West Meets East: The Interaction Between The West and Vietnamese LGBT+ Civil Society Organizations
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Abstract

This thesis studies the West's engagement with local civil society organizations in Vietnam to promote LGBT human rights. By interviewing embassy employees of some Western countries and NGOs officials, substantial data is collected, shedding light on the relationship in question. The findings of this study points to the benefits brought about by the West's using local actors as a channel to diffuse LGBT norms, calling for a continuous collaboration. The outcomes also help address the gap embedded within the existing literature body.

Introduction

As the world marched into the second decade of the 21st century, a novel and seemingly promising era for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) community worldwide unfolded. This new era could be argued to have been paved the way by the best-known passage of the resolution 17/19 by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in June, 2011 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011). The resolution, which was sponsored by South Africa, aimed at urging the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) "[to document] discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity" (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011, para. 9). In order to celebrate this achievement, the then - U.S Secretary of States Hillary Rodham Clinton delivered a speech to the United Human Rights Council's headquarters in Geneva, pushing the global support for LGBT+ rights even further. Wearing blue, Hillary proclaimed that "gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights" (Clinton, 2011). Given these landmarks, it would not be too presumptuous to say that what a time to be gay.

Yet, it is important to note that not only is such an era characterized by a promise of the sexually perverse's entitlement to equal treatment, but it also marks a period in which the incorporation of the promotion of LGBT+ human rights into foreign policies by some states, notably those from the Global North, undergoes its rapid ascent. As mentioned in the speech by Clinton, the Obama Administration, for example, regards the protection of human rights of LGBT people as a priority of its foreign policy (Clinton, 2011). Coupled with that, actions taken to put in place the very first U.S. Government strategy dedicated to combat oversea human rights violations on the grounds of sexual orientation by the same government on the same day was also disclosed. Such an infiltration was not limited to the States as the United Kingdom (UK) also made some effort to fight for the cause globally. More specifically, the former UK Prime Minister David Cameron threatened to stop providing general budget support to states failing to uphold "proper human rights" ("Uganda", 2011; "Cameron", 2011, para. 4).

Those who have been either interested in or experienced any kind of sexuality-based oppression, or both, *cannot not want gay rights to be human rights*[1], and cannot not be happy about this recognition as well as the promotion (Spivak, 1993). With that being said, universality of human rights is a contested umbrella notion as there exists a lack of an international-wide consensus on several basic terms, such as who deserves human rights and under what conditions (Agathangelou, 2013, p.459). As the enjoyment of human rights by the sexual minorities is an initiative proactively led by the West, the expansion of human rights to include rights of LGBT+ individuals, thus, could be argued "[to be] defined within a narrow context of liberation that reflects a Western experience"; thereby creating a standard built upon the West's understanding of human rights in general and LGBT+ rights in particular (Delatolla, 2020, p. 154). In a similar vein, a national response to gay rights is often employed as "a test of civilizational maturity, modernity, partnership within the international system, shared norms and values" (Langlois, 2015, p. 394). Consequently, those who fail the test, meaning they could not keep up with the same pace as the West, would be subject to punishments, namely cutoffs in aid. That is to say, Clinton's speech to the United Nations (UN) or Cameron's threat to condition aid, "when viewed through the lens of dominant liberal progress narratives," exposes various dimensions of what Langlois calls LGBT global sexuality politics (Langlois, 2016, p. 394).

The Western-centric promotion of LGBT+ human rights values around the world has been more likely to generate backlash rather than expected positive outcomes. For instance, in his publication The troubled rise of gay rights diplomacy, Encarnación (2016) draws out a general picture of LGBT-related spreading setbacks in the field of policy in several distinguished regions of the world (i.e Russia, India, Uganda,..), which is brought about by the West's "good" intentions to ameliorate rights of non-normative sexual subjectivities elsewhere. That is not to say, the non-West merely adopts regressive stance on LGBT+ rights, as a consequence of such a promotion. Looking into the case of some South American countries, Pauselli (2023) notes that criticism from the West, for example, led to a LGBT-friendly change in the Peruvian legal system (p.2). The struggle of

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[1] To paraphrase Spivak (1993)

LGBT+ people around the world for equal rights persists. As of March 31 2023, homosexuality, for instance, remains outlawed in 64 countries ("Homosexuality", 2023). Given that, LGBT+ rights diplomacy is still surely high on the agenda of the West. Yet, academic research has not caught up with this for two reasons. Firstly, it is obvious that some territories and countries are being neglected, such as Southeast Asian states as countries which either were colonized by the UK (i.e India[2],...) or are located in Africa[3] or find themselves in a geopolitical contention between the West and a third power[4] seem far greater attractive to researchers. Secondly, the existing research tends to place a heavy emphasis on studying the impacts of such a promotion in forms of coercive measures, including aid conditionality (see) or criticism (see). Meanwhile, the West's using local civil society as a channel to diffuse LGBT+ human rights norms is equally interesting and worthy studying, but left marginalized in the field of academic research on the topic. In order to contribute to this gap, this research will study the topic of the West's LGBT+ rights diplomacy and norm diffusion through local brokers by answering the research question 'How has the West been engaging with Vietnamese civil society?'.

Beside from the aforementioned gap, this thesis is also driven by another academic ambition which is to enhance the position of queer international relations (IR) theories within the discipline of IR. As a matter of fact, the focus on LGBT rights is often associated with queer studies or relevant to international (human rights) law studies at least. Coupled with that, realist or liberalist lenses are often applied to explicate how the international system functions and how states interact with each other within that environment. Yet, those two camps of theories, in the view of Symons and Altman, are unable to inform our understandings of "why some states are so invested in opposing LGBT rights", for instance (Symons and Altma, as cited in Janoff, 2022, p.56; my emphasis). That led to a creation of a queer void in the middle of the discipline of IR. Exploring this phenomenon does not make the thesis inch away from IR. Rather, it is closely related to the field. As mentioned above, "queer subjectivities and queer practices [have been] disciplined, normalized, capitalized upon by and for states" to exert their powers and maintain the hegemony (Weber, 2014, p.597). Therefore, studying the West's promotion of LGBT+ rights overseas allows for an ability to highlight how the former plays out in different parts of the world, and thus an understanding of the current power structures within the international system from a different angle - queer approaches.

In order to provide an answer to the research question, this thesis is structured as follows: Firstly, the literature review will lift the veil from existing scholarship on related topics, demonstrating how this research is located within that. What is more, it will clarify how it can contribute to the research agenda. Secondly, there will be a discussion on the theoretical framework that contains this research. Subsequently, the methodology section, whose aim is to outline how this research is designed (covering data collection and analysis) follows. Thereafter, an explanation of the data will be provided under the result section. The discussion section will look deeper into the data in light of societal and academic discussions on foreign policy objectives and diplomatic channels. After that, improvement points in relation to the set-up and execution of this research will be found under the limitation section. More specifically, it will shed light on research opportunities that are not incorporated in this thesis, constructing a potential future research agenda for any scholars interested. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes findings of this thesis and discusses further implications.

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[2] see Rao, 2014
[3] see Amusan et al., 2019
[4] see Rohrich, 2014

Literature Review

In order to provide a concrete answer to the research question with respect to the interaction between the West and local civil society in Asia in terms of promoting LGBT rights as human rights, it is necessary to call on three separate, yet interrelated strands of research - which are queer international relations (IR) theory, norm diffusion, and state-society relations within the setting of an authoritarian state- to lay a foundation. Alternatively speaking, they, combined together, are able to outline a strong theoretical ground and simultaneously offer several conclusions which to some extent speak to the research topic. Yet, those two strands of research remain insufficient to answer my specific question directly without any further investigation and interrogation. Resultantly, in this literature review, I will first give an overview of what has already been already discussed by scholars of queer IR and norm diffusion with the aim of casting light on knowledge gaps. Subsequently, I will provide how this thesis will contribute to filling those gaps, thereby establishing how this thesis is located within the broader academic scholarship on diplomacy and norm diffusion.

1. **Queer International Theory and Norm Diffusion Theory**

The emergence of global governance through sexuality necessitates a theorization of the phenomenon within disciplinary IR to shed light on these newly developed aspects of power relations, establishment of (state) identity and social movement that are partially responsible for contemporary international relations. In contrast to that urgent academic demand, the presence of queer international theories remains limited within the field of IR, sharing the same faith with its marginalized subjectivities. Resultantly, there have been constantly myriad attempts made by scholars to consolidate the relevant contribution of queer IR to IR itself. One of the most prominent queer IR scholars may include Weber Cynthia (see Weber, 2014). Aside from that, queer IR also extends its reach to the 3 core domains of IR: war and peace, international political economy, and state as well as national formation (Weber, 2014, p. 597). Given the scope of this thesis and the limited space, it is crucial to highlight that only the third domain - that is, how states build up their identities based on gender and sexuality - would be dived deeper into, however.

Peterson argues "figures like the 'heterosexual' and the 'homosexual' are foundational to international relation conceptualizations of states, nations, and international politics more widely", thereby suggesting the sexualised international orders (as cited in Weber, 2016a, p.49). In the same vein, Langlois (2015) writes in his article titled *International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics* that, "in processes of governance, sexuality becomes a constant (often hyper-visible through moral panic) thread" (p.390). Given these arguments, it is undeniable that sexuality is a recurring theme in and a driving factor that helps to mold and is held sway by (global) governance. As a result of an interconnectedness between sexuality and governance, the pathway to conceptualize international relations and any other constituents embedded within it would be incomplete, if disregarding the operations of figures like the homosexual and the heterosexual. Hence, it is not surprising that IR scholars of this sub-group have more interest in investigating and understanding how "queer subjectivities and queer practices… are disciplined, normalized, or capitalized upon by and for states…" to constitute their identities and thus justify state behaviors (Weber, 2014, p. 597; my emphasis). Topics like the acceptance and tolerance of LGBT individuals characterized as civilization and development by Western states in the modern times, for instance, would definitely attract the academia's attention.

It could be argued that figurations of the homosexual and the heterosexual shift their own meanings throughout the course of time to the benefit of those who mobilize them. In an agreement with this argument, queer theorists posit that sexuality and gender are socially constructed and "thereby often reduced to black-and-white issues that can be manipulated or distorted" by states (Thiel, 2018, para. 7). During the Victorian era, the figuration of the white homosexual was interpreted through discourses on civilization, rendering them as sexually deficient beings, yet curable. Also a similar figuration, yet placed in the context of the 21st century, is associated with normality in part thanks to neoliberalism. Given the instability of sexual figurations, dismissing an understanding of how they are put into discourse and, in return, support that discourse would disregard implication for understanding how international relations are (sexually) ordered. In this regard, queer theory would lend support to expose the inner world of those figurations as it is enable to to interrogate

"established norms and dualistic categories with a special focus on challenging sexual (heterosexual/homosexual), gender (male/female), class (rich/poor), racial (white/non-white) classifications" (Thiel, 2018, para. 2). As Rao (2014) notes, temporarity is one of the core concerns of queer theory (p. 201).

As a matter of fact, figurations of the homosexual and the heterosexual have always been tethered with developmental temporality. Weber (2016b)'s reading of the most-cited *History of Sexuality Volume 1* by Michael Foucault and her reading of Donna Haraway's conceptualization of "figuration" would be able to shed light not only on "how sex [was/is] put into discourse", permitting it to go beyond the private sphere, but also on how sexual figures have been accompanied by civilization discourses; thereby rendering it an efficient tool for the hegemony within the international system (p.14). As Weber (2016b) notes, the access of sex into Victorian discourse was facilitated by sciences at the time, ranging from Law to Medicine, followed by the creation of sexualities such as heterosexuality and homosexuality (p.14). At the same time, she also point outs one of the reasons why homosexuality was invented - that is, "the homosexual made it possible to identify normal sexual behavior, discursively implant normality in the procreative heterosexual Malthusian couple, and circulate social understandings of this couple as exemplary of normal, healthy, moral Victorian sexuality" (Foucault, as cited in Weber, 2016b, p.14). To put it in plain terms, even though the homosexual was associated with perversion, their presence was required as it played a role of a marker of what sexual practices and desires should be considered normal. Heterosexuality did not only serve as a marker of normality, but also as a benchmark against which levels of civilization are measured. In relation to civilization discourse, Weber (2016b) turns to the Haraway's second element of figurations - that is, temporalities. As cited in Weber (2016b), Haraway notes "the semiotics of Western Christian realism" allowed for any figurations embedded in it to have a connotation of progressive, eschatological temporality (p.15). It is important to highlight that a fundamental Christian understanding still prevailed in all aspects (including modern Europe knowledge) of European societies in general and the Victorian in particular, albeit scientific reasons and secular politics brought about by the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution (Calinescu, as cited in Delatolla, 2020, p. 151 - 152) . Therefore, despite being an invention of sciences, figurations of the homosexual and the heterosexual also "[embodied/embody] this progressive temporality" (Haraway, as cited in Weber, 2016b, p. 15; my emphasis). More specifically, this progressive temporality posits that "to become closer to god, one had to be a productive individual and engaged in earthly work and economic production - a result of capitalist industrialization and the rise of bourgeoisie" (Weber, Gorski, as cited in Delatolla, 2020, p.152). It could be understood that becoming god was the goal and the means would be both "[being] a productive individual and [engaging] in earthly work and economic production" (Weber, Gorski, as cited in Delatolla, 2020, p.152; my emphasis). Given the homosexual's inability to engage in normative sexual practices, they could not perform properly and thus are not anywhere closer to god, rendering them less perfect or of inferior quality in comparison to the heterosexual. Resultantly, the homosexual throughout the Victorian era was not only sexually but also civilizationally primitive. Fortunately, thanks to the aforementioned promise of salvation, the homosexual could be civilized by being subject to "constant surveillance, management, and correction" (Weber, 2016b, p. 14).

