'Hanoying' Traffic: Manifestations of Mobility Injustices through The Cát Linh-Hà Đông Metro Railway

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In memory of Sabine Luning. Her inspiration remains with me. I wish she'd been here to see this completed.

We were not moving. At least, not really. The taxi driver had turned on his playlist full of Western pop music, which I interpreted as a gesture of hospitality. But I had not been listening with much attention. Lost in my own thoughts, I was staring out the window, just moving my eyes every so often. I had already acclimated to the traffic jams of Hanoi, but being stuck on Phố Hoàng Cầu Street never sat quite right with me, as the elevated metro was right beside us. "Are you in a rush?" the taxi driver suddenly asked. "Not really." I replied. "Well, feel free to stay here and enjoy the music. It looks like we are not going anywhere anytime soon." I watched as another metro train passed by. It looked mostly empty.

This article seeks to understand this paradox: how Hanoi's inaugural metro project, contrary to its stated objectives, has ended up reinforcing (im)mobility injustices. Specifically, I examine the metro project through the lens of Mimi Sheller's *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*.[1] Sheller defines mobility justice as "an overreaching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility

[1] Sheller, *Mobility Justice*. Other key works on mobility injustice I engage with include Sheller and Urry, *The New Mobilities Paradigm*; Kaufmann, *Re-thinking Mobility*; Cresswell, *Towards a Politics of Mobility*.

in the circulation of people, resources, and information."[2] (Im)mobility injustice exceeds the social and spatial dimensions of mobility. Mobility is shaped by power and inequality. It is inherently political.[3]

To discuss (im)mobility in space as inherently political is to consider infrastructure within said space beyond merely its material functionality. In my analysis, I therefore consider the metro as a contested site of micropolitics. Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality are useful conceptual underpinnings for me in making sense of the metro as a site of micropolitics. In Foucauldian thought, biopolitics and governmentality refer to the ways in which the conditions of existence of a population are governed within the framework of political sovereignty.[4] Thus, the focus moves from infrastructure itself to what that infrastructure reveals about governmental practices and regulation of mobility.[5] Infrastructure is never neutral. Mobility, then, is not simply about physical movement through space, but also about how it is controlled, distributed, and experienced.

While urban mobility in metropolises of the Global South has been well studied, Hanoi remains in a comparatively early stage of development. This makes it a valuable case study for research on sustainable, future-oriented urban mobility, particularly from a policy perspective, as discussed by Hull, and by Melia, Parkhurst, and Barton.[6] This project builds on existing work examining various modes of transportation in Hanoi, including research on the politics of street vending, proposals for a sustainable 'car-free' Hanoi, and the city's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system as a case study of the challenges facing BRT implementation in the Global South.[7] My project, however, focuses on an aspect of mobility in Hanoi that

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[2] Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 22.
[3] *Ibid*, 23
[4] Nilsson, *Foucault, Biopolitics, and Governmentality*, 25.
[5] Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," 329.
[6] Hull, "Policy Integration,"; Melia, Parkhurst, and Burton, "The Paradox of Intensification."
[7] Eidse, Oswin, and Turner, "Contesting Street Spaces,"; Minh, "Application of 'Car-Free City,'"; Dung and Lien, "Health Co-Benefits".

Figure 1: The Cát Linh-Hà Đông metro positioned above Phố Hoàng Cầu street as seen from La Thành metro station during rush hour. Photograph by the author, February 2024.

remains underexplored in these studies: how infrastructural projects reconfigure the social world. My analysis shifts the discourse from policy frameworks to the questions of whom these policies serve and how they materialize on the ground.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, I outline the methodology. Next, I contextualize the metro's contentious legacy. The three axes structure the ethnography: the first explores contestations that emerged during the construction of the metro line; the second problematizes the metro as a flawed solution for Hanoi's urban mobility challenges; and the third examines the discourse of institutional actors. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the metro's paradox and urges future projects to learn from its failures

Methodology

Ethnographic research stands out as a particularly relevant approach for accessing the nuanced, obscured, and mundane aspects of the social world. For this reason, Tim Oakes advocates for a grounded, project-based methodological approach to studying infrastructure.[8] More specifically, I adopted a postcritical ethnographic stance toward the study of the metro line. This approach emphasizes research as an ethical and political practice, foregrounding *emic* perspectives and local knowledges.[9] Postcritical ethnographies neither emancipate nor empower; rather, they aim to envision alternatives to existing social realities.[10] In doing so, postcritical ethnographers contribute by shifting the discourse around injustices that would otherwise remain systemically obscured.

