

The Role of Emotions, Power, and Politics in Setting Policy Agenda: A Theoretical Analysis of Policy Inaction in the Shipbreaking Industries in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Agenda-setting may not always be a rational process and depends mostly on the perception of the policy problem made by the policy entrepreneurs to the decision-makers where ‘non-decision’ or ‘policy-inaction’ is also a kind of decision to avoid certain issues. Taking the existing ship-breaking policy of Bangladesh as a case study, this study tries to theoretically analyze how the level of public emotions and exercise of political power impacts policy-making in a policy domain that resulted in no policy change. The study applies mainly two theories of public policy: the threshold model of the policy process by Christopher Pepin-Neff and the theory of three faces of power by Lukes which relates public emotions and political power with policy formulations. The study argues that, according to these theories, the case study is an example of a high emotion policy threshold (HEHP) issue where despite the initiatives by some policy actors to open a new policy window and the demands of the advocacy coalition consisting of International Labour Organization (ILO) and non-government organizations (NGO), the government used covert power to establish the preference for employment generation, national GDP and GNP and exclude the demand for policy redesign from policy-agenda. The objective of this study is not to establish a new proposition of policy discussion but rather to discuss policy inaction or agenda-setting in an existing problem from a new perspective, theoretically from two distinct points of view: Emotions and political power.

Keywords: Threshold Model, Policy Process, Political Power, Human Rights, ILO, Ship Breaking.

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Introduction:

Shipbreaking and recycling industries (SRI) have catalysed economic progress in Bangladesh through their support in supplying raw materials for the steel, furniture, electrical, and other manufacturing, and construction industries (Rabbi & Rahman, 2017). Despite its contribution to employment generation, poverty alleviation, and gross economic growth of the country, it is often criticized for workers' rights violations through posing significant threats to human and environmental security, which has often been ignored by the government (Vidal, 2017). Human rights organizations and environmentalists have been demanding workplace safety and the banning of importing ships carrying toxic chemicals for a long time. Consequently, the government formulated the 'Shipbreaking and Recycling Rules' in 2011, which is often contradictory to the health and safety issues of the workers and the local community (Chowdhury, et. al., 2024).

However, human rights violation in this industry is often prevented from being exposed in public and ensured not to arise on the political agenda through influencing the political arena and the informal process (Alam and Faruque, 2014). Despite a huge demand for policy change or redesign, policy entrepreneurs like industrialists instigated the government for policy stasis that creates or reinforces socio-political values and institutional norms in such a way that limits the scope of the policy process to public consideration of the issues that are relatively innocuous to the policymakers (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962).

This article will theoretically analyze different socio-economic issues in the ship-breaking industries in Bangladesh using the Threshold model of the policy process and the theory of three faces of power, two significant theories of policy studies. This study argues that, according to the theory of three faces of power, in the present socio-economic, ethical, and cultural context of Bangladesh, the government processed this issue by preventing it from coming to the agenda by elucidating the informal processes through which an agenda is set (covert power) where they focus only on national economic growth through poverty alleviation and employment generation of the poor jobless people (Lukes, 1974). Using the threshold theory of policy process, it also argues that, human rights violations of the workers in this industry in Bangladesh is a High Emotion High Policy (HEHP) threshold issue (Pepin-Neff, 2019) as despite carrying a lot of emotions and having a strong and entrenched policy subsystem, it caused policy stasis that inclines attention avoidance.

Objectives of the Study:

- To understand the agenda-setting process from two different perspectives: public emotions and political power. Using two significant theories of policy studies, the threshold theory of the policy

process and the theory of three faces of power, and considering Bangladesh’s existing shipbreaking and recycling policy as a case study, this study theoretically discusses how the level of public emotion and exercise of political power prevented the demand for policy change/redesign from policy agendas that resulted in policy inaction.

- To focus only on the industry’s economic, health, and environmental aspects that played their part in policy inaction in the case study, not the detailed information on the overall shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh.
- To theoretically analyze the relevant features of the policy from emotion and power dimensions in the policy process considering secondary data on the case study; not to establish any hypothesis through discussion or collecting primary data.

