
VALUES, VULNERABILITY, AND --- SOCIAL EXCLUSION



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**VALUES, VULNERABILITY, AND SOCIAL
EXCLUSION - 2026**

ISBN: 978-625-91915-4-6

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20970137

July / 2026
Ankara, Türkiye



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Date: 17.07.2026

Farabi Publishing House

Ankara, Türkiye

www.farabiyayinevi.org

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ISBN: 978-625-91915-4-6

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PREFACE

Contemporary societies are shaped by cultural diversity, unequal social conditions, and forms of vulnerability that influence individual experiences and collective life. These realities require interdisciplinary perspectives capable of examining how values, social risks, and exclusionary practices are produced and experienced in different cultural and social contexts.

The chapters in this volume address selected issues related to multiculturalism, addiction, and social exclusion. The first chapter examines multicultural value relativism and considers how cultural diversity shapes moral, social, and collective understandings. The second chapter investigates the prevalence of drug addiction among female students at Gombe State University in Nigeria, drawing attention to a significant issue affecting student wellbeing and public health. The third chapter explores aporophobia and symbolic violence experienced by urban informal workers in Tabasco, highlighting the relationship between poverty, dignity, and marginalization.

By bringing together these studies, this volume emphasizes the importance of understanding social challenges through cultural, social, and human-centered perspectives. The chapters demonstrate how value systems, health-related vulnerabilities, and structural inequalities can shape individual lives and influence wider processes of inclusion and exclusion.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a useful academic resource for researchers, students, professionals, and scholars interested in multiculturalism, social inequality, addiction studies, urban marginality, and human dignity. We extend our sincere appreciation to all contributing authors for their valuable scholarly efforts.

Editorial Team
July 2026, Türkiye

CHAPTER 1
MULTICULTURAL VALUE RELATIVISM

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism as a form of communitarianism is frequently defined as a contemporary theoretical and practical movement that confirmed the importance of a particular culture in human life, the importance that is allegedly marginalized by liberalism. This view often ignores the fact that one of the main multiculturalist objections to liberalism is that the latter made particular cultures irrelevant in the process of constituting legal order of modern states, by placing them within the private sphere. This basic objection to liberalism leads to the central point of the multicultural idea – insistence on internal connection between the character of particular cultures, and the character of legal-constitutional orders of communities and states. Thus, one could argue that multiculturalism aims at re-integrating what liberalism tore apart – a cultural tradition and a legal-constitutional order. Liberalism does not deny the importance of particular cultures or cultural traditions in human lives, as it grants to each individual the right to choose, based on one's own preferences, from different concepts of the good life, whose integral part is culture. It is up to the individual whether he/she will choose an individualized concept of the good life, or the one that originates from a certain cultural tradition. From a liberal point of view, a cultural tradition cannot be excluded as an optional content of choice; legally guaranteed primacy of individual rights is of prime importance – that is to say, a legalized rule that no one can make decisions instead of an individual, unless he/she explicitly authorized him/her to do so.

By insisting on internal connection between particular cultures and normative orders, multiculturalism actually contextualizes law, as each law has to be particular, as a reflection of a particular culture that lies in its foundation. Thus, the essence of every legal system becomes a concrete social context, which is strongly determined through an appropriate cultural tradition. A necessary consequence of such understanding of a legal system is a radical criticism of every type of universalism – both a metaphysical (that is to say, substantial) one, as well as a post-metaphysical (de-substantial, of the liberal kind) one. The essence of multiculturalism is a contextualism, within which there can be no law in the singular, but only in plural. By granting a particular culture the status of a fundamental level that is the root of everything else, multiculturalists contextualized universal reason as such.

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According to them, individuals can develop their own self-understanding, their own concepts of good and justice and their abilities for constituting moral judgments only in the context of a particular cultural tradition, and the community appropriate for it.

According to them, reason independent of tradition, which would, relying only on itself and on its own internal logic, deduce a universal normative (moral and legal) order, that would be valid in all contexts and times, is only a liberalist chimera. A system of moral and legal principles that would be deduced from such a reason would be, according to them, a mere intellectual construction that, if used in the real world, performs violence over real life, as it has no grounding in it. Just as there cannot be any contextless, depersonalized person, there cannot be a morality or a law or a context-transcending reason, neutral and independent with regard to cultural traditions.

A particular cultural tradition is postulated as a *prius*, while the rationality, morality, and law are perceived as deduced from it. Rationality only makes explicit the principles immanent to a given context, within which it functions. "Philosophical theories give organized expression to concepts and theories already embodied in forms practice and types of community" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 390).

As they assigned to the cultural tradition the status of an essential component of a particular context, multiculturalists brought all the intra-contextual moments in relation to that essential fact, also including an individual, as a member of a particular contextualized community. Individual activities are shaped and determined by the culture in which they get "socialized" from the very first day of life: "What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I found myself part a history and that generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 220).

By connecting reason to a concrete socio/cultural context, multiculturalists actually reject the universal reason as such, not only the metaphysical reason as essential one, but also the post-metaphysical, pure procedural reason, thus abolishing any autonomous power that it as such might have.

1. MULTICULTURALISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF UNIVERSAL REASON

According to Hegel, at the height of metaphysics, reason is deprived of any outside conditioning, which makes it absolutely non-conditioned and independent, based in itself: unlike understanding (*Verstand*), which is determined by the empirical data, that exists outside of it as an independent positive being, reason (*Vernunft*), as it contains everything “other” within itself (the empirical, the sensual, the particular, the final), turns out to be a self-positioning, self-developing and self-uniting power, so any empirical given is nothing but empirical phenomenal manifestation of reason as an all-encompassing principle.

As a critic of metaphysical ontologization of reason, Kant ascribes to reason the *a priori* status: in his *Critique of the Practical Reason*, relevant for the discussion here as it points to his relationship with the normative order – both moral and legal – Kant treats the pure practical reason, as the reason unmediated by empirical data, as an autonomous rational power that, following its internal formal logic rules, produces purely formal, non-teleological, de-ontologized norms, regardless of any cultural tradition and all empirical sources.

On the other hand, multiculturally minded MacIntyre points the following: “... it is an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions Those who have maintained otherwise either have covertly been adopting the standpoint of a tradition and deceiving themselves and perhaps others into supposing that theirs was just such a neutral ground or else have simple been in error” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 220).

Thanks to this abolishment of reason’s autonomy, which necessarily leads to anti-universalism, multicultural ideal is, in essence, the opposition to the liberal, or modern, ideal. While the liberal ideal can be summed up as coexistence within the state of the individuals of different ethno-cultural identity, the multicultural ideal is coexistence within the state of the groups of different ethno-cultural origin, which are treated as political units.

It is obvious that realizing the latter demands a “return” of ethnic and cultural principles from the sphere of the society into the sphere of state’s constitutive principles, to a different extent, and depending on the character of collective rights.

However, if the aforementioned multicultural logic is consequentially followed through, it turns out that it leads to the intracontextual monism and holism. If the legal system is put in a function of protecting concrete cultural traditions, then the individuals who live within that system are expected to follow only substantial values and customs of their own cultural tradition, that is to say, they are forbidden to accept substantial values and customs of other traditions. In other words, as in such legal system most individuals are deprived of the right to choose between different cultural conceptions according to their will, the necessary relationship between their (individual) and their community’s identity based on a specific cultural tradition is established.

Furthermore, if a specific cultural tradition is treated as a substantial basis of the entire institutional system, it follows that that institutional system is closed for classical parliamentarism, for in such a political system different parties can relate to cultural tradition in different ways, and some of them might even be oriented against tradition. In the best case scenarios, in countries whose legal system is connected to a cultural tradition, a limited party pluralism is possible, limited in it allows only for parties that respect fundamental presuppositions on which a given cultural tradition is based. For example, multiparty system exists in contemporary Iran, but only parties that do not reject Islam are legal in it, so they are reduced to pro-Islamic fractions that can be reform-oriented to a greater or lesser extent, but under the condition that the reforms do not question the foundations on which Islam is based.

2. VALUE RELATIVISM AND WALZER’S CONTEXTUAL UNIVERSALISM

By rejecting every transcontextual, i.e., universal standard, multiculturalism actually accepts the point of view of the absolute relativism, because if that standard is absent, cultural traditions cannot be hierarchically ordered, but must be treated as equally valid.

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However, the historical experience so far shows that customs that can hardly be accepted from the position of elementary humanity and civilization could be essential component of some cultural traditions. Some examples include the institution of slavery, mass killings of people in order to maintain the despotic rule, absence of individual rights, lack of women's rights, burning of widows, stoning of adulterers, public whippings in sport stadiums, discrimination of allegedly inferior races, etc. If all of this is taken into account, the question is how to criticize these actions, if there are no supra-contextual, universal standards?

Faced with such problems, multicultural pluralists face a dilemma: whether to also approve all of the above mentioned phenomena that go against elementary feeling of justice, or to modify to an extent their starting premises. In order to dodge accusations of extreme relativism, a number of them attempted to make a distinction between "thin" universal morality, which was supposed to be common for all particular communities, and "thick," "solid," more encompassing, relativist morality which differs from one place to another, and thus represents the specific moral basis for each particular community. Such a distinction was made by Michael Walzer, following his book on the realms of justice. In the Introduction to his *Thick and Thin*, he wrote, singling out the topic he is about to discuss: "There is a thin man inside every fat man", Georg Orwell once wrote, "just as... there is a statue inside every block of stone". "Similarly, there are the makings of a thin and universalist morality inside every thick and particularist morality – but the story of these two is not at all like the statue and the stone. They are differently formed and differently related, as we shall see" (Walzer, 1994, p. 2).

What immediately comes to mind is the way in which Walzer establishes the relationship between the "thin", minimal, and "thick", contextualized morality. Given his assumption that universal morality exists "within each thick and particular morality," Walzer does not treat minimal universal morality as something external to "contextualized morality", but as its immanent part, as its expression.

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Minimal morality is not the foundation of maximal morality, as morality is from the very beginning “thick” and culturally integrated, thus the morality in which a moral minimum is rooted and from which it is occasionally and temporarily abstracted, is a full-bloodied contextualized, particular morality which people possess as a people. It is not that the minimal morality comes before the particular, maximalist morality, but the other way around. Minimalist meanings are included in the maximalist morality; both of them are expressed in the same idiom, and they share the same historical, cultural, religious and political orientation. Minimalist morality breaks free from this internal connection with particular morality, and becomes independent only during the times of personal and social crises, or during political confrontations.

By tying thin universal morality to contextualized one, Walzer actually tries to develop a concept of contextualist universalism in order to avoid the substantial universalism of the metaphysical provenance on the one side, and formalist (procedural) universalism of the post-metaphysical provenance on the other.

In his Tanner Lectures, “Nation and Universe,” Walzer analyzes main characteristics of substantial universalism using historical examples – Judaism and Christianity. This type of universalism claims that, as there is one God, there is one Law, one Justice, one correct understanding of the good life or good political system, one salvation, one Messiah, one millennium for the entire humanity. „I will call this the covering-law version of universalism“ (Walzer, 1989). “The end - of this type of universalism – can be described in militarist and triumphant terms as the victory of the universalizing tribe ...” (Walzer, 1989). Thanks to its monistic nature – one truth, one law – this universalism will develop into a mission – a mission for the chosen, selected, true believers, the avant-garde, the ones who already possess all the knowledge and legal codebook that will one day be accepted by everybody. “What is the state of mind and feeling appropriate to such people? If not pride, then certainly confidence; we can recognize covering-law universalism by the confidence it inspire“ (Walzer, 1989).