I conducted fieldwork from January to March 2024 in Hanoi. I employed purposive-stratified and convenience sampling to engage with two cohorts: (1) residents variably affected by the metro and (2) commuters, such as taxi and motorbike drivers.[11] Institutional actors—a state official and two state-affiliated journalists

[8] Oakes, "Geopolitics," 281.

[9] The term emic refers to the viewpoint from studying behavior as from inside the system. It emphasizes the interpretation of meaning. Pike, *Language in Relation.*

[10] Anders, "Post-Critical Ethnography."

[11] Purposive-stratified sampling strategically identifies subgroups relevant, whereas convenience sampling prioritizes accessibility, leveraging factors like participant availability or proximity. Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 418.

—were accessed through the kinship networks of Linh who accompanied me throughout the fieldwork. In addition to ten semi-structured interviews, the research involved numerous informal conversations with key informants, a detailed questionnaire, traffic and metro observations, and the collection of state-run news reports and official records. While state-produced documentation has limitations in terms of critical insight, it reveals the official state narrative and serves as a tool for propagandistic analysis. Interviews and informal conversations were conducted in English where possible, and in Vietnamese where necessary. Vietnamese-English translation was facilitated by Linh's kinship ties. Ethical protocols were followed, including pseudonymization, verbal consent and encrypted data storage.[12]

Finally, since postcritical ethnography is rooted in reflexivity, I openly situate my research in relation to my Western background and Linh's Vietnamese heritage and European upbringing. Tensions arose throughout the fieldwork. Some interlocutors expressed skepticism about our presence, questioning our motives for conducting politically sensitive research in socialist Vietnam. It is therefore worth reflecting on the political constraints surrounding open discourse. Interlocutors often self-censored or conformed insincerely to state narratives to avoid potential repercussions. Others, however, welcomed 'foreign' curiosity and emphasized the importance of documenting local narratives. Perceptions ranged from viewing me as a naive Western researcher to confusion about our intentions. Navigating these responses required time, sympathy, and patience, particularly as interlocutors themselves concurrently negotiated what to reveal and what to withhold.

The Cát Linh–Hà Đông Metro Railway

The Cát Linh–Hà Đông metro line is arguably one of the most prominent infrastructure projects in contemporary Vietnam. Presented by the Vietnamese state as an embodiment of modernity, it is the first of eight planned lines intended to form an integrated metro network in Hanoi and to address the city's persistent traffic problems. Yet, a closer look reveals a complex and troubled history.

[12] Chenhall, Senior, and Belton, "Negotiating Human Research Ethics,"13.

Construction began in 2011, and, despite an initial completion target of 2013, the line only became operational in 2021. The process of land acquisition contributed to major delays and substantial costs. Approximately 2,000 households across the districts of Đống Đa, Thanh Xuân, and Hà Đông were displaced to make room for the metro line. Throughout the construction process, the project was fraught with significant accidents, including fatalities. Allegations of corruption were rife. State authorities felled 6,700 trees to clear space, without notifying citizens. Simultaneously, barriers enclosing construction sites arose all over the city.

After nearly a decade of construction, Hanoi residents were finally able to make use of this new mode of transportation. The metro attracted many curious riders upon its opening. Yet public interest quickly declined, and today the metro is mostly empty. This is partly due to its failure to integrate effectively into Hanoi's broader urban mobility network. Rapid urbanization in the late 20th century manifested in a maze-like configuration.[13] Hanoi, with its intricate networks of narrow streets and innumerable alleyways had transformed into a 'motorbike dependent city.' However, the explanation for the metro's underutilization is two-fold. When the project was first announced, Hanoi residents welcomed it enthusiastically as a promising mobility solution. This early optimism soon gave way to growing criticism and declining public support. In *Part 1: Construction*, I argue that as the metro's construction progressed with all its accumulating contentions, disapproval of the metro project among residents accumulated concurrently.

