

# VERITAS

FALL 2024

Volume 1, No. 1





# “Ric·o·chet”

[“to bind back”/ “to rebound”]

# Letter from Editors-in-Chief

## Dear Readers and Contributors,

It is with profound enthusiasm to present the first volume and issue of *Veritas*, a University of Toronto Policython journal. Rooted in the pursuit of truth, *Veritas* reflects our commitment to a rigorous and analytical exploration of public policy and its multifaceted impacts on our world. Throughout the creation of *Vertias*, we sought to ensure it upholds Policython's legacy of fostering excellence in research and advancing policy literacy within the undergraduate academic community.

The theme of this first issue, *Ricochet*, encapsulates the cascading effects of public policy decisions. Policies, like ripples in a pond, rarely remain contained to their intended sectors for their intended purposes; instead, they reverberate across economic, social, and political landscapes, leaving a lasting imprint on the past, present, and future. In curating this issue, we sought works that not only highlight the interconnectedness of policy but also challenge us to consider the unintended consequences that arise from strategic decisions.

Among the compelling contributions featured, certain essays stand out for their profound and urgent relevance. Melani Vebecka's *Entrapped: How the Overturning of Roe v. Wade Fuels Cycles of Systemic Oppression for Black Women* is a striking examination of the ripple effects of restricting abortion access in the United States. Vebecka exposes how such policies exacerbate healthcare inequities and perpetuate systemic barriers for Black

women. It draws on poignant connections between reproductive justice and the broader lattice of social oppression.

Similarly, Isha Yadav's essay on Western Intervention in Afghanistan offers a sobering reflection on how decades of foreign policy missteps paved the way for the Taliban's resurgence. Yadav's exploration of the epistemic violence embedded in narratives surrounding Afghan women is particularly compelling, illustrating how misrepresentations of agency and liberation contributed to cycles of instability and radicalization.

In the Canadian context, Raghad Barakat interrogates the intersection of law and identity in the analysis of Canada's ban on faith-based arbitration. Her essay delves into the Islamophobic undertones that shaped public and political discourse, revealing how this ostensibly secular policy reinforced cultural exclusion and undermined the ideals of pluralism.

These essays, alongside the other thought-provoking contributions in this issue, exemplify the depth and diversity of scholarship that *Veritas* seeks to endorse. Each piece resonates with the theme of our first issue, *Ricochet*, illuminating the often-overlooked ways in which policies echo through time and across borders.

We thank our contributors for their tireless efforts and incisive perspectives. To our Associate Editors, Aditi Malhotra and Shania Winter, your dedication and commitment have been invaluable. And to the broader University of Toronto

Policython community, thank you for your unwavering support in bringing this vision to life.

As Co-Editors in Chief, we are honoured to embark on the beginning of *Vertias'* first journey with you. *Ricochet* is both a reflection and a call to action, inviting readers to engage critically with the policies shaping our world and to imagine new possibilities for the future.

*Warm Regards,*

**Sara Kim & Michelle Woo**



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*Michelle Woo*

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*"Every Canadian Needs A Copy". Source: Wikimedia Commons*

## Ban of Faith Based Arbitration: Secularism or Western Domination?

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*Faith or Fear? Examining the Role of Islamophobia in Shaping Canadian Arbitration Law*

RAGHAD H. BARAKAT

Canada is known as a mosaic of identity and diversity, however, are the same sentiments maintained in Canadian law? The encounter between Anglo-Christian law and Sharia law is highlighted through the conflicts of faith based arbitration. The Arbitration Act was originally put in place in 1991 and allowed for third-party decision-making processes and advisors; in Section 58 of this act, there were regulations and safeguards to ensure fair practice.<sup>1</sup> The Act meant that Canadians could deal with familial legislative matters with a third-party correspondent if they so chose. For years, families corresponded with religious legal organizations and experts to mediate and resolve matters whilst upholding their faith beliefs (commonly Christianity or Judaism). However, calls for religious arbitration to be resigned began in 2003 after Syed Mumtaz Ali, a Muslim lawyer, announced an organization to arbitrate cases through Islamic principles.<sup>2</sup> The public belief was that this would allow Sharia law to be used in Canadian court, which was perceived as oppressive to women. A report was done by Attorney General Marion Boyd, in order to review the discrimination towards women in arbitration; she found no evidence to show the harm of arbitrated religious law as long as regulations were followed and recommended continuing the use of this act.<sup>3</sup> Given that there is no foundational evidence for the banning of the Act and that there had been no issues before the announcement of Sharia law arbitration, it is more likely that Islamophobia played a role in shaping public and political opinion and actions.

Scholars such as Anver Emon pointed out that the anti-Sharia groups pushing for the removal of the act are robbing Canadian society of the chance to try something new, as well as likely putting Muslims in more dangerous positions by forcing them to access these arbitrations through “back-alley mediations”.<sup>4</sup> The importance of integrating and making space for faith based arbitration gives Canadian law and policy based on Anglo-Christian foundations to grow and truly become a mosaic of Canadian beliefs. In barring access to jurisdiction arbitration, many Canadians will have to feel misrepresented in court or use back-alley mediations which could be more destructive.

Looking into the space and time of Canada at the time of the debate, it was clear the Islamophobic rhetoric led to the political and legal removal of arbitration, as there was little evidence or other lobbyist point other than anti-Sharia, anti-Muslim sentiments. In 2005, Premier McGuinty solidified Canada’s position on this heated debate and stated that the idea of religious arbitration was inconsistent with Canadian law and that there “will be no Sharia law in Ontario”.<sup>5</sup> This statement highlighted that the Canadian public had no issue with other Abrahamic faiths seeking arbitration, as long as it was not Sharia. Canadian law at its foundation is Anglo-Christian; at the time of this debate this was widely known and not an issue for the Anglo-Christian majority. Comparatively Jewish ideologies, although faced with anti-Semitic rhetoric, were never highlighted or disputed in this case. Thus, it is clear the pushback was not a push for secularism but rather a push out of Islam in Canada.

It is important to note that this debate sparked shortly after the 9/11 bombings where Islamophobic rhetoric and misinformation were openly spread in North America. These orientalist images are clear throughout the anti-lobbyist groups’ statements regarding Sharia law and Islamic ideas, particularly in the unfounded claims that Sharia-based arbitration would be discriminatory or dangerous for women. The overarching orientalist notion that Muslim women are inherently oppressed in their families consequently paints Muslim men as violent oppressors and furthers discriminatory stigma. The pinkwashing of this issue is clear in how lobbyists weaponized feminism, not to help Muslim women but rather to villainize Islam, and Sharia law. This mindset played a huge role in shaping Canadian society and global politics for the next two decades.