However, Weber (2016a) points out that these narratives when exported to colonies were added with evolutionary discourses in relation to race and colonialism. That is to say, if the white Western European homosexual was figured as the underdeveloped, their counterparts residing in one of colonized territories were figured as the undevelopable. Weber (2016a) further explains that the "underdeveloped" designated "the beginning of the modernization process", meaning that they could still be civilized. Meanwhile, the "undevelopable" was totally excluded from this process. In contrast to the white Western European homosexual - who were still believe to be able to be converted thanks to the intervention of a regimen of normalization, the homosexual in colonies would never have the ability to engage in normative sexual practices; thus "endlessly [oscillating] between the irredeemable "non-progressive homosexual" and the redeemable "morally perfectible homosexual"" (Bhabha, as cited in Weber, 2016b, p. 15). In the same vein, the colonized homosexual was even further perceived as a threat to the West, causing disruptions to not only their colonial power but also their humanity advancement agenda (Delatolla, 2020, p. 153). This hierarchy of acceptance for different kinds of homosexual depending on race and space has resulted in distinguished regimes that regulate the homosexual everywhere. That is to say, the colonized homosexual was not only stripped off a regimen of normalization but

their lives were also dictated by an introduction of codified framework, medicine and literature embedded in a broader civilizing project (Delatolla, 2020, p. 153, Rao, 2012, para. 7). The Indian Penal Code containing the infamous section 377 would be the most prominent illustration for this point. More specifically, the section 377 criminalizes any sexual acts it deems unnatural, including homosexuality, making any offence punishable by life imprisonment penalties ("What is Section 377", 2018).

As Weber (2016b) writes, which is worth citing at length, "centuries later, these racialized and colonial legacies of "the homosexual" live on, but in ways that appear to be completely different from those of their Victorian predecessors" (p. 15). As a matter of fact, if the colonial governance of sex and sexuality is built upon what Berlant and Warner call heteronormativity[5] (Weber, 2016a, p. 47); thereby producing hetero-colonialism, then the West's attempt to export LGBT rights as a norm to the global South is anchored on the new homonormativity and homocolonialism. Defined by Lisa Duggan (2002), homonormativity is a neoliberal sexual politics "that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption". This means heteronormativity of the 19th and 20th century has evolved to consist of new figurations of the (normal) homosexual. Alternatively speaking, the homosexual has been normalized through heteronormativity, which in turn supports the existing system that had persecuted them. However, it is important to point out that not every homosexual is recognized by the heteronormative system. Only those who are embedded in a tenet of neoliberal modalities of domesticity and consumption are referred to as the normal homosexual (Edelman, 2004; Ahmed, 2010; Berlant, 2011; Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 1999; N. Smith, 2015, as cited in Weber, 2016c,). Otherwise, they are still associated with perversion or primitiveness; thus posing a threat to the West. With regards to the modality of domesticity, the normal homosexual is expected to enter a civil union through marriage and raise their children together, which is conceived as a support to reproduction (Peterson, as cited in Weber, 2016c). On the other side of the coin, they are also expected to engage in the market like other consumers in the societies without provoking any challenges to the system (Weber, 2016c). In this context, the LGBT shall be regarded as the 'normal homsexual' as they uphold neoliberal values by forming a "normal family" with their partner as well as involving in consumption. The figuration of the LGBT as the 'normal homosexual' is visible in Clinton's iconic speech at the UN (for more discussion, see Weber, 2016c; Langlois, 2020). In a parallel to such a good kind of queer, the queer migrants, terrorists are opposite due to the fact that they are unable to be properly attached to neoliberalism, such as being an uncritical consumer. It could be argued that being an expansion of heteronormativity, homonormativity and the figuration of the LGBT as the 'normal homosexual' are not contradictory to the West's perception of sex and sexuality in the past. Rather, they are relatively beneficial. First of all, as LGBT+ rights have developed into an international norm within a remit of the human rights framework (Nogueira, 2017), such an expansion allows the West to update its past narratives in relation to civilization to align well with the emerging LGBT social movements and its neoliberalist agenda. Aside from that, by engaging in homonormativity, the West keeps identifying itself as modern and thus sustaining its imposition of civilization narratives on the Global South, leaving the postcolonial world in the waiting room of history again (Dipesh Chakrabarty, as cited in Rao, 2014, p. 201). As Delatolla (2020) points out, Human Rights Watch, for example, divides states into civilized and uncivilized societies respectively on the basis of marriage equality. That is to say, areas where marriage equality is not institutionalized yet are still viewed as primitive despite a noticeable presence of queer communities that are welcome in politics and society.

In discussion of Derrida's logocentric system and Ashley's "statecraft as mancraft", Weber (2016b) notes the "logos" of "modern man" determines the structure or the organization of international relations. Along with that, whatever is narrated by him would be upheld, but otherwise it would be "violently opposed" (Weber, 2016b, p. 17; my emphasis). As with the creation of homonormativity and the figuration of the LGBT as the 'normal homosexual', the West secures its role as a modern man in the international setting, giving its the rights

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[5] According to Berlant and Warner, heteronormativity is "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent … but also privileged" (as cited in Weber, 2016a, p. 47).

to order the international on the basis of homonormativity. That means their foreign policies are squarely shaped by this understanding of homonormativity. More precisely, this new project does not only seek to promote and advocate LGBT rights as human rights but also induce states to give their LGBT citizens full recognition and an equal treatment. To illustrate this, the Obama's administration equipped its foreign missions around the world with toolkits to ameliorate LGBT rights records in corresponding countries (Clinton, 2011). On the other hand, states that fail to uphold LGBT rights would be identified as a source of backwardness and worth being "violently opposed", albeit the active involvement of queer communities into some aspects of society. In this vein, this, to some extent, explains the language that West employs to bring about changes in terms of LGBT-friendly policies is often aggressive - be it criticism or sanction. The UK's threat to dock the aid to Uganda over its homophobic bill could serve as an iconic illustration for this. However, the coercive measures are likely to trigger backlash in the Global South. As Biruk points out, tying aid with the promotion of LGBT+ human rights, for instance, exposes the illiberal side of the West and echoes the histories of imperialism (as cited in as cited in Valesco, 2020). Furthermore, aid conditionality is argued to increase the vulnerabilities of the local LGBT individuals, including stigmatization and state harassment (Rahman, 2014b). Among these vulnerabilities are the stalled access to health and education services which are part of development aid projects and the risks of being scapegoated by the local authorities, as observed by Tanzanian activists (Stewart, 2018). With regards to criticism, policy-related outcomes - be progressive adoption of LGBT-related policies or restrictive- rely on the relationship between senders and targets of criticism (Pauselli, 2023). That means if the target of criticism is an ingroup[6] member, then there is a higher chance that such a criticism could lead to the adoption of LGBT-friendly policies, in light of the level of affinity between the actors. Otherwise, restrictions on rights of the LGBT population follows the criticism delivered by an outsider.

The equation of LGBT rights with human rights is also a driving factor that sometimes complicates or even exacerbates the progress on LGBT+ rights at the national level. As Agathangelou (2013) argues, despite the significance of drawing on human rights to open space for the rights of the LGBT[7] and their expressions, that move is risky because the concept of human rights has always remained universally contested (p. 459). She further points to debates in reference to who is worthy of human rights defined by that framework and under what conditions to bolster her argument (p. 459). As a matter of fact, human rights norms are not always understood the same everywhere. To expand on this, there exists an on-going debate between universalists and relativists in terms of how the conception of human rights should be understood. If universalists posit that one set of human rights must apply to all, highlight shared values, proponents of relativism believe the opposite, claiming that human rights are culturally and politically conditioned (Duncker, as cited in Janoff & Madrigal, 2022, p. 51). It could be argued that the application of a relativist lens to translate the human rights language is quite prevalent in the non-West world, especially in East and Southeast Asia. One of the most famous representatives of relativism would be the former Singaporean prime minister Lee Kuan Yew given his active advocacy for what he calls 'Asian values'. He bases his argument to build up 'Asian values' on confucianism-inspired culture that values collectivism over individualism. That is not to say, human rights do not exist in the region, but they are not of paramount importance in comparison to the growth of the society in general which is itself a precondition for a wide range of political goods (Zakaria, as cited in Freeman, 1996, p. 356 - 357). Therefore, according to Lee, national stability and economic development should come to the fore and some sacrifice in terms of individual rights in exchange is worthy (Freeman, 1996; Bell, 1996). This view gained some support from other Southeast Asian leaders, including former Malaysian prime minister Mahatir Mohamad and the then Indonesian foreign minister Ali Alatas (Sim, 2021). Langlois (2019) argues that rights claims of any sort are fundamentally political as they potentially could spring into conflicts as proxies for other interests and agents embedded in the international political order (p. 75). Based on such an argument, it can be argued that distinguished interpretations of human rights could be explained beyond the regional and local understandings towards it, but also viewed as a facilitator for whosoever's political mobilization. In the case of 'Asian values', given the histories of the region, it makes sense that subsuming human rights under Asian

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[6] As Pauselli (2023) defines, an ingroup relationship is one in which members share normative values, mutual trust, and empathy. Meanwhile, an outgroup lacks all these elements.
[7] In the original, she uses the term 'queer'. However, as I am informed by the literature on the West-led global sexuality politics, I use 'the LGBT' instead to ensure the consistency of my arguments.

cultures by state leaders within the region came about as an attempt to protect Asia from Western political neocolonialism (Tharoor, 1999) or, in Sim's terms, from being subservient to the West politically and economically (Sim, 2021, para. 11). Moreover, this interpretation authorizes East and Southeast Asian states' behaviors, which are not viewed as respectable by the international community. In this context, Bell (1996) points to the Malaysian government's focus on economic prosperity as an excuse for its curtailment of the indigenous people's access to natural resources.

If the framework of universal human rights is already problematic, being perceived as Western neocolonialist and alien to local cultures, constructing the rights of LGBT people as human rights and exporting it to where sex and sexuality contention is socially and legally noticeable is all the more so. Counter-arguments premised on cultural relativism are utilized to challenge the universal human rights notion, and those to LGBT rights as human rights likewise. For example, in response to Obama's comment on legal discrimination against the local LGBT population, the Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta said that their culture, their societies did not accept, implying incongruence of the LGBT to local culture (Alimi, 2015). Similarly, a set of norm diffusion theories dedicated to partial norm diffusion and change also agrees with the presence of a friction between norm diffusers and norm adopters. Premised on the logic of contestedness, this set suggests that a norm is stable and flexible, simultaneously (Winston, 2018) One the one end, a norm is stable when its content and meaning do not vary as it diffuses to adopting states. On the other end, with the same norm, the flexible aspect allows norm content and meaning to change while being diffused. They also resonate with cultural relativists by attributing variation in terms of how a norm is interpreted to cross-cultural disparities (Cortell & David, as cited in Winston, 2018). In the same vein, by studying the institution of some security-related policies by ASEAN, Acharya coined a process to which he refers as norm localization, emphasizing impacts of local agents. According to Acharya (2004), localization is "an active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices" (p. 245). By local actors, he means individuals, regionally based epistemic communities, or non governmental organizations (NGOs), who are dedicated to localizing a normative order, legitimizing and enhancing that order by making it congruent with ideas from the outside. Coupled with that, he highlights that diffusion strategies that adjust itself to fit with local sensitivity are more likely to yield auspicious outcomes than those that make an effort to supplant the latter; thereby recommending outside norm entrepreneurs to act through local agents (p. 245)[8]. The legal victory in terms of same-sex marriage won by Taiwanese LGBT social movement could serve as an prominent illustration for changes generated by local agents. That is to say, acknowledging that the locals value collectivism and democracy based on equality and human rights, Taiwanese activists tailored their campaigns so that they could speak to these virtues, stimulating societal and legal acceptance (Kao, 2021).

However, it is equally important to note that Acharya seems not to take into consideration local actors functioning under the rule of authoritarian and hybrid regimes. In discussion of civic space in countries characterized as authoritarian or democratically flawed, Toepler et al. (2020) point out that operations of claims-making NGOs are likely to be exposed to more state restrictions than service-providing nonprofits and quasi-governmental organizations[9]. These restrictions include a disruption on international funding flows, a

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[8] This can be exemplified by the case in relation to same-sex civil union law of Nigeria. As Mittelstaedt (as cited in Janoff & Madrigal, 2022) looks into the case of a bill banning same-sex marriage in the country, she argues that Western LGBT advocacy can be detrimental sometimes. More specifically, she notes that the bill had not been passed into law and had not been mainstreamed, but it resurfaced after Nigeria had been criticized by the international community. Upon the re-emergence of the bill, NGOs within the region asserted that Western advocacy had undermined their strategy of quiet negotiation.

