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PHILOSOPHICAL AVENUES

The future of hermeneutic rationality: Spectral ontology and the humanities

Zachary Isrow*

Abstract: Hermeneutics aims to decipher meaning through interpretation that extends beyond the text itself, treating the world itself as text. Every encounter can be hermeneutical and hermeneutic rationality can be applied to the study of various cultural phenomena. However, traditional ontologies focus on the primary categorization of beings, that is, objects, or on forces (hyperobjects). A new ontological model, spectral ontology, places a particular importance on nonbeings, spectricities, that serve to establish the fundamental ontology of relationality. This ontology creates a need to extend hermeneutics beyond that which exists into the nonrelational, that is, nonexistent. This paper aims to reveal the necessity of this shift and the implications of it for the study of the humanities.

Keywords: hermeneutics, spectral ontology, hyperbeings/hyperobjects, digital world, hermeneutic rationality

Introduction

The humanities as an academic discipline has long distinguished itself as unique in that the objective of its study is distinct from the object of its study. All other fields of inquiry have both their objective and objective study grounded in materiality. There is a material object being studied in order to understand the materiality of that material object. The sociologist, for example, might study educational institutions in order to better understand the relationship between education and social inequality, both of which, educational institutions and class distinctions, have an external manifestation to them that make them function on a material level. Likewise, the physicist might study the atomic structure of an entity in order to better understand the

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chemical composition of that object, how it is composed, how it functions in accordance with the operative laws of nature, etc.

The humanities, however, can be distinguished in that neither the objective of the study nor the object of the study, are required to contain any materiality. In fact, the objective of the study is often directed towards the internal or toward the immaterial. The philosopher might be interested in uncovering hidden structures of meaning in the universe, meaning itself being immaterial, and it is far more likely that you will find conversations centered on authorial intent and reader interpretation of a particular text in departments of literature around the globe rather than an in-depth analysis of the type of paper upon which the text was printed.

Of course, as noted above, the distinction of the humanities is that just because the objective need not contain materiality does not mean that it cannot as indeed sometimes it does. This is precisely why one would not be surprised should they come across an analysis of the type of paper upon which a text was printed as this choice can have a bearing on the text itself and the authorial intention involved in that choice (Febvre & Martin 1997, 64-65)¹. Likewise, it is just as common that in art analysis we are concerned not only with the meaning the piece aims to represent or the interpretation that a piece yields, but also with the chemical composition of the piece, along with its texture, technique, and the like, all of which are grounded very much in the material².

This is in part why Friedrich Schleiermacher (1977) is adamant in his formulation of hermeneutics that it not only can but also must extend beyond a singular type of text, scripture in this case. Taken further into the contemporary, *hermeneutics* can and must, extend beyond just the analysis and interpretation of text. In other words, the ‘text’ has had its boundaries removed to really allow for the application of hermeneutic rationality to virtually any medium of cultural production, from action (Buck & Brown 1980) to education (Drumm 1992). This is the distinct privilege of the humanities – the hermeneutic interpretation of cultural production can draw insights from across disciplines, including those outside of humanistic inquiry.

¹ Febvre and Martin offer a great discussion on printing and paper choices in the history of the ‘book’. For more on printing, types of paper, and writing, see also Gunaratne (2001).

² For more on the relationship between chemistry and art see Greenberg and Patterson (2007).

This is why it makes perfect sense to discuss the homeostasis of a character in a novel, but it is unlikely to find reader-response theory in research conducted utilizing differential equations. But the humanities approach, allowing for the study of both the material and immaterial, has undergone a shift in the Anthropocene, particularly with the rise of digital technologies. The digital, as well as the virtual, are neither fully material nor fully immaterial, and they pose an interesting opportunity for the future of humanities. But to capture this opportunity, new frameworks for categorizing and thinking on the digital world is necessary.

This paper will explore a new ontological model that can assist in the hermeneutic evaluation of digital worlds and entities. This ontological model I term spectral ontology due to its categorization of not only beings and hyperbeings, but also the lesser discussed non-beings. Under spectral ontology, non-beings, or spectricities, hold just as much influence on the materiality of things as do beings and hyperbeings, and are therefore not simply worthwhile interpreting, but are necessary to be included in hermeneutic rationality. Likewise, digital entities offer a unique opportunity to examine more deeply spectricities and the way they impact reality as structure-establishing (non)entities, serving as a great symbolic stand-in for spectricities, despite not being truly spectral themselves, in order to better comprehend these non-beings.