To understand the public and political orientalist notions, it is important to note that this debate sparked shortly after the 9/11 bombings when Islamophobic rhetoric and misinformation were openly spread in North America. These orientalist images are clear throughout the anti-lobbyist groups’ statements regarding Sharia law and Islamic ideas, particularly in the unfounded claims that Sharia-based arbitration would be discriminatory or dangerous for women. The overarching orientalist notion that Muslim women are inherently oppressed in their families consequently paints Muslim men as violent oppressors and furthers discriminatory stigma. The pinkwashing of this issue is clear in how lobbyists weaponized feminism, not to help Muslim women but rather to villainize Islam, and Sharia law. This mindset played a huge role in shaping Canadian society and global politics for the next two decades. To understand the public and political orientalist notions, it is important to learn their epistemology.

The first scholarly productions of Sharia law and legal tradition that reached the West were created during colonization, as an important tool to define and control Muslims at a time of occupation.<sup>6</sup> For instance, during the French Occupation of Algeria, French legal scholars studied Sharia law and rewrote many aspects; such as property law to make the Algerians less resistant to French colonization. These morphed versions of Sharia law were the first to reach the Western world.<sup>7</sup> This was a form of epistemological colonization and domination by European academia, legislation and policy.

In the same breath, it must be highlighted that current Sharia law and practices inherently result from colonization and European intervention,<sup>8</sup> and thus Sharia law is still dealing with the aftereffects of *legal orientalism* within its confines. This historical research of Islamic legal traditions was a tool of legal orientalism in which occidental powers produced one-dimensional representations of oriental laws to maintain power over them and their narratives.<sup>9</sup> Legal orientalism also takes form in the encapsulation of Sharia law, as something that cannot evolve and is frozen in the past, similar to Canada's view on Aboriginal rights.

This can be seen through when Boyd had created safeguards and additional regulations for safety, lobbyists still refused,<sup>10</sup> which speaks to this un-evolving view of Sharia law regardless of the effort and ability for it to change as any other form of modern law. The jurisprudence of Sharia law has both normative foundations,<sup>11</sup> through its foundations in the Quran and Hadiths, as well as analytical jurisprudence,<sup>12</sup> by the Qadi's use of Qiyas, and Ulema advice.<sup>13</sup> This must not be dismissed as an oppressive set of *myths* but rather a tangible legislative system similar to that of Western Anglo-Christian legal systems.

In analyzing the time and historical context in which the legal encounter of arbitration law and the inclusion of Sharia took place, it is clear that multiple power structures are at play both within social structures. Such examples are the growing fear of terrorism due to 9/11 and the oriental images of Muslim family structures created in the West. The amendment of the Arbitration Act was not done due to legal precedent but rather due to Islamophobic ideals that bar all Canadians from accessing faith based arbitration. This case showcased Western legal domination based on discrimination that led to the erasure of an Act that would have aided in growth, equity and visibility within Canadian law and policy.

## Notes

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*"What is Roe v. Wade and how is it related to abortion in America?". Source: VietFact Check*

# Entrapped: How the Overturning of Roe v. Wade Fuels Cycles of Systemic Oppression for Black Women

*When Race, Rights, and Resources Define Reproductive Freedom*

MELANI VEVECKA

**A**bortion is not just a medical procedure but an essential part of equitable healthcare tied directly to autonomy, opportunity, and survival. In the United States, healthcare has long been stratified along racial and economic lines, and the U.S. Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade widened this gap. Yet, public discourse often hovers at the surface: hovering around debates over constitutional interpretation, religious morality, and partisan polarization dominate the conversation. What remains dangerously under-examined is how this historic legal regression endangers the communities that reside at the intersection of race, gender, and economic marginalization, most notably Black women.<sup>1</sup> Their lived experiences, shaped by both present inequalities and historical injustices, demonstrate that the denial of abortion is not merely a matter of discontinuing a medical service; it is part of a broader lattice of oppression that leverages healthcare as an important instrument of racial subordination. The idea that healthcare is a right rather than a privilege is increasingly untenable in a system where access depends on race, income, and geography.

This research paper shifts the focus from theoretical arguments about morality to the tangible consequences of denying abortion. For Black women, especially those in conservative-led Southern states; restrictive abortion laws exploit existing racial, gender, and financial discrepancies; exacerbating injustices in reproductive autonomy, maternal care, and broader access to healthcare. By banning abortion, these

regulations worsen healthcare inequalities that ripple outward into economic, social, and political spheres. Healthcare is one of the foundational pillars of systemic oppression, and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* perpetuates cycles of injustice that disproportionately stifle Black communities, reinforcing structures of inequality that impede progress at every level.

### **Healthcare is a Privilege, Not a Right**

The American healthcare system has long been characterized by stratification, manifesting as an uneven distribution of resources, providers, and a quality of care that comes from deeply embedded social and economic systems. In theory, modern healthcare institutions aim to treat all individuals equally. In practice, the United States healthcare field operates within a market-driven system where the capacity to pay, the geography of one's residence, and one's racial and ethnic background play decisive roles in determining access to, and quality of, care. Nowhere is this more evident than in reproductive healthcare. Rather than functioning as a universal right, access to safe, legal abortions and comprehensive maternal healthcare is frequently a privilege awarded only to those with the requisite economic means, proximate healthcare infrastructures, and sociopolitical capital.<sup>2</sup> For Black women in Southern states where abortion is now banned, this privilege has *always* been elusive.

Restrictive abortion laws passed in states like Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana must be analyzed as operating on a preexisting basis of inequality. Even before the Supreme Court decided to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the South was known for its scarcity of abortion providers, high poverty rates, and tense racial histories that continue to shape policy and public health outcomes. Based on this context, additional regulatory legislation does not occur on neutral grounds: constrictive laws simply intensify existing disparities. As reminded by Angela Davis, racism persists within a framework far broader and more pervasive than the confines of the legal system.<sup>3</sup> While policymakers often justify abortion restrictions through moralistic language, the material reality is that they deepen the structural barriers Black women face. This is not an accident but a reflection of a social order where power and privilege heavily align with whiteness and economic security, causing the path to reproductive autonomy for Black women to remain fraught and persistently out of reach.

To understand how race and class converge to produce disproportionate hardship for Black women seeking abortions, one can translate the problem into quantifiable terms. Consider Mississippi, an illustrative case given its strict abortion regulations and vast healthcare deserts. When in-state access to abortion is effectively unavailable, many residents must travel to distant states like Illinois, adding even more costs and logistical problems. The financial burden to access healthcare can be broken down into three main components: travel, accommodation, and the procedure itself. A hypothetical (but plausible) scenario draws on average expenditures to demonstrate the cumulative impact:

1. Travel Costs: With clinics closing and legal challenges mounting, Mississippi residents face an average round-trip distance of approximately 552 miles to reach a provider in Illinois. The IRS mileage rate is \$0.655 per mile, making this trip cost around \$361 in transportation alone if one is driving.