[9] As defined by Toepler et al. (2020), claims-making NGOs pursue rights-based agendas that are aimed at principally upholding liberal, Western values. Meanwhile, nonprofit organizations function as a service provider and only engage in advocacy to enhance the conditions of their services. And quasi-governmental organizations could also be seen as a service provider. Yet, in doing so, they help the government in their respective country to earn more popular support. Aside from that, they tend to subvert the agendas of claims-making NGOs by mobilizing counter-arguments to the latter's propagation of progressive, Western values (Lorch and Bunk, as cited in Toepler et al., 2020).

repression of access to information and global discourses, and a reduction in these organizations' political voice (Toepler et al., 2020). And in the worst-case scenario, they could be persecuted. That results in the distinction of these kinds of NGOs. For example, facing the state's scrutiny, no local human rights organizations could last in some regions of Russia (Toepler et al. as cited in Toepler et al. 2020). Less exposed to hardships brought up by the regime, nonprofit organizations also struggle in a sense that they have to constantly adjust to changing governance mechanisms in the field of welfare policies. As Toepler et al. (2020) argue, that is owing to authoritarian and hybrid regimes' incapacity to reproduce "Western experience of collaborative governance" (p. 654). In contrast to the first two types of civil society organizations, government-organized NGOs enjoy more state favor in part thanks to their structural organization and their stances. Hence, it could be argued that the West is left with two options when it comes to choosing local partners to localize LGBT rights norms: claims-making NGOs and nonprofit organizations. That being said, the crackdown on organizations that pursue rights-based agendas and the less political agendas of nonprofit organizations call into question the efficiency of foreign norm entrepreneurs' acting through local agents. What is more, such engagement would put them at risk.

2. Societal and Legal Stances on LGBT Individuals in Vietnam

In the past few years, some achievements have been gained in Vietnam with regards to laws and societal attitudes, allowing Vietnam to be "praised as a leader in LGBT rights" within the region (Mosbergen, 2015, para. 2; my emphasis).

In the realm of society, prior to the French colonization, the societal views towards sexual minorities in Vietnam were quite diverse, but no perception that dictated homosexuality or non-traditional gender identities were a sin was recorded. Even though an austere view of sexuality and female morality was applied to the official and elite society, sexually deviant acts and practices were very pervasive in popular culture dating back to the period before the 19th century (UNDP & USAID, 2014). For example, witch doctors who were men wearing women's attire were believed to have the ability to communicate with the supernatural world. Such a practice was not made punishable by any contemporary law back in time. By contrast, it was openly practiced (Heiman & Le, 1975). A discourse that equated practices non-conforming to traditional understanding of sex and sexuality with sins only infiltrated into Vietnamese society only after the emergence Western literature in the country as a consequence of the French colonization (Heiman & Le, 1975). This opinion is also accepted by Frank Proschan as in one of his works, he confirmed that homosexuals are stigmatized nowadays partly due to legacy rooted from the French colonial era (as cited in Blanc, 2006). This perception got negatively intensified when gender-nonconforming behaviors were classified together with drug addiction, alcoholism, and prostitution under one umbrella term - social evil (te nan xa hoi) following HIV contagion's swelling into an epidemic in Vietnam in the 1990s (Pham Quynh Phuong, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that although numerous action plans were launched by the government at this time in order to prevent social evils' entrenchment, none of these was the codification of anti-sodomy discrimination (Phuong, 2022). It could be argued that the society's tolerance towards sexual minorities tends to be more considerable in subsequent to "I Agree" (Toi Dong Y) campaign led by the Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment (iSEE) and other 7 NGOs in the period of 2013 - 2014. The overarching goal of this campaign was to increase support for the legalization of same-sex marriage (Pham Quan Thuong et al., 2022). As a matter of fact, sexual deviant beings are more visible in the media, more likely in a positive light. Studying the changing social attitudes towards LGBT in Vietnam, Pham (2022b) points to one of the episodes of a reality show which is called Life Skills (Ky Nang Song) and produced by People's Police television (Truyen Hinh Cong An Nhan Dan)[10] as an illustration for an open Vietnamese society and the positive language to talk about LGBT individuals by the media. As Pham further explains, the episode titled "What would you do when witnessing homosexuals facing discrimination against their behaviors?" (Ban se lam gi khi thay nguoi dong tinh bi ky thi qua dang?) sets up random people on a street by faking a scene in which homosexual couples were stigmatized by a group of youngsters to record and investigate the participants' reactions. As a result the couples are protected by people nearby and towards the end of the episode, constructive advice for the LGBT community is provided by the host. What is more, anti-discrimination recommendations are also mentioned.

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[10] This television channel is well-known in Vietnam by an abbreviation of its name - ANTV. The channel was established under the prime minister's decree no.4372/QĐ-BCA, catering only to producing and broadcasting programs related to public order, society, and security ("Kênh", 2021)

With regards to the legal framework, sexual minorities in Vietnam did not face any restrictions until 2000. That is to say, under the French colonial rule, homosexuality was not criminalized, making the reality in Vietnam back in the day in stark contrast to those of colonies of the British such as Singapore (Nguyen & Doan, 2022). That legal freedom continued to prevail as the Penal Code of Vietnam has not contained any provision related to same-sex marriage since the country reunited in 1975 (Nguyen & Doan, 2022). That being said, an amendment was made to the 1986 Marriage and Family Law in 2000 after two same-sex weddings took place and exposed the legal void. In this context, article 10 of the amended law prohibited marriage of people of the same sex. Any violation was punishable by a fine of up to 500.000 VND (Pham, 2022a, Nguyen & Luong, 2022). Nevertheless, that policy was reversed 15 years later when the government lifted the ban in 2015 (Lewis, 2016). It is noteworthy that this move by the government does not have the implication that same-sex marriage is legally recognized (Hoang, 2016). At the same time, a bill that allows transgender people to undergo gender-affirming surgery and to register with their new gender identity was also passed by the National Assembly (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Recently, the Vietnam's Ministry of Health announced that homosexuality was not a disease. Coupled with that, the Ministry also stated that conversion therapy is outlawed (Snell, 2022). Despite the progressive stance, such an announcement is unable to authorize enforcement (Snell, 2022). That means if a conversion therapy is performed on a queer person, they would not be protected by any law. Since the struggle of sexual minorities for legal recognition is still existent, it could be argued that the West's promotion of LGBT rights as human rights in Vietnam does not cease yet.

3. Civil Society in Vietnam

According to CIVICUS, civil society is formulated as a separate arena from the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests (CIVICUS, as cited in CIVICUS, 2005, p. 23). In discussion of this definition, Norlund (2007) posits that this formulation does not provide a concrete delimitation of what is called civil society, emphasizing the fuzzy borders between civil society and other sectors. In line with that observation, Edwards (2011) notes civil society is an elastic concept that continues to spark the confusion of the civil society debate (p. 7). He further explains, the concept of civil society varies corresponding to who is speaking: it could be seen as a part of society, while being seen as a kind of society or as a space for citizen action and engagement (p. 7). However, he asserts that a physical infrastructure is certainly indispensable as a means for citizen participation and deliberation to express their voice. That results in the application of two caveats. The first caveat is that "a huge range of entities of different types, sizes, purposes, and levels of formality, including community or grassroots associations, social movements, labor unions, professional groups, advocacy and development NGOs, formally registered nonprofits, social enterprises, and many others" could fit well into the concept of civil society organization (p. 7-8). On the other hand, the effects of these associational ecosystems[11] are mostly unpredictable. On this end, he attributes this phenomenon with its organic characteristics. Therefore, its effects are conditioned by local supports and mechanisms of support (p. 8). On top of that, Edwards recommends civil society be understood in light of contexts and theoretical approaches (2011, p.7)

Such a recommendation is true in a case of authoritarian or flawed democratic regimes. In order to study the civic space of NGOs in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, Toepler et al. (2020) identify three distinguished, yet sometimes overlapping, types of civil society organizations, including claims-making NGOs, service-providing nonprofits and loyal NGOs. As the group of authors explain, claims-making NGOs aspire to the construction of a society that models liberal and Western values by being dedicated to rights-based agendas and advocacy. Less political, nonprofits place their strong emphasis on channeling services to their clients. It is mainly owing to their clients that they engage in advocacy. In a stark contrast to advocacy and service providing NGOs, loyal NGOs are different in a sense that they are either supportive of or supported by the state (Toepler et al., 2020). By pushing the opposite values to the progressive Western ones but in line with the ruling regime, this type of NGO shows some support for the latter. What is more, through one of the functionalities of these

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[11] Edwards (2011) equates the environment in which these organizations interact with the state and its agencies as well as the market with complex civil society assemblages or ecosystems, using a biological trope (p. 8).

NGOs - that is, service provision, the authoritarian - based states seek to enhance or sustain its legitimacy. In concrete terms, loyal NGOs could be viewed as a means by which an authoritarian state could enter the civic space and thus continue to maintain its hegemonic control over society as a whole. On a side note, this is where the confusion in relation to the delimitation of civil society often lies at. That is to say, the intervention of the state calls into question the limited autonomy of the organizations, complicating understanding of loyal NGOs as part of civil society pertaining to Western perception. In the same article, some coping mechanisms as measures for NGOs to deal with or survive state oppression or persecution are also disclosed. These strategies range from co-optation to political integration (see, for more discussion, Toepler et al., 2020).

With reference to the context of Vietnam, the existence of civil society in the country is evidenced. Following the re-unification in 1975, civil society was not recognized by the Vietnamese state as an independent realm upon itself (ADB, 2011). The renovation (doi moi) of 1986, nevertheless, served as a stimulus for changes in the state's perception towards civil society. The renovation, principally aimed at economic reforms, was undertaken as a response to the extreme level of poverty within the country (Norlund, 2007; Hutt, 2023). As a result, many laws were promulgated, including the first foreign investment law (Hutt, 2023). Such promulgation of the law facilitated the foreign investment flows into Vietnam, resulting in the establishment of international companies based in the country. The collapse of the USSR and the U.S' lift of trade embargo on Vietnam also contributed to such a reform as they forced Vietnam to seek new sources for its economy and thus build relations with the U.S as well as its allies in Asia and Europe (Norlund, 2002). That gave rise to the Vietnamese civic space, with international NGOs beginning operations in Vietnam and local NGOs proliferating (ADB, 2011; Norlund, 2007). However, it could be argued that the doi moi allowed the Vietnamese civil society to flourish, but it did not manage to delineate the former in accordance to the Western definitions because, to paraphrase Bach Tan Sinh (2014), which Vietnamese organizations falling under the umbrella of civil society remains debatable. In this respect, Bach Tan Sinh (2014) identifies five groups of civil society organizations, namely the mass organizations *(doan the),* popular associations including professional associations *(hoi quan chung)*, funds/charities and supporting centers, Vietnamese NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs). Meanwhile, Asian Development Bank (2011) and Norlund (2007) posits that Vietnamese civil society is made up of mass organizations, professional associations, community-based organizations, and Vietnamese NGOs. The difference lies in the categorization of funds, charities and supporting centers as a separate group belonging to civil society.

In the article Tracing The Discourses On Civil Society In Vietnam, Phuong Le Trong (2014) points to the state's approaches to account for why it is hard to detect the public sphere in the context of Vietnam, complicating the common Western definition of the civil society. More specifically, based on her observations, she identifies 'structural dominance' and the 'accommodating state' (original emphasis).

On the one hand, 'structural dominance' implies the restrictive landscape for society to maneuver, ranging from self-regulation to monitoring the state (Koh, as cited in Phuong Le Trong, 2013). This approach of the state is embodied by mass organizations[12] , which often sparks the debate in relation to constituents of civil society. That results from the political intervention into their functionalities as well as the structures of those organizations, thus hindering them to be classified as one of the civil society organizations. According to Kerkvliet et al. (2008), mass organizations should be seen as a "corporatist" approach adopted by the Vietnamese state to address new needs and interests emerging in the society as a result of the new political economy. As the group of authors explain, corporatism is "a pattern of organizing interests and influences in which the state gives favored status to certain interest groups" (Stromseth & Jeong, as cited in Kerkvliet et al., 2008). As such, the main purpose of such organizations is to be "articulators of people's concerns and demands and feeding those concerns into the policy-making process" (Stromseth, as cited in Kerkvliet et al., 2008). In addition to that, Phuong Le Trong (2014) notes that these types of organizations serve as the state's ear in the society, providing force for mobilization and assisting the state in controlling main social groups. Although mass organizations constitute a pillar of the Vietnamese state structure (Phuong Le Trong, 2014), Norlund (2007)

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[12] Some prominent examples of mass organizations include Vietnam's Women Union, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union,...Together with Vietnam Father Front Land, these mass organizations establish "the political base of people's power" (Vietnam's Constitution, 2001)

points to mass organizations' dedication to social life related purposes, arguing for them to be recognized as part of the Vietnamese landscape of civil society. She further argues mass organizations at the grass-roots level are more autonomous for two reasons. First, they do not strictly adhere to the rules from the central level. Secondly, they are sometimes funded by non-state sources.

If mass organizations serving as the state's extension into the public realm marks the Vietnamese landscape of civil society as structural dominance, such a landscape is also characterized as accommodating as a consequence of the state's relaxation on some civil society organizations other than mass organizations (Phuong Le Trong, 2014). As Phuong Le Trong (2014) notes, the state compromises with civil society as it lacks vitality to implement its policies, which, in turn, gives rise to the growth of civil society organizations and their engagement. It is equally important to note that nascent civil society organizations have always framed themselves as the state's partner in terms of development projects rather than an oppositional force since their existence started to take root in the Vietnamese setting. As with such self-framing, the Vietnamese civil society appears to be benign and manages to show its good intention, encouraging the state's accommodation. In line with this, when studying the engagement of the state with civil society, Kerkvliet et al. (2008) notes that the state's working with civil society organizations to deliver service is the most vigorous form of interaction between the two actors. Delivering service, in this sense, should be understood as facilitating state programs whose aims are to improve citizens' life, taking up policy issues, and putting the state's behavior under surveillance (Kerkvliet et al., 2008). In this regard, although civil society undertakes the tasks of monitoring the state's behavior or even "offering a source of 'critical feedback'" (Phuong Le Trong, 2014, p. 181, original emphasis), they are doing it under as a state's partner under the latter's permission.