Literature Review:

This essay will use the threshold policy process model to understand how governments cope with public emotions in agenda-setting. Here, the formal or informal agreements that promote the opening of a policy window are proposed as policy thresholds. Various legal rules, discursive signals, social limits, political norms, and social values that regulate the decision-making environment around individual policy issues and domains are indicators of this model (Pepin-Neff, 2019). Policy thresholds can occur in two ways in the policy process: high and low thresholds. The high thresholds are intended to impose costs, such as emotional taxation and exclusion of certain groups, to keep actors out of the process. Low thresholds enable policy windows to open, allowing actors to alleviate public anxiety, a concept known as “policy as therapy.”

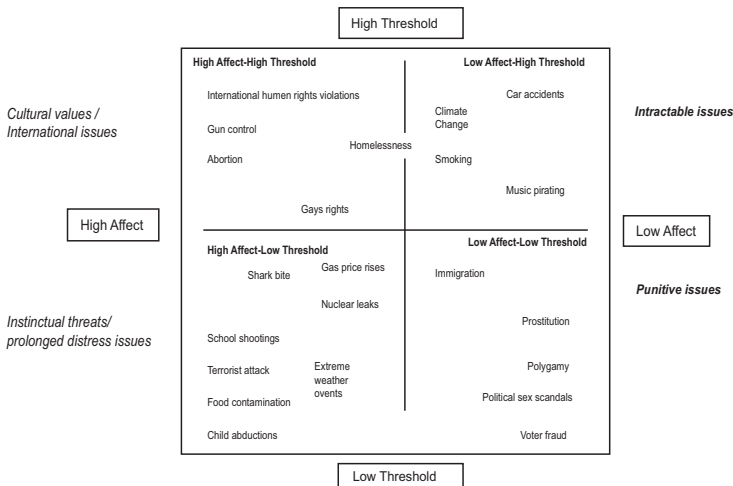


Figure 1: Model of Emotionality-to-Threshold Levels (Pepin-Neff, 2019)

For example, in the case of the abortion issue, despite high public affect/emotion due to religious and human rights perspectives, for their high thresholds, governments do not take it immediately to the policy agenda or focus on more important policy issues whereas terrorist attack is a highly emotional public issue with a low threshold that is promptly responded by the government and included in the policy agenda. Thus, this theory provides a frame for understanding the core question of public policy: “Who gets what, when, and how?” (Lasswell 1950) through the emotional lens that signifies how public feelings facilitate the distribution of political penalties. This framework entitles some essential elements to perceive the consequence of the policy process.

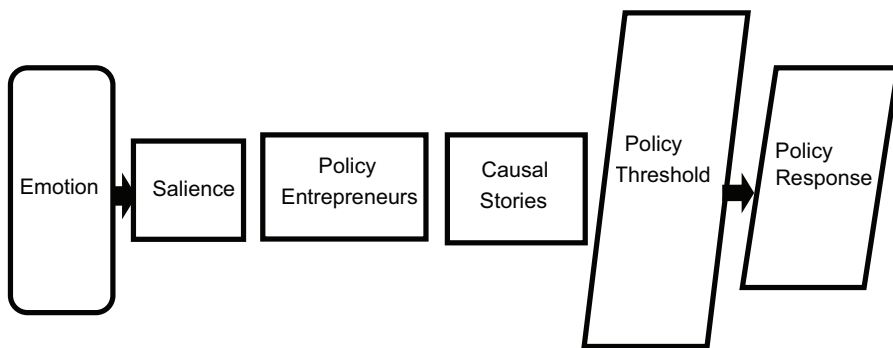


Figure 2: Policy Process (Pepin-Neff, 2019)

This essay will also apply the Theory of the Three Faces of Power proposed by Lukes (1974) as a tool to analyze how policymakers utilize power to pursue their interests. According to Lukes (1974), the government uses three types of power namely: overt, covert, and latent to utilize their preferences and prevent any policy amendment. This essay argues that in our case of discussion, the policymakers utilized covert power which means the power to control decision-making and agenda-setting to prevent the issue from arising in the policy agenda.

Methodology:

1. Research Design

A qualitative explanatory method of research was proper because the objective of this study was to examine the agenda-setting process through which non-action gives power back to the powerful. Using the threshold model of the policy process and the theory of three faces of power, this study theoretically identifies the role of emotions and political power behind excluding an issue from the policy agenda. To elaborate on this, the study takes the existing shipbreaking policy of Bangladesh as a case study where despite enormous

environmental and security threats, and the demands of amendment from different policy entrepreneurs, the government did not include the demand in the policy agenda that resulted in no policy redesign. Thus, this study largely follows the case study analysis approach for its qualitative research where a specific part was thematic analysis to identify patterns and connections and to categorize them for analysis.