Beginning with a brief overview of the historical foundations of hermeneutic rationality and the art of interpreting structures of meaning, this paper will proceed to articulate spectral ontology as a new ontological model offering insight into hidden structures of meaning that are not only immaterial but are non-existent through considerations of spectricities. Following this, applications to the contemporary challenges posed by digital technologies, entities, and worlds will be considered, along with what this means for the future of humanities-focused inquiry. In the end, it will be shown precisely in what way spectral ontology and the interpretation of spectricities can provide a much-needed extension to hermeneutic rationality.

The foundation of hermeneutics

When we consider that object of study in hermeneutics are the structures of meaning that are often embedded, even if hidden out of sight, in the world around us, we are left to first detail the development of hermeneutic rationality. Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early 19th

century offers up a position that begins to move us into hermeneutic rationality by extending the art of interpretation beyond merely scripture. Hidden layers of meaning can be unveiled across a variety of written text, he argued. Hermeneutics as the “art of understanding”, had been “handled as a supplement to logic” but is better recognized as the “art of relating discourse [*Reden*] and understanding [*Verstehen*] to each other” (Schleiermacher 1978, 1). This broadening of the definition of hermeneutics is essential to the shifting interest and outlining of the task of *hermeneutics*. It is through this lens that Schleiermacher arrives at the task of hermeneutics as to:

handle every part in such a way that the handling of the other parts will produce no change in the results, or, in other words, every part must be handled as a discrete unit with equal respect paid to all other parts (1978, 3).

In treating hermeneutics as an art, and as such placing it firmly within the boundary of philosophy, Schleiermacher paved the way for the hermeneutical act of interpretation to be firmly embedded not only in scholarly practice but also rooted in a historical consciousness. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer noted that as the shift away from philosophy gave way to the social preference to science and fact rather than interpretation, the result was in historical reflection yielding thinking, or ‘will’, that hovered between utopic and dystopic. On this, Gadamer (2013, xxxv) wrote “the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront that will with something of the truth of remembrance: with what is still and ever again real”. This hermeneutic consciousness, the recognition of the necessity of interpretation of events, ‘texts’ in the broadest sense, presents to us truths that once present, forever remain with us. The past, for Gadamer, is never really past, but always remains present.

As with Schleiermacher and Gadamer, Ricoeur offers the insight that hermeneutics provides an inescapable usefulness for the acquisition of self-understanding. For Ricoeur ([1970] 1974, 13), what is ‘spoken’, the semantic structure provides only an ‘as-is’ meaning. That is to say, taken at face value, it is a literal meaning. But there are always additional layers that can be uncovered each themselves adding additional layers of meaning. This layering of meaning is the main task of hermeneutics which “consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning”. Peeling back these layers of meaning from the ‘text’, is the central process of humanistic inquiry, given that in the

humanities we so often find ourselves in the role of interpreters brushing away the dusty surface, what is present at face-value, to unveil the deeper meaning. So, it becomes clear that hermeneutic rationality as a method of interpretation of text is indispensable for humanistic inquiry.

If indeed hermeneutic rationality is the essential *μέθοδος* for humanistic inquiry, then it is worthwhile to explicate the core of this methodology to be clear not precisely how hermeneutics offers this pathway to the interpretation of meaning drawn from the engagement with ‘texts’, particularly as broadly defined as the world within which we find ourselves as bearing the role of interpreter. In particular, we must inquire as to the relationship between the world as text and the subject as interpreter. What is the process for the study of this relationship and how are the various structures of meaning drawn out from it?

Perhaps the primary conceptual tool in the hermeneutical process is the hermeneutic circle. This ‘circle’ positions us to consider that meaning can only be recognized and understood in reference to the relationship between the various parts of the ‘text’ to one another as well as to the work as a whole. It is important to note that this ‘circular’ process of interpreting the parts along with the whole does not result in a purely subjective interpretation lacking any objectivity. On this regard, Dilthey (1969, 120) notes that:

Meaning is not subjective; it is not projection of thought or thinking onto the object; it is a perception of a real relationship within a nexus prior to the subject-object separation in thought.