2. Accommodation Expenses: Patients often need overnight stays. Two nights in a
3. Procedure Fees: The average abortion procedure itself, depending on the stage of pregnancy and clinic fees, averages around \$587.<sup>4</sup> Vasectomies, on the other hand, are covered by insurance.

These expenses amount to about \$1,290, a hefty sum for anyone, especially for individuals at the lower end of the income spectrum. To capture the racialized implications of this financial strain and inaccessibility, compare this \$1,290 to Mississippi's average annual income for women of different ethnicities. For white women, whose average income is around \$33,141, \$1,290 represents 3.89% of their yearly earnings. For Hispanic women making approximately \$27,395, the cost increases to 4.71% of annual income. For Black women, averaging around \$25,000 per year, the \$1,290 price tag soars to 5.16% of their total yearly income.<sup>5</sup>

Translating these statistics into a more interpretable visual or conceptual model can explain the differences more clearly. Consider a "relative difficulty" scale that assigns levels from 1 (easiest) to 5 (hardest) based on what percentage of annual income the abortion costs represent. One can approximate this scale as follows: if the total abortion cost is 1% or less of yearly income, it corresponds to Level 1 (easiest); between 1% and 2% corresponds to Level 2; between 2% and 4% corresponds to Level 3; between 4% and 5% corresponds to Level 4; and any amount exceeding 5% of annual income corresponds to Level 5 (hardest). White residents' 3.89% financial burden corresponds to a moderate difficulty rating (Level 3). Hispanic residents, facing 4.71%, move closer to a more difficult setting (Level 4). For Black residents, at 5.16%, the difficulty escalates to the highest level (Level 5).

This scaling is not just a theory, it shows how a single medical decision, one that is time-sensitive and often emotionally fraught, becomes a near-impossible feat for many Black women. The magnitude of this burden exposes how racial wealth gaps and labour market contrasts, both of which are consequences of persisting systemic discrimination, produce distinct results in healthcare scenarios.

Analyzing abortion restrictions through this expansive lens allows us to see what conventional policy discussions often overlook. This is not just a question of legality or abstract moral principles. It is about how the spatial distribution of healthcare resources, wage gaps, and residential segregation converge to who can access healthcare and how easily they can access it. Understood this way, statistics on travel distances, accommodation expenses, and procedure fees are not random anecdotes. They are proof of a broader structural failure, one that puts Black women at the juncture of multiple systemic disadvantages, making what might be a manageable medical decision for a more privileged individual into a gruelling, resource-intensive ordeal.

### **The Deadly Cost of Restrictive Laws**

While abortion restrictions are often framed as measures to protect life, their real impact on maternal health tells a very different story. In the United States, Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women.<sup>6</sup> This gap is not just an unfortunate side effect of a flawed system but a direct result of deeply rooted inequities in access, quality, and

Responsiveness within healthcare. When abortion is severely limited or outright banned, it decreases the options for safe reproductive care, forcing many individuals, especially those with high-risk pregnancies, to carry to term without adequate medical support. This reality is especially grim in regions like the South, where healthcare systems already struggle to meet the needs of Black communities. By limiting access to safe, legal abortion, these laws push more women into unsafe pregnancies, increasing their already heightened risks and compounding an unjust and dangerous system.

To understand why this increased risk in healthcare quality prevails, it is critical to analyze the quality and nature of care Black women receive. Systemic racism pervades the healthcare system and is shown not only as limited access to top-tier hospitals or specialized maternal care units but also as subtle and prevalent preconceptions among providers. Medical professionals in the United States are more likely to dismiss or undervalue the pain of Black patients because of racist stereotypes that state Black patients are tougher and feel pain to a lesser extent than their white counterparts.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Black-majority neighbourhoods frequently encounter hospitals that face chronic underfunding, staff shortages, and outdated equipment.<sup>8</sup> Many Black women navigate what might be termed a form of “healthcare apartheid”: a bifurcated approach where high-quality services are found in affluent, often white areas, while less-resourced facilities struggle to meet basic standards in predominantly Black communities.

These conditions develop within a broader societal context that consistently devalues Black lives. The link between inadequate healthcare infrastructure and the scarcity of essential maternal resources is not a coincidence. It reflects historical patterns of discrimination, where Black neighbourhoods have been subject to redlining, divestment, and systematic neglect. Consequently, the healthcare infrastructure itself becomes a map of racial inequality, where certain populations are expected to endure lower standards of care, shorter life expectancies, and a higher tolerance for maternal mortality.<sup>9</sup>

To truly understand the weight of these healthcare disparities, it's critical to see them as part of a broader system of structural violence. This violence is not loud; it festers within systems. It's in the chronic underfunding of hospitals that serve Black communities, the dismissal of Black women's pain, and the quiet acceptance of their higher death rates as inevitable.

The parallels to eugenics are hard to ignore. While today's policymakers do not frame these disparities in such explicit terms, the outcomes are similar. Constrictive abortion laws and inadequate maternal care control who gets to have safe pregnancies and under what conditions, perpetuating racial hierarchies that prioritize whiteness and economic privilege. This isn't just about neglect; it's about a system that actively decides whose lives and futures are worth protecting. Even if it's not the primary intent of policymakers, the outcome is the same: Black women lose their autonomy, face barriers to quality care, and are systematically denied the ability to control their own futures.

## Policing the Womb

Healthcare, once grounded in trust and an ethical commitment to patient well-being is increasingly becoming a space where legal agendas outweigh medical judgment. Miscarriages, stillbirths, and other negative reproductive outcomes can now induce suspicion, with patients being questioned about whether they deliberately caused them. This imminent threat of criminalization hangs over every decision, creating an incredibly hostile environment for Black women, who have historically been subjected to heightened scrutiny and systemic control.<sup>10</sup> Instead of being a space of refuge and healing, healthcare is increasingly becoming a place of surveillance, where asking for help can lead to suspicion and potential incarceration instead of care and compassion.

This vulnerability is not a coincidence; it comes from deeply embedded structural inequalities that predate recent legal changes. For generations, harmful stereotypes have portrayed Black women as reckless, unfit, or morally suspicious, and these narratives have penetrated the healthcare system itself. Providers, consciously or not, often see Black women's reproductive outcomes through this distorted lens. For example, a miscarriage, instead of being seen as a medical event requiring care and empathy, is treated as something suspicious, as if the patient must have done something to intentionally cause it. Requests for contraception or other reproductive care, which would be considered responsible and routine for others, are more likely to be viewed with unwarranted skepticism or judgment when they come from Black women. What should be routine medical procedures become hostile interrogations, forcing Black women to prove their innocence, credibility, and worth just to receive basic care. This isn't just a failure of the healthcare system; it's a reflection of a bigger pattern where racial and gendered biases come together to strip Black women of the respect and rights that should be required in healthcare. This dynamic intensifies under legal regimes that ban abortion. When legal protections for terminating a pregnancy become non-existent, the line between seeking medical attention and risking legal consequences blurs. The cultural narrative that preemptively questions Black women's intentions provides a solid rationale for authorities to intervene.