Walzer has two main complaints for the formalist (or procedural) morality. First of all, on careful inspection, the procedural minimum includes in itself more than a minimum.

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When the rules are set based on which a debate will be conducted about the issues of justice that should provide freedom and equality for all the participants, then participants in debate are left to achieve consensus about the social structure, political involvement, distributive standards and the like, about the questions that actually cover a particular way of life, so the assumed “thin” morality turns out to be quite “thick” (Walzer, 1999).

Second, when discussing justice understood in a procedural sense, this is where minimalism comes before justice: “we used to be thin, but then we become thick”. Therefore, procedural philosophers argue for rejecting any morality that is not or could be not produced through their own procedure. Minimal rules are treated as something devoid of any personal or social characteristics, as completely depersonalized rules. Minimal morality is claimed by everyone, because no one in particular claims it. That is why it abstracts from subjective interests and cultural expressions. “But the minimum is not the foundation of maximum, only a piece of it” (Walzer, 1999, p. 18).

As I already point out, in contrast to metaphysical and procedural universalism, Walzer attempts to set up a contextualized universalism, whose characteristics are most clearly outlined through the analysis of its roots in a version of Judaism in the aforementioned essay “Nation and Universe”. When analyzing certain Biblical fragments, Walzer pays special attention to the one in which God asks:

“Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? . . . Have I not brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, And the Philistines from Caphtor, And the Syrians from Kir?” (Amos 9:7).

These questions are important because they indicate that “there is not one exodus, one divine redemption, one moment of liberation, for all mankind, the way there is, according to Christian doctrine, one redeeming sacrifice. Liberation is a particularist experience, repeated for each oppressed people. At the same time, it is in every case a good experience, for God is the common liberator. Each people has its own liberation at the hands of a single God, the same God in every case, who presumably finds oppression is universally hateful. I propose to call this argument reiterative universalism. What makes it different from covering-law universalism is its particularist form and its pluralizing tendency.

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We have no reason to think that the exodus of the Philistines or the Syrians is identical with exodus of Israel, or that it culminates in a similar covenant, or even that the laws of those peoples are or ought to be the same” (Walzer, 1989).

In non-religious language, different peoples, peoples with different cultural traditions, all have different experiences of their own self-liberation, and the goal of this self-liberation is self-determination, whose content will vary accordingly – according to the history and cultural characteristics of the liberated nation.

“Self-determination is a value that I have to defend, if I defend it at all, even if I believe that unworthy or wrongful choices will often be made. I may oppose self-determination in a particular way, however, if the agent’s choices in that case are sure or virtually sure to violate critically important moral principles; but I would still count myself as a defender of self-determination. People have to choose for themselves, each people for itself. Hence, we determine our way of life, and they do, and they do, up to the nth they – and each determination will differ in significant way from preceding and concurrent determinations ... There is no covering law or set of laws that provides a sufficiently complete blueprint for our works and theirs. Nor is the case that the laws agreed to by one people cover all the others, so that substantive imitation can replace procedural reiteration. There cannot be a replace of that sort if the values and the virtues are real values and the virtues” (Walzer, 1989).

Therefore, just as various nations, as their cultural identities are quite different, have different experiences in liberating themselves, they also, for the very same reason, have different forms of self-determination; hence, every form of collective liberation and each aspect of collective self-determination have a particular character. All the nations share the struggle against tyranny and torture, but the content of that struggle will be irreducibly different. That is why a general substantially determined concept of that struggle can never be formulated, nor can one list any general rules that would be valid in case of such a struggle. The same goes for self-determination. The wish for self-determination is common for all, but its content varies from one nation to the other, because every nation is a story for itself when it comes to its history and cultural tradition.

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Taking all that into account, Walzer's minimal morality should not be interpreted as a minimal set of certain final values or purely formal rules, in relation to which exists, or could exist a consensus on the level of entire humanity. Minimal morality of a Walzerian type could be described in negative terms: to be opposed to tyranny, suppression, torture, cheating, arbitrary arrests, etc.

In the beginning of the already mentioned book *Thick and Thin*, in the chapter on moral minimalism, Walzer reminisces television images of 1989 mass Prague protests, when people carried banners reading "Truth" and "Justice." Protesters were members of the same culture, mostly unknown to him. However, he immediately felt a sense of solidarity with them and allegiance to their cause; moreover, he was certain that he could have joined them and carried the same banners, regardless of the fact that he would have probably advocated somewhat different ideas of "truth" and "justice." However, protesters were not marching in defense of a certain theory of justice and truth, but in defense of something that was so elementary, that it could have been part of any theory of truth and justice. Even though they had different explanations of history and culture, protesters "wanted to hear true statements from their political leaders; they wanted to be able to believe what they read in the newspapers; they did not want be lied to anymore... What they meant by justice inscribed in on their signs, however, was simple enough: an end to arbitrary arrests, equal and impartial law enforcement, the abolition of the privileges and prerogatives of the party elite – common, garden variety justice" (Walzer, 1999).

To summarize, they protested against the phenomena that are the integral part of tyranny as tyranny. Members of other nations and culture who would, like Walzer, feel the need to join the Prague protesters, also had the experience of tyranny, or listened or read about it in stories which form an immanent part of their own culture. That is why they could, at least in their thoughts, also join the Czech protesters, while supplanting the banners on truth and justice with meanings from their own cultures, calling upon similar protests that took place in their homeland, where they either took part, or experienced them through stories woven into their own culture. "We too don't want to be told lies; we too remember, or we have listened to stories about, tyranny and oppression. We

see the point of the Czech signs. At the same time, however, we give to “truth” and “justice” our own additional meanings; we allow them their full expressive rang within our own culture. So while we march in spirit with the men and women of Prague, we have in fact our own parade” (Walzer, 1999). If the ones who felt compassion with the Prague demonstrators did not have, in reality or in imagination, similar marches in their own cultures, they would have been unable to feel sympathy for the expressions of mass discontent in other cultures. Czech communist society was morally an insufficient society because it performed violence over minimal moral standards (demands for the abolishment of tyranny and oppression). “It is of course the minimalism of ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ that makes it possible for us to join the Prague marchers” (Walzer, 1999).

As soon as one steps onto the terrain of the discussion on potential alternatives to Czech communism, the agreement stops, for that discussion goes beyond the limits of minimal moral standards. “A society or political regime – like that of the Czech communists – that violated the minimal standards would be a deficient society” (Walzer, 1999).

It is clear that, by introducing into the story minimal standards, Walzer wants to deny legitimacy to tyrannical regimes, political systems that were established through violence over logic of self-determination of peoples, whether one speaks of external (subjugating a previously free nation by another one) or internal violence (coming to power an individual or a group because of an illegal coup). However, by already establishing the premise that only a society that fulfills moral standards could be considered as a moral one, Walzer limited his plural concept and, to an extent, corrected the absolute relativism of radical multiculturalists, because his pluralism cannot be interpreted as fully inclusive when it comes to objective value pluralism. On the other hand, if Walzer’s concept is thought through, one could see that it is more exclusivist than its creator explicitly admits, as it contains elements of normative ideal, albeit different than the liberal ideal.

3. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY, INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, AND THE LIMITS OF MULTICULTURALISM

This will become clearer if we consider Walzer's idea of the relationship between collective and individual self-determination.

Walzer always connects discourse on collective self-determination with the one on individual self-determination. These two types of self-determination are linked. However, the very fact that Walzer legitimizes something like the individual self-determination implies that he also legitimizes individual rights, for there can be no individual self-determination without individual rights. Walzer rejects tyranny because it denies individual rights. As a matter of fact, Walzer approves himself "the right of subjective nullification, the right of the agents to refuse any given object status – as commodities, 'hands', slaves, or whatever" (Walzer, 1993, p. 173). In doing so, he sets up a minimal condition that each particular community that pretends to legitimacy and to respect of its integrity has to satisfy – that it has to be accepted by its members. However, here Walzer fails to note that communities could differ with respect to the character of individual rights that they have. In one type of community, individual rights have an originary character if they are not derived from something else, that is to say, if everything else, including the form of the state, is derived from them. In another type, individual rights have secondary character, as they are derived from something that is more primary than they are, that is, from membership in a specific cultural tradition.

In the first case, that is to say, in the case of liberal-democratic societies, individual rights as primary precede cultural tradition, or a particular substantial good as a product of this tradition. In the second case, in the case of traditional societies, the cultural tradition and the particular substantial good that is derived from it, precede the individual rights and condition them. This difference in the character of individual rights also brings the difference in the character of individual self-determination. The primacy of individual rights that is at work in liberal-democratic societies offers to individuals a legally guaranteed possibility to shape their own lives independent of their relations with others, so that different individuals can have different forms of life, depending on the chosen substantial values.

Of course, this is just an option – if they want, individuals can also accept a specific cultural tradition and shape their own life accordingly, but even in that case, they do it for themselves, as no one else, unless authorized by them, has the right to make decisions in their name. However, as in traditional societies a particular substantial good precedes individual rights, individuals cannot shape their personal life independently of their relationship with others and with community as a whole: these collective decisions in which members of the community participate precede individual actions.

Thus, individual cannot do anything that would put into jeopardy the realization of collective decisions. Liberal democracies are compatible both with living in accordance with different individual life projects, and with living in accordance with different cultural traditions exactly because moral and legal principles on which they are based are distinct from cultural traditions and substantial goods. On the other hand, traditional societies legally forbid a way of living that would not be according to their cultural traditions and substantial goods derived from them, because their moral and legal norms are mere expressions of their cultural traditions. As normative system in liberal-democratic societies is purely formal, there is no necessary relationship between it and the way of life of members of these societies; this is confirmed by rich empirical data – for example, in the USA, which is formally a liberal democracy, the way of life of a number of its non-Western citizens (Chinese, Hindus, Mexicans, Japanese, Indians, etc.) is significantly different from the way of life of the citizens who are of Western origin, but even the ones who come from Western cultures differ, as they follow distinctive cultural and religious patterns.

Walzer's idea common to all postmodern pluralists that a liberal concept of society factually implies a unique Western way of life, is simply untenable. That is an attempt to join what cannot be joined to equate two structurally different types of state: a liberal state, where law is distinct from the cultural tradition, and a state whose legal form is predetermined by its cultural tradition. As in the latter case a particular, concrete cultural tradition precedes a normative system and largely predetermines it, that normative system to a great extent prescribes the way of life of the citizens of that state.

For example, citizens of non-liberal Muslim states that would renounce Islam and its customs would be treated as delinquents, and would lose their individual rights. On the other hand, in liberal societies, each individual has the right to change his/her religious beliefs, and one should note that the change in these beliefs to an extent also implies a change in the way of life.

