wing extremism in the pure peoples of Europe and the United States.¹⁵⁸ In Joppke’s example, working-class White American citizens may compare their economic hardships to minority citizens, creating a feeling of relative inferiority because they perceive their taxes as being used to fund welfare

¹⁵³27. Joppke, 248.

¹⁵⁴28. Joppke, 248.

¹⁵⁵29. Joppke, 248-255.

¹⁵⁶30. Joppke, 248-255.

¹⁵⁷31. Joppke, 255-258.

¹⁵⁸32. Joppke, 255-260.

for minority citizens, who are predominantly members of cultural minorities due to systemic discrimination.¹⁵⁹ The same White American citizens may then see tax-funded affirmative action initiatives that exclude members of the majority culture, themselves, as the state favouring cultural minority groups.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the anti-minority, anti-immigrant sentiment that right-wing Western populists carry revolve around frustrations toward perceived self-inadequacy that are then used to justify discrimination.

Gellner's definition of the origins of nationalism and Joppke's overview of Western populism both provide important context for the development of neo-nationalism and right-wing extremism in the modern day. While both Gellner and Joppke's analyses are centred on the West, right-winged political parties and anti-immigrant public rhetoric have risen in non-Western nations as well, such as Japan. In the following section, this paper will review a history of the development of Japanese nationalism in the mid and post-war age through the works of Atsuko Ichijo, Yuko Kawai, and Marie Thorsten, respectively.

Mid-War and Post-War Japanese Nationalism

In her paper "Kokugaku and an alternative account of the emergence of nationalism in Japan," Atsuko Ichijo discussed the concept of *Kokugaku* as one of the first identifiable sources of nationalism in Japanese academia, dating back to the eighteenth century.¹⁶¹ *Kokugaku*, whose kanji characters directly translate to the "study of the nation-state," was an ideology that idealized aggressively

¹⁵⁹33. Joppke, 258.

¹⁶⁰34. Joppke, 258.

¹⁶¹35. Ichijo, 270-272.

imperialistic and militaristic values.¹⁶² In fact, the slogan “revere the emperor, expel the barbarian” the arose amidst wartime Japan as a form of rallying the nation has been traced back to the *Kokugaku* movement.¹⁶³ The *Kokugaku*-bend of nationalism viewed feudal Japan as a perfect, harmonious nation, with foreign contract seen as the contamination preventing Japan from achieving total order.¹⁶⁴ An example of this emphasis on purification is the Kokugaku school’s focus on solidifying the one true Japanese identity through studying texts that were published in the feudal period.¹⁶⁵ Said texts were written using Chinese kanji characters due to there being no existing Japanese writing system at the time, with Kokugaku scholars viewing this as an impurity upon what would become the Japanese kanji system, a key foundation in the formation of their national identity.¹⁶⁶

As Ichijo further discussed in a reflection of well-known *Kokugaku* ideologists, this supposed in-depth recovery of the feudal Japanese cultural values that were hidden within the Chinese kanji characters led the scholars to place blame upon China for various issues, like peasant revolts and high taxation, that plagued Japanese society.¹⁶⁷ This antagonism towards China for being a perceived impurity upon Japan reflects the growing nationalist sentiments in the state as the transition from feudal to industrial society took place.¹⁶⁸ It was at this time that Japan eventually made contact with the West through trade with the Dutch East Indian Company, though the majority of non-Japanese contact was and continues to be

¹⁶²36. Ichijo, 270-271.

¹⁶³37. Ichijo, 271.

¹⁶⁴38. Ichijo, 272.

¹⁶⁵39. Ichijo, 271-272.

¹⁶⁶40. Ichijo, 273.

¹⁶⁷41. Ichijo, 275.

¹⁶⁸42. Ichijo, 275.

with neighbouring Eastern nations.¹⁶⁹ The West had a minor role in the development of classical nationalism at this time in Japan's history, yet nationalism still grew. In the eyes of Kokugaku nationalists, a superior Japan was one that had purified itself of its foreign defects.

Moving into the twentieth century, the imperial Japanese government engaged in full-force assimilation and exclusion of non-Japanese peoples, both internal and external to the nation's borders.¹⁷⁰ The disassociation of the Japanese identity from outer neighbours such as China and Korea occurred alongside the assimilation of ethnic minorities within Japan, namely the Indigenous Ainu peoples from the island now known as Hokkaido, the forcibly annexed Okinawan peoples, and the population of ethnic Korean permanent residents, better known as *Zainichi* Koreans.¹⁷¹ Japan's focus on dominating the rest of Asia characterized much of the nation's wartime identity.¹⁷² Post-war, however, Japan's focus shifted to the West.

As Yuko Kawai noted in her analysis of popular discourse regarding Japanese nationalism, "Japan's superiority over Asia is supported by having the West as its point of reference and arguing that Japan has progressed (i.e., westernized) more than Asia."¹⁷³ The classical Japanese nationalism that Ichijo identified under the name of *Kokugaku* had evolved into *nihonjinron*, translating to "the theory of the Japanese peoples."¹⁷⁴ *Nihonjinron* can thus be understood as the post-war identity conception of what it meant to be Japanese.¹⁷⁵ While Kokugaku

¹⁶⁹43. Ichijo, 273.

¹⁷⁰44. Kawai, 20-21.

¹⁷¹45. Kawai, 20-21; Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 18.

¹⁷²46. Kawai, 21.

¹⁷³47. Kawai, 21.

¹⁷⁴48. Kawai, 21-22.

¹⁷⁵49. Kawai, 22.

scholars held feudal Japan as the ideal form of the nation, *nihonjinron* deemed a Japan that resembled Western individualism as the new ideal.¹⁷⁶ The objectively foreign nature of the West was seen as a critical source of learning for the betterment of Japan, with the study of *nihonjinron* utilizing comparisons between the literature, customs, and societies of Japan and the West to inform the state's nationalism.¹⁷⁷ The outspoken, aggressively antagonistic nationalism of post-war Japan had entered the backstage for the time being.

Marie Thorsten examined how 1960s Japan, wounded by war-time loss, distanced itself from overt nationalism.¹⁷⁸ In a period of grand economic instability and shame from the nation's historic defeat, the broader Japanese population viewed war-time nationalism with disdain.¹⁷⁹ To prevent the collective populus from fragmenting any further, the Japanese government began to repackage nationalism through state-centred economism.¹⁸⁰ Citizens were encouraged to devote themselves to work, thereby supporting themselves, the economy, and the nation as a whole.¹⁸¹ This was not a simple feat, and was accomplished gradually through to the 1990s.¹⁸²

For the average Japanese family, engaging in economism was a means for survival.¹⁸³ The housing market was completely unaffordable, parents were separated from their children due to overtime, and reported deaths from over-work

¹⁷⁶50. Kawai, 22.

¹⁷⁷51. Kawai, 22.

¹⁷⁸52. Thorsten, "Shame to Vengeance," 221.

¹⁷⁹53. Thorsten, 221-222.

¹⁸⁰54. Thorsten, 224.

¹⁸¹55. Thorsten, 224.

¹⁸²56. Thorsten, 231.

¹⁸³57. Thorsten. 225.

skyrocketed.¹⁸⁴ Despite this reality, the Japanese government characterized the population's desperation for stability as a state-wide act of vengeance over losing the war, resulting in the Western misperception of "Japanese people as bound in loyalty and duty around state economic principles, anachronistically shouting 'banzai!' to the high ideals of Japan, Inc."¹⁸⁵ The West's projected identity of the Japanese was at odds with the lived experiences that made up much of the Japanese identity during this era of post-war fragility, representing a fundamental mischaracterization of post-war Japanese nationalism in the eyes of the West.¹⁸⁶ As a result of this, *nihonjinron* came back into public debate, with Japanese academics reanalyzing what Japan's core identity truly is.¹⁸⁷

Modern-Day Japanese Nationalism

In the face of the new millennium, Japan's transition into neo-nationalism reflected the continuation of the cultural purity principal to *Kokugaku*. Kristin Surak's application of Will Kymlicka's multiculturalism framework to contemporary Japanese policy concluded that minority rights within the country are loose if not nonexistent, exemplifying an instantiation of Japan's classical nationalism.¹⁸⁸ Okinawa remains under joint Japanese-American military rule, Zainichi Koreans who were previously stripped of their Japanese citizenship were only granted extended special residency coming into the 1980s, and the Ainu peoples were not formally recognized as an Indigenous minority until 2008.¹⁸⁹ This formal

¹⁸⁴58. Thorsten, 225.

¹⁸⁵59. Thorsten, 236.

¹⁸⁶60. Thorsten, 236.

¹⁸⁷61. Thorsten, 233.

¹⁸⁸62. Surak, "Assessing Kymlicka's Liberal Multiculturalism in Japan," 236.