When women fear that their reproductive choices might be policed they may delay or avoid medical services altogether. This response can worsen health outcomes, including maternal mortality rates that already disproportionately affect Black communities. Furthermore, when women are forced to carry unwanted pregnancies or must navigate extreme financial and logistical hurdles for care, the ripple effects can shape entire life paths. Without reliable access to reproductive autonomy, educational achievements are harder to secure, career opportunities become limited, and financial stability remains elusive. These material constraints intersect with cultural stigmas to reinforce cycles of disadvantage, where structural hardships are misread as personal failings. Over time, a pattern emerges: policy choices that restrict abortion and heighten surveillance help maintain existing hierarchies; allowing those already better positioned, economically and socially, to keep their advantages.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a powerful lens for understanding why Black women bear such a distinct and amplified burden under restrictive abortion laws. Rather than viewing race, gender, and class as separate layers of discrimination simply stacked atop one another, intersectionality reveals how these identities link to create unique forms of oppression.<sup>11</sup> Under these

Conditions, the same structural factors that limit access to quality healthcare, such as underfunding of clinics in Black neighbourhoods or insurance coverage shortfalls, also amplify the impact of racial stereotypes and sexist assumptions in the context of abortion. Intersectionality is important in the context of “Policing the Womb” because of the negative assumptions informing that policing is not simply the product of racism or sexism alone. They arise at the intersection of both, shaped further by economic precarity and geographic seclusion.

Within this intersectional matrix, Black women’s reproductive decisions are judged through contorted lenses that reflect a long history of racialized control over Black bodies as well as patriarchal expectations of “ideal” motherhood. For example, a provider might dismiss a Black woman’s reporting of pain because of racial stereotypes about toughness while also deeming her contraceptive choices as irresponsible because of sexist notions that good mothers put children before their own health.<sup>12</sup> Using an intersectional lens, it becomes clear that simply “accounting for race” to our understanding of how abortion laws affect women, or “accounting for gender” for how they affect Black communities, is insufficient. Intersectionality shows that Black women’s unique vulnerability occurs precisely where these axes meet, creating situations in which the policing of their wombs is not incidental but systematically enabled.

### **Reclaiming Autonomy**

If we step back and look at the bigger picture, it becomes clear that these aren’t simply disagreements about healthcare policy or morality. It’s about whose voices are heard, whose experiences are validated, and who is deemed worthy of fair and compassionate care within the healthcare system. Faced with the burden of restrictive abortion laws, Black women’s reproductive lives become fault lines and expose the contradictions in national narratives about equality and justice. Their experiences expose a system failing its moral obligation and supporting harmful hierarchies through the guise of law and medicine, turning healthcare into a central pillar in the architecture of inequality.

Intersectionality is not a buzzword; it is a diagnostic tool - one that helps us detect how race, gender, and class form overlapping protection for some and cages for others. Until we internalize this concept, healthcare will remain susceptible to manipulation by those who find it convenient to punish rather than heal, to surveil rather than serve.

Real change demands more than restoring legal protections, it requires reimagining the ethos of care itself. This means prioritizing investments in neglected communities and directly confronting the harmful stereotypes that have justified inadequate treatment. Above all, it requires moral clarity to acknowledge that the way we treat the most marginalized among us is not a peripheral issue but a defining measure of who we are and who we aspire to be.

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*“Policing the Streets”*. Source: flickr

# The Black Justice Strategy: Toward a More Equitable and Effective Justice System

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*What If Safety Was Built on Trust and Community, Not Force and Fear?*

CHIDERA UDUJI

The over-reliance on police as a necessary component of social order, referred to as police fetishism, stretches law enforcement beyond its capabilities. This leaves officers ill-equipped to manage complex social issues, which can exacerbate inequalities, especially in marginalized communities. In Canada, systemic racism within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as highlighted in retired officer Rae Banwarie's *Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security*, reflects a damaging trend rooted in discriminatory practices and the standing organizational culture.<sup>1</sup> These practices disproportionately affect Black Canadians, who face increased surveillance and criminalization in situations better addressed by social services. Instead of resolving underlying social issues, the overuse of police perpetuates systemic inequalities. In emphasizing community-based interventions, “de-tasking” police, and restructuring accountability mechanisms, this essay will argue that reducing reliance on police in historically overrepresented communities, alongside the Black Justice Strategy, is key to creating a more equitable justice system for Black Canadians.

The Black Justice Strategy (BJS), led by Canada's Minister of Justice, aims to address the overrepresentation of Black Canadians in the criminal justice system through community-informed policies and legislative reform. A key (and the third) recommendation lies in establishing a Black Community Wellbeing and Safety Division within Public Safety Canada. This division would focus on community engagement, awareness programs, and support services tailored to Black communities due to existing systemic inequalities and exclusionary practices in policing.<sup>2</sup> This

preventative and inclusive approach measures a shift from traditional law enforcement to assistive safety initiatives, which work to address root causes of crime by reducing cycles of criminalization that arise from reactive policing and the long-standing mutual mistrust.

The strategy closely aligns with research by Kruis et al.,<sup>3</sup> which observed the importance of police legitimacy, built through culturally competent and fair practices, in promoting cooperation between law enforcement and Black communities. The authors highlight non-enforcement initiatives, including the New Haven Community Policing program, which fostered trust through proactive engagement. They also reference youth outreach programs that offered mentorship to prevent delinquency and educational campaigns on procedural justice that promoted transparency by explaining police decision-making.<sup>4</sup> The research demonstrates how the increased legitimacy envisioned through the BJS' community-based model will enhance the well-being and safety of Black Canadians by shifting the focus from enforcement to community empowerment. It serves to reduce crime risk factors and its subsequent over-policing and criminalization, which, in a trusted environment, makes it easier to address issues collaboratively and sustainably.

The principles of restraint and opposing excessive criminalization are central to the Black Justice Strategy and call for reallocating resources to alternative conflict resolution, thereby shifting police involvement away from non-criminal responsibilities. Recommendation #35 proposes redirecting significant federal funding to non-police organizations specializing in “pre-criminal” interventions, such as crisis management and health-related responses. These initiatives aim to address systemic disadvantages related to mental health crises and substance abuse before they escalate into criminal behaviour.<sup>5</sup> Research on community-based models like Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) in Eugene, Oregon, affirms the potential impact of this approach.