When, while writing about individual self-determination, Walzer emphasizes that the same argument valid for peoples/nations is also valid for individuals, and then directs his readers to pluralism in the forms of individual self-determination, everything seems acceptable at first. "The same argument hold for the individual as for the people/nation... There is no single mode of 'having' a life of ones owns. We are inclined to think that such a life must be made before it can be had, that is, we think of an individual life as a project, a career, an undertaking, something that we plan and then enact according to the plan. But this is simply our – collective – understanding of individuality; it does not suggest the only legitimate or authentic way of being an individual. In fact, it is entirely possible to inherit a life and still possess it as one's own; and it is also possible to find a life, literally light upon it, with no forethought at all. In any account of autonomy, there has to be room not only for different self-determinations, but also for different kinds of self-possession" (Walzer, 1989). Why would not a thesis according to which there is a pluralism of ways in which individuals shape their own identity be acceptable? In itself, that thesis is certainly acceptable, but the problems arise when one wonders if there are various forms of individual self-determination here within the same society, or whether the pluralism of individual self-determinations is related to the fact that there are different forms of particular communities, to which various forms of individual self-determination correspond?

This ambiguity is the effect of Walzer not making the said distinction between two types of individual rights and, related to it, between the two basic types of individual self-determination: an individual one, in which the individual does not have to enter any relationship with other individuals or his community, except for respecting purely formal limitations that affect all the other individuals equally; and an individual self-determination that necessarily takes place in the community with others, thus representing a consensus of the members of a certain particular community.

These two basic types of individual self-determination imply different approaches to the issue of the relationship between collective and individual identities, i.e., between community identity and individual identity. It is obvious that in conceptualizing of the individual self-determination of the first kind, the underlying assumption is that the identities of the community and of the individual are separated (even when an individual follows certain collective tradition, his identity remains separate from the one of a community/ state, for no cultural tradition can be an integral part of a community/ state identity, as this instance is, as having a purely formal character, separated in principle from any form of a particular cultural tradition). In conceptualizing of the other kind of individual self-determination, the underlying assumption is that the individual identity is deduced from the community identity.

Perhaps someone could claim that in this case one could not talk about the self-determination, but in that case we could also speak about some kind of individual self-determination if an individual is so entrenched in the life of community/state that he/she does not regard the community/state as any limitation, i.e., if an individual's identification with the community/state is voluntary. Of course, that voluntary identification could also be a consequence of the individual's participation in the creation of the common substantial good of the community, if it is a community based on the principles of direct democracy.

Such an interpretation of this form of individual self-determination fits into the postmodern-pluralist concept of the situated self, the self that owes its identity to the constitutive community, for that concept negates a possibility of shaping individual identity that is treated as something that would be separate from the values of a particular community and from the practices and beliefs immanent to that community. "And in so far as our constructive self-understandings comprehend a wider subject than the individual alone, whether a family or tribe, or city or class or nation or people, to this extent they define a community in a constutive sense" (Sandel, 1982, p. 172). In other words, a particular community is here considered as an entity constitutive of the self.

Of course, some of the radical pluralists, like Michael Sandel, in an attempt to avoid the objection that the individual identity is in their concept considered as a mere expression of a collective identity, trying to allow for possibility of the pluralism of individual identities, introduce the distinction between a “radically situated self,” that does not have any possibility to distance itself from its own particular community, from its collective identity, and therefore from itself, reflexively speaking, and “relatively, partially situated self,” which has a capability to reflexively distance both from itself, and from its community. Hence, they are close to what Sandel claims: “As a self-interpreting being, I am able to reflect on my history and in this sense to distance myself from it” (Sandel, 1982, p. 179). However, as noted by Rainer Forst: “Sandel does not give any indication as to how the self, which is only ‘partly’ defined by ‘attachments and commitments’ to the community, establishes this distance or as to how a ‘revision’ of identity is possible if after all the self-understanding of the community is constitutive of the self-understanding of the subject. If the self has become a self as part of a ‘wider subject’, how can it then distinguish itself from this“ (Forst, 2002, p. 11).

This Forst’s remark hits multicultural pluralism. However, I believe that the crucial thing is the following. If a substantial good of a particular community is determined as a specific combination of concrete substantial values (cultural, religious, ethical, ideological), and one does not see how it could be determined otherwise, then those substantial values, as that good precedes law, have to be immanent to the way of life of the individual members of that community, for they cannot be subject to their free choice. If a certain religion is an integral part of the substantial good of a particular community, then its legal system, as pre-determined by the good, has to order members of that community to follow and practice that religion. As much as the classical Athens was, generally speaking, the birthplace of direct democracy, in which Athenian citizens had freedom to participate in common good, he had to show respect to the Athenian pagan gods in a way clearly defined in the law, as those gods were an integral part of the common good, and the law served to its maintenance and development.

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In specific communities whose legal order is based on a substantial good, it not only, to repeat Walzer's words "fully possible to inherit a life and possess it as one's own," but that is also the only basic model of individual self-determination within these communities, as the current generation, thanks to the cultural tradition on which they are based, establishes continuity with the life of their ancestors and the life of the yet to be born members of the same tradition. As John Gray would put it, in his communitarian-postmodern phase, immeasurable values are inserted into the collective identities which are not chosen, but inherited. Or, as put by another postmodernist, Zygmunt Bauman, "tradition lives only in as much (...) it is constructed as the heritage." And also MacIntyre writes: "... it is also that we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This in part what gives my life its own moral particularity" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 12-13).

Of course, "to inherit a life and possess it as one's own" is also possible in a liberal-democratic society, as the primacy of individual rights does not mean an antecedent individualization of human life, but it also enables to the individual, if she/he wants it, a choice of the collectivist concept of good life. However, according to multicultural pluralists, in that context, a collectivist idea of good life turns out to be a mere preference of the subject who chooses, and thus not as a necessary component of an individual identity. Conversely, in a particularistic community based on the traditional cultural forms, a specific collectivist way of living guaranteed by certain legal norms is not something that a member of that community could select, depending on his/her subjective preferences, but something that he/she encounters in living with others, and as such, something that is necessary for his identity.

Therefore, only a basic form of human life whose essential components are predetermined by the preceding common good are appropriate for particular communities in which a common substantial good precedes individual rights.

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Of course, the common substantial good does not have to be “thick” enough to include the entire way of living, it can be “thinner.” For example, it can include only the cultural-ethical or religious-cultural substance, and exclude ideological-political values and orientations, which would then enable ideological and political pluralism within a culturally and ethnically, or only religious-culturally homogenous population. However, political subjects’ ideological programs within such a community would not question cultural-ethical or religious-cultural foundations of such a community, as they would be legally protected. One could see that using the examples of Iran and Pakistan. In these countries, specific versions of Islam are elevated to the level of common public good, as they have a status of state religion, which means that the citizens of these countries cannot have the freedom to choose their own religion, but have to follow a given version of Islam. Political subjects in Iran and Pakistan are not allowed to question Islam and cultural values related to it in their political programs. In its 1991 Constitution, Pakistan is defined as a multi-party federal democratic republic, with Islam as the state religion.

After the 1979 revolution, Iran was constitutionally established as a theocracy, so that political authorities derive their legitimacy from Islam. Hence, most of the power is concentrated among the priests – the final says and the power to veto a number of political decisions is in the hand of the Supreme leader of the revolution, as a priest. Even though there is constitutionally recognized government of the people, who freely elect their president, there is no political pluralism as commonly understood (political parties as such are banned), and only Islamic fractions which represent two basic political currents, the conservative, and the reformist one, are allowed. Both of these are expected to defend the existing Islam-based system, but the conservatives are opposed to changes, and reformers are in favor of a more liberal policy within the Islamic context. Freedom of the media is conditioned by respect for the Muslim principles; media which transgress these principles lose their license. The Supreme leader appoints heads of the national TV and radio.

Hence, these two examples clearly demonstrate that a community established on a particular substantial good, whether “thick” or “thin,” is irreconcilable with the primacy of individual rights, for in such a community individual rights have to be conditioned by the respect for the common good.

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The primacy of individual rights cannot guarantee the reproduction and development of the public substantial good. If such a primacy would exist in certain countries, it would enable their citizens to radically criticize the common substantial good, to leave it and, if they choose so, to shape for themselves a concept of good life. Within the context of the primacy of individual rights, substantial public good would not be established on its own basis.

Of course, neither Pakistani nor Iranian government cannot be denied legitimacy, for as long as the majority of their citizens support them, even implicitly. However, one must note that the degree of individual liberties in them is lower than in liberal democracies, as individuals cannot enjoy neither full political freedoms, freedom of choice of religion, nor freedom to choose cultural values not typical for Islam. This follows from the fact that in the societies where a common substantial good is set on its own foundation, freedom as individual autonomy is not possible. The only possibility is the freedom to participate in the common good, that is, freedom limited by the common good as the substantial frame that cannot be transgressed.

Conversely, within the liberal-democratic framework, each individual becomes a bearer of liberty as an individual autonomy, which guarantees him/her the freedom of choice between different alternatives, when it comes to individual self-determination. The reason for this is that the individual liberties are only formally equally limited in this context, as this is a purely formal, and not a substantial framework. In other words, Walzer is right when he claims that life as an individual project, like something that he/she can, according to his/her will plan and then attempt to realize it, is just one of many possible forms of life. Other forms of life, i.e., individual self-determination (possibility to inherit a life, etc.) are possible also. But he is not right when he believes that the first form of life (life as an individual project) can have legitimacy in the communities where a substantial good precedes individual rights.

Walzer faces another problem with his thesis on the right of the individuals to reject the relations in which they are treated like commodities, “extended arms,” slaves, i.e., as “objects,” and not as subjects.

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In particular communities that are preceded by a substantial good, individual rights need not be universalized, i.e., they do not have to include all of its adult citizens. Just as in the democratic ancient Athens some classes of people were excluded from the individual rights (women and slaves), in some contemporary particular communities that could not be labeled as tyrannies, certain parts of their population do not have fully recognized individual rights, at least not in the full sense of the word, so they cannot be treated as members of these communities, or at least not as full members (like women in Muslim countries). Thus, one could say that segments of their population still have the status of “object,” as Walzer would put it. In other words, as “subject’s right to nullification, the right of the subject to reject any given status of being an object,” as proposed by Walzer, is not recognized in all non-tyrannical particular communities, then it must be treated not as a given, but as a normative ideal. As this right is not an integral part of all cultural traditions, it is obvious that this normative ideal is brought into the specific cultural traditions from the outside.

If one accepts the point of view that human beings could understand each other exclusively on the basis of concepts and standards derived from shared traditions in which they have been included, then the moral, legal, and cultural relativism is unavoidable, so there is also a relativism of the criteria. It follows that each objective-historical tradition must be granted a full legitimacy as the only pre-normative source of all norms and objective values, objective as they are inserted into the specific traditions based on history. Radical postmodern contextualism is incompatible with any sort of minimal universal standards, or with any normative ideals. Each attempt to avoid absolute relativism by introducing minimal standards that have to satisfy all special communities means a departure from the initial radical pluralism as an ontological fact. For example, could the right of the members of some community to go away from it be guaranteed if it is not guaranteed by its cultural tradition? Can it be guaranteed at all, if the primacy of individual rights is not guaranteed?

To conclude: one could say that the descriptive methodology does not open the way to a minimal morality, as it always has to start from the experience, from particular values and social practices about which, in principle, a universal consensus is impossible.