The study uses secondary data to analyze trends and perceptions articulating the policy process following highly emotional events. It is an extensive review of new perspectives that facilitates an understanding of how public emotions and political priorities shaped the agenda-setting process of an existing problem in Bangladesh. The study purposefully avoided detailed explanations of the theories other than relevant topics to the case study and various quantitative information of the shipbreaking industry as the focus of the study does not demand any numerical analysis.

In this study, the process of not responding to relevant issues and preventing the government from implementing required policy change is analyzed through four thresholds: relevant affect/emotional expression, relative salience, policy entrepreneurship, and causal stories where the government applies covert power that impedes an issue from appearing in the policy-agenda by prioritizing other issues (Pepin-Neff, 2019, Lukes, 1974).

2. Data Collection and Analysis:

Data collection refers to the systematic gathering and measuring of information on variables of interest, that facilitates finding answers to research questions or discussing the research argument. Secondary data were collected from different relevant sources selected for their factual data and theoretical contributions to the subject matter of the study. The sources are:

Scholarly Articles, Journals, and Research Institutions: Different peer-reviewed journals and essays supported preparing the article's structure. These articles were searched through keywords like 'Threshold Model', policy process, human rights, ILO, and shipbreaking in academic databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, and SSRN. Moreover, journals and publications from institutions like the *Young Power in Social Action (YPSA)*, the *International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)*, *Greenpeace International*, the *Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)*, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) added valuable insights into the analysis. Relevant statistical information about the industry especially published within the last decade was also taken from these publications.

Official Reports: Periodical reports by national and international organizations especially the International Labor Organization (ILO) and, the World Bank provided documentary evidence that helped to contextualize the theoretical analysis.

Government and NGO Publications: Action plans, policy papers, and assessments published by the Government of Bangladesh helped in narrating government stands on the specific issues. Though reports from different NGOs like the Environment and Social Development Organization (ESDO), Works for Green Bangladesh (WGB), and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) helped in developing insights in the essay, no data were directly used from their reports.

However, selected journals and reports were meticulously assessed based on their authenticity and pertinence. Key findings and arguments from the selected literature were then categorized and analyzed thematically to find patterns and connections. Thematic coding grouped similar ideas and arguments, allowing the identification of significant issues impacting the government's decision to prioritize economic aspects rather than health and environmental aspects of the industry. Finally, the study underwent a thorough case study analysis discussing all the categorized ideas and arguments applying the threshold model of the policy process and theory of three faces of power to develop a different understanding of setting policy agenda.

3. Limitations:

As the study mainly depends on the secondary data, some limitations were inevitable:

Reliance on Accessible Literature: Because of its dependency on the available literature, the study may not cover all dimensions of the industry or the processions for policy redesign by different groups of people. Again, biases in data of certain articles or reports may affect the overall discussion of the study.

Temporal Constraints: As the secondary data presents information on a specific timeline, the study cannot cover newer developments on the issue.

Illustrative Bias: As the illustration of secondary data is subjective, the study cannot deny the probability of researcher bias while prioritizing specific matters over others.

A Brief Discussion on the Ship-breaking Activities in Bangladesh:

The shipbreaking yards are largely in the country's southeast, just outside Chittagong (Frey, 2013). Although locals began dismantling ships that had sunk

on their shores in the 1960s and 1970s, the Government of Bangladesh did not formally recognize it as an industry and therefore did not have any regulatory measures until 2011 (Alam and Faruque, 2014). Many ship-breakers are from Bangladesh’s northwest, a poverty-stricken region with little economic activity, while others are from Chittagong and the surrounding areas in the country’s southeast (Pasha et al., 2012). Around 150 shipbreaking yards are reported to exist along the coast north of Chittagong, with 50 to 60 of them being operational all year (Rabbi and Rahman, 2017). According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development’s (UNCTAD) “Review of Maritime Transport 2019,” Bangladesh ranked first in shipbreaking in 2018, dismantling 47.2 percent of all vessels in the world (Sirimanne, et. al, 2019).