We can therefore propose that the relationship between the ‘world as text’ and the interpreter begins within the subject but extends beyond the subject and projects unto the textual object as the focal point of our interpretive thinking. This hermeneutical process has remained largely the standard interpretive method, with slight variation, across the majority of the humanities-centric fields. Some, of course, hold that meaning is more subjective than some other positions claim, but the interpretive process, the way we approach the world as text, is more or less the same. This should not be surprising given that the object of study, the world as text, also remains the same across the humanities fields and as such our method of approach to this object of study bears similarities across the disciplines of the humanities.

Although this hermeneutical approach works well when applied to the ‘world as text’, to those physical manifested realities that we encounter in our daily life, its application is much more obscure when applied to the non-material factors that remain unmanifested. Hermeneutic rationality even offers a strong methodology for the interpretation of social forces, but these too, though non-material, are manifest in the structure of the reality that we are interpreting. It is in applying this hermeneutical process to that which is not present that the effectiveness of it becomes more blurred, particularly if we want it to extend beyond the purely subjective as interpretation. We can think for example of pure potential realities, those which are not real and do not manifest in the world as text. Instead, as purely conceptual³, any interpretive framework can present itself only as one that is pure subjective.

Insofar as hermeneutic rationality ought to maintain some grounding in the objective as opposed to being merely subjective interpretation, and given what has just been noted, that unmanifested potentialities can be part of the hermeneutic process only in such a way that they provide subjective interpretation, we are placed in a position which requires a rethinking of the required framework to enable hermeneutic rationality to offer insights into the full scale of humanistic inquiry. This expanded framework must enable the hermeneutic art of interpretation to extend beyond simply that which is being, and as being, is manifested in what we have termed ‘world as text’. The new framework must also allow for the hermeneutical interpretation of what is absent, non-existent, yet which bears the very foundation of the structures of reality, of the ‘world as text’, that which I term *spectricities*. This framework, which positions us in such a way to approach these spectricities through a lens of hermeneutic rationality, is spectral ontology.

Spectral ontology, spectricities, and hermeneutics

Emerging out of recent trends in what is termed speculative realism, spectral ontology proposes a reintegration of the categorization of non-beings into the ontological models categorizing various beings. The majority of ontological models focus on entities, objects, or things. More recent ontologies even include hyperobjects, that is objects that

³ Though I would, and will, claim they hold a non-conceptual nature, it is easiest, perhaps, to conceive of them as conceptual, hence the use of conceptual here.

are so grand in scale that they extend beyond the formal borders of an entity, that is to say they are unbound by defining physical characteristics but their presence is very much felt in the physical world (Morton 2013). Many of these ontologies describe and categorize not just beings that are physical but those which are abstract or universal as well. Very few, however, consider the relevancy of non-beings to any given ontological model. Rather than proposing a hierarchical model of ontology like in many traditional accounts, or a flat model such as those in object-oriented ontology Harman (2018), *spectral ontology* offers a spectrum of being that consists of entities we commonly refer to as beings, hyper objects, as well as the often-undiscussed non-beings.

Spectricities, as the definitive non-being, provide the necessary preconditional framework of existence. The influence of latent forces is nothing controversial as we see the influence of nonmaterial forces in our daily lives. Various biases or social institutional structures themselves remain in the nonmaterial realm of existence while the manifested impacts of those structures are very much felt, as with Morton's hyperobjects such as climate change.

But in the very same way that these nonmaterial forces hold very real and significant impacts to the world around us, spectricities as not only nonmaterial, but nonexistent entities also shape our world by shaping the very structure of both the material and immaterial reality (Isrow 2022). Serving as the fundamental framework of reality, spectricities shape not just our perception of reality but the structure of reality itself.

Spectral ontology therefore can offer a unique tool for hermeneutic rationality. Applied through the lens of spectral ontology hermeneutical interpretation can approach not only material and immaterial entities, but the underlying frameworks of these entities that shape existence and, as such, meaning itself. In this way we can approach the interpretation of the world as 'text' in a way that drives at the very core of existence and meaning formation. Although seemingly far beyond the reaches of the manifested world, these spectral foundations provide for a great tool to analyze and interpret various cultural phenomena.