¹⁸⁹63. Surak, 231-233.

designation, however, has not led to any major reparations by the Japanese government towards the Ainu population, which is rapidly dwindling.¹⁹⁰

Surak highlighted the Immigration Control Act as one of the few examples of multicultural policies that exist within Japanese law.¹⁹¹ Instituted in 1990, the Immigration Control Act granted temporary residence permits with no work restrictions to first, second, and third generation descendants of Japanese emigrants.¹⁹² Surak noted that though the policy was proposed under the guise of allowing Japanese descendants the ability to learn about Japan's culture first-hand, the lack of work restrictions on their visas led to Japanese businesses to look upon the Immigration Control Act as an opportunity to utilize foreign workers.¹⁹³ Particularly, work that involved extensive physical labour that mainland Japanese workers found unappealing was seen as the slots Japanese descendants could fill.¹⁹⁴

As the number of Japanese descendant workers rose moving into the 2000s, the Japanese government briefly promoted "multicultural coexistence" as a way of integrating the descendants with the national majority population, as well as the state's internal minority groups.¹⁹⁵ This promotion involved an unfunded plan to encourage local communities to develop programs to facilitate multicultural coexistence.¹⁹⁶ Surak argued that this plan's unfunded nature and the lack of initiative from the Japanese government in the decades since has resulted in the

¹⁹⁰64. Surak, 231.

¹⁹¹65. Surak, 233.

¹⁹²66. Surak, 233.

¹⁹³67. Surak, 233.

¹⁹⁴68. Surak, 233.

¹⁹⁵69. Surak, 233.

¹⁹⁶70. Surak, 234.

continuation of harmful nationalist understandings of the Japanese identity.¹⁹⁷ Local multicultural programs that were implemented following the state government's promotion largely targeted tolerance promotion and multilingualism, not the idea that the Japanese identity label could extend to individuals that were not fully Japanese.¹⁹⁸ Thus, the issue of the Japanese identity as one of ethnic purity that stems from Kokugaku and feudal-period thinking continues on even after Japan engaged in limited multicultural efforts. The Immigration Control Act and the subsequent national focus on tolerance over inclusion for non-Japanese communities within policy reinforced the nationalist sentiments of antagonism towards those that Japan has always seen as foreign.

Kawai's research presented a second example of multicultural policy in Japan in the form of the Japanese government's advisory report, "The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millenium," published in 2000.¹⁹⁹ The report considered multiple aspects of the West to be used as tools to assist Japanese people in the era of globalization.²⁰⁰ For this paper, two leading considerations will be discussed. The first of these aspects is the report's suggestion that Japanese people not only learn English for global literacy, but for Japan to take on English as an official second language.²⁰¹ The report defends this proposition by positioning English as a tool for Japanese residents to "strengthen Japan's national power, not to enhance mutual understanding among people around

¹⁹⁷71. Surak, 234.

¹⁹⁸72. Surak, 234.

¹⁹⁹73. Kawai, 23.

²⁰⁰74. Kawai, 25.

²⁰¹75. Kawai, 25-26.

the world,” suggesting that aligning Japan more with the West in spoken tongue would be a crucial advancement for Japan in a global context.²⁰²

The advisory also described immigration as an instrument to support the development of Japan in the age of rapid globalization.²⁰³ Non-Japanese individuals are only accepted in this governmental report by what Kawai labelled as “corporate multiculturalism.”²⁰⁴ In other words, foreigners who are welcomed into the state are only those who can contribute to the economy, with no cultural protections.²⁰⁵ Western multicultural countries offer minority individuals who immigrate access to cultural protections in exchange for their labour, as well as opportunities to gain citizenship and become part of the respective country’s identity.²⁰⁶ “The Frontier Within” does not advise Japan to offer any form of reciprocity to foreign workers, once again reflecting the Japan-first sentiment that has remained as the throughline of Japan’s nationalism and now, neo-nationalism.²⁰⁷

Right-Wing Populism in Present-Day Japan

Satofumi Kawamura and Koichi Iwabuchi examined the phenomenon of the *netto uyoku*, or the cyber right-wing, in their analysis of the rise of digital neo-nationalism and populism in Japan.²⁰⁸ The *netto uyoku* are identified as users who comment particularly violent and inflammatory anti-Korea and anti-China sentiments on online forums.²⁰⁹ The cyber right-wingers are also characterized as

²⁰²76. Kawai, 27.

²⁰³77. Kawai, 30.

²⁰⁴78. Kawai, 30.

²⁰⁵79. Kawai, 30.

²⁰⁶80. Surak, 228.

²⁰⁷81. Kawai, 30.

²⁰⁸82. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 17-19.

²⁰⁹83. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 19.

being skeptical of left-wing politicians and in support of politicians who honor the Yasukuni war Shrine, who fall on the right to far-right spectrum of Japanese politics.²¹⁰ The majority of the neo-nationalism enacted by the *netto uyoku* takes place online, though there have been instances of the users taking to in-person activism to demonstrate their neo-nationalist beliefs.²¹¹ One such group is the “Citizen’s League against Special Privilege of Koreans in Japan,” who have organized hate crimes targeting the *Zainichi* Korean community, Okinawans, the Ainu, as well as atomic-bomb survivors and anti-nuclear advocacy groups.²¹² The *netto uyoku*’s selective engagement in classical Japanese nationalist sentiments, particularly of the anti-foreigner ideology, while ignoring the traditional nationalist importance on state unity reflects their alignment with neo-nationalism. Kawamura and Iwabuchi identified the *netto uyoku* as a specific instance of right-wing populism, shown in their blatant divisional worldview of themselves as the pure people, left-wing politicians as the corrupt elite, and non-Japanese foreigners as cause for the dilution of the pure Japanese identity.²¹³ The rise of *netto uyoku* online and offline activities reflects that the period of anti-nationalism of the post-war era has melted away, making room for neo-nationalist extremism to boldly present itself modern-day Japan.

In fact, leading Japanese politicians seem to be shifting further and further to the right-wing of the political spectrum. As journalist Yuki Nikaido highlighted in their report, the leading candidates for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), including the now-prime minister

²¹⁰84. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 19-21.

²¹¹85. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 19.

²¹²86. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 19-20.

²¹³87. Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 19-23.

Sanae Takaichi, advocated for stricter tourism policies, reduced immigration policies for foreign Japanese nationals, and restrictions on residential land ownership by foreigners.²¹⁴ Importantly, none of the candidates broadly discussed policies related to themes of socio-cultural integration and coexistence with non-Japanese residents.²¹⁵ Once again, this reflects an ignorance towards true multicultural coexistence, with the focus of the LDP being on restricting this possibility even further. According to Nikaïdo's piece, the LDP defended their shift to more neoliberal values as being due to how government-supported tourism led to distrust among Japanese voters, with their evidence being their inability to earn majority government in the election this past July.²¹⁶ Thus, the LDP's shift towards right-wing policy over more leftist ideals is a reflection of growing public support for restrictions on Japanese citizenship and coexistence with others.

Further evidence of the rising right-wing in Japan is presented by reporter Justin McCurry, who's article called attention to how the overtly far-right political party, Sanseito, has seen a dramatic increase in voter support following their July 2025 campaign.²¹⁷ Current leader of the so-called "Japanese First" party, Sohei Kamiya, has rallied supporters through vocalizing anti-foreigner statements, anti-Korean slurs against the Zainichi Korean population, and promoting militarism via visits to the Yasukuni war shrine.²¹⁸ The alignment with the right-wing populist sentiments of the *netto uyoku* with Kamiya's platform cannot be ignored. While there has been protest amongst the Japanese public, particularly by human rights advocacy groups, against Kamiya's radically offensive platform, it has done little to

²¹⁴88. Nikaïdo, "LDP hopefuls push foreigner limits," sec. 1-14.

²¹⁵89. Nikaïdo, sec. 25-28.

²¹⁶90. Nikaïdo, sec. 3-4.

²¹⁷91. McCurry, "mini-Trump on the rise," sec. 1-3.

²¹⁸92. McCurry, sec. 11-15.

discourage he and his party.²¹⁹ In fact, the Sanseito party's claimed registered members grew from less than 3,000 to over 90,000 between 2020 and 2025.²²⁰ Through analyses of the LDP platforms and the Sanseito party's values as of the 2025 election, the growth in support for an uncontaminated Japan is clear.

Conclusion

Traces of nationalism exist in Japan's history as far back as the eighteenth century, beginning with the *Kokugaku* school of thought. At the time, the Japanese identity was formed through distinguishing itself from the rest of Asia, particularly China and Korea. Upon entering the post-war era, Japanese nationalism left Asia in the past and brought the country's relationship with the West to the forefront of identity discussion. *Kokugaku* became *nihonjinron* as blatant nationalism turned unpalatable to a public facing immediate economic and cultural insecurity. Today, the rise of the Japanese right is represented through the *netto uyoku*, the LDP, the Sanseito party, and Japanese governmental responses to globalization that reflect Japan's wish to reclaim a national identity by defining it themselves. The history of Japanese nationalism reflects the nation-state's unique position between the East and the West, with the two forces holding fluctuating influence over Japan's nationalist identity over time. Despite the noteworthy non-Western relations that have contributed greatly to the formulation of Japanese nationalism, the nation has still fallen prey to the same troubling fate as various Western democracies in the age of globalization. The future of neo-nationalism in Japan and across the globe is of grave concern, in consideration of the historical damages inflicted upon all those deemed as foreign. What can be understood, however, is that the most authentic aspect of Japan's identity is its commitment to nationalism since its very inception.

²¹⁹93. McCurry, sec. 14-16.

²²⁰94. McCurry, sec. 16.