Figure 2: Inside the Cát Linh-Hà Đông metro during rush hour. Photograph by the author, March 2024.

[13] Leducq and Scarwell, "The New Hanoi," 70.

Part 1: Construction

Resettlement

The democratic centralism ideology of the Communist Party of Vietnam restricts public expression of dissenting view.[14] Criticism of the political system, the party state apparatus, its policies, or the absence of democratic processes are not tolerated but treated as threats to the regime. Critical views, however, do exist. Adopting a biopolitical perspective shifts the focus from formal power structures to the everyday experiences of being governed. While many Hanoians may be alienated from political power, they are not alienated from an awareness of injustices.

I met Nguyên through my extended family. He and his family were among the approximately 2,000 households forcibly resettled to make space for the metro. Upon learning about my research, Nguyên proposed sharing his experiences. Visiting Nguyên at his new home, two weeks after our initial meeting, he made it clear that regaining a sense of stability following resettlement had been a long and difficult process. "Our moving completely disturbed our lives. We got some compensation from the government for the resettling, but we got barely any assistance with finding a new home," Nguyên explained.[15] Ever since the resettlement, he and his family have struggled to rebuild their lives. Their former home held many memories, and adapting to their new one has been a struggle. "Actually, I don't consider this place as 'home,'" he added, forming quotation marks with his fingers. Nguyên explained how he feels wronged by the government for being forcibly resettled and relocated to a smaller house. His frustration is compounded by the metro's underwhelming performance: "Actually, some local authorities from the Hanoi's People Committee (HPC)[16] told us that the project would be a great benefit for Hanoi, and that our sacrifice

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[14] Kerkvliet, "Governance," 34.

[15] Nguyên, interview by the author, February 2024. Compensation details for displacements remain unclear. Vietnam's urban development has long faced criticism for inadequate compensation and forced evictions during land acquisition. Harms, *Luxury and Rubble Civility.*

[16] The HPC is the executive body of the Municipal People's Council and local state administrative authority of Hanoi.

would serve the city. The way I see it is that we had to give our home up for nothing. You can see yourself; the metro is mostly empty! But what could we have done? We had no say in the matter."

Nguyên and his family continue to negotiate their displacement. Despite official promises of public benefit and institutional support for the resettled, reality has had a disruptive impact on their lives. This case illustrates how the HPC managed to leverage on the metro as a biopolitical *dispositif*, a mechanism of governance regulating urban space and ultimately deciding who moves, when, and where.[17] It does so paradoxically: while the metro is intended to improve mobility, it has produced a coercive mobility for affected households. In doing so, who remains visible in the 'modern' city and who is relegated to its peripheries is determined by the state's imagined modernity.

Construction barriers

As mentioned above, the HPC's bureaucratic opacity has disrupted lives and revealed the metro's overt biopolitical governance. Yet, the metro line can also cause destabilization through less visible means. In this section, I trace the temporal dimension of (im)mobility injustice.

The first time Linh and I visited the Cát Linh station, we noticed a small street-side restaurant located next to the entrance station. We sat down and ordered some food. The owner recalled the commencement of the construction: "According to the project manager of the construction site, the restaurant was expected to yield higher profit and generate more sales once the metro would be implemented," she remembered.[18] She was also told that the land value of her place was expected to increase its value, perhaps even double, given its proximity to what would become the main station of the metro line. However, these promises never materialized. Shortly after the construction barriers emerged, the visibility of her restaurant diminished and accessing it became nearly impossible. The decrease in traffic due to the construction barriers obstructed accessibility to the main roads, which directly impacted the owner's

[17] Nilsson, *Foucault, Biopolitics, and Governmentality*, 96.
[18] Restaurant owner, interview by the author, January 2024.

Figure 3: The small, street-side restaurant, identifiable by its yellow chairs, is situated adjacent to the Cát Linh station. Photograph by the author, January 2024.