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A different methodology is necessary, the one focused on establishing de-ontological norms that any reasonable member of any cultural tradition could not reject, as these norms are culturally-traditionally neutral, that is to say, as they enable following of the plurality of cultural traditions.

As one could see, multicultural contextualists responded in different ways to the difficulties and serious objections they faced, and they went through different phases of their intellectual development, trying to “save” their initial thesis about the cultural monism of the particular communities.

Multicultural pluralists are forced to supplement their initial theses with different versions of universalism, as they wish to avoid the criticism that they are absolutely relativists, while at the same time keeping to some degree their initial pure contextual point of view. Actually, the real, sometimes hidden, postmodern pluralists’ ideal is a particular organic community as a construct of a specific self-grown culture which has to precede an individual and his/her rights, both ontologically and normatively. Only such a community could secure the unity of the individual and collective life, without which no individual can find a grounding in something “firm,” leading him/her to lose her/his moral integrity and continuity of the self, eventually disintegrating into the morally and socially disoriented being. That is the reason for the criticism of the purely formal moral and legal principles devoid of their communal substance. The ethics based on such principles, de-substantialized ethics of principles, cannot direct human and social life to any sublime, high end; the most it can strive for is to call upon people to fearlessly rely on their fallen, sinful nature. According to the multiculturalists, the Enlightenment understood in a Kantian sense, as the foundation of de-ontological morality and law, as well as of the liberal order, suffered the disaster because it rejected the ethics of virtue. This predetermined the essence of this project, depriving humanity of the telos of good life, and devastating and rendering senseless the concept of community and of the substantial common life. “This notion of the political community as a common project is alien to the modern liberal individualist modern world. This is how we sometimes at least think of schools, hospitals or philanthropic organizations, but we have no conception of such community concerned, as Aristotle says the polis is concerned, with the whole of life, not with this or that good, but with man's good as such.

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It is no wonder that friendship has been relegated to private life and thereby weakened in comparison to what it once was.

Friendship, on Aristotle's view, involves affection. But that affection arises within a relationship defined in terms of a common allegiance to and a common pursuit of goods. The affection is secondary, which is not in the least to say unimportant. In modern perspective affection is often the central issue; our friends are said to be those whom we like, perhaps whom we like very much. Friendship has become for the most part the name of a type of emotional state rather than of a type of social and political relationship. E. M. Forster once remarked that if it came to a choice between betraying his country and betraying his friend, he hoped that he would have the courage to betray his country. In an Aristotelian perspective anyone who can formulate such contrast has no country, has no polis; he is a citizen of nowhere, an internal exile where he lives. Instead from an Aristotelian point of view a modern liberal political society can appear only as a collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection. They possess at best that inferior form of friendship which is founded on mutual advantage. That they lack the bond of friendship is of course bound up with the self-avowed moral pluralism of such liberal societies. They have abandoned the moral unity of Aristotelianism, whether in its ancient or medieval forms" (MacIntyre, 1984: p. 156).

This quote from MacIntyre perhaps best expresses multicultural pluralists' nostalgic longing for an organic community, in which a logic of internal, necessary relationship between its constituent elements would rule: between private and public sphere, politics and ethics, institutional-normative sphere and cultural ethos, individual and society. As much as multicultural minded postmodernists are rhetorically harsh critics of Hegel's universal, essentialistic understood reason, and as much as they destroyed his idea of the internal relationship between the universal and the particular, within which the particular appears only as a reflection of the universal, they, liberating particular communities of their subsuming under the world spirit as an absolute, practically ascribed to them a kind of an absolute, within which relations are similar to the ones inside a Hegelian-interpreted totality, the parts of which can not be in external but only in internal relations, so that they cannot have any relative autonomy.

The only difference is that this special community is not treated as an emanation of the universal spirit. So Hegel's universal world spirit is divided in plenty small absolutes because each of them is *causa sui*.

Multiculturalism's central error is in its insistence on the primacy of difference, i.e., on the assumption that difference is the primary event. The primacy of difference implies the idea that the difference is not limited by any universal criteria, whether substantial nor formal. If it would be limited by any universal standard, one could not claim that it is primary. In that case, the universal standard that would "filter" differences would have preceded difference as difference – which would have then excluded some of them as unacceptable. By rejecting a universal standard, i.e. by treating difference as the primary event, every difference is necessarily granted a legitimacy, including the one between the democratic and the Nazi regime (as a matter of fact, contemporary proponents of Nazism refer to that difference). If the multiculturalists would want to deny Nazism the right to exist, that would necessarily lead them to the standard valid for all particular communities/states. As it would be valid for all communities based on respective particular traditions, it would have been independent from any of them, making this standard the trans-contextual normative rule.

The consequence of the uncritical glorification of difference, that does not originate from freedom but from pluralism, is the apotheosis of a new essentialism, of a particularistic kind, within which issues of group identity are elevated to the pedestal of primary principles. The main base of this essentialism is the point of view about incommensurable values, that is to say, a view that the existence of fundamentally different worldviews, different inasmuch as they, allegedly, cannot be reduced to any substantial common denominator on the one hand, nor can they be subsumed under any purely formal principle on the other, is the basic ontological fact. The final consequence of this approach is an absolute value relativism, for denying that any value, with its corresponding way of life, could be superior to others, means relativizing all values: everything that any community regards as valid must be considered as such. An attempt to avoid this conclusion by making a distinction between the so-called objective values, which are the result of particular cultural traditions, and subjective ones, does not solve the problem.

For even such a limited pluralism remains relative in regard to the “objective” values. This equates all particular communities, both democratically organized, and the ones that deny its members equal rights, or do not respect their individual rights at all. When it comes to identity politics, I agree with Richard Wolin: “Identity is not an argument. It represents an appeal to ‘life’ or brute existence as opposed to principles that presuppose argumentative give-and-take. As a European friend once put it: ‘identity politics that’s what had in Germany from 1933-45’” (Wolin, 2004, p. 13).

When it comes to the famous idea of the Other, one should say that it is one thing to express openness toward the other – non-Western, in the name of justified critique of the imperial Eurocentrism, and quite another to romanticize and idealize the Other. In the latter case, this is not just criticism of the negative sides of the Western civilization – a tendency to subjugate the Other through colonialism, neo-colonialism, humanitarian military interventions, using, as Kant would say, barbaric liberties as liberties unlimited by any legal or moral principles, etc., but this is anti-Westernism, anti-liberalism, anti-modernism. This became obvious when Michel Foucault enthusiastically welcomed coming to power of the Ayatollah Khomeini, just because of the fact that his government was oriented anti-Western, anti-liberal, and anti-modern. As if non-Western political regimes are incapable of excluding and subjugating the Other, dominating, using religious fundamentalism, which in its extreme form brings with itself a possibility of tyranny, and the like.

Of course, after all that was said here, someone could conclude that there is no just a radical, but also a moderate multiculturalism, whose goal is not the rejection of liberalism, but only its correction. And that would be correct. I am one of the scholars who believe that if social reality in some basically liberal-democratic countries demands the introduction of some aspects of moderate multiculturalism, that reality should be acknowledged. But one should also not ignore the fact that radical multiculturalism as a philosophy of identity is in effect a moderate multiculturalism, brought to its ultimate logical consequences.

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CHAPTER 2
PREVALENCE OF DRUG ADDICTION AMONG
FEMALE STUDENTS IN GOMBE STATE
UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION

Drug addiction has evolved into a global social challenge with widespread implications on public health, social productivity, and human development. Recent global estimates indicate that the use of psychoactive substances continues to increase annually, with over 296 million individuals reported to have engaged in illicit drug consumption, representing a steady rise over the last decade (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, 2023). Beyond biomedical explanations, sociologists conceptualized drug addiction as a consequence of weakened social regulation, modern lifestyle anxieties, shifting identity orientations, and the breakdown of communitarian values that historically controlled deviant behaviour (Becker, 2019). The rise of individualistic cultures, disintegration of collective norms, and expanded relational networks facilitated by technology has accelerated exposure to risky behaviours among young populations globally.

Across Africa, drug addiction has assumed an institutional priority due to the increasing rate of social disintegration, rising economic vulnerabilities, and the proliferation of synthetic drugs. Countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria have recorded steady increases in cannabis use, codeine-based pharmaceuticals, and tramadol consumption among urban youth populations (Akinola, 2022). Social theorists argue that Africa's rising drug problem reflects broader structural contradictions with youth unemployment, intergenerational disconnection, cultural transition, and informal markets that legitimize illicit economies (Agnew & Brezina, 2019). These conditions created alternative spaces of belonging where substance use becomes symbolic capital in identity formation.

Within Nigeria, the escalation of drug addiction among youths has generated research interest, institutional concerns, and public interventions. Reports by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2023) highlight that millions of young people actively consume substances such as cannabis, rohypnol, tramadol, and codeine mixtures. Drug consumption is increasingly tied to academic stress, emotional instability, peer imitation, and experimentation motivated by youth subcultures (Oshodi et al., 2022).

Studies further associate addiction with school dropout, delinquent tendencies, diminished academic engagement, loss of moral agency, and impaired psychological functioning (Okpataku et al., 2021). This pattern reflects what Durkheim described as anomie a condition where rapid societal change weakens normative controls, leaving individuals vulnerable to deviant pathways.

The problem has become more pronounced in tertiary institutions, where age transition, residential independence, and weakened family supervision intersect to shape behavioural outcomes. Universities expose students to peer networks, leisure activities, alternative leisure markets, and social spaces that normalize substance consumption (Akers & Sellers, 2019). Drug accessibility around campuses, coupled with academic challenges, romantic relationships, and pressure of social comparison, facilitates experimentation that gradually transforms into compulsive usage. Sociologically, drug addiction within tertiary institutions represents the outcome of differential association, strain accumulation, and identity negotiation within youth micro-environments. Within this general pattern, female students represent a particularly vulnerable category. Studies reveal that drug involvement among females is increasingly rising, although often concealed due to fear of stigmatization, gendered moral sanctions, and reputational consequences (Ede et al., 2021; Yahaya & Mohammed, 2021). Female students often encounter complex stressors including emotional abuse, low self-esteem, relationship trauma, domestic expectations, and academic instability. Feminist sociological perspectives assert that patriarchal structure amplifies vulnerability among females by restricting access to emotional support systems while simultaneously imposing moral expectations that intensify pressure to perform acceptably (Nwankwo & Nwoke, 2018). Consequently, drug use among female students becomes not only a coping strategy but also an adaptive response to gendered inequalities. Although institutional experiences differ across tertiary environments, evidence increasingly suggests that the prevalence of drug use among females is no longer marginal but evolving into a patterned social phenomenon. However, documentation remains limited, particularly at institutional levels, resulting in gaps in policy intervention, counselling approaches, and preventive strategies.

Gombe State University (GSU) was established in 2004 through the initiative of the Gombe State Government, the university was conceptualized to expand access to higher education within the North-East region. Located in Tudun Wada, Gombe metropolis, the institution has expanded in student population, social spaces, residential settlements, and interactional networks. With increasing commercialization around campus and the growing presence of urban youth subcultures, the university environment now reflects social transitions that typify modern academic institutions.

Against this background, this study examined the prevalence of drug addiction among female students in Gombe State University. The study has specifically investigated the causes, effects and strategies of addressing drug addiction.