As such, the focus of civil society in Vietnam is placed on the delivery of state programs that are aimed at benefiting citizens. There is little space for the society to exert their influence on institutional changes. However, as Thayer (as cited in Phuong Le Trong, 2014) argues, the space in relation to citizens' participation in policy matters is opening up. He further says the power structures is loosening up to include civil society thanks to challenges posed by the mass media, intellectuals and cultural groups, individuals (as cited in Phuong Le Trong, 2014, p. 183). However, it could be argued that what Thayer observed in 2013 is no longer applicable to the current time in light of the recently issued decree that dictates the associational life. That is to say, decree No. 58/2022/ND-CP, as a replacement of its precedent dated to 2012, enables the state to put civil society more under its control by specifying which groups are authorized to operate (Sidel, 2023). In doing so, the bureaucratic procedures of registration are more onerous for civil society organizations that seek to get an approval from the state for its establishment. At the same time, this decree preserves its hostile stance towards activities violating Vietnamese "national interests," "social order," "social ethics," "national customs," "traditions," or "national unity," among other provisions (para. 12), increasing the chances that civil society organizations are shut down or terminated. Even though the new decree targets primarily foreign NGOs, the effects are pervasive as local NGOs rely on the funds that are channeled to them via these foreign NGOs also known as umbrella NGOs. Given these legal challenges, the engagement between the West and local civil society is arguably complicated.

In brief, the literature lays out fundamental knowledge on the general research topic. That means certain gaps persist. With regards to queer IR theory, it informs our understanding of how homonormativity came about and infiltrated into the West's foreign policies, thereby producing global sexuality politics. Speaking of global sexuality politics, the existing body of literature places a heavy emphasis on resistance as a result of governance based on sex and sexuality based states that were colonized by the British empire, such as India (see Rao, 2014) or Iran (see Long, 2009) or states in which national identity draped in religious identity (see Nuner - Mietz and Iommi, 2017). Aside from that, regions where the West is grappling gain its influence, such as Central Asia (see Rohrich, 2014) are also put under extreme scrutiny by scholars of queer IR. That means a research gap lies in the interaction between the West and regions which do not check the aforementioned criteria when it comes to the former's effort to internationalize LGBT+ human rights. With regards to norm diffusion, for the first time, the impacts that local agents could bring up have been exposed to the academia through its work to build congruence between foreign ideas and locals. That being said, the dynamics of norm outside proponents and their counterparts relations, which also contributes to determining outcomes of norm diffusion process, especially under the rule of authoritarian regime, is not of salience.

The overview of LGBT rights development course in Vietnam informs our understanding of the fact that it is still a work in progress. For example, smae-sex marriage, lying at the core of homonormativity, has not been legalized, suggesting a civilizing mission led by the West to take place in Vietnam. Additionally, the literature also illuminates the current landscape of civil society in Vietnam right now, replete with legal barriers. Taken together, this thesis attempts to expand on the current literature by answering the question in relation to the West's engagement with civil society in Vietnam to promote LGBT human rights.

Theoretical Framework

As the existing body of literature of queer IR suggests, homonormativity as an institution that has been forged to validate the engagement of the LGBT populations on the basis of heteronormativity is made "a measurement of social progress and political development" (Delatolla, 2021, para. 6). In other words, the degree of visibility of LGBT individuals pertaining to homonormativity corresponds to the level of civilization maturity. As such, states that uphold these homonormative norms are defined as civilized. In contrast, states that fail to take in these values are associated with barbarism. Premised on homonormativity, global politics of sex and sexualities liberation, in disguise of human rights discourses, led by the West is not only aimed at exporting these norms, liberating the oppressed LGBT individuals but also, to paraphrase Weber (2016b), authorizing itself to deploy violence as an imperialist preemptive strike to constrain the instability brought about by uncivilized states and its impacts on the West; thereby producing homocolonialism. Therefore, the measures that the West employs to socialize uncivilized states into accepting these norms are often aggressive, namely aid conditionality or criticism, dismissing the significance of local actors in such a process.

This thesis whose aim is to study the under-researched relationship between the West and local civil society in Vietnam in terms of pushing forward LGBT rights as human rights is theoretically grounded to what Momin Rahman (2014a) develops the 'homocolonialist' test. Despite the fact that the original intention of the test was to rethink the West's international politics of sexuality diversity in the context of Islamic countries, assisting in passing by "oppositional models of western gay culture and Islam" (Kucinkas, 2014, p.?), it could be arguably applicable to the case of other societies different from the former, such as Vietnam. He proposes the test as it, in his beliefs, could enable us to ponder over whether in the political concepts, political strategies and tactics, and assumptions of their outcomes, the triangulation of Western superiority is reinstated or reiterated, either in its positioning of cultures or in its process, or whether this formation could be disrupted (Rahman, 2014a, p. 139). Pointing to the argument made by Lennox and Waites that speaks to the national particularities of how movements have developed as far more important than international discourses (p. 142), Rahman (2014a) further suggest a shift in the paradigm that embodies the West's international socialization of LGBT human rights norm, from "attaining universal human-rights outcomes" (Kucinkas, 2014, p.?) to a focus on equality as a "set of discursive and institutional resources" (p. 7). This approach of translatability would allow for the sensitivity to local contexts, thereby upholding LGBT-related values and not showing an attitude of patronizing superiority towards local anti-empathy LGBT values, simultaneously. Therefore, applying this test to this thesis, the engagement of the West with local civil society organizations in Vietnam would be illuminated, whether they are making an effort to adjust to local cultures or using the latter as a tool to sugarcoat Western exceptionalism in relation to sex and sexuality.

In light of the fact an authoritarian regime persits in the context of Vietnam, local civil society organizations that pursue a rights-based agenda, let alone those that have a proximity with the West, within the country are susceptible to restrictions imposed by states, limited in the scope of work or even put in peril. In this respect, I will draw from the aforementioned literature on NGOs operational within the context of authoritarian regimes. We found that advocacy NGOs have to co-opt with the state as one of the coping mechanisms in order to bypass the state's censorship and keep pursuing their rights-based agendas (Toepler et al., 2020). This form of governmental intervention into civil society is widely disapproved of by international definitions of such space; thus constraining their engagement with the West and vice versa. Therefore, the aforementioned theories will lend support in investigating how such a cooperation plays out against the backdrop of the rule of authoritarian regimes.

In sum, the theoretical framework of this thesis is twofold. First, it will apply the theory of the homocolonialism test to investigate the West's deployment of local civil society organizations to induce Vietnam into accepting LGBT rights as human rights. Secondly, theories of claims-making NGOs functioning in authoritarian states would shed light on the limitations of the West's involvement with local organizations in terms of the topic in question as well as their ability to adapt with the situation.

Research Design

This section will focus on the methodological approach which is applied to achieve the aims of this research. The section will start first with defining unit of analysis and unit of observation, shedding light on the focus of the research. Aside from that, sampling methods will also be included. Subsequently, a discussion on why the semi-structured interview is used for this research as a method of data collection. What is more, the validity of this project will be provided, exposing the approximate truth of my inference. Eventually, this section will end with a detailed And this section culminates with the proposed method of analysis to interpret the data in a systematic and appropriate manner.

1. Unit of Analysis & Unit of Observation
a. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is twofold - the West and local civil society organizations. With regards to the West, it is not a fixed concept, evolving throughout the course of time and depending on who is using it. In discussion of the conception, McNeill (1997) notes the West in the beginning was limited to the Atlantic littoral of Europe and America (p. 513). Then, the conception of the West extended its reach to cover Australia and New Zealand. That is also a triggering point for a debate in relation to the delimitation of the West, given the distance between Australia, New Zealand and Europe or North America. However, to Vietnam, Australia is one of the countries forming part of the West. This point of view is disclosed in an article by Voice of Vietnam - the Vietnamese national radio broadcasted, that reiterated the fact that Australia was the first Western country to establish bilateral relations with Vietnam (see, for discussion, "Quan hệ", 2023). Other than that, there is seemingly unavailable data on Vietnamese conceptualization of the West[13]. Therefore, this thesis will adopt the conceptualization mentioned by McNeil. As protection of LGBT rights has been made one of the states' foreign policies (Janoff & Madrigal, 2022), the promotion of LGBT rights abroad is presumably handled by foreign missions. Therefore, cases selected for the data gathering process would be Western foreign missions which are posted in Vietnam and proactively engage in the advancement of the human rights record of LGBT individuals. These missions also need to check the box that they work with local NGOs on this end. Otherwise, it would be invalid.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, civil society in Vietnam encompasses four different types of organizations (i.e, community-based organizations, mass organizations, professional associations and Vietnamese NGOs). The functions of these types of NGOs vary from one to another, depending upon its commitment and its distance with the state. As mentioned above, the Vietnamese civil society is dedicated to (state) projects that are aimed at ameliorating citizens' well-being, with few organizations involved in the policy issues. That includes community-based organizations and Vietnamese or local NGOs. As such, the civil society-related cases for this study would be narrowed down to community-based organizations and Vietnamese NGOs as these two types of organizations are involved in the advocacy work. Another criteria for the case selection are that these organizations have to be mandated to fight for the rights of the LGBT population and that they are formally registered.

b. Unit of Observation

The sample of this thesis is made up of 8 subjects: five embassy officials, of which two are working for the EU Delegation to Vietnam, and three NGO representatives. They signed in the consent form, meaning that they are aware of their rights while participating in this study (see Appendix A for the example of the consent form).

On the one hand, advocating and mobilizing legal as well as social support for the cause of LGBT individuals in Vietnam is a relatively niche area, despite the existing legal vacuum. Given that reason, civil society organizations whose mandate is to ensure the equal treatment of LGBT population are not rampant in the context of Vietnam. In this respect, I have identified the Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and

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[13] In Vietnam, *phuong Ta*y is often used as an equivalent term to the West.

Environment (iSEE), ICS ((Information, Connecting, and Sharing) center, Lighthouse and Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender - Family - Women and Adolescents (CSAGA).

iSEE is a local NGO. The organization was established in Hanoi in 2007 (Park, 2022) thanks to the funding from Oxfam (Pham Quynh Phuong, 2022). According to their Facebook, iSEE (n.d) is a non-governmental organization whose work encompasses fighting for the rights of and empowering the marginalized groups in the society, thereby "envisioning a more equal, tolerant and free society in which everyone's human rights are respected and individually valued" (para.1). In addition to the advocacy work, iSEE has conducted numerous research centered on Vietnam's LGBT community (iSEE, n.d). In Vietnam, iSEE is famous for the I Agree (*Toi Dong Y*) campaign, which resulted in the removal of the ban on same-sex marriage codified in the Law on Marriage and Family of 2000 (Libcom.org, 2021). Another tangible achievement that iSEE reached was the reform in the Civil Code that grants transgender persons to legally change their gender identities on paper (Ngo, n.d)).

ICS center became an independent organization from iSEE in 2010 after receiving funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) (Pham, as cited in Pham Quynh Phuong, 2022). In principle, ICS was formally registered as a social enterprise (ICS official, 2023). The organization claims itself as an organization to protect and promote the rights of LGBTI+ people in Vietnam. In order to achieve such mission, ICS has been placing its emphasis on "transformation in social perception with the help of media…training, organizing seminars and events, providing advisory services, or offering courses about capacity building and empowerment for the LGBTI+ community" (ICS, n.d, para. 1). ICS' other activities include advocacy work. ICS was also involved in the I Agree campaign, and lobbying work to generate legal reform in terms of rights of couples of same sex and transgender people (Ngo, n.d).

Being the very first LGBT-related organization in Vietnam, Lighthouse was established in 2004 (Lighthouse, n.d). Lighthouse is a social enterprise "led by and working with the young LGBTI community in Vietnam" (Aidsfonds, n.d, para. 1). Their missions entail "empowering the community, enhancing their participation and their voice based on evidence, reinforcing the access to comprehensive health services, and envisioning a community that upholds solidarity, ensuring that no one is left behind" (Lighthouse, n.d, para.1)

CSAGA was originally a counseling center called Linh Tam when it was founded in 1997 (CSAGA, n.d). The organization changed its scope of work in 2001. Along with that was the "establishment of the Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women and Adolescents (CSAGA) [as] a non-governmental organization working for the rights of discriminated women and those suffering from gender-based violence" (CSAGA, n.d). It was not until 2009 that CSAGA expanded its scope again to include lesbian-related projects. CSAGA was also the organizer of the first Vietpride in Vietnam (CSAGA, n.d).

Given the particularity of this cause within the context of Vietnam, I will use purposive sampling technique to recruit participants of the interviews. These participants could be any incumbent officials working for the aforementioned NGOs as long as they are knowledgeable about the advocacy work of their organization. Other than that, it is necessary that the NGO officials participating in the interviews should also be involved in projects or work supported by Western foreign missions in Vietnam. Otherwise, the relationship between their respective organizations with Western foreign missions will not be illuminated, impacting the results of this study. It is noteworthy that despite my constant attempts to reach out to CSAGA, I have not received any response from them in relation to their participation in this study. For other organizations listed above, I have secured a 'yes' answer from each of them. Due to their request to remain anonymous, I could not provide other information, such as their position within the organization they are working at.