Figure 4: Construction barriers of the Nhổn-Hà Nội line, the sole metro project under construction at the time in Hanoi. Photograph by the author, February 2024.

livelihood. Sales dropped significantly, but still; she remained hopeful, willing to sacrifice a part of her income in anticipation of long-term benefits. However, the accumulating construction delays only worsened the situation, and the restaurant nearly went bankrupt. After nearly a decade of waiting, neither the influx of customers nor the predicted rise in land value materialized. The metro's low ridership failed to generate additional traffic for her restaurant. Despite repeated attempts by the owner and her neighbors to seek compensation, the funds disbursed remained insufficient. The restaurant owner I spoke to was just one of many with similar experiences.

Her story illustrates how infrastructure projects can slowly disrupt livelihoods. Attending to the temporal dimension of injustice reveals how the metro can materialize antithetically to the state's vision. Infrastructure often does not work out as planned.[19] The state's discursive practices of modernity and progress then contradict the lived reality of the shop owner. This injustice is systemic. Although construction barriers were removed after the Cát

[19] Appel, Gupta, and Anand, "*The Promise of Infrastructure*," 33.

Linh-Hà Đông metro commenced operations, the metro line is just one of eight future lines. Given the project's prolonged construction timelines, citizens have repeatedly voiced concerns that future metro projects may similarly disrupt the city, cutting off streets from main roads and forcing people to live under difficult conditions for many years. The state justifies this expense in the name of long-term, future-oriented modernity. This leaves many Hanoians with a dissonant sense-making of the broader metro network initiative: how to balance their desire for improved mobility with the state-imposed expense of 'progress'?

Tree Felling

In March 2015, HPC authorities started cutting down trees in Hanoi along the streets reserved for future railway lines. The project's cost was estimated at USD 3.4 million and involved cutting down 6,700 trees. The HPC failed to notify or consult citizens, justifying the initiative by claiming that the trees were old and dying, and that different kinds of trees made for "a poor aesthetic choice."[20] The tree cutting initiative quickly triggered public outcry. Citizens formed Facebook groups to collectively express their opposition, requesting the tree felling be postponed until experts could review the plans. The utilization of Facebook by citizens as a means for protesting attracted enough awareness that the HPC announced the suspension of the initiative. However, despite this suspension, tree felling continued in areas required for metro construction, sparking further controversy and public concern.

Vinh, a 22-year old student and Hanoi citizen shared his views during one of the weekly events at Puku Café & Bar where we connected over our shared interest in anthropology. When I told him that I was researching the metro, he opened up about how he has experienced the metro project's implementation. Vinh explained how he could not possibly grasp the irony of cutting down trees for a 'greener city'. "Look at the mess they have made! How can the government promise us progress, while destroying our trees? They should know how dependent we are on these trees, given the

[20] Clark, "Hanoi Citizens."

extreme air pollution."[21] For Vinh, the issue went beyond the environment, it concerned public well-being: "You have noticed the people outside wearing masks, right? It just shows how disassociated the government is from the public: cutting down trees, ignoring environmental concerns, while arguing to 'greening' the city. Meanwhile, the metro line has failed to attract people, and I would argue, worsened traffic, leading to even more pollution. 'Graying the city' would be more appropriate, I would say," Vinh concluded cynically.

While some Hanoians referred to the tree felling as a necessary sacrifice for the city's development, most interlocutors expressed their frustrations with the initiative, citing concerns over the loss of fresh air. Vinh's critique, and others like him, like the Facebook protests, illustrate a form of resistance within the mechanisms of the state power. No outright rejection of governance but a refusal to accept its terms: *counter-conduct* in response to the state's biopolitical violence.[22] Yet, the state's response of reinforcing its authority in continuing cutting trees reveals the limitations of such counter-conduct.

Part 2: Traffic

'Motorbike Culture'

Having moved beyond its contentious construction phase, Hanoi's inaugural metro line revealed a new friction: its ineffective integration into the city's mobility fabric. This section shifts from the politics of *building* infrastructure to the vexing paradoxes of *using* it —or not. I focus on *non-users* whose mobility routines persist unaltered despite the metro's three-year operational history. Many interlocutors have framed their resistance through what they referred to as 'motorbike culture.'

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[21] Vinh, informal conversation with the author, January 2024.

[22] Counter-conduct ... signals "a perpetual question" ... which asked, "how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them." Odysseos, Death, and Malmvig, "Interrogating Michel Foucault's,"153.