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From Watchdog to Mouthpiece: *How Populism, Platforms, and Ownership Reshape the Media in India*

By Claire Beatty

Abstract

This paper examines the erosion of press freedom in India and its implications on the media's democratic role. While the press is expected to function as a watchdog by holding the government accountable, informing citizens, and facilitating public debate, this role is increasingly constrained. This paper argues that right-wing populism, the expanding influence of social media platforms, and the growing concentration of media ownership have significantly limited the independence of Indian journalism. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, populist strategies aim to delegitimize journalists and suppress dissent through harassment, legal measures, and creating conditions that compel self-censorship. At the same time, social media has amplified misinformation and polarization, challenging the authority of traditional media outlets. These pressures are compounded by concentrated media ownership, which prioritizes political and economic interests over independent reporting. Together, these developments limit the media's capacity to act as an effective watchdog for democracy. India's case reflects broader global pressures on media institutions, raising concerns about the future of democratic accountability.

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Introduction

India is currently experiencing constraints on press freedom that limit the media's ability to fulfil its ideal democratic role. In a democracy, the media is expected to act as a watchdog by holding the government accountable, informing citizens, and providing a platform for debate through the expression of diverse perspectives.²²¹ While scholars argue that “dissent and democracy ideally go hand in hand,” this relationship is increasingly not a reality in India, undermining the effectiveness of the media in the world's largest democracy.²²² This paper argues that the most significant challenges to the Indian media's democratic responsibility are the rise of right-wing populism, the expanding influence of social media platforms, and the growing concentration of media ownership. Although this analysis is specific to India, these challenges reflect broader pressures experienced by media institutions globally.

Recently, India's media landscape has undergone significant structural and ideological shifts in the production, distribution, and consumption of news content. These transformations include changes in political ideologies, technological advancements, and the liberalization of the media industry.²²³ At the same time, Hindu nationalist discourses dominate media outlets, promoting narratives that India is strengthened through one land, religion, and language.²²⁴ As certain

²²¹ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. “Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India.” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²²² Joseph, Anjali Merin. 2024. “The Times of Jeopardising Free Speech.” *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (8): 1737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241282179>.

²²³ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. “Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape.” *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²²⁴ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. “Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India.” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

narratives become privileged, the space for acceptable dissent and debate in the Indian media has narrowed. Additionally, the expansion of social media across India has intensified the spread of misinformation, undermining the media's ability to provide accurate information. Alongside this, media independence is further undermined in India by political and corporate elites who incentivize content that aligns with their interests. Together, these developments significantly constrain the Indian media's ability to fulfil its democratic role.

The Rise of Right-Wing Populism

Right-wing populism in India challenges the media's ideal democratic role by reinforcing the dominance of Hindu nationalist ideologies. This dynamic is further shaped by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intolerance of dissent towards the government, which narrows the space for critical journalism. Populism is a political strategy in which elites seek power by catering to majoritarian concerns while creating division within the nation.²²⁵ Bhat further identifies relevant strains of populism in India, including right-wing populism, which seeks to deepen the national divide between "the people" and non-Hindus, as well as anti-media populism spread by Hindu nationalists, which relies on claims of corruption to foster distrust of the media.²²⁶ As these strains of populism are intertwined throughout India, the media struggles to find spaces where a free and pluralist press can thrive. When the ability to express dissent and a diversity of opinions without repercussions is limited, a threat to India's democratic media is presented.²²⁷ The

²²⁵ Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

²²⁶ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²²⁷ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

main ways in which the Indian government utilizes right-wing populist strategies to regulate the media for its advantage are by delegitimizing journalists, punishing dissenters, and promoting self-censorship.

Right-wing actors and supporters actively attempt to delegitimize journalists to maintain control over the Indian press. By scrutinizing the mainstream news for any error in reporting, Modi and his supporters are able to justify their assertions that journalists are unreliable and unprofessional sources.²²⁸ Right-wing actors position themselves in opposition to India's mainstream media outlets, or what they allege to be the dominant, elite, corrupt, and left-wing media.²²⁹ As distrust in the mainstream media furthers, right-wing actors have encouraged both their supporters and the public towards platforms where Hindu-nationalist discourses are dominant.²³⁰ This shows that the erosion of trust in mainstream Indian media challenges journalists' ability to realize their democratic role of educating the public on relevant issues through presenting a diversity of perspectives.²³¹ Controlling narratives by suppressing journalistic dissent is central to Modi's populist strategy, allowing himself and his party to remain shielded from any legitimate criticism.²³²

²²⁸ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²²⁹ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²³⁰ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²³¹ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²³² Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

Modi's government engages in punishing dissenters that are perceived to criticize him or any Hindu nationalist ideologies. Journalists frequently face harassment and occasionally violence as the police, legal regulations, and the judiciary are utilized by the Indian government with the intention of suppressing dissenting views.²³³ Ultimately, these measures create the deception that a tightening control on the press is necessary for national laws and security to be maintained.²³⁴ Furthermore, Modi and his government reward right-wing supporters who engage in violence against journalists by allowing them to avoid consequences as well as offering them what Bhat calls, "a seat at the table," or influential positions in government decision making.^{235, 236} Without dissent, the Indian government is able to eliminate the media's mechanisms of answerability and transparency that function to ensure accountability.²³⁷ Consequently, the media's democratic role in providing citizens with comprehensive content is undermined by the suppression of dissent.²³⁸

As a result of Modi's attempts to discredit and punish dissenters, many media sources and journalists have responded with self-censorship. Prabhu explains that mainstream media journalists are likely to experience intimidation

²³³ Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

²³⁴ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²³⁵ Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

²³⁶ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²³⁷ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²³⁸ Joseph, Anjali Merin. 2024. "The Times of Jeopardising Free Speech." *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (8): 1737–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241282179>.

and harassment from publishing critical views of Modi's government or Hindu-nationalist ideals.²³⁹ As journalists are becoming increasingly concerned about their personal safety due to fear of both governmental consequences and "mob persecution," many resort to self-censorship.^{240, 241} Consequently, mainstream news sources across India have not only refrained from critiquing Modi's government, but also shifted towards advocacy for Hindu-nationalist ideologies.²⁴² This growing trend of self-censorship in India, enabled by a declining presence of dissent, encourages a further polarization of perspectives towards the media's pertinence. Without protections surrounding criticism, self-censorship challenges the media's role of ensuring rigorous journalism across India's democracy.²⁴³

Modi's right-wing populist strategy aims to not only garner support but create loyal devotion to the Hindu nationalist cause. To ensure this, the media is expected to conform with Modi's right-wing government.²⁴⁴ Without debate present in mainstream outlets, the media becomes absorbed into Modi's populist plans.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ Prabhu, Nagesh. 2020. "Managing the Unmanageable: Media and Modi." In *Middle Class, Media and Modi: The Making of a New Electoral Politics*, 249–93. Mathura Road, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353885847.n7>.

²⁴⁰ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁴¹ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁴² Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁴³ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁴⁴ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁴⁵ Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

Ultimately, the suppression of free press provides Modi with outlets used for “delivering selective propaganda.”²⁴⁶ This propaganda is designed to perpetuate the division between Modi’s supporters and anyone else, by portraying dissenting voices as a threat to national unity. Without a free press, the media loses the capacity to keep the government accountable, fundamentally challenging democracy in India.²⁴⁷

Expanding Influence of Social Media Platforms

Increasing social media usage in India challenges the media’s ideal role in democracy as the spread and increasing influence of misinformation undermines possibilities for truthful journalism. Nation-wide, much of India’s public uses social media to engage with politics and learn about election campaigns, party policies, and governmental actions.²⁴⁸ In turn, many prominent political leaders leverage social media to engage with citizens, and specifically voters, to share their ideologies and shape public perceptions.²⁴⁹ As India ranks the second largest country in terms of global internet users, social media has become an increasingly influential instrument of mass communication.²⁵⁰ Ultimately, social media’s broad reach provides an accessible space for citizens to demonstrate political

²⁴⁶ Joseph, Anjali Merin. 2024. “The Times of Jeopardising Free Speech.” *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (8): 1745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241282179>.

²⁴⁷ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. “Silenced Voices: Unravelling India’s Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression.” *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁴⁸ Raj, Shipra. 2023. “Digital Media and Women’s Political Participation in India.” *Media Watch*, New Delhi, 14 (3): 366–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911231185975>.

²⁴⁹ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. “Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists’ Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda.” *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁵⁰ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. “Coping with Change in India’s Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape.” *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

participation.²⁵¹ Despite this democratic benefit, many social media platforms have enabled hate speech and misinformation that weakens the Indian media's ability to reliably inform citizens.²⁵²

The rising use of social media platforms in India has amplified the spread of misinformation and propaganda, ultimately heightening polarization across political discourses. Obijiofor and Singh explain that this expansive use encourages competition for audience attention, resulting in “more quantity and less quality,” which intensifies the dispersion of misinformation.²⁵³ In order to attract viewers, social media content frequently adopts emotional language that focuses on political personalities instead of informative policy analyses.²⁵⁴ Additionally, political actors exploit digital platforms with the intent of influencing audiences in favour of their agendas by circulating misinformation and propaganda.²⁵⁵ The spread of “fake news” influences the masses, especially illiterate populations and politically neutral individuals who are more susceptible to emotional, fear based, and polarized narratives.²⁵⁶ Polarized content is reinforced on social media as individuals are likely exposed to content they already align with, further perpetuating pre-existing

²⁵¹ Raj, Shipra. 2023. “Digital Media and Women’s Political Participation in India.” *Media Watch*, New Delhi, 14 (3): 366–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911231185975>.