The program, managing emergency mental health and substance use calls, has shown great potential to be an effective crisis response model by reducing the need for police intervention and providing timely, specialized care with properly trained and available teams.<sup>6</sup> The ability of such non-police organizations to de-escalate crises without interfering with police efforts reduces the likelihood of criminal charges and long-term incarceration, thereby increasing public trust in the program. Thus, the reallocation of funds proposed in Recommendation #35 into community-driven, non-punitive interventions stands to address overlooked social determinants of crime, such as poverty, mental health crises, and homelessness, which disproportionately affect Black communities. This shift not only reduces the over-policing of Black Canadians but also ensures resources are directed toward justice solutions that prioritize long-term well-being and community safety rather than simply managing the symptoms of systemic inequality.

As communities shift away from traditional policing, external oversight bodies play a crucial role in ensuring the effective implementation of alternative safety models. Outlined in recommendation #40 of the BJS, these bodies provide essential checks that address the needs of marginalized groups and enhance policing accountability by confronting excessive force, racial bias, and over- and under-policing in Black

communities.<sup>7</sup>

Critics, however, argue that independent oversight boards often fall short in addressing deep-rooted issues within police culture, such as self-protection and hierarchical structures. Officers of colour, in particular, may view these boards as ineffective and symbolic, lacking the authority to bring meaningful reform and are often disregarded by the systems they aim to hold accountable. Despite these criticisms, successful models, like the Independent Citizen Review Boards, even in relatively small police departments such as Southern Carolina's National City, clearly demonstrate that transparency, a representative police force, and genuine community participation in oversight can significantly administer accountability and reduce disparities in policing outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

Framing community trust as a dynamic asset that not only responds to but also reshapes oversight enables boards to become collaborative spaces where community members actively define police accountability goals and priorities. Recommendation #40's oversight structures offer a promising solution to strained police-community relationships in helping to rebuild trust, as it makes the community an active partner in shaping public safety rather than a passive recipient of police services. By integrating community-led oversight with transparent police data, disparities in policing practices and experiences can be distinguished, ensuring that interventions are impactful, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of Black communities.

Ultimately, shifting away from harmful policing practices through the Black Justice Strategy is key to creating a more equitable justice system for Black Canadians. By prioritizing community-led solutions such as early outreach and legal education and reallocating resources from police involvement in non-criminal matters, the BJS addresses racial disparities in policing. The strategy's strengthened accountability mechanisms further help rebuild trust and promote long-term, sustainable public safety beyond enforcement measures in Black communities. As policing evolves, the true measure of the plan's effectiveness will be seen not in the number of arrests but in the restoration of safety and dignity for all.

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"Afghanistan War". [Source: rawpixel](#)

# Western Intervention in Afghanistan: The Weaponization of Religious Extremism from the Taliban

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*How Western Narratives and Militarized Interventions  
Strengthened the Taliban's Grip on Afghanistan*

ISHA YADAV

The failed U.S. withdrawal in Afghanistan, leading to the 2021 Taliban takeover, is the product of decades of turbulent and volatile clashes between Western powers, radical religiosity, and foreign intervention. The rise of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan, epitomized by the Taliban, is not merely a reactionary response to colonial and neocolonial interventions but an extreme reconfiguration of Islamic values into a tool for political and cultural mobilization. This paper argues that the U.S.-led War on Terror, justified by epistemic violence framing Afghan culture as sexually oppressive, enabled the Taliban to weaponize extremist ideology and destabilize Afghanistan. This paper establishes a theoretical framework using Saba Mahmood's concepts of agency, subjectivity, and freedom, along with Ayotte and Husain's critique of epistemic violence, to analyze how Western narratives on Afghan women justified the U.S.-led War on Terror. It then examines the physical impact of these narratives, including drone strikes and civilian casualties, which fueled the Taliban's resurgence, before exploring pluralistic approaches that combine Islamic principles with gradual democratic reforms to foster long-term stability in Afghanistan.

Western interpretations of liberation, freedom, and agency have shaped the core narrative of women in the Middle East for the last two centuries. Many of these dominant conceptualizations fail to account for alternative iterations of agency and autonomy rooted in religious and cultural traditions. Saba Mahmood's *Politics of*

*Piety* counters mainstream liberal feminist paradigms that equate agency with resistance to norms, or freedom to solely individual autonomy. This rethinking of agency, subjectivity, and universal freedom is crucial to comprehensively analyzing how interventions orchestrated by the United States have misrepresented Afghan culture and practices. Mahmood defines “agential capacity” as one’s ability to act within, and even through, structures of powers and social norms rather than solely as a resistance to them.<sup>1</sup> She situates subjectivity as the way individuals understand themselves and from which they form their identities. It serves as a foundational element through which agency is expressed as one navigates, internalizes, and inhabits sociocultural norms, allowing them to find meaning in practices that would otherwise be deemed oppressive.<sup>2</sup>

Mahmood incorporates these concepts in her premise: power operates through the production of norms, fundamentally impacting subjectivity and agency rather than simply oppressing individuals.<sup>3</sup> This premise is particularly relevant to understanding how the Taliban was able to use extremist Islamic norms as a tool for governance in Afghanistan. The Taliban’s strict imposition of Sharia law and its framing of gendered practices, such as the mass-enforced burqa, can be seen as an exercise of power that consolidates their authority while responding to the historical imposition of colonial and postcolonial modernization efforts from the Global North. These efforts, bolstered by Western powers, were most recently exemplified by the War on Terror waged by the U.S. post-9/11. They sought to reshape Afghan society according to liberal secular ideals, disrupting local traditions and inadvertently cultivating an environment for extremist counter-narratives to emerge. Her critique of universal freedom reiterates the disconnect between Western liberal ideals and the lived realities of Islamic societies. By imposing a singular notion of freedom that delegitimizes practices like veiling, the U.S. not only misrepresented Afghan women’s agency but also contributed to epistemic violence that ultimately laid the groundwork for military intervention.

This framing rendered Afghan culture inherently oppressive, setting the stage for the Taliban to position themselves as defenders and enforcers of Islamic identity and sovereignty. The burqa was constructed in Western media and political discourse as an archetypal representation of female subjugation. It served as an antithesis to the principles of contemporary liberal feminism, necessitating foreign intervention from the U.S. for liberation. Post 9/11, the images of women in burqas were circulated and the veil quickly became a “visual and linguistic signifier” of Afghan women’s oppression.<sup>4</sup> The discursive oversimplification of the burqa as a monolithic image is highlighted by Western media criticizing the physical burqa/hijab rather than its forced, violent imposition.<sup>5</sup> Beyond its religious and cultural purposes, the burqa has been vital for Afghan feminists who were covertly smuggling books or documenting abuse they endured by the Taliban regime with concealed cameras.<sup>6</sup>

It should not be understated that the Taliban’s blanket enforcement of the burqa and usage of violence are deeply intertwined and intrinsically impact women’s agency and security in Afghanistan. However, such phrasings and vilification of the burqa in mainstream political media leave no room for considering that women may choose to wear it as a preference and that it may be an expression of their own agency.<sup>7</sup> These neocolonial assumptions and oversimplifications of nuanced cultural wear become a

dangerous rhetorical technique where seemingly innocuous language inflicts epistemic violence by denying an Afghan woman's agency through their choice of veiling and, consequently, translating to physical violence as depicted by the U.S. military intervention.