Figure 5: Hanoi citizens buying goods while on their motorbikes, resembling 'motorbike culture.' Photograph by the author, March 2024,

Duy, a friend of Linh's cousin, joined us on a Sunday morning to play football at Hanoi University's sports field. During a break, I asked him about the metro. Although the field is one of the stops of the Cát Linh-Hà Đông metro, Duy commuted by motorbike. "To use the metro, I'd need a motorbike just to reach the station," [23] Duy laughed. Like many Hanoians, his home is too far away from any of the stations. But the issue runs deeper than that: "The metro clashes with our 'motorbike culture'." To illustrate, Duy described his childhood commute: "When I was young, my mother would take me on her motorbike to work. First, she'd stop at a street vendor to buy me snacks, then drop me off at school. Only after that would she head to her job." Duy continued explaining that Hanoians' reliance on motorbikes is rooted in systemic barriers in alternative transport—absent bike lanes, hazardous interactions with motorized traffic, a lack of public transportation, and the maze-like urban layout where motorbikes are often the only practical option. "One metro line won't change much. Maybe when all the other lines are there," he concluded.

This systemic dependence on motorbikes is further compounded by perceived governance failures. During a visit to a nail salon for Linh's manicure, we met Điều, the nail technician working that day. The salon lay unexpectedly near the Nhổn-Hà Nội metro construction site, which at the time was the sole metro project under construction in Hanoi. "The construction has been ongoing for more than a decade. And from what I understand, due to funding issues, they are not even constructing anymore. ... I used to

[23] Duy, informal conversation with the author, February 2024.

dream of commuting by metro, but I've lost hope,"[24] she explained. Điều went on: "I hate traffic here. Every day I am stuck, and the air is extremely toxic. But what choice do I have? On top of that, now the government even wants to ban motorbikes.[25] It's absurd. It's impossible. I say: continue building the lines, educate people on using the lines, *then* implement a motorbike ban. Hopefully in the future, we can phase out 'motorbike culture'. . . no kill it. Please kill it!"

Interlocutors' resistance to the metro does not reflect an anti-modernization sentiment but rather its misalignment with Hanoi's socio-spatial realities. The proposed motorbike ban illustrates this disconnect. While the motorbike ban has been described by many interlocutors as necessary, it is simultaneously premature. Such fragmented interventions highlight a fundamental gap between technocratic planning and Hanoi's emergent urban mobility practices. For the foreseeable future, motorbikes will remain essential tools and sustain Hanoi's 'motorbike culture.'

Xe Ôm

While the prior section detailed the metro's inequitable impacts on Hanoi's residents, this analysis foregrounds a critical yet understudied group: motorbike taxi drivers (xe ôm). Their livelihoods are uniquely threatened by the state's modernization agenda. In line with the proposed motorbike ban, authorities have labelled the xe ôm as 'unfit' for Hanoi's future urban mobility and have escalated efforts to regulate and police them.[26]

The Vietnamese government frames modernization as 'essential to the capital's future.' When I asked a xe ôm driver about this notion of modernity in relation to the Cát Linh-Hà Đông line, he expressed a sceptic viewpoint. "In my opinion, this metro is not 'modern proof'; people barely use it, and it completely disrupted traffic flow. It feels like a step backwards. I wish the metro was a

[24] Điều, informal conversation with the author, February 2024.
[25] Hanoi officials have introduced a stepwise ban on non-electric motorcycles from inner-city streets by 2030. The city officials actively endorse modern mobilities such as the implementation of BRT systems and metro systems over motorbikes. See: Kieu et al., "Evaluating Public Sentiment."
[26] Minh, "The Transformation of Mobility,"130.

success story though," he noted.[27] "How come? Is the metro not your competition?" I asked him. "I think my business will be safe!" he replied, laughing. The xe ôm driver had initially welcomed the metro's announcement, hoping it would reduce traffic congestion and improve his working conditions. "But the metro turns out to be mostly empty," he noted. "I am still trapped in traffic congestions daily, which limits me a lot in earning money," he added. I followed up by asking how his working conditions had been affected during the construction of the line. "It was even worse than it is now. Some roads were constantly blocked, and some places got extremely overcrowded due to the limited space available on the road caused by the construction sites," he explained. "Even now, the metro line itself obstructs us from doing our work properly, because there are fewer turning points because the metro line and the support pillars of the metro line are in the way."