²⁵² Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. “Silenced Voices: Unravelling India’s Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression.” *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁵³ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. “Coping with Change in India’s Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape.” *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 271. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²⁵⁴ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. “Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India.” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁵⁵ Joseph, Anjali Merin. 2024. “The Times of Jeopardising Free Speech.” *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (8): 1737–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241282179>.

²⁵⁶ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. “Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists’ Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda.” *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

divisions.²⁵⁷ Without the dominance of truthful and diverse information in online spaces, the mainstream media's inability to set agendas and narrative hinders their democratic role.²⁵⁸

The influence of digital platforms has enabled anyone to create a narrative, undermining the role of mainstream journalists. Additionally, politicians such as Modi, neglect to interact with mainstream media sources by instead communicating directly with the nation's voters through social media outlets.²⁵⁹ This allows political actors to reach supporters while avoiding the scrutiny of the press.²⁶⁰ As a result, the role of mainstream media has shifted as journalists balance the need for impactful stories that captivate audiences against the time-consuming challenge of verifying the information spread on social media platforms.²⁶¹ Furthermore, journalists often experience hate speech on digital spaces when challenging dominant narratives. What Obijiofor and Singh define as "trolling" in the context of the Indian media is an "ideological attack on those who question Modi's Hindu nationalist vision."²⁶² As this harassment collides with the accessibility of social

²⁵⁷ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁵⁸ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. "Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists' Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda." *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁵⁹ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. "Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists' Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda." *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁶⁰ Prabhu, Nagesh. 2020. "Managing the Unmanageable: Media and Modi." In *Middle Class, Media and Modi: The Making of a New Electoral Politics*, 249–93. Mathura Road, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353885847.n7>.

²⁶¹ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. "Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists' Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda." *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁶² Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 273. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

media, space for accurate and exhaustive journalism diminishes, fundamentally challenging the media's democratic role.

Despite the challenges that social media presents to the mainstream media's democratic role in India, impactful democratic benefits have also emerged. This includes providing citizens, especially marginalized communities, with greater access to political participation. The increasing use of digital platforms in India has resulted in accessibility for engagement in ongoing issues, allowing political actors to instantly share their platforms nationwide.^{263, 264} In addition to staying connected, social media outlets have created spaces in which the public can collectively mobilize and speak out about issues that matter to them and their community.²⁶⁵ This ability to participate in politics upholds the media's democratic role as citizens are able to stay informed, voice concerns, and prioritize issues. However, individuals that speak out are not exempt from online trolling and hate-speech, proving caution should be given towards romanticizing social media's capabilities of free-speech. Additionally, the presence of a "digital divide" means that many communities in India continue to have inadequate access to the internet or digital spaces, reinforcing pre-existing socio-economic inequalities in media representation.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. "Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists' Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda." *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁶⁴ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁶⁵ Raj, Shipra. 2023. "Digital Media and Women's Political Participation in India." *Media Watch*, New Delhi, 14 (3): 366–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911231185975>.

²⁶⁶ Raj, Shipra. 2023. "Digital Media and Women's Political Participation in India." *Media Watch*, New Delhi, 14 (3): 369. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911231185975>.

The rise of social media in India has dramatically shifted the ways in which citizens participate in politics, requiring the mainstream media's democratic role to adapt. As people increasingly depend on digital platforms to access political content, the ways in which politicians connect with the public has been fundamentally restructured.²⁶⁷ Traditional mainstream media in India has largely been replaced, prompting many journalists to amend their reporting strategies.²⁶⁸ While social media has created avenues for political participation, the spread of misinformation and propaganda threatens the media's ability to defend their democratic duties.²⁶⁹

Growing Concentration of Media Ownership

The increasing concentration of media ownership in India challenges the media's democratic role in providing independent journalism and holding the government to account. The economic liberalization of the media industry in the 1990s resulted in a transition from family-owned outlets to a corporate-controlled press across India.²⁷⁰ Although the Indian media has become financially successful since privatization, the proceeding quality of journalism is in question.²⁷¹ Corporate prioritization of profit over unbiased and analytical reporting has resulted in the

²⁶⁷ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. "Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists' Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda." *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁶⁸ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁶⁹ Raj, Shipra. 2023. "Digital Media and Women's Political Participation in India." *Media Watch*, New Delhi, 14 (3): 366–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911231185975>.

²⁷⁰ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁷¹ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

rise of commercialization and consequently, infotainment. Captivating content is utilized by the Indian media to retain consumer's attention, hindering the media's democratic role of prioritizing educational reporting.²⁷² Additionally, India's public interests are frequently disregarded because of what Saeed describes as, "phantom journalism," which occurs when hidden corporate and political concerns influence the production of media content.²⁷³ Without the Indian media's ability to independently and critically scrutinize government actions and policies, their democratic responsibility to act as a watchdog through measures of transparency are hindered due to external pressures.

The intensifying concentration of media ownership in India has shifted priorities, as goals of generating profit now challenge the press' democratic responsibility to provide independent journalism. The motivation to maximize profit encourages the publication of content on polarizing topics, as controversy effectively captures viewers' attention.²⁷⁴ With a decline in investigative journalism in India combined with crime and entertainment dominating media landscapes, underrepresentation of issues that impact marginalized groups has become a reality.^{275, 276} Ultimately, journalists face corporate pressures to produce content that

²⁷² Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²⁷³ Saeed, Saima. 2015. "Phantom Journalism: Governing India's Proxy Media Owners." *Journalism Studies* 16 (5): 663. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054174>.

²⁷⁴ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁷⁵ Saeed, Saima. 2015. "Phantom Journalism: Governing India's Proxy Media Owners." *Journalism Studies* 16 (5): 663–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054174>.

²⁷⁶ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

is tailored to attract mass audiences, and therefore profit.²⁷⁷ As long as profit continues to control and shape journalism in India, the media will struggle to uphold their democratic role of reporting on issues that authentically impact the public.²⁷⁸

As media ownership becomes more concentrated in India, corporate and governmental control over narratives threatens transparency, and therefore the press's democratic duties. Due to financial dependency, Indian media outlets experience pressure to produce content that fits with the interests of their sponsors.²⁷⁹ Through strategically investing in the media, the government, businesses, and advertisers are able to gain political power, suppress negative publicity, and manipulate public perception by threatening to withhold funding.²⁸⁰ Utilizing this, Modi and his party have secured ownership ties with media outlets, further constraining the media's democratic responsibility in upholding transparency out of public interest.²⁸¹ For example, Modi's close affiliations with corporations that own media outlets allowed for dramatic influence over the media's election coverage to be swayed in his favour.²⁸² As the concentration of media ownership has been shielded from public awareness, deceiving audiences

²⁷⁷ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²⁷⁸ Saeed, Saima. 2015. "Phantom Journalism: Governing India's Proxy Media Owners." *Journalism Studies* 16 (5): 663–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054174>.

²⁷⁹ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁸⁰ Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²⁸¹ Joseph, Anjali Merin. 2024. "The Times of Jeopardising Free Speech." *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (8): 1737–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241282179>.

²⁸² Prabhu, Nagesh. 2020. "Managing the Unmanageable: Media and Modi." In *Middle Class, Media and Modi: The Making of a New Electoral Politics*, 249–93. Mathura Road, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353885847.n7>.

into believing that curated content is fair and accurate has been normalized in India.²⁸³

Overall, Indian media outlets have been discouraged from reporting on issues that conflict with the interests of powerful corporate and political actors. This hinders the press's ability to fulfil their democratic role of independently scrutinizing the pursuits of dominant actors in India.²⁸⁴ When elite ambitions are prioritized over fostering a media environment that functions to maintain democracy, quality and critical journalism are sacrificed. Furthermore, corporate influence in India has conditioned media outlets to treat audiences as consumers instead of citizens.²⁸⁵ Ultimately, commercialization throughout India's media environment undermines the quality of journalism, and therefore public trust.²⁸⁶ Without public trust, the press lacks the capacity to effectively keep prominent political actors accountable. Ultimately, the Indian media's ability to uphold their role as democracy's watchdog has experienced deterioration amid a corporately dominated environment.²⁸⁷

Conclusion

²⁸³ Saeed, Saima. 2015. "Phantom Journalism: Governing India's Proxy Media Owners." *Journalism Studies* 16 (5): 663-79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054174>.

²⁸⁴ Prabhu, Nagesh. 2020. "Managing the Unmanageable: Media and Modi." In *Middle Class, Media and Modi: The Making of a New Electoral Politics*, 249-93. Mathura Road, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353885847.n7>.

²⁸⁵ Sharma, Neelam, and Gayathri Sivakumar. 2023. "Social Media, Political Discourse, and the 2019 Elections in India: Journalists' Perspectives on the Changing Role of the 11 Mainstream Media in Setting the Political Agenda." *Global Media and Communication* 19 (2): 185-205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231186252>.

²⁸⁶ Joseph, Anjali Merin. 2024. "The Times of Jeopardising Free Speech." *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (8): 1737-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241282179>.

²⁸⁷ Saeed, Saima. 2015. "Phantom Journalism: Governing India's Proxy Media Owners." *Journalism Studies* 16 (5): 663-79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054174>.