Applications and considerations

In considering the applicability of spectral ontology to hermeneutic interpretation of cultural phenomena, it is crucial to first look at the

products of cultural production. This cluster set typically includes elements such as media, music, and even knowledge itself. All of these are cultural products that position themselves in such a way so that they are interpretable through a hermeneutical lens. Through the model of spectral ontology, hermeneutical interpretation allows us to penetrate deeper into the various aspects of these objects. As noted previously, spectral ontology offers a model that incorporates the spectrum of beings (objects), hyperobjects, and spectricities. These cultural products are rightfully objects, which are beings themselves. But we can recognize the various forces that are required in order for these products to be created, distributed, and to ultimately affect cultural shift through their creation. These forces include things like tradition, norms, biases, capital, labor, etc. These affect both the cultural input and output of the product, but unlike the product, exist in a unique way that is not bound to a singular spatial or temporal condition. Thus, these function in ways akin to what Morton, and which I have adopted, terms hyperobjects.

Cultural production occurs not only through social forces, but also only within the confines of various social structures. It would be impossible, for example, to consider any product or mode of production itself, without considering the dynamics of power at work in that production.

Of course, power dynamics as a conceptual structure in itself poses another structural challenge: inequalities. Like the many products of culture, these social structures are experienced only in their spatial and temporal conditions, but like the social forces driving production, social structures that enable production are not themselves bound by these conditions. Structures of equality, or inequality, and of power are not limited to a ‘here-and-now’ experience of them, but rather permeate the entirety of the social. Herbert Marcuse (1964, 11-12) noted as much articulating precisely how goods and production as a whole shapes the total social system in place writing that cultural products:

carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood.

Given the lack of spatio-temporal determination of these social structures, yet, afforded the very observable and lasting impact they have on production and social systems at large, these too are hyperobjects and are part of the spectral ontological model placing them of importance for hermeneutical reflection.

Of course, all the above is currently fully immersed and exposed to hermeneutic interpretation. What is claimed above does not propose anything new that is at stake for hermeneutic rationality, but merely provides the assertion that, that which is already a stakeholder in hermeneutic interpretation remains so under the spectral ontological model. What remains to be accounted for is the new element being offered by spectral ontology, namely that of spectricities and what these hold in store for hermeneutics.

The importance of spectricities here is most easily seen in reflecting on the political and economic hyperobjects involved in cultural production – laws, policies, etc. These are, of course, experienced through their societal effect while holding no singular spatio-temporal material form. However, it is easier to see how these are shaped by spectricities than the previous hyperobjects discussed previously. Laws, policies, and economic systems are pure functions of relationality. They exist through the relationality expressed by them. Montesquieu famously began his *The Spirit of Laws* writing “Laws, in their most general signification, are the necessary relations derived from the nature of things” (1777, 3). Spectricities, as the underlying preconditional structure for the manifestation of relationality can provide insight into the relational structures conditioning their existence. This opens a new avenue for exploration through the lens of hermeneutics.

Implications for the humanities

As one of the primary methodological approaches in the study of the humanities, the expansion of hermeneutic rationality through the lens of spectral ontology to be inclusive of the nonexistent entities that serve as the framework for the world also provides a unique opportunity to rethink the humanities as such. The humanities, as noted at the start of this essay, holds an interesting place in academic discourse precisely because it also aims to address the immaterial dimensions of the world, in particular the immateriality that does not always manifest in a physical form. Hermeneutics, as expanded through spectral ontology, builds off this interpretation of immaterial

to further extend towards not simply that which holds no physical manifestation, but to that which is entirely absent, nonexistent. While at first this might seem counterintuitive, a brief consideration of how a spectral ontological hermeneutics can be applied to particular modes of inquiry will help to ground this suggestion and indicate the importance of negation, absence, and spectricities. It is perhaps easiest to reflect on this in the interpretation of anthropological or cultural modes of thinking.