Not only does the industry supply raw materials to industries such as inland shipbuilding, manufacturing, re-rolling mills, steel mills, oxygen plants, wire, ceramics, furniture factories, etc. but also ship scraps have been used as raw materials by over 350 re-rolling mills (Alam and Faruque, 2014). Currently, the industry provides more than 60% of the raw materials for the local steel industry (Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). Furthermore, the local shipbuilding industry is heavily reliant on it, as the majority of raw materials are derived from scrap steel. Without a local shipbreaking/recycling industry, inland and some coastal shipbuilding will be crippled (Ahammad & Sujauddin, 2017).

Sectors	Quantity	Unit
Steel Consumption	5	million tons
Steel Production	2.2 to 2.5	million tons
Scrap Steel from Ship Breaking	Up to 1.5	million tons
Ship Breaking Steel Contribution to Production	50	%
Ship Braking Steel Contribution to Consumption	20-25	%

Figure 3: Shipbreaking industry contributions to steel consumption and production in Bangladesh (Ahammad & Sujauddin, 2017)

Moreover, this industry significantly influences the country’s socio-economic growth. Scrap ships guarantee the nation’s long-term economic development without iron ore (Hossain, 2015). More than a million people are engaged in this sector, both directly and indirectly. If the local shipbreaking/recycling industry fails, three million people and the entire national economy will suffer greatly, lowering GDP and impeding the whole of national development process (Hossain, 2015).

According to the United Nations, Bangladesh shifted to middle-income nation status, where this industry played a big part (Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). The industry pays about Taka 5 billion (about US\$68 million) in customs charges, income taxes, and value-added taxes each year, providing the government with a significant source of annual revenue (Ahammad and Sujauddin, 2017). In the

five years leading up to 2015, the industry contributed to the GDP of Bangladesh around Taka 53.3 billion (or US\$770 million at 2009-10 constant prices) worth of output each year on average (Ahhammad and Sujauddin, 2017).

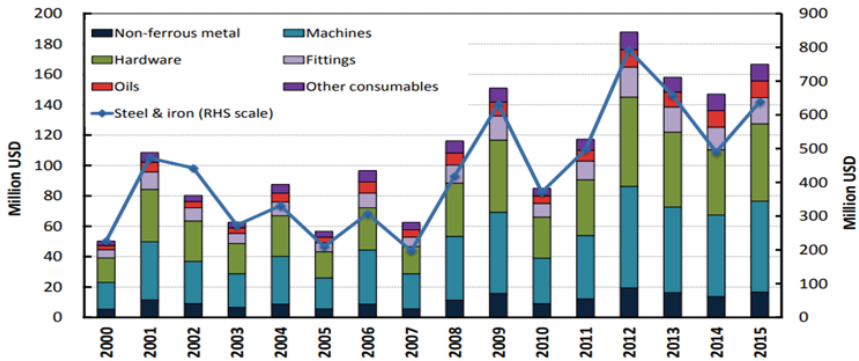


Figure 4: Gross value of production in the Shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh (at 2009-10 constant prices), 2000 to 2015 (Ahhammad and Sujauddin, 2017).

However, SRI in Bangladesh has grown rapidly, at the expense of environmental degradation and extreme labour abuse (Hossain, 2017). The working conditions of shipbreakers are appalling due to a shortage of protective facilities, lack of awareness, lack of government intervention, and ineffective laws (Rabbi and Rahman, 2017). Hazardous chemicals such as persistent organic pollutants, asbestos, and heavy metals are released into the atmosphere as a result of shipbreaking which increases the turbidity of the seawater in the region and accelerates the rate and amount of shore erosion posing a danger to the inhabitants (Ahhammad and Sujauddin, 2017).

Despite the employment of low-wage workers and environmental deregulation, SRI is a crucial source of revenue for the country and a source of livelihood for a large number of Bangladeshis (Rahman et al., 2018). Mainly for this reason, notwithstanding the international and local NGOs slammed the government of Bangladesh from time to time, they remained indifferent to filthy and unsafe shipbreaking activities (Hossain, 2017).

Discussion & Findings:

The process of preventing required policy change in the existing shipbreaking and recycling policy in Bangladesh will be discussed mainly through two theories of policy studies: the threshold model of the policy process and the theory of three faces of power. According to the theories, policy inaction will

be discussed through four thresholds: relevant affect/emotional expression, relative salience, policy entrepreneurship, and causal stories where, Emotional expression is discussed through four dimensions: emotional oppression, emotional labour, intersectionality, and social mobilization, and Relative salience is discussed through two dimensions: racialized affect and social construction of the target population (Pepin-Neff, 2019). Every part of the discussion will relate to the presence of power and politics, where despite the high emotion of the public, the government prioritized other issues and avoided the demanded policy change using their political power. This discussion will thus try to develop a significant perspective on the role of public emotion, power, and politics behind this non-decision-making or non-action of policy change.