The most significant challenges that the media in India encounter while attempting to fulfil their democratic role under Modi's government are the rise of right-wing populism, the increasing influence of social media platforms, and the growing concentration of media ownership. The issue of press freedom in India demands attention, as this case represents a broader, global trend in which media institutions are tolerated only when journalists' activity overlaps with elite interests.²⁸⁸ Basu and Sen highlight that healthy democracies not only require discourse from a variety of views, but also the ability to effectively respond to criticism.²⁸⁹ The rise of right-wing populism and Hindu nationalist discourses in India has demonstrated that for this ideal to be reached, the media must continually keep the government to account, despite repercussions.²⁹⁰ Although social media has allowed for an expansion of political participation, the protection of independent journalism is needed alongside, ensuring that the media remains committed to holding the government accountable.^{291, 292} Ownership concentration of the media suggests that there is a greater need for a regulatory distance to be present between corporations, the government, and the media.²⁹³ Awareness of the most significant challenges that the media in India currently face is crucial to

²⁸⁸ Bhat, Prashanth. 2023. "Hindu-Nationalism and Media: Anti-Press Sentiments by Right-Wing Media in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25 (4): 296–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379231201455>.

²⁸⁹ Basu, Subhajit, and Shameek Sen. 2024. "Silenced Voices: Unravelling India's Dissent Crisis through Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Free Speech and Suppression." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 33 (1): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2023.2249780>.

²⁹⁰ Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

²⁹¹ Raj, Shipra. 2023. "Digital Media and Women's Political Participation in India." *Media Watch*, New Delhi, 14 (3): 366–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09760911231185975>.

²⁹² Obijiofor, Levi, and Shailendra B. Singh. 2020. "Coping with Change in India's Media: Struggles of English-Language Journalists in an Evolving Mediascape." *Pacific Journalism Review* 26 (2): 261–78. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i2.1076>.

²⁹³ Saeed, Saima. 2015. "Phantom Journalism: Governing India's Proxy Media Owners." *Journalism Studies* 16 (5): 663–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054174>.

ensuring that media institutions globally can continue to fulfil their ideal democratic role of providing news that is transparent, educational, and diverse.

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Thomas, Pradip Ninan. 2023. "Populism, Religion, and the Media in India." *International Journal of Communication* 17: 2925–38.

A Gendered Weapon of War:

Sexual Violence against Women in Haiti through an Intersectional Feminist International Relations Approach

By Kaya Dupuis

Abstract

Wartime sexual violence is systematically under-theorized in both realist international relations (IR) and mainstream feminist IR frameworks. Realism's state-centric lens renders gendered violence invisible, while universal feminist approaches fail to account for the complex intersections of race, class, displacement and postcolonial history that shape women's lived experiences of sexual violence. This paper argues that an intersectional feminist perspective, applied through a multifactorial analytical framework, more adequately addresses wartime rape as a deliberate weapon of war. Using Haiti as a case study, the analysis examines how gang-perpetrated sexual violence in Port-au-Prince operates at the intersection of poverty, postcolonial state failure, anti-Haitian racism and gender. Drawing on testimony from Haitian grassroots organizations, survivor accounts and human rights documentation, it demonstrates that wartime rape in Haiti is not an unfortunate by-product of conflict, but a calculated instrument of territorial domination and social control that demands an intersectional analytical response.

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Introduction

Wartime sexual violence is as old as the act of war.²⁹⁴ The continued neglect by scholars and institutions of wartime rape as a weapon of war reveals significant gaps in how gendered security issues and political events are analytically framed by mainstream feminist and international relations (IR) theories. Traditional peace and security scholarship often ignores the link between war and rape, as the prominence of wartime sexual violence only became widely recognized in 1993.²⁹⁵ For example, approximately 30,000 to 50,000 women were raped in the Bosnian war,²⁹⁶ illustrating how a European conflict was one of the first situations to draw attention to the tangible problem of wartime rape,²⁹⁷ which itself exemplifies the gendered racial ignorance embedded in traditional scholarship. Traditional approaches to IR are dominated by realism, where women as a group are rendered invisible. Realism argues that it is not "sensible" to talk about gendered problems like wartime rape.²⁹⁸; instead, many scholars argue that research should consider security threats external to the state, as the state is the referent object. Even feminist theories rely on a broad discourse about the universal struggles of women, which fails to account for the nuances of gendered power and sexual violence in war crimes.²⁹⁹ I argue that traditional realist and mainstream IR feminist theories do

²⁹⁴ Katrina Lee Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness: Women, War and Rape in the International Politics of Security," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 3 (2002): 525.

²⁹⁵ Nicola Henry, Tony Ward, and Matt Hirshberg, "A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9, no. 5 (2004): 535–536.

²⁹⁶ Adriana Kovalovska, "Rape of Muslim Women in Wartime Bosnia," *ILSA Journal of International and Comparative Law* 3, no. 3 (1997), <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/ilsajournal/vol3/iss3/8/>.

²⁹⁷ Nicola Henry, Tony Ward, and Matt Hirshberg, "A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9, no. 5 (2004): 535; Katrina Lee Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 3 (2002): 525.

²⁹⁸ Smith, 1996, cited in Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness," 526.

²⁹⁹ Elora Halim Chowdhury, "Locating Global Feminisms Elsewhere: Braiding US Women of Color and Transnational Feminisms," *Cultural Dynamics* 21, no. 1 (2009): 53.

not sufficiently address the weapon of wartime rape and its gendered implications for lived experiences. The broad, universal, state-centred lens of conventional IR and feminist theories overlooks sexual violence in internal conflicts, such as those in Haiti, where an intersectional feminist perspective can better investigate the complexities involved in this gendered act of war.

Haiti is a particularly urgent and theoretically revealing case study for this argument. The country offers a concentrated site where the limitations of both realist and universal feminist frameworks are most visible: a context of near-total state collapse, gang control of the majority of Port-au-Prince, deep colonial legacies and extreme poverty converge to produce a form of wartime sexual violence that cannot be explained through state-centred or single-axis lenses. Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021 and the subsequent political vacuum, criminal organizations have seized control of an estimated 80 percent or more of the capital.³⁰⁰ In this environment, rape functions not as an unfortunate by-product of disorder, but as a calculated instrument of territorial domination, community terror and social control. Understanding why specific Haitian women are targeted requires examining how gender intersects with class, geography, displacement status and the postcolonial architecture of state failure. This paper integrates intersectional feminist theory with a multifactorial analytical framework to examine wartime rape in Haiti, arguing that only through this lens can the full complexity of gendered sexual violence be properly understood.

Conceptual Framework: Intersectionality and the Multifactorial Approach

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch, *"Living a Nightmare": Haiti Needs an Urgent Rights-Based Response to Escalating Crisis* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/08/14/living-nightmare/haiti-needs-urgent-rights-based-response-escalating-crisis>.

The conceptual framework of this paper integrates two key analytical tools to address the theoretical dimensions of wartime rape. I adopt the systematic theoretical approach to wartime rape from Henry et al.,³⁰¹ derived from White and Kowalski's 1998 multifactorial model. They describe it as a "multifactorial" approach in which individual, sociocultural and situational aspects are analyzed together.³⁰² Building on the multifactorial model, I centre intersectionality as the paper's overarching framework, drawing on Crenshaw's³⁰³ nuanced, foundational work on how gender interacts with race, social status, ethnicity and other identity markers on a global scale in relation to politics.³⁰⁴ In the case of Haiti, this combined framework allows for the exploration of individual women's experiences, the dissection of sociocultural factors and the country's current political state and the interpretation of the different situational contexts in which wartime rape of particular Haitian women occurs. I analyze Haiti through this intersectional lens to understand the unique experiences of sexual violence and terrorism and to challenge the traditional narrative of universal womanhood.

I use a qualitative methodology, building from critical feminism, intersectional feminism, the multifactorial model and the case study of women in Haiti, to assess how different international lenses view wartime rape and their implications for women's security. Contrary to a traditional top-down lens which looks at conflicts from a statist level, I view Haiti from a bottom-up perspective

³⁰¹ Henry, Ward, and Hirshberg, "A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape," 536.

³⁰² Ibid., 537.

³⁰³ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989), article 8.

³⁰⁴ Celeste Montoya, "Intersectionality," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations*, 3rd ed., ed. Laura J. Shepherd and Caitlin Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 47.

and consider the micro factors (such as social status or income groups) involved with wartime rape and how it is weaponized.³⁰⁵ I seek to dissect the binary understanding (“us” versus “them”) of mainstream IR³⁰⁶ and embrace the lived experiences of different women to understand the micro-political complexities faced by marginalized communities.³⁰⁷ As the grassroots Haitian organization KOFAVIV (Commission of Women Victims for Victims) demonstrates, survivors themselves are the most authoritative voices on how gendered violence operates. Founded in 2004 by women from poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince who were raped during the 1991-1994 military dictatorship, KOFAVIV's testimony is essential to any genuine bottom-up analysis.³⁰⁸ Their co-founder Eramithe Delva has described how women in displacement camps lived in "harsh and degrading conditions" with no lighting, no security and no recourse; conditions that directly enabled serial sexual violence.³⁰⁹

Traditional IR and the Limits of Realism

Realist IR theory view the state as the main object of security, often leaving little room for, or completely neglecting, the human perspective of war and conflict, especially gendered sexual violence. The idea of human security, which shifts the

³⁰⁵ J. Ann Tickner, "Feminist Responses to International Security Studies," *Peace Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 45.