Material culture, as noted above, lends itself to the interpretation of not only its creation and those forces which shape its production, but also those which are absent. When an archaeologist, for example, unearths a stone tool, hermeneutic rationality might seek a route to interpret the relationship between that particular culture and their environment, or, perhaps what the tool can inform us about their way of life, ritual practices, etc. Mark Edmonds (2012, 34) notes the importance of looking at material culture, particularly stone tools, writing that observations on the proximity of tombs and churches:

can only take us so far. The physical presence and episodic use of tombs may have had important consequences among the living. But we need to ask how particular concepts and relations among dispersed communities were actually grounded in day-to-day practice.

Hermeneutics provides a lens through which we connect the object and the people – the ‘text’ and the author.

Within the ontological framework of *spectral ontology*, the question of this relationship, of the connection between ‘text’ and author, shifts towards the negation or the absence. It poses the question of the relationship between the ‘text’ and its non-relational elements. That is, it asks very directly what the ‘text’ or object of inquiry is when all of its relationality, everything that makes it what it is, is abstracted from it. What is a ‘text’ when it is not a ‘text’? If we consider ‘text’ literally, as in a written book for example, it is precisely the relation between the ink and the pages that make a ‘text’ or the relation between the pages, between molecules, words, letters, etc. Any ‘text’, any object, is positioned as such due to its relations. Even every individual ‘letter’ is established only through the relationality of various patterns of thought

that led to its coming to be what it is. Relation builds upon relation down to the fundamental relation that is *relationality* itself.⁴

What lies between these fundamental relations? There can seemingly be only one answer: nothing. This *nothing* is not even the nothing of Hegel⁵ or Heidegger⁶ – a *nothing* which must yet be something because it still holds some relation. The nothing left over after relationality as such is a nothing which itself is nothing, one which does not exist. In short, everything, every ‘text’ is grounded in its very own nonexistence. It exists not in spite of or in contrast to its nonexistence, but through it. By thereby focusing on the interpretation of the relationship between a ‘text’ and its nonrelationality, its nonexistence, we can truly get to the core of being a being.

Conclusion

Spectral ontology serves as an ontological model that can enhance the interpretative range and depth of *hermeneutic rationality*. Through the lens of *spectral ontology*, we can expand the meaning of ‘text’ to include not only the material and immaterial entities that can be grouped into the ontological categories of beings or hyperbeings, but to also include those which are altogether nonexistent. That which does not exist, still serves as a necessary framework for existence and that which exists. To that end, it is imperative that nonexistence, *spectricities* as I have termed them, become a part of hermeneutic investigation and inquiry.

But such an additional change in the methodological approach, incorporating the nonexistent, can also alter the discipline itself. The humanities, although open to reflect on the imaginary, the immaterial, and the spiritual, does not typically concern itself with nonexistence in and of itself. This shift would open the door to a new perspective of and within the humanities, a humanities of absence, nonexistence; it would be a *null humanities* with inquiry focused on the underlying structure rooted in this absence or nonexistence. Such an area of

⁴ As I have elsewhere argued, this is, in principle, giving oneself a fixed idea rather than being subjected solely to ideological fixes (See Isrow 2021; Ibid. 2024).

⁵ Hegel discusses nothing at length in relation to the dialectical process, writing that “it is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a determinate nothingness, one which has a content” (Hegel 1998, 51).

⁶ Heidegger, in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, notes that “Nothing remains forever an absurdity of science” insisting that *nothing* is brought into being through speaking and thinking it, thus making it something (2014, 29).

inquiry would bring this often-neglected dimension of being into proper humanities, and hermeneutic, discourse.

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Rereading W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" through the Gramscian and Foucauldian lenses of hegemony and power relations

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Abstract: This paper presents a re-examination of W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927). The poem has been analyzed in various ways, mainly in terms of historical and biographical references. This study attempts to unravel the language through a close reading. With the focus on the semiotics of the "old men," "singing school," and "drowsy Emperor," in my investigation, I will decode the philosophical riddles in Yeats's work. Eventually, the analysis will show the concept of shifting power and its integration to space and history, which evokes the essence of theories related to cultural hegemony (Antonio Gramsci) and power relations (Michel Foucault) within historical context, but also throughout the act of reading the text.

