

Editorial

Reinvention: Research Through a Cultural Lens

Shreya Sridharan, University of Warwick

Welcome to this year's final issue of *Reinvention: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, Volume 15, Issue 2 (15.2). To close off this year's publications, we present to you a selection of articles spanning across history, economics, the arts and biology. This issue explores the potential of research to, simultaneously, be set within a deep and nuanced cultural context *and* transcend cultural boundaries at the same time, generating knowledge that is both local and universal.

In this edition, we bring you five original research papers, a guest article and a book review of Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste*.

Kalos Lau's 'Sovereignty or Security? Maintaining Peace and The Ambivalent Relationship Between Europe and Washington, 1945–1991' explores the relationship between sovereignty and diplomatic protection for Western European states during the Cold War. Comparing policies adopted by the USA and Western European countries, Lau focuses on understanding the scale and nature of these dichotomous policies and finds that despite strategic alliances with Washington, European states were able to retain sovereignty and pursue independent foreign policies. This paper provides an interesting discussion of hegemonies and the extent of their power, especially at times of conflict, and deftly balances perspectives from varying historiographical schools, thus providing an adept display of research within cultural and sociopolitical contexts.

In 'Does Taxing Mobile Money Harm the Poor: Evidence From the 10 Per Cent Excise Fee Introduction in Kenya', Kai Foerster examines the effect of transaction costs on the use of mobile money in Africa. While emphasising the value of mobile money as an innovation, Foerster finds that poorer households have reduced their monthly mobile-money transactions by 25 per cent more than richer households as a result of the excise fee. This result is presented alongside evidence that reduced remittances (due to fewer transactions) were not substituted with other transactions, suggesting a potential decline in remittance flows for poorer and more vulnerable households. Foerster provides incisive insights into the potential impacts of such taxation on the very aim of a tool such as mobile money – to serve as a social protection mechanism, while also considering that these results lie within a very specific cultural context. As with many practical solutions to problems in development, scalability is a key concern and must be examined on balance with cultural and geography-specific needs.

'*Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*: Reawakening Czech Cultural Heritage through the Psychoanalysis of New Wave Surrealism' by Toby Phipps is an expertly written analysis of *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, a cornerstone of Czech New Wave cinema, placing the film within a context of Freudian psychoanalysis. The film, based on a 1935 novel, narrates the story of a 13-year-old girl at the onset of menstruation and her sexual awakening, blending the genres of fantasy and Gothic horror. Phipps roots their analysis of the film with three key concepts of psychoanalysis – the id, ego and superego and skilfully explores the connections between Freud's theories and the surrealism of Czech New Wave. This paper makes for an engaging read, guiding the reader towards a niche cultural context and arguing that viewing art through a Freudian lens

opens doors for social transformation and enables communities to revisit and be reinvigorated by their cultural heritage.

Emerson Hurley's 'Digital Decodings: Becoming-Ungenderable in Online Spaces' discusses the role and functioning of gender identities within digital spaces. Hurley puts forth compelling ideas about the way we develop our gendered identities online and posits two potential pathways for what this might mean: one, that we may be able to resist gendered societal expectations; or two, that the gender binary may be further reinforced by digital media. Hurley brings a poignant conclusion: that it is neither one nor the other, but rather that the Internet presents a site of constant tension between the two forces. This paper's strength lies in how it situates a modern, extremely relevant issue in a strong theoretical background and relays the proposed ideas within a context of an almost universal digital culture while opening the door towards nuanced, complex and distinct cultural frames of thought on this topic.

In 'Preventing Cancer With Turmeric: The Whole is Better Than the Sum of its Parts', Megan Bowers reviews the use of turmeric for cancer prevention, setting it within the context of existing research surrounding its phytochemical, curcumin and its medicinal capabilities. Bowers discusses the bioavailability and preventative activities of turmeric compared to curcumin alone, and highlights the need for study on the chemopreventative potential of phytochemicals as opposed to a more enhanceive role in cancer treatment. This paper shows the value and need for alternative therapeutics within the area of cancer treatment and prevention, for which the answers may lie in looking back to cultural and indigenous healthcare practices and remedies.

Aliya Pal presents a thoughtful piece on post-COVID challenges for international students in this issue's featured guest article. Pal argues that the main issues faced by international students were acculturative stress and economic stress due to job uncertainty, where the former refers to a reduced health status for individuals undergoing assimilation to a new culture. Using a literature review of government reports and news articles, Pal identifies potential solutions to improve the experience of international students, such as a dedicated careers team or a student support programme for students of similar backgrounds. This article is a clear reflection of our focus for this issue: to showcase sensitive, compelling research that considers and centres research within culture.

In Sanika Savdekar's review of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson, this theme is discussed in more detail. The book itself is an exploration of different caste systems in the world, linking the histories of India, Germany and the USA, and Savdekar provides a contemplative review of Wilkerson's skill and style as well as on the topic itself. As Savdekar aptly puts it, the book, perhaps intentionally, succeeds in making the reader uncomfortable and encourages them to reconsider and challenge their own views about cultures, hierarchies and stratification.

The articles in this issue span a wide range of topics, and the underlying threads tying them together may seem less obvious, but I believe that bringing them together through this issue offers a unique perspective on the nature of the connections between different disciplines and topics. What is it that is common about turmeric for cancer prevention and peace-keeping struggles? Or Czech cinema and mobile money in Kenya? My answer is that each paper brings forth a different iteration of the same two core ideas: one, that an issue or problem can be viewed both specifically within a cultural context as well as universally, hence needing solutions that address both perspectives; and two, that respect and inclusion of various cultural viewpoints can enrich the research that we conduct.

To refer back to the papers we are presenting, turmeric as a health remedy has widely been used in indigenous and ethnic communities and viewing this as a viable solution can bring forth cutting-edge research and solutions as widely applicable as for cancer prevention. Similarly, understanding the purpose that mobile money serves for communities in Kenya specifically as opposed to anywhere else in the world can enable a better understanding of how this service can be improved or provided more efficiently. Thus, I urge our readers to keep this in mind as they peruse these papers: culture is both unique and all-encompassing, and finding the balance and interplay between the local and global can help us achieve, or at least strive towards, more innovative and inclusive solutions for our problems.

With this issue, my tenure as Editor at *Reinvention* has come to an end. I am excited to introduce Elle Pearson as the next Editor. As a strong part of our team, she has consistently helped innovate our work and I have no doubts that she will take the journal to new heights. I am honoured to have had this role at *Reinvention*, and I have greatly enjoyed my time here. Having the chance to work on our Special Issue earlier this year was extremely rewarding, and I am thankful for the opportunities this role has given me. I am ever-appreciative and proud of the work we do at *Reinvention*, and I would like to thank Mara Caldarini for her guidance and support, and the amazing editorial team that I have had the pleasure of working with. To all our readers and authors, I hope you will have an equally fulfilling journey with *Reinvention*, now and in the future.

To cite this paper please use the following details: Sridharan, S. (2022), 'Reinvention: Research Through a Cultural Lens', *Reinvention: an International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, Volume 15, Issue 2, <https://reinventionjournal.org/article/view/1242>. Date accessed [insert date]. If you cite this article or use it in any teaching or other related activities please let us know by e-mailing us at Reinventionjournal@warwick.ac.uk.