Figure 6: The support pillars of the Cát Linh-Hà Đông metro placed on Phố Hoàng Cầu street, thereby impeding with traffic flow. Photograph by the author, March 2024.

Xe ôm drivers consistently criticized the metro's elevated tracks and prolonged construction for worsening traffic and obstructing their work. When asked about the line's symbolic modernity, many highlighted contradictions. One driver noted, "Metro commuters ironically breathe in more smog than people on street level." Others critiqued its bulky, outdated design, making the city appear 'messy,' alongside observations of 'visible cracks' and early deterioration. While xe ôm drivers may sincerely find the metro line unattractive, their comments on its aboveground structure often quickly shifted to practical concerns: how the support pillars directly obstructed their mobility. Since few other

[27] Xe ôm driver, informal conversation with the author, March 2024.

interlocutors mentioned the aboveground sections, their perspectives seem particularly influenced by its effects on traffic and their livelihoods. At the same time, their perspectives reveal a deeper flaw in Hanoi's urban vision: the state dismisses xe ôm as 'unfit' for modernity, yet their experiences expose a modernity that fails to fit the city itself.

Part 3: State Discourse

Propaganda

Behind the metro's shortcomings lies a regime of discursive production. While state propaganda distorted the metro's realities, urban youth has increased information access and political awareness. This epistemic shift compels the state to negotiate between changing civic expectations and institutional hegemony. Nevertheless, the socio-political environment left little space for substantive engagement in the planning and decision-making process of the metro. Through state-managed monthly meetings, the government staged a semblance of democratic engagement. Yet, these forums functioned at best as controlled channels where citizens could express concerns and at worst as a tokenistic exercise under the guise of democratic inclusion.

I talked with Vương at his residence in the Đống Đa district. He studied Journalism simultaneously with the cousin of Linh, and after completing his studies he became a journalist and news reporter in Hanoi. "I strive to report as neutrally as possible, but my information must always first pass an official that can approve the message," Vương explained.[28] He further elaborated on the monthly public meetings organized for the construction of the metro line: "The HPC would gather citizens and journalists in a conference room for them to ask questions or express concerns on the progress of the line." "Could people *really* voice their concerns?" I asked. Vương replied: "criticizing the state carries risks. People come, they listen, but most keep their doubts to themselves. Still," he added, "the government cannot simply throw a blanket over the

[28] Vương, interview with the author, February 2024.

construction site and then lie about the progress. Citizens can see the construction sites with their own eyes."

As we concluded, Vương admitted that he had to watch his words as he was still an employee of the state. Then he suggested meeting his retired uncle Huy, a former investigative journalist, who was freer to talk. We returned two weeks later to interview Huy at the same table.

"In Vietnam, true transparency is elusive. But I think journalists can play an important role in seeking out the truth." Huy began thoughtfully.[29] I asked Huy whether he had investigated the metro project. "I tried," Huy said. "But the HPC redirected me to the Vietnamese Ministry of Transport (VMoT),[30] who then warned me to back off. It wasn't safe to push further." Huy continued explaining the state's influence on media: "It's hard to know for the people what to believe. Different outlets report conflicting stories. Some follow state narratives, others push a journalist's or politician's agenda. I have seen many journalists get bribed into 'playing games' with politicians or businessmen." I followed up by showing Huy a news article titled 'Công ty vận hành đường sắt Cát Linh-Hà Đông lãi đậm' ('Cát Linh-Hà Đông railway operating company makes big profits'), that reported a six-fold increase of profit.[31] "Impossible!" Huy laughed. "The metro has structurally been losing money." He added. As I shared more similar articles, to which he continuously responded with laughter and ridicule, his laughter faded. "These reports are just smokescreens to deceive the public. Nobody in the government even knows what we're building or when."

Deflection

Throughout the three months of fieldwork, I have made persistent efforts to establish contact with government officials affiliated with the VMoT or the HPC. Shortly prior to departing for the Netherlands, I was fortunate enough to finally secure an interview with Trần, a deputy director of the HPC involved in the Cát Linh-Hà

[29] Huy, interview with the author, March 2024.
[30] The Vietnamese Ministry of Transport was the overseeing governing body responsible for investment and coordination with the contractors.
[31] VnExpress, "Cát Linh-Hà Đông."