On the other hand, I also employ purposive sampling technique to identify and reach potential interviewees for the Western foreign missions sample. In so doing, I looked into the websites of the aforementioned NGOs to learn about their main partners/ donors (see Appendix C). In this respect, I have identified some embassies that work closely with NGOs in Vietnam to promote LGBT rights as human rights,

namely the U.S embassy, the UK embassy, the Dutch embassy,... However, due to the tight time frame of this study as well as the sensitivity of the topic, only officials working for the Dutch embassy, the EU Delegation to Vietnam, the Canadian embassy and the Swedish embassy agreed to participate in this study as interviewees. Similar to the NGO officials, the officials working for embassies also requested to be anonymous. As a result, I could not provide much information, including their position within the embassy.

2. **Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews are applied as a method of data collection for this thesis. As states make support for LGBT rights a focus of their foreign policy strategy, it becomes part of diplomacy. Russett, Starr and Kinsella (as cited in Qin, 2020, p. 166) refers to diplomacy as "direct, government-to-government contact whereby officials interact in order to communicate desires and accomplish goals in behalf of states". Therefore, it could be understood that human beings, or officials in the terms of Russet, Starr and Kinsella, lie at the heart of diplomacy. That means without them, diplomatic missions would not be achieved. On the other hand, behind those civil society organizations is also a group of people. Given the significance of humans as a component of diplomacy and civil society, semi-structured interviews would be a very suitable tool. That is because by engaging in this technique, the research could induce participants to tell their stories which altogether disclose the partial and ideological of the official story (Kinsman & Gentile,as cited in Janoff & Madrigal, 2022). Aside from that, the diplomatic environment is replete with distinguished actors (Melissen et al. 2012). In this case, these actors include only officials that are in charge of LGBT-related projects and people working for NGOs dedicated to the cause of LGBT the population. Semi-structured interview technique will let the researcher go beyond the state processes and institutions and dive deeper into shifting identities, power dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and everyday experience (Daigle, 2019, p. 323). Alternatively speaking, it encourages the participants to take the lead and share their own experiences as well as their personal perspectives on the topic. As a result, it allows me to access the world behind closed doors and understand what they do in their capacity. This might be one of the pitfalls of semi-structured interview - that is, the interviewees might be invested in one point. However, as an interviewer, I will politely interrupt if the discussion of one specific issue is spent too much time, but not providing any useful insight. One more good point about semi-structured interview is that it enables interviewers and interviewees to be at ease when sensitive topics are covered largely thanks to the process of relationship building embedded within the process (Leech, 2002). As a matter of fact, human rights issues, in general, are genuinely sensitive. Interviewees would be cautious in their answers, thus restricting them from sharing their honest opinions. Yet, partly thanks to this technique of interview, I can be closer to my subjects, allowing them to open up to sensitivities. As a result, I developed two questionnaires for an approximately 45- minute interview, one for the embassy officials and the other for NGO employees. Both questionnaires will start off with two warm-up open-ended questions with the aim of cultivating the relationship between the interviewees and me. Followed are open-ended questions pertaining to engagement between the two actors. Both sets of questions culminate with cooling-down questions, so that the interviewees could add more information they deem necessary and feel relaxed (see Appendix B for the full sets of questions)
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3. **Validity**
   a. **Internal Validity**

Even though the literature on the topic remains absent, evidence points to the fact that the West also seeks to diffuse LGBT-related norms via local civil society organizations within the context of Vietnam. For example, the fund from Oxfam was invested in the establishment of iSEE (Pham Quynh Phuong, 2022). Through their course of operation, iSEE at one point was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (Libcom.org, n.d). Moreover, based on my preliminary research by looking into the websites of some LGBT-dedicated civil society organizations and Western foreign missions based in Vietnam, I have identified that the two actors are still cooperating through different projects with each other to advance the cause, for instance the Hanoi Pride organized by local civil society in collaboration with the EU Delegation (see Appendix D). Therefore, it could be said that this thesis is internally valid

b. External Validity

The findings of this study could be broadly applicable to a certain degree, if the results are reinforced by future research on the same topic in light of the context. As many of my informants told me LGBT rights are not currently a sensitive topic in Vietnam but the capacity of some civil society organizations to mobilize support would provoke the state, the results of this study should be best applied to settings sharing the same similarities. Aside from that, anti-sodomy laws were not passed in Vietnam during the colonial era. Therefore, researchers who intend to replicate the results also need to pay attention to this context-specific difference.

4. Method of Analysis

Following the data collection and data transcription stages, I will employ thematic analysis as a method to analyze and interpret the data retrieved from the interviews. As Pistrang and Barker (as cited in Riger & Sigurvinsdotter, 2016, p. 34), researchers using thematic analysis typically work with interview data, suggesting a compatibility between the two. Therefore, this choice of analysis method, first of all, is appropriate to the method I use for data collection - that is, semi-structured interviews. Aside from that, by engaging in thematic analysis, the research is tasked with a search for ideas that recur across the interviews. As a result, this technique provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore an issue in depth without the intervention of predetermined analytic categories that could overshadow good responses from participants (Riger & Sigurvinsdotter, 2016). What is more, Roberts et al. (2019) also emphasize on the ability of thematic analysis to facilitate the investigation of interviewees' experience. As a matter of fact, whatever is experienced by the participants of this study is considerably significant because it is central to the study. Using this technique, my personal interpretation would be systematically constrained. Rather, their perspectives would be highlighted, thus reflecting the reality they are faced with. At the same time, in doing so, I would be able to solve the puzzle resulting from the literature view from their points of view, instead of my point of view.

That being said, this technique is not entirely perfect, meaning that it can fall short. As Riger and Sigurvinsdotter (2016) point out, a collection of extracts could be selectively picked to justify the arguments made by the researcher. The second pitfall is associated with the interviews. In this context, Braun and Clarke (2013) notes that the research might use interview questions to organize themes, leading to no analytic work being produced. Acknowledging these issues, I would strictly follow the theoretical framework as a guide to ensure the consistency of the data with the former (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

In order to carry out thematic analysis successfully, I will follow steps presented by Riger and Sigurvinsdotter (2016). First of all, I will create initial codes. This step allows me to identify and classify data into distinguished units. Thereafter, I will conduct a search for themes. That said, data that speaks to the same theme will be brought together under one umbrella. To ensure that the different data would fit together into one border theme, I will carry out a review, followed by a stage that Riger and Sigurvinsdotter (2016) calls defining and naming themes. Eventually, based on a thematic map, I will conduct my analysis.

Results

This section reports findings from the seven interviews that have been mentioned above under the research design section. Among those interviews, four interviews are with officials of Western embassies posted in Hanoi and the other three are with officials of local NGOs which are dedicated to fight for LGBT rights in the country. There are four common themes emerging from the data and they are identified as follows: 'Content', 'Characteristics', 'Modality', and 'Limitations'.

1. Content

The theme 'content' could be understood as which LGBT-related issues are driving the foreign missions' agenda. In other words, this theme speaks to the focus of diplomatic endeavors. As Morin and Paquin (2018) argue, different, sometimes conflicting goals can be pursued by political leaders, leading to changes in national interest (p.19). As a result, there is no one-fits-all theory of foreign policy analysis. Having said that, the literature suggests that the West's global sexuality politics embody homocolonialism that aspire to export norms, politics and rights informed by homonormativity (Rahman 2014a,b; Delatolla, 2021). Therefore, the 'content' is predicted to align with the homonormative system. For example, decriminalization and/or legalization of same-sex marriage could serve as an illustration for a diplomatic endeavor's focus in this respect. As mentioned above, *we cannot not gay rights to be human rights* (to paraphrase Spivak, 1993). That being said, the homonormative system does not always work, if not triggering backlash. What is more, homocolonialism might fail to recognize queer values that are locally practiced and upheld. Therefore, that this recurring theme emerges in the narrative of the interviewees would create a chance for me to examine it, thereby contributing to the outcomes of this study as it also reflects some aspect in relation to the West's interaction with local civil society organizations.

When asked which LGBT-related issues or areas they are particularly concerned the most within the broader LGBT topic, all of four embassy officials provided slightly similar responses to each other. More specifically, two out of five respondents mentioned the general guidelines that they need to follow when it comes to improving the human rights record of LGBT individuals in Vietnam. This is logical because they are representing not only the government but also their domestic constituents abroad. The guideline will ensure that their work aligns with their country's interests. For example, the official working for the Dutch embassy said:

> "[G]lobally, the Netherlands has committed to a couple of things and the most important is fighting criminalization of the community, and of same sex acts. In Vietnam, we, of course, don't have a situation where criminalization happens, luckily. But, we also focus on non-discrimination and just improving the right [...] We don't push for things such as, for example, marriage equality, even if we do have it in the Netherlands and we believe in it, but it's not our goal. So the goal focuses more, I think, on the defensive side, so protections for LGBTQ+ persons from criminalization, from persecution, etc".

For the case of the Netherlands, the guideline takes a genuinely clear shape. And, combating against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identities is of paramount importance, serving as the top priority for them. However, such a guideline does not curtail much of their freedom in terms of agenda setting. Alternatively speaking, they have some leeway to tailor campaigns. At the same time, the existence of a guideline is also reflected in the narrative of one of the EU Delegation officials:

> "[W]e are always pushing and advocating for non-discrimination rules…I think our strategy is to push as much as possible for compliance with international standards. So it can be different issues. I think we can push equally".

In this context, there is a similarity between the EU as an intergovernmental organization and the Netherlands in terms of reversing discrimination policies. Aside from that, international standards remain in place as an overarching focus, outlining its advocacy programs in general. As said, as long as the issues fall under this broader framework, they would be supported with equality. However, international standards would be problematic as they might reinforce the Western import discourses. In addition to that, such standards might not be able to capture the existing leeway of local queer people. It is important as well to highlight that from the perspectives of one of the NGO-interviewees, some Western embassies posted in Vietnam do have some concerns, prioritizing one issue over another. More specifically, he said:

"New Zealand, for example, is more concerned about the mental health of the LGBTQI population. The Netherlands cares more about community building or the development of the movement like I already shared. Aside from that, they are also interested in sustainable development. They want to make sure that the movement can take place in a very sustainable fashion. With regards to the UK, they place a heavy emphasis on building up the movement, raising social awareness in relation to the LGBTQI individuals and the community as a whole. Australia is more interested in equality, with a closer focus on marginalized populations. The U.S has a very overarching interest. It depends on the departments within the embassy or the consulate. For example, the Public Affairs section invests in culture. Meanwhile, CDC shows its interests in health".

On top of that, they do hold the same view which is that their respective foreign missions do not have any strong preference over one or some particular issues. Rather, they are driven by the context or their local partners. For example, one of the EU Delegation officials shared:

"No. From what I understand is when a door is already a little bit open, it's easier to push. So maybe it was [a] priority, I mean, more corporation[s] [when] the government is more open to work on this. So not even that. If we see a door that is open, like I was talking about, the gender law, of course we are pushing to go further, quicker, and further. Of course you have to adapt to the country. Our bible is our action plan, is our democracy and human rights action plan. You find here everything we are fighting for and we are advocating. But then of course you need to adapt your message to the country so that people hear you when you have more leverage".

Meanwhile, the Canadian embassy employee touched on the role of her respective foreign mission's local partners in terms of shaping their goal, by saying that:

"Nope. There's no focus. Our area of focus would be driven by our partners."

In a similar vein, the Swedish embassy official shared:

"We've been trying to support those positive actors that have been in place, [not only] in civil society, but actually also within parts of the Vietnamese governments…We would never want to put anyone at risk for reprisals or anything like that, so we will always try to act based on the advice from civil society itself. We have no interest of pushing an agenda of our own"

In this case, it could be, therefore, understood that there are no concrete strategies assigned to them from the headquarters in Sweden, so that they could adapt to the local situation and provide the suitable support for the corresponding progress. What is more, by doing this, they are also making sure they do not reinstate the Western import discourses, thereby leading to an upsurge of backlash targeting the claims-making NGOs or simply their local partners.

Generally speaking, states have interests to defend and promote internationally. That accounts for why some areas are more significant to some states in comparison to others. Foreign missions work on a mandate assigned by their respective ministry of foreign affairs, so they uphold the same values and interests. Having said that, some Western foreign missions in Vietnam have more leeway to tailor their agenda when it comes to the promotion of LGBT rights as human rights, allowing them to adapt to the situation of the country. What is more, the role of local partners is not dismissed. In order words, they work with them to understand more about the demand of the LGBT locals in order to provide appropriate assistance.

2. Characteristics

The next recurring theme in the narratives of the respondents is called characteristics. This theme focuses on the nature of the relationship in question. In other words, this thematic category reveals how such a relationship plays out in reality by looking into the perception of each actor towards the deployment of local civil society organizations as a channel to diffuse LGBT human rights norms in Vietnam, demonstrating its quality.

A win-win situation could come to the fore as a way to define the cooperation between the Western diplomatic missions and local civil society organizations. In this regard, both local actors and Western foreign missions benefit from this relationship, regarding the role of each other as indispensable for their respective projects. Almost all of the interviewees of this study agreed on this point, implying a comprehensive consensus in terms of a mutually beneficial cooperation. In their narrative, for example, one of the EU Delegation officials stressed the importance of civil society:

> "Civil society organizations [are] our key partner, for the EU. So if you look at all of our policy documents, you will see that in every country, civil society is a key partner and we are implementing many projects with civil society".