Affect/Emotional Expression:

In the case of workers' rights violation in the SRI in Bangladesh, high Policy thresholds occurred in the policy process that is intended to impose costs, such as emotional taxation and exclusion of certain groups, to maintain policy actors out of the process (Pepin-Neff, 2019). Because of the structural complexity of ships and many environmental, safety, and health issues involved, shipbreaking and recycling are considered to be a complex process (OSHA, 2010). Moreover, SRI in Bangladesh is not only posing threats to the human rights of the workers especially women and child workers but also to local people by causing scarcity of natural resources, unsafe work environment, and pollution (Devault et al., 2017).

1. a Emotional Oppression:

More than 1000 shipbreaking workers have died and 10,000 were seriously injured in Bangladesh over the last 20 years mainly because of toxic gas explosions, the fall of heavy steel beams and metal plates from upper decks of ships, electric shocks, etc (Rabbi & Rahman, 2017). Moreover, these workers often suffer from respiratory diseases that reduce their life expectancy and physical capacity (YPSA, 2005). There is no provision in the current policy in Bangladesh for investigating the existence of flammable and dangerous chemicals, gas, etc., in the imported ships and assurance of workers' especially women and children's safety (Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). All these factors have aggravated the workers' health and human security risks.

Not only the hazardous impact on the environment and human health but also the problems of low wages especially for women and child workers, extended work hours, etc. in this industry in Bangladesh led to a negative high-affect

aggregation (Linville and Fischer, 1991) or public distress that spurred massive protest through the workers' union and relevant policy actors facilitating the dissemination of political penalties in both national and international settings (Pepin-Neff, 2019). The government of Bangladesh, to suppress the emotions of the workers and mobilize their outrage, allows them a limited range of emotions along with a restricted existence and limited experience of humanity through rewarding the system of acceptable emotions denying their full humanity (Rahman, et. al., 2018). This emotional invalidation leads to social oppression by preventing these poor workers from expressing themselves against unsafe and inhuman treatment at the workplace and bearing silent pain that ultimately prevents them from developing a sense of entitlement (Pepin-Neff, 2019).

1.b Emotional Labour:

Toxic discharge from the dyeing and the finishing plant, and emissions from the boiler and generators stack endanger the biodiversity and ecosystem of Bangladesh and result in alteration of the core characteristics of the regional environment that mostly affects the workers who live nearby and the local community (Chowdhury, et. al., 2014). Moreover, women and child workers in this industry here are often deprived of proper wages and expected to accept it as natural which causes emotional labour for them which represents structural discrimination and socially constructed emotional racism (Rahman, et. al., 2018). As child-bearers and homemakers, women are more vulnerable to the safety and environmental issues related to this industry (Bailey, 2000). The pollution in shipyards dangerously affects maternal health in Bangladesh with evidence of impaired childbirth and by-born lung disease (YPSA, 2005). Moreover, the on-the-job death rate of women is higher than men in this country due to risky manual jobs and a lack of safety measures (ILO, 2021). The social prejudices often deny acknowledging the emotional labour of these poor workers along with the local community, especially the women by denying their entire human and emotional range (Pepin-Neff, 2019).

1.c Intersectionality:

Because of high-risk involvement and ILO recognition as “by any standards, the demolition of ships is a dirty and dangerous occupation” (Bailey, 2000), the rich countries are gradually outsourcing shipbreaking and recycling activities to suitable developing countries like Bangladesh utilizing the facility of the free-market economy (Barnett, 2001). Mainly because of the availability of cheap labour, poverty, and the lack of environmental awareness, Bangladesh has become an attractive destination for this industry (Rahman, et. al., 2018).

Poisonous substances discharged from the scrapped ships are mixed with the soil, the Bay of Bengal, and nearby river water which harms the coastal environment and biodiversity and has a huge negative impact on the workers who live nearby and the local community (Greenpeace, 2001). Consequently, the scarcity of safe drinking water and arable lands affects local lives near the shipyards in Chittagong (FIDH, 2005).