³⁰⁶ Roxanne Krystalli, "Feminist Methodology," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations*, 3rd ed., ed. Laura J. Shepherd and Caitlin Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 37–38.

³⁰⁷ Swati Parashar, "What Wars and 'War Bodies' Know about International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 4 (2013): 624.

³⁰⁸ MADRE, "Meet MADRE's New Partner: KOFAVIV Supports and Seeks Justice for Rape Survivors in Haiti," ReliefWeb, September 6, 2006, <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/meet-madres-new-partner-kofaviv-supports-and-seeks-justice-rape-survivors-haiti>.

³⁰⁹ Eramithe Delva, cited in "Group Founded by Rape Survivors Lifts Up Haitian Women," Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, March 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/group-founded-rape-survivors-lifts-haitian-women>.

main object of security from the state to the individual, directly objects to this realist blind spot by recognizing that threats to individual safety, agency and basic dignity are as politically important as threats to state autonomy.³¹⁰ This traditional perspective is partially due to realist scholarship's exclusive focus on the state's external behaviour, rather than internal peace and security.³¹¹ Realist IR scholarship has historically been dominated by men who focus on the "high politics" of weapons of mass destruction, international organizations and states in an anarchical system.³¹² The standard of realism in IR portrays the state as the primary actor in every conflict, which reroutes every problem back to statehood.³¹³ Women, who are not seen as individuals but as a "gendered grouping," of an issue, are not taken seriously and therefore cannot be seen outside of the realist state-centred lens.³¹⁴ Conventional IR approaches directly silence gendered issues such as wartime rape. The state-centric approach fails to understand the diverse insecurities of individual women, which relocates them outside of the international realm and actively depoliticizes them.³¹⁵

When traditional approaches define security and conflict only in terms of state security, they dismiss the lived experiences of people, especially women, whose bodies become either battlefields or weapons of war themselves. Traditional

³¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 22–23,

<https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr1994encompletenostats.pdf>.

³¹¹ Swati Parashar, "What Wars and 'War Bodies' Know about International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 4 (2013): 624.

³¹² Ibid.; J. Ann Tickner, "Feminist Responses to International Security Studies," *Peace Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 44.

³¹³ Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness," 526.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 526.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 525–527, 530–532.

IR theories view war as an "event,"³¹⁶ with a distinct beginning and an end, removed from everyday life.³¹⁷ This conventional perspective neglects the "omnipresence of militarism," where its deep, everyday impacts on women and other marginalized communities are ignored.³¹⁸ Waltz's (1979) "technical realism" argued that only facts which can be scientifically proven or objectively verified (such as number of casualties, for example) should be taken seriously.³¹⁹ The problem with this lens is that it would accept a gang member's deceased body as evidence of conflict but question the legitimacy of a woman's rape survival testimonial, because it may not have physical evidence. Realist scholars only believe what they see and dismiss individual lived experiences like sexual violence as anecdotal. This credibility issue directly limits IR's analytical applicability to a context like Haiti, where the violence is continuous, inescapable and cannot be separated from everyday life.

Feminist IR and the Limits of Universal Approaches

Feminist IR theory challenges the state-centred lens by shifting focus away from the state and onto individuals, revealing how gendered power structures and relations shape global politics and conflict. Since the late 1980s, feminist IR theories have challenged conventional IR assumptions but have often not been taken seriously; mainly because male-dominated theories tend to overlook "gender differences" in security issues.³²⁰ The difference between IR and feminist IR lies in the referent object: for feminists, it is the global relations between gender, race,

³¹⁶ Chris J. Cuomo, "War Is Not Just an Event: Reflections on the Significance of Everyday Violence," *Hypatia* 11, no. 4 (1996): 30; Schott, 1995, cited in Cuomo, 31.

³¹⁷ Cuomo, "War Is Not Just an Event," 31.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, 31.

³¹⁹ Waltz, 1979, cited in Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness," 532.

³²⁰ Inass Abdulsada Ali, "Feminist Theorizing in the International Relations Discipline," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 25, no. 2 (2023): 2, 5; Tickner, "Feminist Responses to International Security Studies," 45.

class, sexuality and the human; for traditionalists, it is the state.³²¹ Feminist IR scholarship has been instrumental in addressing identity oppression, domestic violence and rape as a weapon of war.³²²

Despite significant feminist contributions to the scholarship, mainstream feminist IR theory often views women's struggles as a universal experience, neglecting the intersectionality of gendered sexual violence.³²³ Universal feminist discourses (through a patriarchal lens)³²⁴ implicitly assert that men are the perpetrators and women are the victims in wartime rape, which overlooks male victims and ignores female perpetrators.³²⁵ When discussing terrorism (a factor in wartime rape), mainstream feminist IR approaches sometimes fail to accept that women can be just as terrorizing and violent as men.³²⁶ Some feminist approaches to wartime rape still view it through a rigid male-female power structure, which fails to explain why particular men commit sexual violence, the significant variations of wartime rape or why some men rape other men in war.³²⁷ These limitations are particularly apparent in the Haitian context.

³²¹ Ali, "Feminist Theorizing," 3; Cynthia Masters and Marysia Zalewski, "Feminist International Relations," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 10; Montoya, "Intersectionality," 47.

³²² Wendy Harcourt, "Body Politics," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 111; Tickner, "Feminist Responses to International Security Studies," 45.

³²³ Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary 2* (London) 30, no. 1 (1988): 61–88. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42>.

³²⁴ Kodamaya, Remi, and Fumika Sato. "Taking Male Victims Seriously: Toward A Deeper Understanding Of The Interrelations Between Wartime Sexual Violence And Patriarchy." *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 53, no. 1 (2022): 1–18. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/27098768>.

³²⁵ Miranda Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence: Women's Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity," *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 84, 89.

³²⁶ Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, "Terrorism and Political Violence," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023): 376–377.

³²⁷ Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence," 78.

Intersectionality as Corrective Framework

Intersectionality challenges and corrects mainstream feminist theory, arguing that different experiences of wartime rape are shaped not only by gender, but also by ethnicity, postcolonial factors, social and economic status, race and more.³²⁸ A key concept of intersectionality is that gender is never the sole explanatory factor; rather, it is intersected with other identity factors to understand the complexities of feminist IR research.³²⁹ Intersectional feminist research functions as a "political consciousness," combating oppression through both cross-racial and cross-national approaches.³³⁰ Western-dominated mainstream feminist approaches acknowledge the need for gender analysis, but their single-axis approach often neglects or discriminates against women of colour and ignores the intricacies of oppression.³³¹ An intersectional feminist approach attempts to highlight these geopolitical dimensions, which can address the gendered complexities of wartime rape.

When intersectionality is applied to the study of wartime rape, it illustrates how sexual violence is used strategically against marginalized groups to enforce gendered and racial hierarchies, terrorism, domination and control. Intersectional approaches are not trying to disregard the gendered binary power imbalance between men and women.³³² Instead, feminist intersectional theories are interested in the intersection of gender with identity factors and situational variables

³²⁸ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241; Montoya, "Intersectionality," 47.

³²⁹ Masters and Zalewski, "Feminist International Relations," 15–16.

³³⁰ Montoya, "Intersectionality," 49.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³³² Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence," 78.

regarding violence.³³³ Rape in wartime is often intentionally committed by specific men against specific women and men, namely those who belong to an "enemy" group.³³⁴ Intersectional analysis of wartime rape reveals that it is not necessarily based on sexual desire, but is rather a tactic used to target, terrorize and delegitimize another group, making it a weapon of war.

Furthermore, intersectional approaches make space to investigate men's experiences and address the reality that women can also be agents of sexual violence.³³⁵ Gender identities are social and political constructs³³⁶ and militarization is often linked to masculinity and manhood.³³⁷ Intersectional approaches allow for the gendered aspect of wartime rape to be addressed, where masculinity is inherently tied to aggression and femininity to devaluation.³³⁸ Rape and sexual violence by men on other men serves as a weapon of feminizing those men, making them weak and highlighting the multifactorial theoretical explanation of targeting the enemy: marginalized communities, ethnic groups and even men, can be terrorized and delegitimized through wartime rape depending on cultural, individual and situational circumstances.

Postcolonial Context and the Haiti-Dominican Republic

³³³ Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence," 79; Henry, Ward, and Hirshberg, "A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape," 543; Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness," 528–529.

³³⁴ Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence," 79.

³³⁵ Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence," 84; Swati Parashar, "Violence," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 387.

³³⁶ Ali, "Feminist Theorizing", 4.

³³⁷ Parashar, "Violence," 389; Megan Mackenzie and Nick Wegner, "Militarism and Security," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 292.

³³⁸ Mackenzie and Wegner, "Militarism and Security," 293; Gentry and Sjoberg, "Terrorism and Political Violence," 370.