Đông metro project, through a personal connection facilitated by Linh's uncle.

The interview proved far from smooth. While Trần predictably stuck to the state's narrative, his dismissiveness grew frustrating. I started by asking about the state's view on citizen complaints, such as inactive sites causing mobility issues during the metro's construction. Trần insisted that unforeseen challenges were inevitable.[32] After some back-and-forth, he admitted the government's inexperience, calling the project a "baby step" and a learning process, since this was the first project of its kind in Hanoi. Trần also admitted, as aligned with newspaper reports, the HPC's role in land-clearance missteps, but he swiftly shifted most blame to the contractor. Then I asked Trần whether he thought the government-facilitated platforms, where citizens could voice their concerns were adequate. "Construction standards are followed strictly. People will be able to handle it," he said. "I have spoken with many Hanoians who faced serious problems even when standards are supposedly met." I explained, to which Trần replied: "In Vietnam, solidarity with the country is deeply valued. Our people are ready to endure for Vietnam to achieve its common goal. If the Cát Linh-Hà Đông Dong metro will improve Hanoi, then citizens will take pride in making sacrifices."

Trần's concluding remark exemplifies the dismissive posture of the state toward citizen concerns. Much like Nguyên, who was told that sacrificing his home would 'serve the city', or Vinh, who could not possibly grasp the government's promises of 'greening' the city through felling trees, and Điều's disbelief at the government's proposal to ban motorbikes with no alternatives in place, I observe a detachment between governmental attitudes and the lived realities of Hanoians. Simultaneously, Trần rightly cites the state's inexperience. First-of-their-kind projects inevitably expose systemic learning curves.[33] Yet, inexperience cannot fully rationalize the government's failures.

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[32] Trần, interview with the author, March 2024.

[33] High-modernist projects driven by an "aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society" often arise from a triad of conditions: utopian faith in rational design, the unrestrained power of the modern state, and a civil society too "weakened or prostrate" to resist. The Cát Linh-Hà Đông Dong metro reflects these three conditions. Scott, "Authoritarian High Modernism," in *Seeing Like a State,* 88-9.

Finally, while my frustrations with Trần, shared by many Hanoians, are valid, they must be contextualized within Vietnam's authoritarian governance. Much like the tokenistic monthly meetings, the interview was preordained as a performative exchange. Its value lies not in genuine dialogue but as a case study exposing the regime's propagandistic mechanisms.

Conclusion

The above narratives of (im)mobility injustices exemplify how the Cát Linh-Hà Đông Dong metro embodies a paradox: while ostensibly designed to improve mobility, its implementation impeded with mobility more often than not. The focus on (im)mobility injustices helped examining how injustices manifested throughout and after construction. By moving away from viewing infrastructure as simply material manifestations conventionally enhancing mobility, this study revealed how superimposed technopolitical visions of mobility can collide with the ways people experience mobility. The identified gap between the state's strategic intent and the 'on the ground' effects is rooted in the strict exercise of control over mobility by those in positions of power, as evidenced by the forced evictions, disruptive construction barriers, tree felling, and proposed motorbike ban. Here, the railway and the state apparatus become so tightly interconnected that it becomes impossible to separate the railway's power from the government's. Thus, the Cát Linh-Hà Đông Dong railway manifests as more than just a transit system: it evolved as a force that reshaped the urban landscape and daily life—an important reminder that infrastructure's transformative power arises not from intention, but from how it materializes once it enters the everyday world.

Was the project then a failure? By its own metrics, yes. Yet, its existence is not an endpoint—a nuance often also recognized by interlocutors. When asked about the future prospects of Hanoi's urban mobility, many replied: "We must keep faith in our leaders." Such responses left me with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I have a sense of admiration for all of those who remain faithful in their government and its plans for improvement. On the other hand, these responses betray a sense of resignation: "We can do nothing but hope." More than anything, the railway should be taken as a

point of departure for future metro lines. Whether Hanoi's mobility advances depends on whether the state recognizes and addresses past mistakes, or continues reproducing them in the pursuit of 'modernity.'

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