All these factors create insecurity for the poor marginalized people, especially women in Bangladesh, in different forms like loss of economic or food security, forced migration, scarcity of water, etc. that result in intersectionality which influences the way political actors articulate this problem and attaches policy solutions and the way power dynamics are determined in this policy domain (Crenshaw, 1990, Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). Being fluid, heterogeneous identity, these poor workers in Bangladesh interact and cross in such a way that exacerbates social and emotional oppressions on workers making this disadvantaged and condemned environment deficient for some people and in a way that privileges the hierarchically advantaged identities like the industry owners (Pepin Neff and Caporale, 2018). Consequently, these poor and unprivileged workers are made hierarchical and stand-alone elements in society by the policymakers (Rabbi & Rahman, 2017) that shape how they would address the oppression and return power to themselves.

1.d Social Mobilization:

Different internal and external actors and influential factors in Bangladesh assumed direct and indirect roles in the development of this emotional process. The International Labor Organization (ILO), and donor agencies (USAID, UNDP) were the major external actors, and the human rights and environmental NGOs (BELA, ESDO) and the civil societies were among the internal policy actors who tried to get this highly emotional issue on the policy agenda of the government of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2017). They attempted to mobilize needful local, national, and global resources around ensuring the safety and establishing the human rights of the labourers of this industry through using social media and some of the news media (Buck and Powers, 2010; Olutokunbo et. al., 2015; Chowdhury, et. al., 2024).

Although the mobilization of this agitation resulted in political distress that insisted the policy entrepreneurs push for positively perceived policy response (Mintrom, 2000), the policy process limited the implementation of the issue and tried to avoid political penalties by preventing the problem from coming to political and media attention in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2017, Linville and Fischer, 1991). However, the government of Bangladesh controlled the agenda

setting by utilizing covert power by highlighting employment opportunities and financial solvency of the workers generated by this industry to prevent the spread of negative public emotions and alleviate political anxiety (Birkland, 1997; Hossain, 2015; Pepin-Neff, 2019). This contributed to minimizing the implementation of this highly emotional issue as a political instrument by the rival political parties creating political distress for the government (Birkland, 1997; Hossain, 2015).

However, as the policy response to such a high-affect issue is operationalized by evaluating the category and timing of policy action and the relevant policy actors (Pepin-Neff, 2019), the policy process has decided to keep this emotionally exhausting issue off the agenda over the extended period and limited the distribution of attention to this issue (Rabbi & Rahman, 2017). Being a consumptive event that triggered public emotions, finally, by attempting to pre-emptively stop negative high-emotion aggregation through agenda displacement they paved the way for continuing the integrity of the emotionality and the relative salience allocated to this issue (Birkland, 1997; Pepin-Neff, 2019).

Relative Salience

Although the death and injury of workers and gradual environmental degradation have drawn the attention of the whole country, especially the environmental organizations of Bangladesh, because of the indifference of the powerful to this issue, could not act as a variable in the political phenomenon (Birkland, 1997; Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). Moreover, the government of Bangladesh exercised authority and supervision to prevent the broadcasting of the news on deaths and injuries of workers media and only highlighted the importance of national economic development in the media and the contribution of shipbreaking industries behind it (Rahman, et. al., 2018). It helped in mobilizing public emotion in a way that people could prioritize financial solvency over environmental and health issues which was easily predictable and resulted in decreasing salience of the event which set the emotional habitus of the issue and consequently prevented the political government from redesigning the policy (Birkland, 1997; Baumgartner and Jones 1991).

2. a Racialized Affect:

Racialized affect helps in understand the salience of one issue over another (Pepin-Neff & Caporale, 2018). The ship-scraping industrialists and relevant stakeholders in Bangladesh are against the policy change because of the additional cost of safe and environmentally sustainable disposal (Kutub, et. al.,

2017). Moreover, this cost will be passed on to suppliers and customers through higher shipping costs and, as a result, higher product costs, which might not be attractive in today's dynamic global market (ILO, 2021). For all these reasons, the industrialists lobbied and motivated the government in such a way that without this industry, the steel supply needed for other sectors in the country would collapse and the GDP of the country would drastically fall causing political distress for the government (Kutub, et. al., 2017). Besides, many of these industrialists are members of the parliament and major donors of the political parties who act on their interests.

However, for all these reasons, environmental and health issues in SRI in Bangladesh are weakened by other political agendas of the government (Hossain, 2015). This results in the marginalized labourers being sustained with conditions of vulnerability circulating liable effect. On the other hand, the business community and the politicians are privileged by circulating empowering effects hidden from the public eye but still dominate the policy process (Berg et al., 2015).