Evidently, working with local civil society is so inherently seen as a top priority for the EU that the mechanism is enshrined in its policy-related documents regardless of the context. As a matter of fact, this point is reflected in the EU Roadmap For Engagement With Civil Society In Vietnam. In this document, one could find that the EU is not only approaching its existing grantees but also reaching out to those who have not been recipients of their fundings (European Union, n.d). However, this relationship is disclosed to be not one-sided but mutually beneficial as the EU official continued to say:

> "[W]e are also advocating for more space, increased space, and more recognition of society organizations as a key partner [for] sustainable development".

More specifically, this demonstrates that the EU recognizes that the participation of civil society could sustain the impacts forged by their development projects on the ground. They also acknowledge such involvement of local civil society organizations is conditioned by the civic space. That means a shrinking civic space would diminish the NGOs' capacities to bring up positive changes. Being aware of that, the EU, therefore, constantly seeks to foster a civil space in which civil society is poised to thrive and engage proactively by pushing against oppression aimed at such space. In addition to that, "a mechanism at the European Union's level" is available as well for "human rights defenders at risk" (Interview ?, 2023). Alternatively speaking, the EU needs grassroot level organization to sustain the impacts brought about by their work. At the same time, these organizations need the EU to ensure their continuous involvement. In a similar vein, the point that touches on the protection of human rights defenders is added as the Dutch embassy official shared:

> "Like half of the human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers, facebookers that get arrested, we don't know them. [W]e are not in touch with them. You know, they just write in Vietnamese on their Facebook, criticizing, for example, the government".

Therefore, it could be argued that the mechanism is not accessible for every human rights advocate, except those who have, at least, worked with them.

The mutually beneficial relations is again mentioned in the narrative of the official working for the Swedish embassy while he was making the point:

> "I mean, they will approach us regularly on different issues, be it to update us on how we see the legal developments on certain issues, for instance, or update us on any current concerns that they might have. [S]ometimes, we contact them, if we have a high level visitor coming or if we want to get an update on the situation or so. So it can go both ways".

In this regard, it becomes clearer how each side of the relationship could gain some benefits from this cooperation. This is beyond the fact that one sees another as an actor to maintain their impacts, while they are, in return, viewed as a facilitator for the work of the latter. They actually engage with each other on a daily basis and in each other's tasks. In line with this, the proximity in terms of relationship between these embassies and their local partners is repeated in the narrative of the official working for iSEE. Particularly, he said:

> "We are very close to each other. They are people I can refer to when in need".

The official working for Lighthouse worded this with more elaboration:

> "We sometimes participate in their projects as a partner. For instance, if there is any important event in which our participation is necessary, we would be willing to join, like a volunteer. In exchange, if we organize an event and their presence is crucial, we would invite them to come to share information. In response to that invitation, they are as excited to be part of, even though they are not our donors […] Sometimes we ask for their mental support".

This reinforces the fact that the relationship between these embassies and the NGOs move beyond the donor-recipient typed relationship. The embassies, within their capacity, show support in all aspects, such as ensuring security of NGO employees. Having said that, this is only applicable on some conditions, one of which is that it necessitates that the foreign missions have worked with them already.

In this respect, I turn to the second characteristic that is 'cautious'. This characteristic might be slightly overlapping with the previous one. Given the authoritarian-based setting of Vietnam, this attribute deserves to be discussed separately. The role of local civil society organizations is acknowledged by the foreign missions to be of paramount importance because they act as "a key partner for a sustainable development" (EU official, 2023). However, "it is a challenging environment for CSOs and NGOs" (EU official, 2023), so their engagement with

advocacy work, in turn, would pose some threats to themselves. Being aware of this, the foreign missions are quite careful in approaching their local partners with discretion. Such a discretion could be identified in almost all of my embassy respondents. For example, the Canadian embassy official said:

> "We're very aware of the fact that it's a challenging environment for CSOs and NGOs. We want to continue to support them, but we don't want to put them at risk, so we are always trying to find a balance".

At the same time, that discretion is expressed stronger in the concern of the official working for the Dutch embassy for the potential risks that civil society organizations could encounter. More particularly, she said:

> "[E]ven though the topic of equal rights for LGBTQ+ at this moment is not sensitive, I think there is always an inherent risk to any movement that is getting stronger in Vietnam…[M]aybe the topic doesn't matter so much as civil mobilization potential does, so I think I'm very mindful of these kind of dynamics because I believe the movement in Vietnam, it's strong and can achieve a lot, but there are certain risks that have less to do, maybe with the movement itself and more with the broader political system. And I wanna be just very mindful of those risks and the ways we support the community".

It is important to note that despite the susceptibility to be targets of state's restrictive acts, 'cautious' is less visible in the narrative of the iSEE official. In response to a question relating to the potential risks brought about by their engagement with foreign missions, the iSEE official said:

> "Speaking of the legal framework, it is not a matter when we work with them. Receiving fundings is a different story […] [W]ith regards to working with them, sending them briefing documents [...] legally speaking, it is not a matter. However, security wise, it could sometimes raise some security-related issues, especially when it comes to countries whose security profile is paid more attention to by the government, namely the USA. In relation to the collaboration with a low security profile like the Netherlands, working with them is much easier […]"

On the other hand, through the anecdotes of the other two organizations, 'cautious' is more discernible, notably expressed in the form of concrete actions whose aims are to protect them from consequences associated with diminishing civic space. For example, the Lighthouse official said:

> "Given the landscape of civil society in Vietnam, it is very challenging to provide fundings, so normally we would sign a service contract. Advocacy could be seen as a service per se. We work with embassies under a contract in which we act as a service provider"

In the same vein, the ICS official said:

> "Back to receiving fundings, you might have heard that there are strict regulations in relation to fundings from overseas. That being said, we have adapted from the beginning [...] After considerations, we decided to formally register ICS as a company, like a normal company [...] I think that is a good move. Just imagine, there are more concrete legal frameworks regulating companies in comparison to other forms, such as NGO or social enterprise [...] On paper, we function as a company, which, in turn, has safeguarded us so far, inhibiting legal risks. As a company, we have to pay tax [...] Having said that, many donors could not accept this…As with the increase in the perceived risks, we, in recent years, have been determined to change the sponsor's mindset by constantly talking to them and thus helping them understand more about context. We only accept funding from donors who accept to pay taxes".

These anecdotes illustrate clearly that in order to bypass the state's censorship, they resort to myriad measures, namely registering as a company or conditioning their engagement with foreign missions. Even though this approach reduces the civil society organizations' opportunity to have access to funding monies, it keeps them safe against the backdrop of the tightened state's grip over civil society.

The fact that NGOs could be put into the position that gives them the right to say no to donors leads me to the third characteristic, which is 'not always static'. That equates with the imbalance in powers of both actors. Such imbalance could be sometimes detected in the engagement between the two sides of the relationship. The first sign of such an uneven relationship is manifest in the fact that in spite of advocating for a niche issue within the context of Vietnam, the three representatives of the NGO side agreed that most of the time they would reach out to the embassies first. For example, when asked who would reach out to whom first, the Lighthouse official responded:

> "It depends but most of the time, we are the one who would make the move first. Whenever we have an idea, we will write down a concept note or proposal. Thereafter, we will send out that concept note or when there is an open call, we will submit it".

Other than that, being a funding recipient strips NGOs off some leverage sometimes. That includes determining the strategies or tailoring an agenda that corresponds to the progress of the society, pointing to an uneven

relationship. For example, when asked about how to receive the funding monies but remain domineering in terms of outcomes of projects, the official working for iSEE answered:

"Having said that, provided that the number of funds is limited, we have to put up with them [even if the way they carry out projects is not aligned with ours]. And the justification is that we can gradually improve this relationship after working with them for a while".

That being said, the relationship dynamics could be reversed, placing the NGOs in a controlling position provided that they have some experience of working with each other. Especially, the good experience would be able to weigh in in terms of changing the nature of the engagement. The same official further added:

"But when we start to work with each other, some would not mind contacting us first. Let's just say, if they have budgets for some activity, it always starts off with us, asking them for the cooperation. Consequently, if they have some good experience of working with us, they will remember us for the next time".

On the same note, the iSEE official shared:

"...provided that the number of funds is limited, we have to put up with them [even if the way they carry out projects is not aligned with ours]. And the justification is that we can gradually improve this relationship after working with them for a while".

The reversed relationship dynamics is even more likely to take place if the NGO has some good reputation already. This point is illustrated as the iSEE official continued his narrative:

"I think iSEE has some leverage which is our reputation. Everyone knows about iSEE...The good reputation does not just come to us naturally. It is a result of good work that we have carried out. Everyone trusts us. People believe that iSEE is capable.... That could be translated into credibility and we use that as leverage to negotiate with donors. We sometimes find ourselves in a position that we could say no if the way they work is not aligned with ours".

Responding to the same question, the ICS official mentioned with strong confidence all the points above, including LGBT rights as a unique issue in the Vietnamese setting, mapping out a comprehensive picture of the engagement in question:

"I think donors whose work is premised on the promotion of rights are sensitive to the context. It's just whether we share with them or not...It goes both ways... we are on the same level. If they do not adapt, they cannot find anyone or any project that could create long-lasting impacts....A large majority of our donors are old donors. We have worked with them before and they know ICS. They want to create changes in relation to this topic... We have a lot of demands in terms of values and ethics. Not everyone we can work with".

To sum up, it could be said that the nature of the relationship between the two actors is fluid. This is mainly because of LGBT rights as a niche rights issue within the context of Vietnam.

3. Modality

The third theme is modality. This theme should be defined as ways in which the cooperation between the West and local civil society interacts with each other. It is common knowledge that the collaboration between state actors and civil society often takes the form of funding. However, based on the response of my interview, this cooperation could go beyond that, such as information exchange.

In this regard, funding can come to the fore as a measure in which state actors could interact with local civil society organizations. In an agreement with this, studying the aid that Russian-based NGOs have received from the West, Henderson (2002) notes channeling money to Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as a means of fostering grassroots civic development has established itself as a significant component of foreign assistance (p. 140). Based on the data in the interviews, funding to civil society actors also takes place in the context of Vietnam. That being said, due to many factors such as staff shortages, funding as a mechanism for the West to cooperate with local civil society organizations has evolved tremendously, moving beyond the traditional idea of channeling funding money - that is, direct funds. For example, one of the EU delegation officials said with strong sentiments:

"The objective of sub-granting is to reinforce the capacity of the small organizations because we don't, at the EU, to be honest, have the resources. I mean human resources to deal with hundreds of grants. We are not so many people, for example [...] I'm the only one to manage it at the delegation. You can be sure that I cannot manage 1000 grants of 20,000 euros. Okay. It's not possible. So what we do is we will give a minimum grant of, I don't

know, 300,000 [euros] to NGOs. Then we'll sub grant, like 15,000, 10,000 and to reinforce civil society. So it's the way we implement it because we don't have the resource, we don't have the people to do differently [...]"

The anecdote clearly shows that human resources at these agencies would play a specific role in determining how they would allocate the funding monies to their local partners. That is to say, the limited number of employees obstructs the way in which officials - they are officials working at the EU Delegation in this case - could manage the funding schemes. In response to this internal challenge, they would resort to umbrella organizations which could assist them in distributing the money they have. On a side note, this challenge is merely mentioned by my EU respondents. In addition to employee shortage, another factor that drives these embassies to do sub-granting is that by doing this, they could extend their (financial) assistance to more organizations on the ground. The same EU officials, for example, added:

"[...] so we try not to restrict too much. Usually there is the necessity to be registered[14] legally. However, we are also becoming increasingly flexible on this [end] because we know that it can be an issue for some organizations in some countries, including Vietnam. So now our rules allow us to subcontract to organizations which are not registered, not directly contracted. We [first] need to have a contractor registered [so that] we can send money, for example, and [they are] able to report".

Acknowledging the same thorny issue, the Canadian embassy official explained why one of her partners had avoided the direct fund from them:

"[I]t's, I think, one of the constraints, the current challenges for CSOs and NGOs in Vietnam. Well, two things. One is basically independent activities, organizing activities that they feel support their mandate and achieve their objectives. And the second is the sort of liaison with the international organizations or international entities, embassies being one of them. The foreign funded NGO decree that came out in 2022 makes it more difficult for local NGOs and CSOs to receive funding, and for international NGOs to provide funding.There's more scrutiny, there's a lot more, well, not a lot more, but there are more sort of bureaucratic steps. You know, there is, engagement of the Ministry of Public Security. So I think there's just a, you know, more of a sensitivity and I think the like-minded missions are sensitive to that and they're, you know, willing to engage with their CSOs and NGO partners and ask them what they want."

Or, the official working at the Dutch embassy said:

"We have done regranting, so we have given grants to larger organizations that have been able to give out smaller grants to individuals. Also to avoid this kind of accumulation of funds in Hanoi and HCM city and then not so much going to provinces right?"