Haiti is a uniquely revealing case for this analysis precisely because it exposes the failures of both realist and universal feminist frameworks simultaneously. The country's current crisis of gang violence and sexual terror cannot be understood without situating it within its deep postcolonial history. As the world's first and only successful slave revolution, Haiti's 1804 independence was met with international isolation that shaped centuries of economic and political precarity.³³⁹ France's demand for 150 million francs in reparations for "lost property" (meaning enslaved people) indebted Haiti for generations and established the structural conditions for the state fragility that enables contemporary gang violence.³⁴⁰ Colonial history is not incidental to wartime rape in Haiti; it is foundational to understanding why the state has been unable or unwilling to protect women, why impunity for perpetrators is the norm and why grassroots women's organizations have become the primary source of survivor support.

Haiti's relationship with the Dominican Republic is an additional and often overlooked dimension of its gendered vulnerability. Both nations share the island of Hispaniola,³⁴¹ but their relationship has been shaped by structural racism, anti-Haitian discrimination and state-sanctioned violence. The 2013 Dominican Constitutional Court ruling TC 168-13 retroactively revoked the citizenship of anyone born to undocumented parents since 1929, making more than 133,000

³³⁹ "Haitian Revolution," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed April 9, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Haitian-Revolution>.

³⁴⁰ Reparations Commission, "When France Extorted Haiti: The Greatest Heist in History," accessed April 18, 2026, <https://reparationscomm.org/reparations-news/when-france-extorted-haiti-the-greatest-heist-in-history/>.

³⁴¹ World Bank, "Haiti and the DR: More Than the Sum of Its Parts," June 11, 2012, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/06/11/haiti-and-the-dr-more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts>.

Dominicans of Haitian descent stateless.³⁴² Mass deportations of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent have intensified since 2022, returning individuals to a country already in crisis; the Dominican Republic deported over 193,000 Haitians in 2024 alone.³⁴³ From an intersectional perspective, the geopolitical context is directly relevant to wartime rape in Haiti. Deportees, many of them women and children, are returned to a country where state protection is absent and gang control is near-total. Stateless, economically precarious and without social networks, deported women face compounded vulnerability to sexual violence. The anti-Haitian racism embedded in Dominican deportation policy and the statelessness it produces, intersects with gender and class to further expose already-marginalized Haitian women to the "war system"³⁴⁴ operating in Port-au-Prince.

Haiti's Gangs, Non-State Armed Actors and the War System

Haiti's gangs and paramilitary groups share significant characteristics as armed non-state actors operating under conditions of weak statehood and political instability, especially in their use of rape as a weapon of war and violence. Although there are differences between gangs and paramilitary groups, both operate beyond state control, possessing autonomous leadership and the capacity to

³⁴² Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Center, "Stateless and Vulnerable: The Ongoing Crisis of Haitian Descent in the Dominican Republic," 2024, <https://kenedyhumanrights.org/our-voices/stateless-and-vulnerable-the-ongoing-crisis-of-haitian-descent-in-the-dominican-republic/>.

³⁴³ Amnesty International, *Dominican Republic: End Racist Deportations of Haitians* (London: Amnesty International, 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/dominican-republic/report-dominican-republic/>.

³⁴⁴ Reardon, 1996, cited in Catia Confortini and Annick Wibben, "Peace," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 318.

terrorize.³⁴⁵ Haitian gangs in Port-au-Prince, based on the nature of the political phenomenon behind their motives (poverty, economic and political instability) fit within a terrorist profile³⁴⁶ which makes their wartime sexual violence an act of conflict.³⁴⁷ Haiti's governments have historically used non-state militias and gangs to control the public through terrorism and violence.³⁴⁸ The question of whether Haiti constitutes a 'war' in the realist sense is worth addressing directly because it is an implication of this analysis. In Sarkees and Wayman's *Resort to War*, they define 'war' as requiring at least 1,000 battle-related fatalities within a twelve-month period.³⁴⁹ By this measure, Haiti may qualify as the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) estimated over 2,000³⁵⁰ killings by criminal groups between January and June 2023 alone, a figure that surpasses the realist threshold.

However, relying on the realist threshold is a problem: the "war system"³⁵¹ refers to the broader militarization of society and its coercive structures. Anchoring the severity of sexual violence to whether a conflict technically qualifies as a 'war' reproduces the exact realist blind spot that this paper critiques. An intersectional feminist framework rejects this classification entirely, because whether Haiti is

³⁴⁵ Francesco Manfredi Firmian, "Introduction: State Capture by Militias, Paramilitaries, and Organized Crime," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 36, no. 4 (2025): 3.

³⁴⁶ National Institute of Justice, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2004), <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/208552.pdf>.

³⁴⁷ James Cockayne, "The Futility of Force? Strategic Lessons for Dealing with Unconventional Armed Groups from the UN's War on Haiti's Gangs," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37 (2014): 739–740; Guerby Cyprien, Mohammad Iqbal, and Yimkumla Pongen, "The Ruralization of Haiti's Gang Violence after the Presidential Assassination," *Deviant Behavior* (2025): 2–3.

³⁴⁸ Cockayne, "The Futility of Force?" 739.

³⁴⁹ Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War: 1816–2007* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010), 41.

³⁵⁰ BINUH, cited in Human Rights Watch, *Living a Nightmare*, 2023.

³⁵¹ Reardon, 1996, cited in Catia Confortini and Annick Wibben, "Peace," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 318.

classified as a 'war' or an 'armed conflict' is not the main issue to be concerned about. The systematic use of rape as a tool of territorial domination, terror and control constitutes wartime sexual violence; the label matters less than the problem.

In late February of 2024, the two largest gang coalitions, G9 and G-Pèp, formed an alliance known as Viv Ansanm and launched an aggressive mission.³⁵² The aim was to destabilize civilian infrastructure across Port-au-Prince, leaving approximately ten percent of the capital under government control.³⁵³ As BINUH documented, gangs have "continued to use sexual violence to punish, spread fear in, and subjugate the population".³⁵⁴ Between January and October 2024 alone, nearly 4,000 girls and women reported sexual violence, including gang rape, mostly committed by criminal group members.³⁵⁵ These figures represent only the reported cases. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) focal point for sexual violence prevention has noted that for every case reported, thousands more remain undocumented.³⁵⁶ The BINUH and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)³⁵⁷ joint report describes how gangs

³⁵² Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Haiti," 2025, <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/haiti/>.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Sexual Violence in Port-au-Prince: A Weapon Used by Gangs to Instill Fear* (New York: UN, 2022), <https://haiti.un.org/en/203684-sexual-violence-port-au-prince-weapon-used-gangs-instill-fear>; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Haiti: Tackling Insecurity 'Utmost Priority,'" September 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/haiti-tackling-insecurity-utmost-priority-un-report-says-hundreds-killed>.

³⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Haiti: Scarce Protection as Sexual Violence Escalates* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/25/haiti-scarce-protection-as-sexual-violence-escalates>.

³⁵⁶ Jess DiPierro Obert, "'Women's Bodies Weaponized': Haiti Gangs Use Rape in Spiraling Violence," *The Guardian*, November 14, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/14/haiti-gangs-violence-women-rape>.

³⁵⁷ BINUH/OHCHR, *Sexual Violence in Port-au-Prince*, 2022.

“use rape, including collective rape, to instill fear, punish, subjugate and inflict pain on local populations with the ultimate goal of expanding their areas of influence”. These methods are forms of strategic violence. Gang leaders in certain areas of Port-au-Prince have asserted territorial authority by specifically targeting the virginity of young girls, illustrating that wartime rape is a calculated tool of power and terror, not a spontaneous act of sexual aggression.³⁵⁸

The Multifactorial Intersectional Analysis: Individual, Sociocultural and Situational Factors

Sexual violence in Haiti can be understood through the multifactorial framework (Henry et al., 2004), which distinguishes individual, sociocultural and situational variables, each of which intersects with gender in distinct ways in the Haitian context.

At the individual level, the framework centers on developmental context: the personal histories, economic circumstances and formative experiences that shape individual behaviour and vulnerability. In Haiti, nearly 77 percent of the population lives on less than two U.S. dollars per day, a condition of extreme poverty that drives young people toward gang membership and simultaneously increases the individual vulnerability of women and girls.³⁵⁹ When rape complaints must be submitted to gang leaders rather than police in gang-controlled areas, individual women are structurally denied justice.³⁶⁰ The intersection of gender and economic status is evident. Impoverished Haitian women are significantly more

³⁵⁸ Koo, "Confronting a Disciplinary Blindness," 528.

³⁵⁹ Jess DiPierro Obert, "'Women's Bodies Weaponized': Haiti Gangs Use Rape in Spiraling Violence," *The Guardian*, November 14, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/14/haiti-gangs-violence-women-rape>.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

likely to be raped than privileged Haitian women, a disparity that a universal feminist or realist framework cannot explain.³⁶¹ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Pran Men'm clinic in Port-au-Prince, which has treated nearly 17,000 patients over a decade, has documented that some of those patients are boys and men and that more than half of patients were attacked by multiple armed group members, with over 100 individuals attacked by ten or more perpetrators at once.³⁶² These individual-level realities demand a micro-political analysis that traditional IR cannot provide.