1. CONCEPT OF DRUG ADDICTION

Drug addiction also referred to as substance use disorder, is a chronic, relapsing condition characterized by compulsive drug seeking, continued use despite harmful consequences, and long-lasting changes in the brain and social functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It involves both physical dependence, which is marked by tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, and psychological dependence, which reflects the individual's perceived need to use the substance for emotional or mental stability (UNODC, 2023).

From a sociological perspective, drug addiction is not merely a medical issue but a social problem embedded within societal structures and cultural contexts (Weinberg, 2013). It is often viewed as a form of deviance, where individuals engage in behaviours that violate societal norms due to various social, economic, and cultural pressures (Akers & Sellers, 2016). Sociologists argue that drug addiction can result from strained social environments, lack of legitimate opportunities, and the influence of peer groups that normalize drug use within specific social contexts (Merton, 1938; Becker, 1963).

Drug addiction among students often begins with experimental use in social settings, driven by curiosity, peer influence, and the desire to cope with stress or emotional challenges (Obot, 2021).

Oshodi et al. (2022) observed that the availability of psychoactive substances, coupled with weak family supervision and societal permissiveness, contributes significantly to adolescent drug use in Nigeria. Additionally, Eze et al (2020) note that the adolescent stage is marked by identity formation, increased risk-taking behaviour, and a desire for social acceptance, which can predispose students to substance experimentation and subsequent addiction.

Scholars have also highlighted the impact of urbanization and economic challenges in facilitating access to illicit drugs among students, making them vulnerable to drug dependency and its associated social consequences, including school dropout, delinquency, and poor health outcomes (Abubakar & Musa, 2022; Yahaya & Mohammed, 2023). Thus, drug addiction is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of individual vulnerabilities and broader sociocultural and economic contexts.

2. SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977, posits that human behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and modelling within a social context (Bandura, 1977; Akers & Sellers, 2016). It emphasizes that individuals acquire behaviours by observing the actions of others, particularly peers, roommates, and influential figures within their immediate environment. In the context of female students in Gombe State University, the theory explains how exposure to peers or acquaintances who use drugs can encourage similar behaviours, especially when such behaviours are perceived as rewarding or as coping mechanisms for academic and emotional stress (Obot, 2021; Oshodi et al., 2022).

From a sociological perspective, Social Learning Theory underscores the role of socialization in shaping deviant behaviour. Female students residing off-campus or in environments with weak supervision may observe and imitate drug-using peers, normalizing substance use as a socially acceptable or effective way to manage stress. Empirical studies have confirmed that peer influence and exposure to drug-using networks significantly increase the likelihood of experimentation and continued use among young adults in tertiary institutions (Eze et al., 2020; Yahaya & Mohammed, 2023).

Critically, while the social learning theory effectively explains the influence of peers and social environments on behaviour, it has been criticized for given insufficient attention to individual differences, personal choice and biological or psychological predispositions that might influence behaviour. For instance, not all students exposed to drug addiction due to the peer pressures, this has suggested that personal resilience, moral values and cognitive processes also played crucial roles. Moreover, the theory assumes that observed behaviours are always imitated if reinforced, which oversimplifies complex decision-making processes in real-life social settings. Thus, the theory failed to explain why some female students abstained from drug addiction despite being in a high-risk environments (Giddens and Sutton, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed research design which combined the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Structured questionnaire and interview guide questions were used to generate the data for this study. The approach enabled the researchers to capture both the numerical trends and deeper insightful personal experiences of the respondents and the key informants on the prevalence of drug addiction among female students of Gombe State University established in 2024 by the then government of Alh. Muhammad Danjuma Goje. The population of the study comprised the female students, staff from the students' affairs unit, university clinic and security unit.

The Human Resource Division of the University (2025) indicated that there are 1,260 staff (academic and non- academic). It further revealed that there are 18,500 students across the faculties and departments, and that out of this number 7,420 were estimated to be female students. These female students largely constituted the target group of this study due to their knowledge of the topic under review. The sample size was 300 but it was only 289 responses that was found to be valid and relevant for the study, it was determined through the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of determining sample size. Additionally, 15 interviews were conducted with the members of the staff from the units of student affairs, guidance and counselling, health services and security.

These set of key informants were purposively selected due to their knowledge of the prevalence of drug addiction among female students of Gombe State University. Multi-stage sampling techniques of stratified and purposive sampling techniques were employed to selected the respondents. The combination of sampling techniques enabled the study to captured both quantitative and qualitative insights on the prevalence of drug addiction among female students of Gombe State University. The data collected for this study were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. This approach enhanced the presentation of a comprehensive data that was presented in frequencies, simple percentages and verbatim responses from the key informants on the topic under review were presented thematically.

4. RESULT OF THE FINDINGS

Table 1. Commonly abused substances among Female Students in Gombe State University

Commoly Abused Substances	Frequency	Percentage %
Codeine	111	38. 4%
Marijuana	104	36.0%
Alcohol	48	16.6%
Others	26	9.0%
Total	289	100%

Source: Field Work (2025).

The table 1 indicates that 38.4% of the female students'in Gombe State University abused codeine cough syrup, 36.0% abused marijuana,16.6% used alcohol, while the least percent abused substances like shisha(smoke substance) and other prescriptions. Abubakar and Musa (2022) observed that female students' are abusing cough syrup and other distances in northern Nigeria.

Table 2. Peer Influence Contributes Greatly to the Spread of Drug Use on Campus

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	124	42.9%
Agree	109	37.7%
Disagree	36	12.5%
Strongly Disagree	20	6.9%
Total	289	100%

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The table reveals that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (42.9%) acknowledged peer influence as a major factor in the spread of drug addiction among female students. This underscores the strong role of social networks in shaping behaviour.

Table 3. Female Students' Experiment with Drugs out of Curiosity

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly agree	96	33.2%
Agree	121	41.9%
Disagree	47	16.3%
Strongly Disagree	25	8.7%
Total	289	100%

Table 3 shows that majority of the female students' in Gombe State University experiment with drugs out of curiosity representing (41.9%), while the least percent(8.7%) strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 4. Family Background Influences Students' Involvement in Drug Use

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	118	40.8%
Agree	97	33.6%
Disagree	46	15.9%
Strongly Disagree	28	9.7%
Total	289	100%

Table 4 reveals that a majority of the respondents,(40.8%), strongly agreed that family background plays a significant role in influencing students' involvement in drug use. This suggests that factors such as family instability, parental behaviour, and home environment may contribute to drug addiction among female students.

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Table 5. Economic Hardship Encourages Some Female Students to Use Drugs

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	102	35.3%
Agree	111	38.4%
Disagree	51	17.6%
Strongly Disagree	25	8.7%
Total	289	100%

As shown in table 5, 38.4% of the respondents agreed that economic hardship encourages some female students to engage in drug use. This finding indicates that financial stress and inability to meet basic needs may push some students toward substance use as a coping mechanism.

Table 6. Emotional Stress and Depression Contribute to Drug Addiction

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	131	45.3%
Agree	96	33.2%
Disagree	39	13.5%
Strongly Disagree	23	8.0%
Total	289	100%

The table 6 shows that majority of respondents(45.3%), strongly agreed that emotional stress and depression contribute to drug addiction among female students. This underscores the role of psychological and emotional challenges in predisposing students to substance abuse.

Table 7. Peer Pressure Is a Major Factor in Female Students' Drug Use

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	144	49.8%
Agree	83	28.7%
Disagree	38	13.1%
Strongly Disagree	24	8.4%
Total	289	100%

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Table 7 indicates that peer pressure is perceived as a major factor influencing drug use, 49.8% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This suggests that social networks and groups play a critical role in shaping drug-related behaviours among female students.

Table 8. Lack of Parental Guidance Contributes to Drug Addiction

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	109	37.7%
Agree	101	34.9%
Disagree	52	18.0%
Strongly Disagree	27	9.4%
Total	289	100%

Table 8 indicates that 37.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of parental guidance contributes to drug addiction among female students. This finding highlights the continued importance of parental supervision and moral guidance even at the tertiary education level.

Table 9. Effect of Drug Addiction on Academic Performance

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	132	45.7%
Agree	101	34.9%
Disagree	38	13.1%
Strongly Disagree	18	6.3%
Total	289	100%

Table 9 shows that majority of respondents, (45.7%), strongly agreed that drug addiction negatively affects academic performance. This suggests that drug use among female students is widely perceived as a major factor contributing to poor academic outcomes such as low grades and reduced concentration.

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Table 10. Drug Addiction and Absenteeism

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	118	40.8%
Agree	97	33.6%
Disagree	47	16.3%
Strongly Disagree	27	9.3%
Total	289	100%

Table 10 indicates that 40.8% of respondents strongly agreed that drug use leads to absenteeism and irregular attendance at lectures. This finding highlights how drug addiction disrupts students' academic routines and commitment to their studies.

Table 11. Health and Emotional Effects of Drug Addiction

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	141	48.8%
Agree	96	33.2%
Disagree	33	11.4%
Strongly Disagree	19	6.6%
Total	289	100%

Table 11 shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents,(48.8%), strongly agreed that drug abuse exposes female students to health risks and emotional instability. This underscores concerns about both physical and mental health consequences of drug addiction.

Table 12. Drug Addiction and Deviant Behaviour

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	126	43.6%
Agree	94	32.5%
Disagree	42	14.5%
Strongly Disagree	27	9.4%
Total	289	100%

Table 12 indicates that 43.6% of respondents strongly agreed that female students who abuse drugs are more likely to engage in deviant behaviours such as misconduct, aggression, or violation of university rules.

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This finding suggests that drug addiction poses not only academic but also disciplinary and security challenges within the university environment.

Table 13. University Policies Against Drug Abuse

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	65	22.5%
Agree	102	35.3%
Disagree	88	30.5%
Strongly Disagree	34	11.7%
Total	289	100%

Table 13 shows that 35.3% of respondents strongly agreed that the University has effective policies against drug abuse, while (11.7%) disagreed. This indicates that institutional policies exist but are not perceived as fully effective or adequately enforced.

Table 14. Counselling Support for Drug-Addicted Students

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	53	18.3%
Agree	94	32.5%
Disagree	95	32.9%
Strongly Disagree	47	16.3%
Total	289	100%

Table 14 indicates that 32.5% of the respondents agreed that the counselling unit provides adequate support, while (16.3%) strongly disagreed. This reflects a mixed perception and suggests a need to strengthen counselling services for the affected students.

Table 15: Awareness Programmes on Drug Abuse

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	71	24.6%
Agree	108	37.4%
Disagree	72	24.9%
Strongly Disagree	38	13.1%
Total	289	100%

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Table 15 shows that 37.4% of respondents agreed that awareness programmes are conducted occasionally. Although more than half agreed, a significant proportion (13.1%) perceived that these programmes are insufficient.

Table 16. University-Community Collaboration

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	119	41.2%
Agree	128	44.3%
Disagree	32	11.1%
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4%
Total	289	100%

Table 16 indicates that 44.3% of respondents agreed on the need for stronger collaboration between the University and the community. This shows broad recognition that external partnerships are critical to enhancing institutional efforts to curb drug addiction.