U.S. concern for the safety of Afghan women was instrumental in raising awareness and global scrutiny on the Taliban regime's conditions for women, yet the usage of feminism was a discursive tool for the nation to rationalize U.S. military intervention. The oppression and rampant violence against Afghani women has been a material reality since 1994, seven years before public discourse on gendered oppression began to rapidly increase within the U.S. —post 9/11—as a sort of “just” reframing of the Western intervention’s goal to save women from the terrorist regime.<sup>8</sup> A speech George W. Bush made to Congress on September 20, 2001, exemplifies this rhetoric, where he stipulates the Taliban ban on education for women as part of his demand for them to turn over Al-Qaeda members hiding in the country.<sup>9</sup> Conveniently, the U.S. has never addressed their historical (financial and logistical) support and involvement in propping up the Mujahideen (from which the Taliban and Al Qaeda emerged) in the Cold War era, which partly makes them responsible for the state of women’s conditions.<sup>10</sup> Surrendering Bin Laden would not have changed any of the realities of the abuse women were facing under the regime. On the contrary, the U.S. employment of women’s rights helped legitimize the drone strikes that would follow, brutally murdering thousands of innocent Afghan civilians—many of them women. The repeated invocation of “liberating Afghani women” in early 2000s speeches by George and Laura Bush to justify U.S. military intervention illustrates how epistemic violence contributed to subsequent physical violence against women’s bodies.

Post-colonial military strategies in Afghanistan are depicted through the United States’ usage of ‘Kill-or-Capture’ techniques, drone warfare, and civilian casualties, directly contributing to the resurgence of extremist ideologies in Afghanistan. Western foreign intervention cultivated an environment of distrust, fear, and resentment fueled by cyclical violence that ultimately allowed the Taliban to lead a successful resurgence effort.

Following the counter-terrorism military intervention in Afghanistan, the U.S. resorted to a ‘Kill-or-Capture’ strategy, where it was expected that killing the leaders and members of a terrorist organization (Al Qaeda and Taliban) would reduce the overall time of a military intervention operation.<sup>11</sup> This strategy was flawed, as killing Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in response to 9/11 neither stopped the group nor dismantled terrorism. Instead, it fragmented Al Qaeda into sub-groups, scattering its leadership. Two decades later, extremist Islamic terrorism remains a global threat. Another issue that arose with this approach was the United States’ failure to establish longitudinal relationships with Afghan civilians and even the women they had originally aimed to liberate and help. Although more schools, medical clinics, and government institutions were built, aerial drone strikes causing 60% of civilian casualties—women and children—undermined any chance of building trust between citizens and the U.S. military.<sup>12</sup> Kill-or-capture strategies operated on flawed intelligence, resulting in substantial amounts of civilian deaths and even arrests, ultimately alienating local populations, from which the Taliban considerably benefitted; able to recruit new members and slowly rebuild their influence.

Drone warfare conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has often been praised for being a precise and effective counterterrorism tool. The implementation of war tools has also led to the death of over 46,000 Afghani civilians from 2001 to 2021.<sup>13</sup> Their remote and covert nature makes them particularly successful in killing targets but, compounded with constant surveilling and uncertainty of attacks, results in civilians living in a perpetual state of impending terror.<sup>14</sup> The unethical nature and “surgical precision” of drone strikes are highlighted when mistaken decision-making results in entire strikes solely targeting civilians who were wrongly classified as terrorist combatants. For instance, in 2010, twenty-three civilian deaths occurred when three minibuses carrying women, children, and others were thought to be full of militant insurgents by drone operators on the other side of the world, specifically Nevada, that chose to strike.<sup>15</sup> The “Drone Paradox” reveals that rather than achieving counter-terrorism by weakening the Taliban, drone strikes counterproductively reinforce their anti-U.S. rhetoric and position the U.S. as a source of terror, allowing the Taliban to recruit and fundraise for future terrorist operations more easily.<sup>16</sup> Civilians often align with the Taliban—despite its brutality—to avenge family and friends killed in drone strikes, viewing them as martyrs, inevitably perpetuating a cycle of violence and instability.<sup>17</sup>

The strategic use of religion as a political tool was crucial for the Taliban’s effort to rebuild influence and mobilize support in the aftermath of the U.S.-led interventions. The Taliban’s use of ultra-orthodox, puritanical Islamic ideology aims to unify the fragmented rural masses, tribes, and young men targeted and isolated by the U.S.-led War on Terror. Much of the ideology mirrors the original Taliban ideals from 1994. Over the last two decades, the Taliban framed drone strikes and violent interventions as an assault on Islam itself, portraying their resistance as a religious obligation—the only ulterior choice available.<sup>18</sup> This narrative resonated deeply with rural populations, where the impact of foreign military actions was most acutely felt.

Extreme interpretations of Sharia law were then utilized as a means of governance, offering an alternative to the U.S.-backed Afghan Government’s secular and often inefficient systems. This is exemplified by the corrupt justice system where basic land issues that were judicially tried took years to be resolved and, due to unethical bureaucracy, eventually came down to the party that paid more and garnered more influence. This reportedly happened with other bureaucratic institutions like passport and ID offices.<sup>19</sup> The Taliban capitalized on these shortcomings by creating their own Islamic courts, which mirrored governmental courts but were more accessible and perceived by rural populations as more efficient and less corrupt.<sup>20</sup> They also controlled provisional state-funded education and healthcare in certain regions. By enforcing strict religious norms, the Taliban not only appealed to conservative segments of the population but also filled a governance vacuum left by the failures of state-building efforts, slowly expanding their territorial control and base of support with specific demographics of citizens.