At the sociocultural level, the framework examines the attitudes, beliefs, norms and values that normalize sexual violence within a given social environment. In Haiti, the cultural norm of hyper-masculinity³⁶³ (violence as a “manly” characteristic and a negative regard toward women and femininity) is identified as an underlying cause of rape and violence.³⁶⁴ As KOFIV's founding declaration notes, armed groups have "forced their way into our homes, stole everything we owned, raped us and our daughters, burned our houses, and threatened us".³⁶⁵ This pattern illustrates how sociocultural norms that treat women's bodies as extensions of male territorial authority become institutionalized through gang culture. The Tonton Macoutes (the state-sponsored paramilitary force of the Duvalier dictatorships) normalized sexual violence as a political tool, and

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Médecins Sans Frontières, *MSF Documents Alarming Rise in Sexual Violence in Port-au-Prince* (MSF, 2026), <https://www.msf.org/msf-documents-alarming-rise-sexual-violence-port-au-prince>.

³⁶³ "Hypermasculinity," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed April 14, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hypermasculinity>.

³⁶⁴ Malamuth et al., 1991, cited in Henry, Ward, and Hirshberg, "A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape," 544; Parashar, "Violence," 389.

³⁶⁵ KOFIV, cited in Haiti Support Group, "Ending Violence and Discrimination against Women Is Everyone's Responsibility," 2021, <https://haitisupportgroup.org/qending-violence-and-discrimination-against-women-is-everyones-responsibilityq/>.

this legacy is visible in the methods of contemporary gangs, which continue to use rape to silence opposition and enforce social control.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, the sociocultural stigma surrounding sexual violence means that over 70 percent of women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in Haiti will not speak about it, knowing perpetrators will not be held accountable.³⁶⁷ Sociocultural context is constitutive of wartime rape in Haiti.

At the situational level, the framework examines the external environmental triggers that create conditions conducive to sexual violence. The existence of the "war system" in Haiti and the in-group/out-group dichotomization of enemy communities are among the situational factors causing wartime rape.³⁶⁸ The lack of safe displacement shelters for more than one million displaced individuals increases the number of rapes that occur, where shelter, sanitation and security are all absent.³⁶⁹ A United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) interview with a woman from a camp near Port-au-Prince airport captures this situational reality, where a girl with no parents and no place to stay was forced into survival sex (the exchange of sex for basic human needs or safety) because no other option existed in conditions of absolute deprivation.³⁷⁰ In Haiti, displacement and economic insecurity directly intersect with gender to increase vulnerability to sexual

³⁶⁶ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "The Gender-Based Violence Crisis in Haiti," 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/gender-based-violence-crisis-haiti>.

³⁶⁷ Civil society worker, cited in CSIS, "The Gender-Based Violence Crisis in Haiti," 2024.

³⁶⁸ Henry, Ward, and Hirshberg, "A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape," 548.

³⁶⁹ UN Women, "Media Factsheet Haiti: Impact of Ongoing Violence on Women and Girls," May 2025, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/05/media-factsheet-haiti-impact-of-ongoing-violence-on-women-and-girls>.

³⁷⁰ UNHCR, "Haitian Group Offers Safe House for Rape Survivors," October 6, 2011, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/haitian-group-offers-safe-house-rape-survivors>.

violence.³⁷¹ The gang control of over 80 percent of the capital constitutes a situational context of total impunity, where perpetrators operate without fear of legal consequence and survivors have little access to protection or care.³⁷²

Women in Gangs and the Complication of the Victim/Perpetrator Binary

The question of whether women are also gang members in Haiti is directly relevant to the intersectional argument of this paper, and it is a dimension that a universal feminist framework struggles to accommodate. Women do participate in Haiti's armed groups, though their roles are complex and often coerced. The 2022 BINUH and OHCHR report documents that gangs "coerce young women, girls and sometimes men into becoming their sexual 'partners,'" and that in poverty-stricken communities, families might push their women to have "non-consensual intercourse with gang members in exchange for food, water, and protection."³⁷³ This coercive association with gang violence complicates any simple reading of women as exclusively victims. Some women become complicit in the system of violence, either through coercion or, in some cases, through genuine affiliation. Intersectional analysis accommodates this complexity in ways that mainstream feminist IR theory does not. Because intersectionality acknowledges that gender identities are social and political constructs,³⁷⁴ and that militarization is linked to masculinity in ways that women can also perform,³⁷⁵ it allows for an analysis that neither victimizes nor exonerates women within gang structures. Instead, intersectional theories examine the structural conditions of poverty, impunity and state collapse that produce these ambiguous roles. This clarity is precisely what is

³⁷¹ Laura Hall, "Migration and Displacement," in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 3rd ed., ed. Shepherd and Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2023), 275, 277–280.

³⁷² Human Rights Watch, *Haiti: Scarce Protection*, 2024.

³⁷³ BINUH/OHCHR, *Sexual Violence in Port-au-Prince*, 2022.

³⁷⁴ Ali, "Feminist Theorizing," 4.

³⁷⁵ Parashar, "Violence," 389.

missing from universal feminist analyses, which tend to reproduce the victim/perpetrator binary that intersectionality challenges.

Haitian Women's Voices

A bottom-up feminist methodology demands that the lived experiences of Haitian women be treated as primary analytical evidence. The testimony of KOFAVIV's co-founder Eramithe Delva, speaking to the United Nations in 2012, articulates this lived reality: women in displacement camps lived in conditions of structural vulnerability where rape was both “rampant” and unpunished and where the Haitian justice system was absent.³⁷⁶ Between 2004 and 2010, KOFAVIV was barely able to get ten rape cases into the justice system.³⁷⁷ However, after the 2010 earthquake, the number rose to approximately 200 cases over two years because KOFAVIV's presence in the camps allowed more survivors to come forward.³⁷⁸ KOFAVIV director Jocie Philistin's documentation that sixty-five percent of sexual violence victims are minors, with cases involving babies as young as one to seventeen months, reveals the degree to which age intersects with gender to shape vulnerability in Haiti.³⁷⁹

More recently, a 29-year-old survivor documented by Human Rights Watch in 2023 described being gang-raped by members of the G9 coalition after watching her brother and others killed with machetes at a location called “Carrefour la Mort,” or Crossroads of Death.³⁸⁰ Another woman, a 27-year-old who was nine months

³⁷⁶ Eramithe Delva, cited in “Group Founded by Rape Survivors Lifts Up Haitian Women,” ReliefWeb, 2012,

<https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/group-founded-rape-survivors-lifts-haitian-women>.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Jocie Philistin, cited in UNHCR, “Haitian Group Offers Safe House for Rape Survivors,” 2011, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/haitian-group-offers-safe-house-rape-survivors>.

³⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, “*Living a Nightmare*,” 2023.

pregnant and living on the street with three children, described going “three to four days without eating” after being raped by G9 members and developing a vaginal infection she could not afford to treat.³⁸¹ A 53-year-old woman treated at MSF's Pran Men'm clinic described being beaten, raped by three men and then watched the men rape her daughter.³⁸² These cases are representative of a systematic pattern that the UN, MSF, Human Rights Watch and Haitian civil society organizations have all documented. A mother of four in Brooklyn, Port-au-Prince, told Human Rights Watch after being abducted and gang-raped: "I'm infected with HIV... They shot me in the foot. When I went to the hospital, they discovered I was infected. It was too late".³⁸³ These accounts make visible what realist scholars cannot see and what universal feminism cannot fully explain: the precise intersection of gender, class, geography and postcolonial abandonment that makes these particular women's bodies sites of political violence.

Conclusion

An intersectional feminist perspective demands that when addressing wartime rape, academia move beyond a traditional realist state-centred lens and recognize the multiple layers of sexual violence in wartime. This paper has argued that traditional realist and mainstream IR feminist theories fail to adequately address the weapon of wartime rape and its gendered implications for lived experiences. Statism overlooks sexual violence in internal state conflicts like Haiti because it cannot see the human beneath the state, while universalism obscures the specific ways in which poverty, race, displacement and postcolonial abandonment compound women's vulnerability.

³⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, *Haiti: Scarce Protection*, 2024.

³⁸² MSF, *MSF Documents Alarming Rise in Sexual Violence*, 2026.

³⁸³ Human Rights Watch, *Haiti: Scarce Protection*, 2024.

Haiti's context of colonial debt, anti-Haitian racism at its borders, near-total gang control and the almost complete absence of state protection creates conditions under which the limitations of both realist and universal feminist frameworks are most exposed. An intersectional feminist perspective, applied through the multifactorial framework, reveals the multi-layered features of sexual violence in Haiti and moves beyond simple binaries of gendered victim/perpetrator dynamics. It acknowledges that women can be coerced into gang-adjacent roles, that men are also victims of wartime rape, that class and displacement status shape vulnerability as powerfully as gender and that postcolonial history is an analytical foundation.

Grassroots organizations like KOFAVIV, founded by survivors for survivors, embody the bottom-up methodology this paper advocates. Their testimony, their documentation and their advocacy represent the kind of political consciousness that intersectional feminist research calls for.³⁸⁴ When Eramithe Delva describes women living in harsh and degrading conditions with no recourse, she is articulating the failure of every framework, state, international and academic that has refused to take these experiences seriously. Rape is not an inevitable, unfortunate by-product of war; rape is a weapon of war in itself.

³⁸⁴ Montoya, "Intersectionality," 49.

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