As Reed (2021) notes, according to CIVICUS Monitor's 2021 Report, civil society in Vietnam remains being marked as "closed". In line with this observation, Sidel (2023) argues that in recent years, myriad measures have been taken by the Vietnamese government in order to tighten the space in which civil society organizations can operate, such as restricting NGOs' registration. Coupled with that, lots of NGOs could not be formally registered; thus, preventing them from having access to international funding monies because "flows of money from outside of the country necessitates to be regulated by Vietnamese laws" (iSEE official, 2023). Despite the structural barriers, the sharing of resources from diplomatic bodies, for example the EU Delegation to Vietnam, with unregistered organizations can be facilitated thanks to sub-granting via umbrella organizations. Meanwhile, the Dutch embassy is working with intermediaries in terms of distributing financial resources to ensure the reach of their aid to smaller organizations located across the country; thereby leading to a comprehensive development. This is because abuses remain prevalent in areas beyond the peripheries of big cities. For example, "[i]t was three provinces in the center where, you know, they continue to face a lot of discrimination" (Canadian official, 2023).

Other than that, funding monies is sometimes granted in the form of payment for a service, namely advocacy[15], in response to regulations restricting civil society organizations' access to foreign funds. This method is more foreseeable for organizations with company as a legal entity, and reflected in the answers of both of my respondents working for ICS and Lighthouse, respectively. For example, the Lighthouse official said:

"Given the landscape of civil society in Vietnam, it is very challenging to provide fundings, so normally we would sign a service contract. Advocacy could be seen as a service per se. We work with embassies under a contract in which we act as a service provider".

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[14] By this, she means that NGOs have to be registered formally to become their funding recipients.
[15] This point is illuminated in the narrative of the respondent working for Lighthouse (2023).

As a matter of fact, carrying the company legal entity gives these organizations more leeway in their activities as it is accorded to a different legal framework. As with registration under the legal entity of a company, these organizations are subjected to tax-paying. This point could be detected in the anecdote of the official working for ICS. As the official further explains, this issue sometimes complicates her organization's relationship with some donor entities as the latter is not aware of this situation; thereby rejecting collaborating with her organization.

Nevertheless, budgets dedicated to investment into Vietnam-based civil society organizations' projects have been cut down in recent years. The Swedish embassy in Vietnam could serve as a prominent illustration for this point. That is to say, as a result of Vietnam's economic growth, Sweden stops channeling funds to the former under the framework of bilateral development corporation (Swedish official, 2023). Rather, they are funding regional organizations, such as ILGA Asia. And his reasoning is that "it trickles down also supporting different local actors" (Interview?, 2023). Additionally, within the embassy, there is a small amount of available fundings. Surprisingly, this type of funding caters to other purposes than development. More particularly, he said:

> "We do have some funding available [...] We find creative ways of funding activities.Sometimes, we don't have development funding, but we do have other kinds of funding that we sometimes can use, for instance, to the organizers of Hanoi Pride to cover some of their costs, more practical costs or operational costs.That's us being a little bit creative in terms of how we can manage our funding".

Encountering the same problem in terms of little budgets for funding, the Canadian embassy, nevertheless, has a different solution, which is putting their priority in experienced organizations. The official said:

> "We do have some funds available at the embassy, a very small amount. That is, like, for instance, the fund that we've used to support the pride official launch [...] We have hospitality funds, we have funds to organize that kind of event [...] It's not a lot of money though, and it changes every year. However much we get, we might not have it at a certain point. How we would choose it, we would choose it if it's aligned with our priorities and the LGBTQ is a priority, and if we feel that it's a really powerful event or powerful, you know, opportunity to make change or to impact, we would consider it".

The restriction in available financial investment into civil society organizations turns me to the second modality whereby the West's collaboration with local civil society organizations is still possible. That modality is "message deliverers". This should be understood in light of the broad setting of Vietnam. That means these foreign missions do not only convey the message to the high-level authorities on behalf of their local partners but also speak to the general public.

In relation to authorities, engagement of local civil society actors with them is not always viable, if not restricted. What is more, there are forums whereby their voices will be heard but not available for them. In contrast, foreign missions would have these privileges as part of their work. Acknowledging these opportunities, the Dutch embassy official indicated:

> "Vietnam was just selected last autumn to a term for the Human Rights Council and the Netherlands also hopes to be elected this year, for the 2024 - 2026 term. And if that happens, we'll have two years of overlap with Vietnam. So we're also trying to monitor the situation so that we can make well-informed decisions so we can find ways to cooperate also with the Vietnamese government on certain topics".

It is undeniable that the potential progressive impacts that Western diplomats could create within their capacity. However, as the literature suggests, this approach could put the governments of the Global South under a pressure and reinstates the Western exceptionalism discourse, thereby producing friction. In contrast to such a suggestion, the voices of Western diplomats are very helpful in the case of Vietnam. Two out of my civil society respondents recognized the contribution of foreign diplomatic agencies as an efficient indirect communication channel to the government, by mentioning it explicitly. More particularly, the official working for iSEE said:

> "For instance, iSEE wants to express message that says LGBT is not a disease. [Western diplomats] would convey that message to [our] policy makers, to forums that are inaccessible for iSEE, namely bilateral dialogues in relation to human rights or meeting between the ambassadors and our ministers. They can raise issues or reiterate focal talking points".

In an agreement with this, the respondent working for Lighthouse stated:

"Or when they have the opportunity to approach high-level authorities [...] they could contribute by raising their voices for us [...] Their voices carry a certain weight. We try our best to make use of that to the best of the community".

This could be explained by the fact that LGBT related issues as a topic falling under the remit of the international human rights framework are "not so sensitive in Vietnam" now (Dutch official, 2023). Yet, the two aforementioned organizations hold that this practice should be exercised with discretion. For instance, what is narrated by the Western diplomats should be well aligned with the patterns of Vietnamese society and should not dismiss the progress that has been achieved so far.

On the flip side of the coin, another support from the Western foreign missions is displayed in their presence at public events. For example, the official working at ICS said:

"In addition to funding, a large majority of our partners is willing to raise their voices. For public events, for instance, if we think their sharing is useful, [we will invite them to come] and they are more than willing to join".

On this end, the official working for iSEE positively held that their engagement with the public would leave some good impacts, while he was making his point:

"Their role is supporting and amplifying messages they have received".

Similar to the engagement of these diplomatic agencies with the government, it could backfire. As a result this practice also needs to be critically engaged. For example, the ICS respondent shared:

"However, with ICS, such engagement needs to be considered critically, especially in light of the context of the Southern part of Vietnam, concretely speaking, Ho Chi Minh city. I will give you an example. That the U.S ambassador to Vietnam participated in a public event and delivered a remark is not always good for the event. Let's take the example of the period of 2015 - 2016, the period that marked the start of a tightened civic space, to give you a better understanding. At that point, Mr. Ted Osius was still in a position of the U.S ambassador to Vietnam, his speech deliveries at the Pride event in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city was considered obvious because he is a representative of the community. Plus, he is friendly. Having said that, due to his presence at these events, none was realized. Their justification was related to security concerns. Aside from that, many departments within the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made announcements, saying that these events had not been approved to take place".

This led to the adoption of an invisible approach. More specifically, the same official stated that Western foreign missions based in Vietnam are well-aware of this problem, so they always consult with their partners before making any move. As she (2023) further gives an example, her organization would not use any Western - related images or logos of these ambassadors for their events and "they are okay with that". In line with this, the Lighthouse respondent shared a similar point by saying:

"With regard to the embassies, they are willing to offer "quiet"supports with the aim not intensifying Western import narratives. With regard to some organizations, they would refrain themselves from including logos [of their partners] on their events' backdrop, and publicizing information relating to their donors. And they accept this because they are doing this not for branding [...]".

In conclusion, the particularity in terms of setting has led to the evolution of the West's engagement with local civil society in order to achieve its goals and ensure the security of its partners. Based on the data, some adaptation measures have been detected such as allocation funds via a third party or channeling funds in the form of payment for a service. What is more, 'quiet' engagement gains traction as a measure in which Western foreign missions could provide support to civil society actors but not put them at risk.

4. Limitations

The last recurring theme is 'limitation'. The civic environment embedded within the authoritarian - based setting like Vietnam could fail to facilitate such an engagement and often expose the civil society actors to risks. 'Limitation' in the case of this study refers primarily to the obstructions that hinder any efforts by the West to collaborate with local civil society organizations and vice versa.

As many of my respondents endorsed that LGBT rights-related issues as a topic are not complicating the advancement advocacy work, limitation in the engagement of the West with local civil society still prevails, lying principally in bureaucratic processes. In this regard, many of the interviewees point to Decree No. 58/2022/ND-CP that has been issued recently as a barrier they would encounter while working with civil society actors.

As Sidel (2023) points out, a young organization would encounter substantial difficulties embedded in the process of registration. As he further explains, these challenges could lie in getting an approval from the state for "an organization's charter, rules, or leadership" (para. 16) Touching on this point, both the ICS and Lighthouse officials, respectively, held that they also faced the same challenges when it came to registering, but in the end, they chose to register as social enterprises, which now turns out to be helpful as it helps them avoid some attempts made by the state to tighten civic space. More specifically, the ICS official said:

> "It was 2011 when we were trying to understand everything about legal entities. At that time, we already foresaw the risks. However, everything was quite easy back then [...] At that time, we tried to register as an NGO like iSEE, [...] Yet, we were ignored [...] After numerous considerations, ICS decided to register as a company [...]"

This clearly demonstrates that the newly issued decree has changed the landscape of civil society in Vietnam, if not shrinking, allowing the state to control more associational life. As a result, many organizations are operating without a license. Coupled with this, their access to fundings monies from foreign missions is disrupted like the the Canadian embassy said:

> "One thing I could say is it does limit the CSOs that we can engage with. Maybe it actually limits CSOs forming independently and then applying for funding because they're not registered".

Or, the case of the EU's subcontracting as mentioned above could also exemplify this.

In short, the engagement of the West with local civil society remains limited due to the challenges embedded in the registration process. As a result, local civil society would lack the access to support provided by Western diplomatic entities to finance their projects as well as their activities.

Discussion

In this section, I will further analyze the data retrieved from the interviews and interpret it in light of broader discussions regarding the promotion of LGBT rights as human rights by the West and the deployment of local civil society actors as a means to achieve such a goal. By doing this, I can go beyond merely presenting the findings of this study. Rather, I am able to demonstrate the implications of such findings, unpacking what it means and how it could relate to the practical world.

There is an upsurge in the incorporation of the promotion LGBT human rights overseas into states' foreign policies. Despite the leading role of Brazil as a LGBT norms entrepreneur at the UN (Nogueira, 2017) or South Africa as one of the principal sponsors for the polarized UN Resolution 17/19 (Rohrich, 2014), it could be argued that their dominance is overshadowed outside the setting of one of the largest international forums. That has made the West become the core vanguard of LGBT rights internationally or, in Thiel's (2014) terms, "the progress of such strategic politics is mainly limited to the West" (para. 7). Empirical evidence would not disagree with such an argument because in reality, there are more attempts made by the West/ the Global North countries to internationalize LGBT rights in comparison to their counterparts in the Global South. For example, on her way back to Washington after delivering an iconic speech at the UN, Clinton made an announcement that the State Department "would extend pride celebrations from Washington to U.S embassies across the world" (Encarnación, 2016, p.18). Or, Cameroon's immediate move to attach domestic LGBT rights upholding as conditions for bilateral aids (Rao, 2012).

"The West's highest-ranking diplomat, Clinton stood before the world and stated that [...] LGBT rights were part of a universal package of human rights, which transcend international borders" (Rohrich, 2014, para. 8). Premised on such an idea, the West's global campaign for the protection of LGBT populations should be supported everywhere as it allows for "a reconstituting of the human" (Butler, 2014, p. 30) and thus paves the way for the LGBT population in general to be equally treated like other 'normal' human beings. In contrast to that, queer IR scholars are not very much a keen opponent of this. In this regard, they posit that the LGBT rights crusade carried out by the West is built upon their understandings of sex and sexuality - that is, homonormativity - which dismisses the locally existing practices or certain accepting attitudes towards queer people. Coupled with this, states are more susceptible to be deemed uncivilized or underdeveloped and to the West's correction (prominently in the forms of criticism or aid-cuts) if they fail to accept these homonormative values (Langlois, 2016; Weber 2016). Alternatively speaking, by doing this, the West is reinstating the international order in which they continue to be the dominating force, giving rise to neo-colonialsim or homocolonialism. For example, Rao (2012) critically interrogates the UK's role as one of the leading faces in the international fight against LGBT discrimination as it could call back the country's civilizing mission, retraumatizing countries in the Global South, notably former colonies. Not only does the West know how to mobilize the LGBT population for their own purposes, but the non-West also knows how to deploy the non-congruence-of-LGBT-to-local-customs narratives to their best. That means they frame the LGBT human rights discourses as exotic conceptions to continue to justify their state homophobia and thus to resist homocolonialism. As such, the expansion of LGBT-friendly states' foreign policies to include the promotion of LGBT rights should be taken seriously in order to avoid friction partly resulting from anti-colonialism sentiments. It is advisable that supporting states cooperate with local queer communities to help them build up their own agenda rather than impose the West's understandings in relation to the treatment of sexual minorities if they want the advancement of LGBT rights to take place. In line with this, many scholars have called for collaboration with local actors, with an emphasis on local civil society organizations, to bring about progressive reforms in terms of the treatment of LGBT individuals (for example, Rohrich, 2014; Velasco, 2020).