Keywords: Yeats, Byzantium, Foucault, Gramsci, power, hegemony

Introduction

Historiography often raises questions about referentiality and the reliability of narrative, prompting a critical reading of historical accounts. In this context, Karl Popper's provocative question "has history any meaning?"¹ frames a broader theoretical challenge. One manifestation of this problem appears in William Butler Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium". A poem that interrogates the act of reading and misreading history through its rich rhetorical and symbolic language. The text was composed between 1926 and 1927 and was

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¹ A primary objective of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism* was to examine the origins and characteristics of totalitarianism. In particular, the emergence of fascism, including in Popper's native Austria, and the outbreak of the W.W.II motivated Popper to write these works in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Popper 1962).

first published in the October 1927 issue of *Blast*. It later appeared as the opening poem in Yeats's poetry collection, *The Tower*, released in 1928 (Csirmaz 2009, 97). On a literal level, Yeats's selected text appears to present a series of contradictions between generations and the transient nature of individual's life. While historically, it seems to depict the decline of the Byzantine Empire², evoking a lost cultural and political order. However, when read closely and theoretically, the poem engages with deeper philosophical concerns, particularly those related to power structures and cultural hegemony. Critics have offered diverse interpretations of Yeats's verse; when discussing any journey, the questions: "where?" and "why?" naturally arise and are of central importance (Karamitev 2020, 84). Thus, the title of the poem provides an answer to the first: the destination is Byzantium, with the mode of travel being by sea. More specifically, the verse centers on "the holy city of Byzantium," which historically known as Constantinople and now called Istanbul. Strikingly, the speaker's use of the city's ancient name suggests a desire to belong to its historical and cultural past. Karamitev (2020, 85) then sheds light on Yeats's personal experience:

Yeats's biographer mentions one of the poet's travels in 1907 when, on tour in Italy, he visited Ravenna which affected his Byzantium-related poems (Macrae 1995, 72). Ravenna had considerable importance in the Mediterranean world and "contains some of the most spectacular works of art and architecture to have survived from late antiquity" (Deliyannis 2010, 1). Among these is the basilica of S. Apollinare Nuova that the poet visited in 1907 (Yeats 1997, 503) and which boasts mosaics heavily influenced by Byzantine tradition as the links between Ravenna and Constantinople were not only political but extended to other areas such as art and architecture.

Bharadwaj (2018, 180), on the other hand, thinks that Yeats's reflections on the idea of life within death are vivid, emotionally rich, and grounded in personal experience, giving them a sense of warmth and immediacy. His contemporaries, such as D.H. Lawrence and T.S.

² The fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked not only the collapse of the Byzantine Empire but also the full establishment of Ottoman authority over its former heartlands and population. This dramatic power shift naturally triggered various ideological reactions and, more broadly, elicited a range of responses from individuals who identified with the now-vanished Byzantine state, regardless of whether they resided within Ottoman-controlled regions (Moustakas 2011). The decline and fall of the Roman Empire had a significant influence that extended well beyond historical scholarship, inspiring numerous major works of art within popular culture (Bamyacı 2023).

Eliot, deal with similar themes through a more intellectual and analytical lenses. Their poetry is shaped by internal conflict and takes on a tone of paradox and logical reasoning, effectively used for poetic expressions. Similarly, Smajli (2013, 224) focuses on the biographical references, claiming that Yeats presents a spiritual journey through the voyage.

When viewed through the lens of revelation, it becomes clear that these poems were written during a time in his life when he was reflecting deeply on mortality, essentially, a moment of personal revelation tied to the creative process. At the age of sixty-two to sixty-five, Yeats was increasingly concerned with aging, the passing of time, the state of the world, and the inevitable approach of life's end. Smajli goes further, pointing out that Yeats's journey/sailing is not a literal or earthly one, rather, it is imagined and takes place on a different plane of perception. It is not grounded in reality but aspires to the realm of art, that is elevated and spiritual. As such, it functions symbolically, representing a voyage to another world. This departure, even from Ireland (a relatively new national concept at the time), becomes a mythical, visionary journey, reminiscent of Dante's passage from hell to heaven (Ibid, 225).