Thematic Analyses of Interview Findings

Fifteen interviews were conducted with the staff of the university, mainly those working with the clinic, students'affairs, counselling and security units of the university. The essence of the interviews was to further gather insightful perspectives from the officials of the university.

Table 17. Awareness and General Perception of Drug Use

Theme	Staff Response Summary	Illustrative Quotes
Awareness of drug use	All staff acknowledged awareness of drug use among female students; most noticed trends increasing over the last 3–5 years.	“We started noticing more female students coming to counselling with signs of substance use around 2021” – Counselling Staff
Common substances	Alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs (codeine, tramadol) were most cited.	“Codeine cough syrups and tramadol are the most abused among female students” – Health Unit Staff

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Theme	Staff Response Summary	Illustrative Quotes
Areas/times of use	Off-campus hostels, night parties, and informal gatherings; late evenings and weekends are common.	“Most incidents are off-campus or during weekend social gatherings” – Security Staff
Level of addiction	Majority described it as moderate, with occasional high-risk cases.	“It is moderate, but there are students who show severe dependence” – Student Affairs Officer
Reasons for drug use	Peer influence, emotional stress, family issues, and curiosity were commonly mentioned	“Peer pressure and academic stress are key drivers” – Counselling Staff

Table 18. Institutional Observation and Response

Theme	Staff Response Summary	Illustrative Quotes
Patterns/trends identified	University monitors student behaviour via counselling visits, reports from lecturers, and security patrols; cases have increased recently.	“Patterns emerge from frequent absenteeism and changes in behaviour reported by lecturers” – Student Affairs
Policy/position on drug use	University has clear anti-drug policies, but enforcement is inconsistent.	“Policies exist but are sometimes hard to implement fully” – Security Staff
Structures responsible	Counselling Unit, Disciplinary Committees, Student Affairs, and Security Units handle cases	“We collaborate with multiple units, but coordination could be stronger” – Student Affairs
Effectiveness of structures	Moderate effectiveness; limited resources and stigma reduce impact.	“We intervene, but some students hide their use and resources are limited” – Counselling Staff
Inter-departmental collaboration	Health, counselling, security, and religious units collaborate on prevention programmes.	“We conduct awareness together, especially during orientation and anti-drug campaigns” – Student Affairs

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Tablo 19. Causes and Contributing Factors

Theme	Staff Response Summary	Illustrative Quotes
Triggers/causes	Peer pressure, curiosity, emotional stress, economic challenges, broken homes	“Peer influence is the strongest factor; many try drugs due to friends” – Security Staff
Academic pressure	Heavy workload and exams contribute to stress and experimentation.	“Some students turn to drugs to cope with stress and pressure” – Counselling Staff
Social activities/environment	Parties, clubs, and off-campus gatherings facilitate drug use	“Late-night social events are hotspots for drug experimentation” – Security Staff
Effectiveness of structures	Moderate effectiveness; limited resources and stigma reduce impact.	“We intervene, but some students hide their use and resources are limited” – Counselling Staff
Family influence	Poor parental supervision, family conflicts, and broken homes increase vulnerability.	“Students from broken homes are more likely to seek drugs as an escape” – Counselling Staff

Tablo 20. Effects and Institutional Challenges

Theme	Staff Response Summary	Illustrative Quotes
Academic effects	Poor performance, absenteeism, lack of concentration	“We notice declining grades and irregular attendance among affected students” – Student Affairs
Behavioural effects	Aggression, misconduct, social isolation.	“Drug use affects their behaviour; some become disruptive or withdrawn” – Security Staff
Health effects	Emotional instability, physical health risks	“Students face emotional instability and sometimes health complications” – Health Unit Staff
Institutional challenges	Limited resources, stigma, reluctance to report, poor enforcement	“We face challenges due to stigma and limited manpower to monitor students” – Student Affairs

Tablo 21. Institutional and Community Interventions

Theme	Staff Response Summary	Illustrative Quotes
University strategies	Awareness campaigns, counselling, disciplinary measures	“We run anti-drug campaigns during orientation and awareness weeks” – Student Affairs
Counselling/rehabilitation	Services exist but are underutilised; accessibility needs improvement.	“Counselling is available, but students often avoid it due to stigma” – Counselling Staff
Collaboration with external bodies	Partnerships with NDLEA, NGOs, and community leaders exist but can be strengthened	“We work with NDLEA and religious bodies, but more structured collaboration is needed” – Student Affairs

The thematic tables summarised staff perspectives on drug addiction among female students, highlighting awareness, causes, effects, institutional response, and areas for improvement. Staff confirmed that peer pressure, emotional stress, and off-campus environments are major drivers of drug use, while current institutional measures are moderately effective but constrained by resources and stigma. The findings align with quantitative data, confirming the prevalence, causes, and consequences of drug addiction.

5. DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

With respect to the objective of this study which sought to identify the major causes of drug addiction among female students in Gombe State University, the findings revealed that drug addiction is largely influenced by peer pressure, curiosity, emotional stress, family background, and economic hardship. The quantitative results showed that a substantial proportion of respondents perceived peer influence and peer pressure as the most significant factors encouraging drug use, while interview findings further confirmed that social networks, off-campus residence, and unregulated social gatherings provide conducive environments for experimentation. Emotional stress, depression, and academic pressure were also identified as key triggers, suggesting that some female students resort to drugs as a coping mechanism for psychological challenges.

These findings are consistent with previous studies which establish peer association and emotional distress as strong predictors of substance use among university students (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Khantzian, 1997). Furthermore, the influence of family instability, lack of parental guidance, and financial hardship aligns with empirical evidence that weak family support systems and socio-economic strain increase vulnerability to drug addiction among young people (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2019; UNODC, 2021).

In line with the objective that sought to examine the effects of drug addiction on female students in Gombe State University, the study found that drug addiction has profound negative consequences on students' academic performance, health, behaviour, and social relationships. The majority of respondents agreed that drug use leads to poor academic outcomes, including reduced concentration, absenteeism, and declining grades, a finding corroborated by interview responses from counselling and student affairs staff. Additionally, drug addiction was found to contribute to emotional instability, health risks, social isolation, and engagement in deviant behaviours such as misconduct and violation of university regulations. These findings support existing literature which demonstrates that substance abuse among university students is associated with impaired cognitive functioning, behavioural problems, and psychological distress (Arria et al., 2015; Eisenberg et al., 2013). The results further align with sociological perspectives which view drug addiction as a social problem with far-reaching implications for both individual well-being and institutional stability (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018).

Consistent with the objective that aimed to explore effective strategies that can help address and reduce drug addiction among female students in Gombe State University, the findings revealed the need for a comprehensive and integrated intervention framework. Although the University has anti-drug policies, counselling services, awareness programmes, and disciplinary measures in place, their effectiveness was perceived as moderate due to challenges such as limited resources, stigma, inconsistent enforcement, and underutilisation of counselling services.

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Respondents strongly supported the strengthening of awareness campaigns, improved counselling and rehabilitation services, stricter monitoring, and enhanced collaboration between the University and external stakeholders such as parents, religious organisations, NGOs, and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). These findings are consistent with previous studies which argue that effective drug control in tertiary institutions requires a balanced approach combining prevention, counselling, policy enforcement, and community engagement rather than reliance on punitive measures alone (UNESCO, 2017; Okafor & Obi, 2020; UNODC, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, drug addiction among female students' in Gombe State University is a significant social and institutional problem that cannot be attributed to a single factor. It is the outcome of a complex interactions between peer influence, emotional and academic stress, family background and economic hardships and environmental exposure. These findings strongly supported the social learning theory, which explains how female students'learned and adopted drug addiction behavior through interactions with peers and social networks.

The study further concludes that drug addiction negatively affect female students' academic performance, emotional well-being, social relationship and behavior often resulting in absteemism, poor grades, deviant behavior and health complications. Although, Gombe State University has made some efforts through policies, counselling services, awareness programmes and disciplinary measures, the persistence of drug addiction suggest that current interventions are not sufficiently robust. Therefore, a holistic approach that integrates prevention, counselling, enforcement and community participation is essential for effectively addressing drug addiction among female students'.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

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- **Strengthening Awareness and Preventive Education:** Gombe State University should intensify regular and targeted drug-abuse awareness programmes, especially during student orientation and throughout the academic session. These programmes should focus on female students and address peer pressure, emotional coping strategies, and the health and academic consequences of drug addiction.
- **Enhancement of Counselling and Support Services:** The University should strengthen its counselling and health units by providing adequate manpower, training, and resources. Confidential and student-friendly counselling services should be promoted to reduce stigma and encourage female students experiencing stress or substance-related challenges to seek help early.
- **Improved Monitoring and Enforcement of Policies:** University authorities should ensure stricter and more consistent enforcement of existing anti-drug policies, particularly in collaboration with campus security and student affairs units. Monitoring of off-campus hostels and high-risk social activities should also be improved.
- **Parental and Family Involvement:** Parents and guardians should be actively involved in monitoring and guiding female students, even at the university level. The University can facilitate this by strengthening communication channels between the institution and families on issues related to student welfare and behaviour.
- **University–Community Collaboration:** The University should deepen collaboration with external bodies such as the NDLEA, non-governmental organisations, religious institutions, and community leaders to support prevention, awareness, and rehabilitation programmes. Such partnerships will help extend drug-control efforts beyond the campus environment.
- **Balanced Approach to Control and Rehabilitation:** Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, the University should adopt a balanced approach that combines discipline with counselling and rehabilitation. This would align with sociological best practices and help reintegrate affected students into academic and social life.

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CHAPTER 3
DIGNITY DENIED: APOROPHOBIA AND SYMBOLIC
VIOLENCE IN THE URBAN INFORMAL WORKER
IN TABASCO

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INTRODUCTION

In the city of Villahermosa, Tabasco, the public space of the sidewalk is not only a transit route: it is the daily scenario where a profound form of social inequality is reproduced, in a silent and normalized way. The urban informal worker who occupies this space for his subsistence faces a double exclusion, the economic and the symbolic, which places him on the margins of full citizenship. This exclusion is not only expressed in figures or in the absence of an employment contract; it is physically exercised on the body, on the territory and on the recognition of the other as a subject of rights. Understanding this dynamic requires articulating two concepts that, although they come from different intellectual traditions, converge to name the same reality: aporophobia and symbolic violence.

The urban informal worker performs honest and socially necessary work. However, their insertion into the city's economy occurs without benefits, without basic labor rights and without the protection offered by a formal contract. Their workspaces are changing and precarious: they must move between different parts of the city to sell their products or services, which constantly exposes them to looks of distrust, pejorative treatment and threats of eviction. Unlike the formal worker, who has institutional mechanisms to defend his rights, the informal worker inhabits a space of legal exception where his presence in the city is tolerated but never fully recognized. This condition of precariousness is not the result of an individual failure, but of an economic structure that produces and reproduces informality as a condition of life for large sectors of the population.

A significant part of these workers come from neighboring states such as Chiapas or Central American countries such as Honduras, in search of better job opportunities. However, when they arrive in Villahermosa, they face barriers that confine them to the margins of the labor market: the lack of formal studies, the scarcity of training opportunities, and the absence of documents that allow them to access regulated jobs. This combination of factors places them in the most vulnerable segment of the informal economy: they depend on unstable incomes, lack health insurance in the event of illness, accident or economic crisis, and bear the additional weight of the stigma that falls on the poor migrant.