The primary Taliban recruitment tool has always been centred around radical religiosity by emphasizing one’s duty to resist foreign occupation and restore Islamic governance. In the years leading up to 2021, this messaging was particularly effective among young men who had grown up in the era of drone strikes, civilian casualties, and corrupt bureaucracy. The Taliban’s religious rhetoric not only legitimized their

actions but also provided a sense of purpose and belonging to individuals who felt marginalized by the state and alienated by foreign forces. Women were largely unsupportive of the regime's rebuilding efforts, as many of their conditions did indeed get better under U.S. occupation: they were allowed to attend schools, hold office in government, have careers, and dress according to their own standards, yet drone strikes caused a refugee crisis that substantially impacted them and female suicide went to an all-time high.<sup>21</sup>

To ensure future, longitudinal stability in Afghanistan requires a fundamentally different approach than the violent and radical imposition of democracy as seen with the U.S. counter-terrorism intervention. A pluralistic plan that reconciles Islamic principles and phases in democratic ideals can achieve this by replacing order-exclusionary authoritarian-like political systems. Post-Islamism refers to the shift from traditional, rigid Islamic political models to post-Islamism that incorporates the religion with pluralism, rights, and democratic principles.<sup>22</sup> In Afghanistan, where Islamic values form the bedrock of societal norms, post-Islamism offers a culturally sensitive framework for governance that respects these values while addressing the need for inclusivity, equality, and individual rights. Additionally, Afghanistan may have one dominant religion but there is a large variety of ethnolinguistic clusters across the regions (Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, etc.), and the Taliban only represents the interests of a small sect of Pashtuns (the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan). The Taliban's reimposition of an extreme interpretation of Islamic governance illustrates the need for a model that avoids both liberal secularism's alienation of rural and conservative populations and the Taliban's exclusivity. Post-Islamism acknowledges this while fostering tolerance, rights-based governance, and the protection of minority voices. This balance can ensure that democratic reforms resonate longitudinally in Afghanistan and avoid the failures of rapid liberalization efforts post-2001.

A key lesson from the collapse of the Afghan Republic in 2021 is that hyper-centralization and ethnic marginalization undermine the legitimacy of governance.<sup>23</sup> Effective pluralism requires dismantling exclusionary systems and creating mechanisms for power-sharing that reflect Afghanistan's ethnic and regional diversity. This includes distributing executive authority to prevent overconcentration of power and establishing explicit constitutional provisions for ethnic inclusion. Reconciliation and stability are largely dependent on the failure of the Taliban regime and it would be a long road, but eventually, material change will only be possible once Afghan citizens can choose who governs them.<sup>24</sup> A tailored proportional representation system could allow ethnic and tribal groups to elect representatives to the central Afghan government, with seats allocated based on the percentage of votes received. The various subgroups of the electorates are essentially represented proportionally within the electoral body.

Decentralization could empower local governance structures, allowing regions to exercise greater autonomy while maintaining national unity. Such an approach aligns with post-Islamist principles, as it allows governance to adapt to local needs and cultural contexts while integrating broader democratic ideals. By fostering inclusion and participation, pluralistic governance can address grievances that extremist groups like the Taliban have historically exploited. Religious leaders and scholars could also

play a pivotal role in bridging traditional Islamic norms with contemporary pluralistic governance practices. Involving these figures in policy discussion would allow the reforms to gain greater legitimacy from conservation populations that may have otherwise resisted. They could also aid with consensus building, as it is crucial to maintaining trust with a population.<sup>25</sup> The U.S. was largely unsuccessful in its modernization efforts due to weak institutions that could not simultaneously provide essential services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure while combating corruption. The Taliban was able to capitalize on this weakness when coming back into power, which is why strengthening public institutions should be the primary focus of pluralistic governance approaches.

Economic and social inequalities have long fueled instability in Afghanistan, providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to thrive. Pluralistic governance must address these concerns to effectively undermine the Taliban's recruitment base. In the last few months before the collapse, some civilians felt that the defence of non-Pashtun areas was deprioritized due to ethnic considerations, with deliberate underinvestment in these regions. Others observed that Pashtun officials and commanders were more open to cooperating with the Taliban due to shared ethnic ties. This undermined the defence of areas otherwise willing to resist the Taliban.<sup>26</sup> Addressing interethnic conflict through equitable resource distribution, poverty alleviation, and unbiased investment in rural development are critical components of a stable political order. Such integrations demonstrate how pluralistic approaches can navigate tensions between tradition and modernity, offering governance solutions that respect Islamic values without succumbing to extremism.

The U.S.-led War on Terror sustained through epistemic violence that debased Afghan culture allowed the Taliban to catalyze extremist religious ideology for their own benefit and orchestrate a political resurgence. Theoretical insights emphasize how Western narratives of agency and liberation misrepresented Afghan practices, ultimately laying part of the groundwork for military interventions. The brutal violence of military strategies, including kill-or-capture efforts, drone strikes, and civilian casualties, deepened alienation and fostered fear and distrust, which the Taliban exploited to regain power. To ensure long-term stability, Afghanistan must adopt a pluralistic approach that reconciles Islamic principles with democratic ideals addressing the systemic failures the U.S. withdrawal left, which the Taliban has historically leveraged. By prioritizing inclusivity, gradual reform, and local autonomy, Afghanistan can break the cycles of violence and build a political system that honours its diverse ethno-religious identity and promotes sustainable peace.

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"Supporting Schools in Kenya". [Source: flickr](#)

# The Link between Development and Education: A Case Study of Kenya and the WE Foundation's Boarding Schools

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*How can schooling improve life  
prospects in a community?*

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Within the traditional international development discourse, education is believed to be a major source of long-term “progress”. Following this approach, investing in schooling is fundamental for a nation’s economic, political, and cultural growth.<sup>1</sup>

This is because educated citizens theoretically make better informed political decisions and are more efficient and higher-paid workers.<sup>2</sup> This perspective was particularly strengthened at the end of World War II, as growing international conferences and organizations began to structure educational policies that would later be applied to incentivize development. Thus, investing in learning became an indication of modernity and a more financially attractive state.<sup>3</sup> In this scenario, one can understand why providing access to education became a central theme in global policies seeking social and economic change. As Chaboot and Ramirez reveal, these initiatives framed education as an “instrument” for achieving capitalist development in the globalized world. Here, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) played a crucial role in spreading the Western-based educational agenda, often failing to recognize the particularities of local contexts.<sup>4</sup> Considering these perspectives, this essay will analyze the WE Foundation’s “Kisaruni Group of Boarding Secondary Schools” project based in Kenya. Further, it will assess if this Canadian organization fosters equity and prosperity through its schooling action.