2.b Social construction of target populations:

The social construction of the target population helps to understand the reasons behind the high or low salience of an issue to the policymakers. A single aspect of an issue can be accepted as positive by the powerful ignoring all other elements (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Social constructions around the policy problem of the case study allocate benefits for powerful politicians and business magnets in Bangladesh. Policy inaction was distributed in this issue across the stakeholders to reward the owners by ensuring continuing profit and cheap labour and punishing the oppressed and the voices raised against the oppression discouraging their engagement (Pepin-Neff, 2019; Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). These patterns of privilege and punishment in addressing this policy problem, attaching solutions prioritizing one issue over others created a 'feed-forward' effect that allowed allocating resources proportionally rather than equally (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). The demand for workplace safety and banning the import of dangerous ships for breaking were represented as detrimental to the economy by the government which influenced them to use covert power to policy stasis (Rahman, et. al., 2018). However, being influenced by the money they avail, and the time they can afford, positive social construction was made about the contribution of this industry to alleviate poverty and unemployment resulting in policies designed to give positive notions of government (Kutub, et. al., 2017). Thus, through social constructions, policymakers of Bangladesh informed people about future policies regarding the issue and path of dependency degenerative politics.

As the timing of the actions and non-actions are key rationale in governing policy domains that directly influence the operationalizing of political responses (Drucker, 2020; Pepin-Neff, 2019), the response to this human rights issue in this era of economic globalization, let the government of Bangladesh exercise their power as decision-maker and agenda-setter. Consequently, this demonstrates how policy actors and policy entrepreneurs advance their material interests through advancing social constructions in both formal and informal ways that produced political control responses using the policy thresholds that failed to link the policy entrepreneurs to advocate positive responses through preventing aggregation and emotional relief (Pepin-Neff, 2019).

The governments' non-decision-making in this high-affect issue occurred due to minimum salience in the policy process and its international stakeholders. Bangladesh's dedication to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDG) and global agenda of poverty alleviation by the United Nations (UN) and getting the status of a 'middle-income country' within 2041 was prioritized over labour safety (Ahammad & Sujauddin, 2017). Moreover, policy redesign might not be well-accepted by multinational corporations, workers' unions, and other stakeholders because of its unlikeliness to provide jobs for the thousands of current labourers (Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). If the global agenda continues but no commitment is made in Bangladesh, the investment will most likely go elsewhere, resulting in job losses, and creating more challenges for the government (Devault et al., 2017). Consequently, it will pose a negative impact on the overall economy of the country which will decrease the relative salience of this issue nationally and globally. This lack of salience influenced the policy process for informal decision-making and resulted in agenda displacement (Pepin-Neff, 2019).

Policy Entrepreneurship

The issues and alternatives in policy design are often set on by the pre-political or pre-decisional processes (Cobb and Elder, 1972:12). The issue of shipbreaking and recycling policy amendment encouraged the policy actors like the politicians of the ruling party in Bangladesh to work as policy entrepreneurs to identify quickly adoptable measures that work as a therapy to mitigate highly emotional political situations (Rahman, et. al., 2018). Through their effective, diversified, and continuous engagement (Zahariadis, 2007), to address the criticism in the local and international settings and associated risks and vulnerability for the government (Rahman, et. al., 2018; Howlett et al, 2009), they advocated for not to respond to this issue and to motivate the public

especially the civil society towards the economic advantages earned from this industry by using covert power (Lukes, 1974).

Despite the dissatisfaction of ILO and some NGOs, joint advocacy of the policy entrepreneurs like The World Bank and the ruling party politicians advocated for non-decision prioritizing the contribution of this industry in financial stability and increasing the economic growth of Bangladesh (Ahmed & Sujauddin, 2017). These persuasive political actors along with the potential business community and the government's ideology as a whole were able to shape the agenda-setting process mainly through their operation as an ideological hegemony (Lukes, 1974: 18-20). Thus, relevant state and non-state policy actors after a strategic analysis of multiple streams of the problem, policy, and politics that build the policy environment (Kingdon and Stano, 1984; Sabaitier, 2007)), identified the policy problem (Mackenzie, 2004) and organized the emotional habitus of this highly emotional issue as 'economy friendly' that set the political trajectory (Pepin Neff and Caporale, 2018; Bossavie, et al, 2019). They attached a detailed solution (Mackenzie, 2004; Mintrom, 2000) to the problem and advocated for policy stasis until the emotional aspects of the issue subside (Vidal, 2017). Besides, they biased (Howlette et al, 2009; Botterill, 2013) the government of Bangladesh for non-agenda setting through the successful exercise of covert power that resulted in increasing the government's reputation and distribution of penalties (Schneider and Teske, 1992; Rabbi & Rahman, 2017). Relevant policy actors, ideas, and institutions played a collective role in this policy process and gave the power back to the powerful (ILO, 2021; Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950).