It is not a simple vulnerability, but an accumulated vulnerability, where poverty and foreign origin add up to intensify exposure to exclusion and mistreatment in the public space.

Added to this material precariousness is the weight of stigma. The figure of the informal worker is frequently associated with disorder, annoyance or even danger in the urban imaginary. This association facilitates the normalization of insults, humiliations and exclusionary practices that occur in plain sight, but that no one names or denounces. Thus, the problem is not limited to the lack of a contract or a living wage: it directly affects the way in which the dignity of the informal worker as a person and as a legitimate inhabitant of the city is recognized or denied. At this point, two theoretical concepts are essential to analyze the phenomenon with the depth it deserves: aporophobia and symbolic violence.

Aporophobia is defined as the rejection of the poor, a form of discrimination based on prejudice that acts both at the level of the stereotype which excludes the other because of their appearance associated with poverty and at the structural level of the economic order (Picado Valverde et al., 2020). The term, with Greek roots, combines *aporo* lacking resources, poor and *phobos* intense and irrational fear, and was proposed by the Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina in 1995 to give name to a phenomenon that remained unnamed in public and academic debate (Cortina, 2017). Its central thesis is that the rejection of the foreigner, the different or the migrant does not occur because of their ethnic or cultural condition in itself, but because of their economic condition: a foreigner is rejected if he or she is poor; if not, its acceptance is considerably easier. The determining factor is, then, socioeconomic status.

Picado-Valverde, Guzmán-Ordaz, & Yurrebaso-Macho (2022) have made progress in the construction of a theoretical model that allows us to understand aporophobia as a multidimensional phenomenon. It articulates cognitive prejudice, the tendency to negatively categorize people in situations of poverty, emotional distance, aversion or disgust generated by their presence, and discriminatory behavior, gestures, decisions, and treatment that materialize rejection in daily life.

These three dimensions are articulated with socio-structural variables such as classism, individualism, and value systems that privilege economic accumulation as a criterion of personal worth, which amplify or attenuate the aporophobic expression depending on the context (Picado-Valverde et al., 2022). Making the term visible also has an important political effect: naming aporophobia is equivalent to recognizing those who were systematically invisible, while opening up the possibility of combating it through specific policies.

In countries such as Spain, aporophobia has been incorporated as an aggravating circumstance in the Criminal Code (Bustos, 2020), which constitutes a relevant precedent for other legal systems to recognize socioeconomic discrimination as a protected category. In Mexico, the theoretical and legal discussion on aporophobia is still incipient; however, the reality it describes manifests itself on a daily basis in the streets of its cities, and in particular in the public spaces of Villahermosa, where the presence of the informal worker triggers reactions of rejection that this research aims to document and analyze.

In Tabasco, aporophobia functions as a form of rejection of those who embody poverty in the street. It is not only an abstract attitude towards poverty as a social phenomenon, but also a concrete contempt for concrete people: street vendors, porters, waiters in street inns, market assistants, migrants who offer services on the street. This reality is especially visible in places such as the Pino Suárez market and the La Paz and Juárez parks, where daily working life coexists with practices of exclusion that make the economic and social contribution of informal work almost invisible. There, the lack of a fixed labor structure and legal documentation places these workers in a position of symbolic inferiority compared to the rest of the citizenry, an inferiority that is not written in any rule but that is exercised every day in every interaction on the sidewalk.

The concept of symbolic violence, elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu, provides the second theoretical axis of this study. Bourdieu defines it as the imposition of categories of perception and thought by one dominant group on another, in such a way that the dominated contribute to their own domination without perceiving it as such (Bourdieu, 1997).

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This form of violence operates on bodies and spaces: it is inscribed in the habitus the incorporated provisions that regulate social practices and leads the informal worker to shrink, to give up his place on the sidewalk, to accept degrading treatment as a natural condition of his trade. Its effectiveness lies precisely in its invisibility: it does not require physical force or explicit threat; the weight of the naturalized symbolic order is enough for the dominated to internalize his position and reproduce it. As Mc Kay Levy (2023) points out, symbolic violence is not an epiphenomenon of power relations, but its deepest and most enduring substrate, the one that guarantees the reproduction of the social order even in the absence of direct coercion.

The violence experienced by informal workers is not reduced to individual mistreatment or isolated events: it is expressed in three dimensions that intersect and reinforce each other. The economic dimension is the most visible in objective terms: most of these workers depend on very low incomes, with long hours and without overtime pay, because the absence of contracts and formal defense mechanisms leaves them unable to demand their rights against the employer or the client. The monthly income is hardly enough to cover rent, food, transportation and the maintenance of the family, which generates a cycle of precariousness that is reproduced generation after generation.

The symbolic dimension is the one that this research places at the center of the analysis. Aporophobia and stigma translate into mockery, mistrust and dehumanizing treatment: customers who haggle aggressively, authorities who automatically suspect their presence, neighbors who consider them a hindrance to the good image of the city. All these everyday gestures convey the same message: that they do not fully belong to the urban space, that their presence is tolerated only to the extent that it is functional for others. This symbolic violence, as Bourdieu pointed out, is normalized to the point of seeming natural, when in reality it sustains and reproduces profoundly unequal power relations.

The institutional dimension emerges when state norms and policies reinforce vulnerability rather than protect it. Regulations that prioritize order and cleanliness in the city can become mechanisms for expelling informal workers: they prohibit their presence in certain areas, require permits that are difficult to obtain for those who live from day to day, or enable eviction operations that destroy in minutes what the worker took weeks to build.

At this level, violence ceases to be only interpersonal to become a structural and collective violence that impacts an entire social group, without any individual agent being able to be pointed out as directly responsible.

Contemporary urban development is not a neutral process. It often acts as a mechanism of symbolic violence that reinforces the exclusion of the most vulnerable sectors under the discourse of modernization and progress (Ramírez, 2016). Under the promise of modernization and beautification, many cities reorganize their streets, parks and markets prioritizing an aesthetic of consumption: clean, orderly spaces, designed for tourism and for certain types of formal commerce. In this logic, the informal worker appears as an uncomfortable figure who breaks the image of progress that is intended to be projected to the outside.

In spaces such as the Pino Suárez market and the La Paz and Juárez parks, these transformations are felt with special intensity. What for decades was a popular meeting point with stalls selling food, fruit, clothing and handicrafts is reinterpreted from the official discourse as an area that must be sorted or rescued. Behind these words are hidden concrete decisions that reduce the spaces for setting up stalls, require permits that are difficult to obtain or move vendors to areas of less affluence, where their sales decrease drastically. This selective urbanism is shaping who seems to have the right to occupy public space and who does not: while certain cafes, brand stores or restaurants are celebrated as signs of development, informal vendors are treated as a problem that must be controlled. The city thus becomes a filter that allows those who fit the image of modernity and consumption to pass, and relegates others both physically and symbolically to the margins.

These multiple forms of violence directly affect the psychosocial well-being of informal workers. Constant stress about money, the fear of losing one's workplace, uncertainty about the future, the permanent feeling of not being recognized as a legitimate part of the city: all of this erodes emotional well-being and the ability to plan. When each day is focused on surviving, projecting oneself into tomorrow becomes almost impossible. For those who migrate from other states and carry the double weight of poverty and foreign origin, this permanent uncertainty turns dignity into a promise systematically postponed.

Not knowing if tomorrow they will be able to continue working in the same place, if there will be operations, if they will be fined or if they will have to start over in another area, directly impacts the way in which these workers think of themselves as inhabitants and as subjects of rights.

To measure the scope of the phenomenon, it is necessary to place it in its structural context. The informal economy in Mexico represents more than 56% of total employment, a reality that cannot be reduced to a market dysfunction or an individual choice (INEGI, 2021). For most of those who are part of it, informality is the only option available in the face of specific barriers: lack of formal schooling, the absence of migratory documents or the impossibility of accessing regulated employment circuits (Soriano Balderas, 2024). In states such as Tabasco and Chiapas, the informality rate frequently exceeds 75%, meaning that the majority of the working population operates outside the formal social protection system. The absence of contracts, health insurance, benefits and unemployment protection constitutes a material precariousness that is, at the same time, a systematic denial of decent work recognized in article 123 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States and in international human rights instruments. But precariousness is not exhausted in its economic dimension: constant exposure to stigma, mistrust, pejorative treatment and invisibilization in public space constitute a daily violence that erodes the psychosocial well-being and self-image of the worker, while consolidating his position of subordination in the urban order.

The role of human rights is essential to reverse these dynamics of exclusion. Policies aimed at the care of informal workers must move from a punitive approach focused on the control and regulation of public space to a management model that guarantees the right to the city, understanding that the informal worker is a legitimate economic actor whose dignity cannot be subordinated to aesthetic criteria or planning logics that exclude him without naming him. The recognition of aporophobia as a specific form of discrimination, the training of security forces in human rights and the development of accessible complaint mechanisms for workers in informal conditions are lines of action that this study contributes to substantiate from empirical evidence.

Given this panorama, the question that guides this research is the following: how are the rejection and exclusion of the informal worker physically manifested in the dynamics of occupation of public space in Villahermosa, Tabasco? It is hypothesized that the occupation of the sidewalk by the informal worker triggers mechanisms of symbolic violence on the part of passers-by manifested in invisibility, evasion and degrading treatment, and that this rejection constitutes an expression of internalized aporophobia in which the common citizen perceives the worker not as a peer, but as an aesthetic or functional obstacle, thus violating their dignity in the daily dynamics of public space. Through systematic non-participant observation, this study seeks to document these invisible interactions to show that job insecurity in Tabasco is accompanied by a social degradation that occurs in plain sight, but that no one names.

1. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, coherent with the purpose of exploring in depth concepts such as aporophobia, dignity and symbolic violence in their lived and contextual dimension. The scope is descriptive, aimed at characterizing in detail the observable manifestations of aporophobia in the urban environment studied. The design is based on critical phenomenology, a perspective that allows the experience of street workers to be described and, simultaneously, to analyze the relations of inequality, discrimination and power that run through it.

The central technique of data collection is non-participant observation, a modality that allows the researcher to place himself at strategic points in the public space to systematically record in a field diary the interactions, attitudes and gestures of exclusion towards informal workers, without altering the natural dynamics of the environment. From the analysis of the records, three analytical categories were constructed: (1) perceived aporophobia, which groups gestures and behaviors of rejection; (2) symbolic violence, which refers to the practices of invisibilization and naturalization of precariousness; and (3) dignity on the sidewalk, which captures the strategies of identity affirmation and resistance deployed by the workers themselves in the face of the hostile environment.

The choice of non-participant observation as the main data collection technique is based on its ability to capture symbolic violence and aporophobia in its most spontaneous and naturalized state. Unlike interviews, where the subject can modify his or her discourse due to social desirability or lack of awareness of his or her own prejudices, observation allows us to record incorporated behaviors that occur in the immediacy of the public space, without the reflective mediation of the informant.