It is crucial to refer to the history of Kenya to understand how the nation's colonial past shaped its prospects for education and development. In contrast to its background of the settlement of diverse cultural identities, the British Crown controlled the Kenyan territory in the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The British administration structurally undermined local traditional economic practices throughout the following decades, seeking to establish the capitalist mode of production.<sup>6</sup> However, with the rise of the decolonization movement, Kenya became independent in 1963. Following Kenya's independence, observing Yende and Ntini's 2022 theory, the country had been left in a state of "dependency" upon the global financial system, facing a series of economic and social issues that resulted from decades of colonial exploitation. One of these problems lay in the nation's educational scene, with only ninety-five schools in Kenya by then.<sup>7</sup>

Before colonization, learning in Kenya followed African native traditions, which encompassed the promotion of a community's morals, daily practices, and connections with the environment.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as a result of the work of Christian missionaries and Britain's declaration of rule, educational practices in the region began to shift towards the Western model.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the nation's first schools were centred around colonial financial centres, providing academic-focused learning for white European groups.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, native Kenyans could only attend "village schools", establishments built around the cities that mainly focused on providing training for professional occupations.<sup>11</sup> In this context, educational inequalities arose in Kenya based on race and were exacerbated in rural areas deemed of "low economic interest," which experienced a corresponding "delay" in the establishment of schools.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, after Kenyan independence, the government acted to build a better-structured national education system. Between the 1970s and 1980s, "... the number of schools grew steadily..."—a factor that allowed for the state to notably increase young Kenyans' enrollment.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the national administration worked on reconstructing the national curriculum, seeking to include "indigenous ways of knowing" and promote decolonisation.<sup>14</sup> Further, primary and secondary education became free of charge. Finally, educational gender disparities have, and continue to, decrease in the country, with recent data revealing similar school survival rates between Kenyan boys and girls.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this, Kenya's contemporary educational picture still encompasses a series of challenges.<sup>16</sup> The nation's public schools are understaffed, classrooms are crowded, academic standards are decreasing, and funding is frequently delayed and/or insufficient. Moreover, as the government does not cover "indirect" schooling costs, such as transportation and uniforms, many lower-income families cannot support their children's education.<sup>17</sup> Another issue lies in the transition from primary to secondary learning, as 19% of girls and 18% of boys do not continue their studies into high school.<sup>18</sup> In summary, inequalities are still a reality in the country as upper-class families ensure their children attend better-structured private schools; meanwhile, students from underprivileged backgrounds receive a lower-quality education. It was due to this inequality that, in 2011, the WE Foundation founded the Kisaruni Group of Boarding Schools.

The Kisaruni Group of Boarding Schools comprises two educational institutions: Milimani Girls' Campus and Ngulot Boys' Campus. They are both located in the rural region of the Maasai Mara, providing a fully funded secondary education for its young inhabitants. More specifically, in Kisaruni, every learner receives a scholarship covering academic and living costs. According to the WE Foundation, high schools deliver a “unique curriculum,” providing students with the opportunity to learn in laboratories, classrooms, and libraries while pursuing extracurricular engagements.

The school’s system is based on five pillars: diversity, community, cultural values, leadership, and active participation guiding the teenagers’ learning. From its foundation, the school has allowed over 400 Kenyan students to graduate, many of them who “... continued to college and university...”<sup>19</sup> Theoretically, this initiative is not singly framed within the capitalist educational logic but, more importantly, considers the ideals of community-based development. In other words, according to WE, the boarding schools empower rural students with “tools, knowledge, and skills” to pursue further studies and, subsequently, lead their communities toward “sustainable change”. From this perspective, the positive and negative aspects of the Kisaruni initiative can be identified.

The group of boarding schools has achieved significant success in keeping students on a path toward further education. In other words, by providing scholars with a strong high school foundation, the WE Charity allows its students to achieve acceptances and scholarships/loans from Kenyan universities, which are not tuition-free. According to preliminary data from 2014,<sup>20</sup> 100% of the Kisaruni girls’ school graduates enrolled in post-secondary education, and 50% received full government scholarships towards university costs. Here, as Kielburger<sup>21</sup> reveals, many students became the first in their families to attend university. Furthermore, by addressing matters of food security and health, the NGO ensures youth permanence in school and alternatives for them to give back to their communities.

As disease outbreaks affected students and their families with dropouts occurring, the WE Charity ensured the construction of permanent clinics and that schooling addressed personal wellness—relieving a burden on learners.<sup>22</sup> In addition, as food insecurity, is another common problem in rural Kenya, the foundation claims to have made “... agriculture and targeted drip irrigation part of the curriculum” to teach students farming techniques that they can later transmit to their family fields.<sup>23</sup> Finally, as Mora<sup>24</sup> argues, the Kisaruni Group of Boarding Schools does not follow a hierarchical curriculum strictly imposed by the “West”. As presented, the initiative’s education is grounded in respect, peace, and community-building principles established through meetings with community elders and local government officials.<sup>25</sup>

However, despite these reported accomplishments, crucial negative aspects of the initiative can also be noted. First, the WE Foundation’s work with the Kisaruni schools lacks minimum transparency. In other words, though the NGO provides a few statistics on its website, they all date back to a minimum of six years ago or are presented without any time reference. Further, the organization does not provide updated reports on how much it raised for these educational centres and how these resources were applied and managed. As Charity Intelligence Canada<sup>26</sup> reveals, the

WE Foundation's work lacks financial transparency and its practical results are incipiently reported, with financial statements not being available to the public.

As a result, it is substantially challenging to analyze this initiative's effectiveness in the last few years—a factor that delegitimizes the charity's work in the Massai Mara. Another problematic aspect of the project is the constant introduction of the so-called “volunteer tourists” to the boarding schools. Daniel and Di Ruggiero<sup>27</sup> argue that this policy fosters “white saviorism” within institutions by portraying visitors as the primary educational experts while disrupting learners' routines through activities like touring their surroundings and “taking pictures”. Moreover, by participating in school infrastructure development, volunteers potentially replace local labour sources, including former Kisaruni graduates,<sup>28</sup> who could benefit financially. In this context, Moore<sup>29</sup> critiques the WE Foundation as a “travel agency” profiting from volunteers.

Hence, the above points reveal that WE Charity's work is connected to philanthrocapitalism and modernization theory. This is because the project lacks public transparency and reinforces the conception that the Kenyan community is still dependent and requires assistance from the “Global North”<sup>30</sup> to improve its educational scenario. Additionally, it is fundamental to recall that not all young individuals from Massai Mara can access the Kisaruni schools. In other words, since enrolment is only granted to students who have demonstrated strong academic performance in the past (based on Western standardized tests), struggling students do not receive the opportunity to attend these secondary schools. This policy thus contributes to educational inequalities in the region as learners, who, for diverse reasons, receive lower grades and “fall behind”, are not provided with a “second chance” to both academically and personally grow.

Ultimatley, the WE Foundation fails to review how its curriculum practically addresses local and historical traditions and decoloniality—focusing on portraying the schools as advanced institutions similar to those in the global West. Despite the reported achievements of the Kisaruni Group of Boarding Schools, the project's potential is undermined by its lack of transparency and reliance on outdated and problematic development frameworks. This analysis highlights the need for educational policies to prioritize development by offering not only traditional content-based learning but also critical knowledge that integrates local cultural elements, inspires students to build expertise, and enables them to contribute meaningfully to society.

## Notes

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