In a similar vein, scholars on norm diffusion also recognize the significant role that local actors could contribute to localizing norms and thus motivating states to comply with international standards (for instance, Acharya, 2004). On the other hand, scholarship on local actors, especially on local civil society organizations, warns of the changing civil society landscape in flawed democratic settings. That is to say, as with these types of states' grip on civil society, the functionalities of civil society organizations would be limited, if not useless.

Taken altogether, this thesis investigates the engagement of the West with local civil society organizations to promote LGBT human rights in Vietnam. Adopting the homocolonialist test developed by Rahman as a theoretical framework in combination with literature on the operation of local civil society organizations within authoritarian states, this thesis has studied representatives from both sides of the relationship: the West and local civil society organizations. The findings of this thesis are insightful as they are able to shed more light on such an engagement which remains understudied within academia. Despite many limitations in terms of the West's engagement with local civil society actors in Vietnam to advance the cause detected, the results of this study encourage the continuity of such cooperation between the two subjects in question given the achievements on this end.

First of all, the results have shown that limitations associated with the engagement persist, mostly lying in the bureaucratic procedures. Given the recently issued decree, the space in which civil society organizations operate would be tightened more by the Vietnamese state. As such, civil society organizations are more likely to face suspension or termination. Given the existing rules of some states that allow their respective foreign missions posted in Vietnam to work directly or indirectly with unregistered organizations, the West should continue to interact with them. Otherwise, the vulnerabilities that these organizations could face may increase. Acknowledging the shrinking civic space and based on the data retrieved from the interviews, this study also urges the West continue to adopt creative and flexible approaches in terms of working with local civil society organizations, such as channeling funding monies via a third party or accepting the fact that a small amount of the funding money would be subject to tax. What is more, "quiet"support would also be a way that the West can engage with local actors but not put them at peril.

Aside from that, this study reinforces the role of local civil society to localize foreign ideas into locally respectable ones based on the achievements that have been achieved. However, this does not denounce the role of the West in terms of advancing LGBT rights in the context of Vietnam since this engagement is mutually beneficial. By engaging more with local actors, the West could be aware of locally accepted queer practice, appreciate the local movement's progress and thus refrain themselves from imposing their "own conditions of what queer equality must look like" (Rahman, 2014, p. 140 -141). Additionally, in contrast to some countries (i.e, Nigeria; see Janoff & Madrigal, 2022, for discussion), the contribution of the West to the development course of local LGBT individuals is perceived to be positive in the context of Vietnam. That is to say, there are channels and forums that local civil society organizations do not have the access to, but the West, such as bilateral meetings, or the Human Rights Council. This is when and where the West could come into play by reiterating the talking points informed by the communities with the government and reminding them of their responsibilities with their own citizens.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

In this section, I will discuss the limitations embedded within this study. The limitations primarily lie in the methodological approach used to address the research question, and in the sample. Therefore, a subsection covering opportunities for future research follows. I take this opportunity to have a look at how this thesis could have been done better. Given the fact that the topic remains marginalized within academia, this section also acts as a call for more study in the future, enriching the existing body of literature.

1. Limitations

The first limitation lies in thematic analysis as a methodological approach of data analysis per se. According to Zelčāne and Pipere (2023), qualitative research allows researchers to conduct a detailed exam of lived experiences, which is very beneficial for this study, but these experiences might be hard to understand provided that there is merely one data analysis applied. As a matter of fact, by conducting thematic analysis, the researcher is advised to focus on the content of the responses; thus, disregarding other factors such as the way respondents provide an answer. Aside from that, thematic analysis focuses on the similarities in the responses and groups them together under codes. This is when the method could go wrong. On the one hand, sharing by a small number of respondents would be ignored even though it could contribute to the outcomes of the study. On the other hand, the coding system is relatively subjective. That said, I as a researcher tried to avoid those pitfalls by triangulating the data internally and externally. By internally, I mean contrasting the responses from the embassy respondents with their NGO counterparts and vice versa. At the same time, the data was compared again with literature to have it verified, and that is what I mean, by externally. It is important to point out that there is no assertive guarantee that such pitfalls were avoided completely during the process of researching. Nonetheless, due to the limited time frame, another method of analysis was not applied.

Another limitation of this study is related to the sample. Again, due to the limited time frame, the researcher's original intention to interview some subjects was not realized. That is to say, the targets for this study's interview were busy at the time, so they could not participate. Otherwise, their sharing could have contributed substantially to this study.

2. Opportunities for Future Research

Given the aforementioned limitations, this part will discuss more how the research could be improved in the future.

First of all, the same topic could be studied again in the future with the application of other methods of data analysis, such as narrative analysis. Respondents tend to structure their answers in the form of a story. Combining with content analysis could help researchers to expose more lived experiences. At the same time, the data could also be extrapolated.

Secondly, as I have identified above, this study could be enhanced by having a larger sample size. My original intention was to interview people working for embassies like the U.S or the UK. In my belief, their responses could disclose a lot about their engagement with civil society organizations to promote LGBT rights given the fact that the Vietnamese government is very cautious about their political intervention, especially on human rights issues. Aside from that, during the process of this research, I also learned about the existence of unregistered civil society organizations. As with the diminishing civil society boundaries, such organizations would have more issues to deal with, complicating the engagement between the West and themselves. As such, if the same topic is to be studied in the future, it is highly advisable that unregistered organizations be included in the sample.

Conclusion

As with the fact that local civil society organizations as a channel for external actors to diffuse norms, notably norm related to LGBT, does not gain much traction within academia, this thesis aims to enrich the existing body of literature on the same topic by unpacking how the West has engaged with local civil society organizations to promote LGBT rights as human rights.

This thesis uses theories on queer IR and state-society relations in the authoritarian setting as a foundation for its investigation. Unlike what queer IR as a discipline has informed our understanding of what is often called the West's LGBT rights crusade, Vietnam with no bills that legalize LGBT rights in connection to homonormativity is not perceived as uncivilized. Coupled with that, there is an active engagement of the West with local actors to generate progressive reforms on this end.

First of all, this study found that the agenda of the West in terms of the promotion of LGBT rights as human rights is not imposed by their understanding of sex and sexuality. Their sexuality liberation campaigns are driven by local demands and local movements.

That is linked to the second finding of the study which focuses on the nature of the relationship between the two actors. More specifically, this study sheds light on the fact that during the process of norm localization, the role of external actors is considerable. That is to say, the relationship between the West and local civil society is mutually beneficial. The West needs local actors as a channel to translate their ideas into those that are locally respectable. On the other hand, local actors also recognize the role of the West given their capacities. For example, diplomats of the West could have easy access to high-level authorities that local actors could not reach. Given the Vietnamese state's attempt to tighten the landscape of civil society, the West's constant advocacy for the engagement of local civil society helps slow down the process or could be reversed.

The context of Vietnam also sheds light on numerous modalities in which the West could engage with civil society organizations. Particularly, the findings identified that direct funding is sometimes replaced by indirect way of channeling funding monies via umbrella organizations. Other than that, fundings sometimes take the form of a payment under a service contract, in which local actors are service deliverers. Coupled with this, an issue which is tax payment arises. However, it is demonstrated that the West is gradually becoming flexible on this issue, willing to pay tax.

The last finding is that limitations persist. The new decree that dictates associational life is making it harder for local actors to establish themselves as civil society organizations. Aside from that, this decree also targets mostly umbrella/foreign NGOs, putting them under severe scrutiny by the state. This is troublesome because umbrella NGOs play the role of a channel whereby funding monies is channeled to smaller or unregistered organizations.

Even though the findings fill in the gap identified in the literature review section by revealing the dynamics of the relationship between the West and Vietnamese civil society, this study could be improved. That means future researchers could reinforce the outcomes of this study by expanding the same size pertaining to my advice. Aside from that, application of more than one data analysis method would also contribute to the improvement of the outcomes. The findings could be broadly applied. Yet, context factors should be taken into consideration. This study ends with a note urging future research to continue to study this topic as this thesis just laid a foundation.

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Appendix A

❖ *Questionnaire for the local LGBT+ civil society organizations:*

Introduction

1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

   Anh/chị có thể vui lòng giới thiệu đôi nét về bản thân giúp em được không

2. How long have you been working at the current position?

   Anh/chị làm ở đây lâu chưa ạ?

3. What do you like the best about this job?

   Anh/chị thích nhất điều gì về công việc hiện tại

4. Could you please describe what your normal day at work would be like?

   Anh/ chị có thể mô tả một ngày làm việc bình thường của mình được không?

Interaction with the West

5. How much percentage of your tasks is dedicated to advocacy work? Could you please share what your organization's main focus is now?

   Bao nhiêu phần trăm công việc của anh/chị có liên quan đến việc vận động cho quyền của cộng đồng LGBT? Hiện tại, tổ chức của anh/chị đang hướng tới những quyền nào?

6. How do you find partners for your campaign? (Prompt: Who reaches out to whom first?)

   Anh/chị tìm kiếm đối tác như thế nào? (Bên nào sẽ là người chủ động?)

7. Do you have any freedom in detailing your campaigns in compliance with your organization's focus? (Prompt: Do your partners have any expectations for the outcomes? How do they let you know about these expectations? Do you have to report to them? How that happens?)

   Anh/ chị có được chủ động trong việc thiết kế các chiến dịch của bên mình không? (Đối tác của anh/chị có đặt kì vọng cho những chiến dịch này không? Họ cho anh/chị biết về những kì vọng này như thế nào? Anh/chị có phải báo cáo về tiến độ của chiến dịch cho họ không? Điều đó diễn ra như thế nào?)

8. In your opinion, what are the challenges while working with these partners?

   Theo anh/chị, đâu là những khó khăn khi làm việc với họ?

Interaction with local authority

9. How often do you have (formal and informal) meetings with local authorities? Are you invited to those meetings or do you initiate those meetings?

   Anh/ chị có hay tiếp xúc với chính quyền địa phương không? Anh/chị được mời hay tự chủ động những cuộc họp này?

10. For those meetings, what is a typical agenda like?

    Với những cuộc họp như vậy, thông thường đôi bên sẽ trao đổi những gì?

11. From your perspective, are they easy to talk with? (Prompt: do they question your motives?)

    Theo anh/chị, họ có dễ dàng trao đổi không? (Họ có chất vấn động cơ của anh chị không?)

    a. If not, in your opinion what could be the reasons?

    Nếu không, thì theo anh/chị đâu là lý do?

12. What would determine the outcomes of your campaigns?

    Điều gì quyết định đầu ra các chiến lược của anh/chị?

Cooling down

13. Are there any things we did not yet touch upon that you would still like to mention?

    Anh/chị còn muốn chia sẻ gì thêm với em không?

❖ ***Questionnaire for the Western governmental bodies interested in the rights of the LGBT locals***

Introduction

1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself?
2. How long have you been working at the current position?
3. What do you like best about this job?

Interaction with local civil society organizations

4. How would you describe your department's scope of work?
5. How would you assess your department's engagement with civil society organizations in Vietnam?
6. In your capacity, what are the pros and cons of working with Vietnamese civil society organizations? How does your apartment avoid those cons?
7. How important is the promotion of the rights of Vietnamese LGBT+ individuals to your department's missions?
8. What has your department done to advance the rights of this group?
9. How would you describe the relationship between your department and the local civil society organizations that you are currently working with?
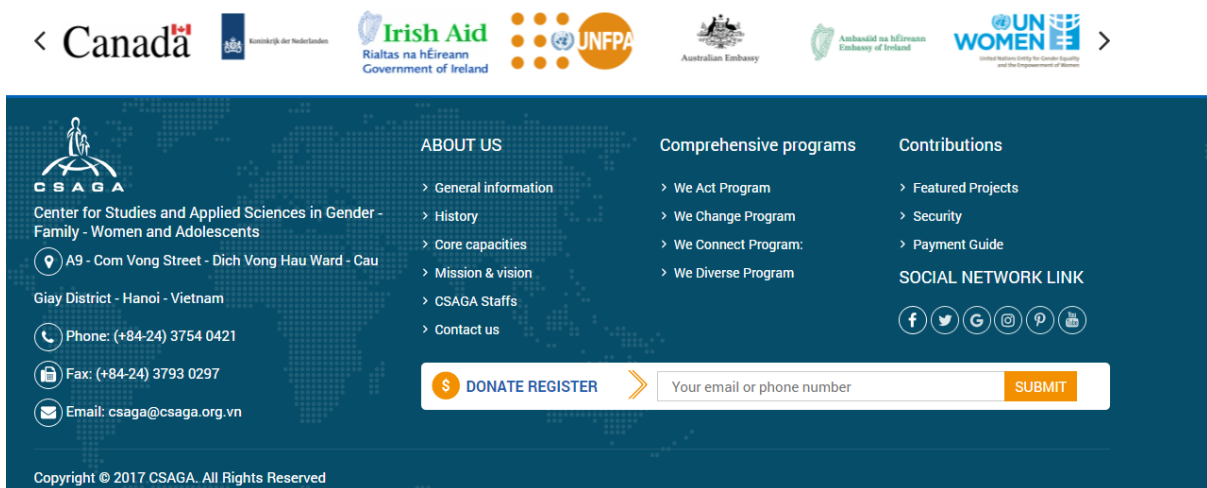10. What is your department's expectation(s) while working with those organizations?

Cooling down

11. Are there any things we did not yet touch upon that you would still like to mention?

Appendix B

Partner section on ICS Center's website

Partner section on CSAGA's website

Partner section on Lighthouse 's website

Appendix C

The EU Ambassador delivering a speech to one of the events within the framework of Hanoi Pride 2022