This technique is particularly relevant to the present study for three reasons. First, it makes the invisible visible: symbolic violence, by definition, is a structure that is not named, but exercised. By observing how passers-by occupy the space on the sidewalk, how they avert their gaze or how they physically interact with the worker's environment, objective data is obtained about the exclusion that words usually omit. Second, it reduces the informant's bias: the informal worker, due to the need for subsistence and psychosocial adaptation mechanisms, frequently normalizes abuse. External observation allows us to identify patterns of rejection that the actor himself might not report in an interview because he considers them an inherent part of his job. Third, it allows for proxemic analysis: dignity in public space is measured in centimeters and gestures; This technique makes it possible to systematically document the use of the territory, the pedestrian trajectories of evasion and the micro-gestures of contempt, generating an empirical basis on the symbolic inequality in the streets of the state. Finally, by positioning the researcher as a passive spectator, the Hawthorne effect is minimized, ensuring that the social dynamics of the study space are not altered by the presence of the observer.

The study is limited to the urban public space of Villahermosa, Tabasco. The selected observation units include: (a) the pedestrian crossing area with the highest concentration of informal workers in the vicinity of the Pino Suárez market, including the pedestrian crossings and adjacent transport stops; and (b) La Paz and Juárez parks, high-traffic scenarios where a diversity of informal businesses such as the sale of food, clothing, handicrafts and typical beverages coexist with the daily flows of citizens. The selection of these spaces responds to their relevance as emblematic sites of the popular economy of Tabasco and to the intensity with which the tensions between informal work and the regulations for the use of urban space are expressed in them.

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Two observation sessions of two hours each were carried out, in different time slots (morning and afternoon), with the aim of recording how contextual variables such as extreme heat, pedestrian influx and worker fatigue influence interaction dynamics. In each session, the researcher maintained a prudent distance so as not to alter the natural behavior of the subjects, assuming the role of complete observer. At the end of each day, a dense description of the scenario was written, including the climatic context, the noise level and the influx, as well as the sensations perceived by the observer. A photographic record of the physical space, state of the sidewalks, layout of the stalls, material obstacles was also made, as complementary evidence of the precariousness of the environment.

The analysis procedure considered triangulation as a validation strategy: non-participant observations were compared with field notes to identify revealing contradictions. For example, when the observation showed that people systematically ignored a worker while he or she reported or could report that he or she was being treated respectfully, this contradiction was a key piece of information to analyze the naturalization of symbolic violence.

In the observation matrix, three dimensions are recorded with their behaviors to be observed:

Table 1. Observation Matrix: Dimensions and Observable Behavioral Indicators (a)

Dimension	Indicators (observable behaviors)
Social Aporophobia	Gestures of rejection, avoidance of passage or contact, expressions of annoyance, body language of the passerby.
Symbolic violence.	Naturalization of precariousness and invisibilization of the other, unequal occupation of spaces
Interaction	Displacement of public space

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Table 1. Observation Matrix: Dimensions and Observable Behavioral Indicators (b)

Social Aporophobia	Gestures of rejection (avoiding eye contact, surrounding the worker so as not to pass nearby), verbal expressions of annoyance, body language of superiority of the passerby.
Symbolic violence	Naturalization of precariousness (people who pass over the merchandise without asking permission), invisibilization (acting as if the worker was not there), unequal occupation of space.
Interaction with the Authority	Police presence or regulations, tone of voice in the indications, seizures or displacements of public space ("the sidewalk").

Procedure and Registration

Two two-hour sessions were held at different times (morning, heat peak, afternoon) to observe how fatigue or weather influence the well-being of the informal worker.

Results

A prudent distance was maintained so as not to alter the natural behavior of the subjects (being a "complete observer").

At the end of each session, a description was written that includes the context (noise, weather, affluence) and the sensations perceived.

Photographic Record

Photographs of the physical space (obstacles, state of the sidewalk, distance between stalls) were taken to show the "dignity denied" through the material environment.

Triangulation

The non-participant observations were used to contrast them with the interviews. For example: Does the worker say that they respect him, but in the observation it is evident that people ignore him and the boss of work gives him a pejorative treatment? This contradiction is key to analyzing symbolic violence.

Observation Technical Sheet

Registration Form: Non-Participant Observation

Project: Dignity Denied: Aporophobia and Symbolic Violence in the Urban Informal Worker in Tabasco.

Table 2. General Observation and Scenario Information

General Data	Scenario Information
Date: 04/03/2026	La Paz Park Sidewalks/Coconut Water Stand
Start/End Time: 9:00 am to 6:00 pm	Weather Conditions: (Sunny)
Observer: Diaz Ruiz José Luis	Pedestrian Footfall: [X] High [] Medium [] Low

Table 3. Observation Matrix

Dimension	Indicators (observable behaviors)	Observed
Social Aporophobia	Physical rejection: pedestrians who surround the worker or change sidewalks when they see him. Expressions of disgust/contempt: facial gestures, holding your nose or cleaning the place after contact.	Yes
Symbolic violence	Invisibility: people who walk through the worker's space without recognizing their presence. Invasion of space: passers-by who step on the merchandise or push the stall without asking permission. Infantilized/authoritarian treatment: derogatory diminutives or imperative tones when asking for prices.	Yes
Institutional	Presence of authority: actions of surveillance, eviction or restriction of the use of the sidewalk. Collection of informal fees or extortion.	Yes

Field Observation Notes

The narrative records obtained during the non-participant observation sessions in the indicated spaces are presented below. Each note constitutes a unit of analysis that evidences one of the three dimensions of the matrix: social aporophobia, symbolic and institutional violence.

Note 1. Social Aporophobia / Degrading Treatment Of Child Workers

The children of candy vendors are constantly treated rudely by pedestrians, especially when offering their products. Children are ignored, interrupted, or responded to with annoyed gestures, with no surrounding adult pointing it out as inappropriate behavior.

Note 2. Symbolic Violence / Naturalization of Rejection in Extreme Weather Conditions

Constant tension is observed due to extreme heat; pedestrians show greater irritability and tend to ignore the requests of street vendors to pass, naturalizing the obstruction of the passage as an exclusive fault of the worker, exempting themselves from all responsibility for the shared space.

Note 3. Symbolic Violence / Pejorative Treatment of Migrant Workers

A migrant worker from Chiapas, in the process of training to sell prepared ice cream, was instructed by shouting from her supervisor. This episode shows how the condition of migrant intersects with that of informal worker to amplify exposure to degrading treatment.

Note 4. Aporophobia and Institutional / Police Extortion

A young banana seller paid a fee to the park's police to be able to continue working. The fact illustrates the institutional dimension of violence: the informal worker, tacitly classified as a suspicious figure, is left unprotected even in the face of formal mechanisms of order, exposed to forms of extortion that reproduce his condition of subordination.

Note 5. Violation of Rights / Child Labour

The children who also work in the observed spaces experience a clear violation of their human rights: they do not have access to education, nor to an environment free of violence, and they work days that exceed eight hours. Their presence in the informal workplace is, in itself, an expression of the failure of social protection systems.

Note 6. Aporophobia / Ethnic Discrimination Against Indigenous Women

Women vendors wearing traditional clothing from their region of origin – mainly traders selling sweets or embroidered handkerchiefs – are subjected to insults, derogatory gestures and racist labels by some customers and passers-by. This dimension reveals the intersection between aporophobia, racism and gender discrimination.

Note 7. Aporophobia / Exclusion Of Central American Migrants

Migrants from Honduras with clothing stalls in Juarez Park are assigned to low-traffic locations. When trying to promote their sale in areas with a greater concentration of buyers, they receive pejorative treatment, shouting, humiliating comments from passers-by, which forces them to retreat to the physical and symbolic margins of the public space.

Visual Evidence Registration



Description: Boy seller of pozol, a typical drink of the Tabasco region.

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Description: Women with improvised stalls of corn and revenge



Description: Women from Chiapas working in ice cream parlor stalls.



Description: elderly street vendor.

2. DISCUSSION

The findings of the observation sessions confirm the relevance of the conceptual framework articulated for this study. In terms of aporophobia, the records document a systematic pattern of rejection that is not randomly distributed, but is concentrated with greater intensity in workers who meet multiple markers of vulnerability: being a migrant, being a woman, being a minor, being indigenous. This accumulation of stigmas, what the literature calls intersectionality, amplifies exposure to exclusion and hinders any individual strategy of resistance (Picado-Valverde et al., 2022).

In terms of symbolic violence, the data show that exclusionary behaviors do not require a conscious discriminatory intent to be effective. Passersby who walk over a vendor's merchandise without asking permission, or who respond to a child vendor with a gesture of annoyance, probably don't perceive themselves as agents of discrimination. This is precisely the efficacy of symbolic violence: it operates in the register of naturalness, as part of the evident order of things (Bourdieu, 1997; Mc Kay Levy, 2023).

The institutional dimension of the findings deserves particular reflection. The documented police extortion is not an isolated event, but the expression of an institutional logic that classifies the informal worker as a suspicious subject rather than as a citizen with rights. This logic is consistent with what Soriano Balderas (2024) identifies as the absence of an effective protection framework for those who enter the informal economy: without contracts, without unions, without formal complaint mechanisms, the informal worker is exposed not only to social stigma but also to active forms of institutional abuse.

Finally, urban development in Villahermosa acts as an amplifier of these dynamics. Policies for the organization of public space that prioritize an aesthetic of consumption, cleanliness, order, and tourist image produce concrete effects on the bodies and trajectories of informal workers: they displace them, fragment them, and make them more vulnerable. In this sense, symbolic violence is not only interpersonal, but also spatial and political.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the dignity of informal workers in Tabasco is not only violated by their economic condition, but by a deep structure of symbolic violence that has been naturalized in the daily dynamics of urban public space. The sidewalk is not a neutral scenario: it is a field of power where the denial of the full humanity of those who inhabit it from precariousness is reproduced, in a systematic and normalized way.

The findings of the non-participant observation allow us to formulate three central conclusions. First, there is a marked proxemic physical social distance, where the passerby avoids visual and personal contact with the informal worker, treating him or her as an architectural obstacle rather than as a subject of rights. This evasion behavior is systematic and does not discriminate based on the type of activity carried out by the worker, but based on the markers of poverty and vulnerability that it embodies. Second, aporophobia manifests itself in gestures of distrust, contempt and invasion that restrict the worker's living space, forcing him to give up his place in a submissive way to preserve his source of sustenance, with which the worker himself involuntarily contributes to the reproduction of the symbolic order that excludes him. Third, the naturalization of precariousness by Tabasco society operates as a mechanism that validates exclusion as an almost deserved acceptable consequence of labor informality, decoupling poverty from its structural determinants and making the individual responsible for his or her own situation.

These conclusions have direct implications for the design of public policies. Urban management with a human rights approach must move from a punitive model and control of space to a model that guarantees the right to the city for all its actors, recognizing the informal worker as a legitimate economic agent whose dignity cannot be subordinated to aesthetic criteria or planning logics that exclude him without naming him. Policies to raise public awareness of aporophobia, the training of security forces in human rights and the development of accessible complaint mechanisms for workers in informal conditions are urgent lines of action that this study helps to substantiate.

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Future research should expand this work with mixed methodologies that incorporate the voice of the workers themselves through in-depth interviews, allowing the observer's perspective to be contrasted with the subjective experience of those who inhabit the sidewalk as a space of life and resistance. The gender dimension and the migrant condition also deserve specific research that accounts for the complexity of the intersections that amplify vulnerability in these contexts.

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ISBN: 978-625-91915-4-6



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