Causal Story

A purposeful-intended type causal story of this event was identified that had intentional causes (Stone, 1989). The stakeholders of this industry especially the industrialists of Bangladesh tend to hide the negative impacts of this industry on the workers' health and safety and the environment from the people's attention (Alam and Faruque, 2014). Thus, the government was motivated in such a way that they used their covert power so that it did not come to the agenda. As the structural position of interests and their political priorities in the policy process is important in determining how effectively issues are treated, this issue was excluded from the policy agenda by being weakened by accepting another priority closely linked with the structural power (Lukes, 1974). The government, being motivated by the industrialists has promoted economic development instead of labour safety and the environment and the influence of these political activists was beyond the visible actions toward other current and future issues (Rahman, et. al., 2018).

Moreover, the amendment to the existing policy would cause loss of employment; as a result, poverty would increase, decreasing the standard of people's lives. This will leave a negative impact on the overall GDP of Bangladesh which will impede achieving the UN's sustainable development goals within 2030 and graduating to middle-income status within 2041 (Ahmed & Sujauddin, 2017). For this reason, the government remained visibly active in only a single field of public concern: economic development (Rahman, et. al., 2018). The policy process also does not shed light on the neglected labor conditions of millions of workers in this industry, most of who are women and children with very low wages, and frequent occupational accidents along with occupational diseases and deaths (Vidal, 2017). Besides, the owners and stakeholders of this industry motivated the government about the probable scarcity of steel supply due to the amendment of the existing policy that resisted the government from any response to the issue (Rahman, et. al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the type of workers engaged in this industry also helps to understand the reasons behind the policy stasis. The workers who live mostly in the nearby locality of the shipbreaking and recycling sites in Chittagong mostly migrated forcefully from disaster-prone coastal areas and drought-prone northern regions where they had to live below the poverty line (Vidal, 2017).

In short, the industrialists, other stakeholders, and the government of Bangladesh as a whole was blamed for using covert power to emotionally oppress the poor workers and ignoring their human rights (Stone, 1989; Pepin Neff and Caporale, 2018). Thus, the causal story was used as a political instrument (Stone, 2002) by the government to derive their intent to create a governable situation and to achieve survival value and speed in promoting a single agenda of economic development. The opposition of the parliament along with environmentalists despite building a coalition against the government, and blaming them for workers' loss, could not achieve a positively perceived policy response (Chowdhury, et. al., 2024). This resulted in legitimizing the relevant policy actors and protected the existing set of rules, political interests, and institutions (Stone, 2002).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that the high level of public emotions does not always bring policy change. As this high-emotional issue tends to bounce back and forth, the government has alleviated the emotional distress through a long period of policy stasis through their power of non-decision-making and non-agenda setting. The policy process, by not responding to this issue, has distributed the political emotionality to decrease the frequency of events that let the health and safety threats of workers continue in exchange for financial

solvency. While the business community, depending on their structural importance, benefitted through extensive campaigns of formal lobbying; the government achieved short-term gains of their interest which could be disastrous in the long term. Thus, despite the high affect/emotion and the existence of strong policy path-dependencies and policy sub-systems, the exercise of the power of agenda control of the policymakers through policy stasis for an extended period, converted to policy inaction.

Though this policy domain has been demanding the policy design for a long time, the policy process did not respond to this incremental issue contrary to the cultural values and international human rights that consequently enacted a high-policy threshold by no amendment to the existing policy. Thus, the policy process prevented the issue from coming to the agenda by valuing financial solvency as divinely ordained and beneficial which is designed by 'deep rules' operating at the structural level (Benson, 1982; 162-5). Finally, in this way, the government of Bangladesh utilized high thresholds to reinforce social constructions and high effects that governed this policy issue by non-decision-making outside the formal political arena which ultimately gives the power back to the powerful (Lukes, 1974; Pepin-Neff, 2019).

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