Besides these scholars, Iseni (2022, 122) sheds light on the rhetoric of the text, asserting that "Sailing to Byzantium" is undoubtedly rich in symbolism, its more literal foundations, though acknowledged, may not have received the attention they truly deserve.

Most interpretations of the poem fall into two main symbolic readings: one sees it as a reflection on the soul's journey around the time of death, and the other views it as a meditation on the artistic process and creative achievement. The distinction between these interpretations largely hinges on how one defines the concept of the "ideal". Put differently, the key question becomes: does Byzantium represent the highest form of aesthetic beauty within this world? Or does it stand for a transcendent and spiritual perfection beyond the earthly realm? Although Yeats's poem has been offered various interpretations, this paper aims to provide a reflective analysis within a close reading of the expressions. My focus is to show the philosophical hidden side of the text as it is intertwined within history.

Theoretical framework

This study follows a semiotic approach³ to unravel the expressions in Yeats's poem by examining the arbitrary relationship between signifiers and signifieds, as well as the etymological meanings of the expressions. That is to say, this paper sheds light merely on the language of the verse; setting aside external factors such as the historical or biographical contexts in which it was composed. In doing so, the analysis focuses on the essence of text rather than the life or intentions of the poet.

Power, hegemony, and the critical rereading of history

Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" is often understood as a depiction of historical narratives associated with the Byzantine Empire. In this context, I do not aim to recount the historical events surrounding the decline of the Eastern Roman Empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire, but rather to critically read these transitions through theoretical frameworks. This re-reading is not grounded in chronology but in the rhetorical and symbolic functions of language, which allow for an interpretive space where history, power, and discourse intersect. The thread of the analysis explores concepts related to cultural hegemony and shifting power. To begin with, 'cultural hegemony'⁴ describes a form of dominance sustained through cultural and ideological mechanisms. It is typically enforced by means of social institutions, enabling those in positions of authority to significantly shape the values, norms, beliefs, expectations, perspectives, and behaviors of the broader population. The Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci, expanded upon Karl Marx's idea that a society's dominant

³ Semiotics is the discipline concerned with signs and the ways they are used in communication. The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, one of its pioneers, described it as the study of "the life of signs within society." Although the term had appeared earlier, used in the 17th century by English philosopher John Locke in a similar context, semiotics did not develop as a distinct interdisciplinary field until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, through the separate but complementary contributions of Saussure and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (Saussure 1972).

⁴ The term 'hegemony' denotes the predominance of a particular group, state, or institution over others, typically exercised through political, cultural, or economic influence. The concept originates from the Greek term *hegemon*, referring to a leader who held sway over neighboring city-states. Throughout history, hegemonic structures have emerged in diverse settings, from classical Greece and Renaissance Italy to the British Empire during its colonial expansion (Ungvarsky 2024).

ideology reflects the interests of the ruling class by developing the concept of cultural hegemony.⁵ Gramsci contended that the dominant group's authority is maintained not only through force, but through the dissemination of ideologies, such as values, and assumptions, through institutions like schools, religious organizations, legal systems, and the media. These establishments play a key role in shaping individuals' understanding of acceptable norms and values, thereby ensuring the population's consent to the existing social order. Consequently, control over these institutions equates to control over society as a whole (Cole 2025).

Scholars have frequently interpreted Gramsci's work as an attempt to challenge the rigidity of traditional Marxist doctrine. While this interpretation is valid, it tends to suggest that his ideas are primarily relevant to those who identify as Marxist thinkers. In reality, Gramsci's insights hold value for historians from diverse intellectual backgrounds. Moreover, his notion of cultural hegemony, which clarifies the shifting power and the political role of cultural symbols, offers a useful framework for intellectual historians examining how ideas can support or destabilize existing social structures, as well as for social historians grappling with apparent contradictions in historical contexts (Lears 1985, 568). According to Gramsci, the dominance of a social class or group is expressed in two principal forms: through coercive control, or what he terms "domination," and through "intellectual and moral leadership," known as 'hegemony'. While domination functions through the use of force and is enforced by the apparatus of political society, hegemony operates within civil society and relies on the consent of the governed. In this framework, the state imposes domination through its institutional power. In contrast, hegemony emerges from the various mechanisms of civil society that shape individuals' cognitive and emotional perceptions, thereby

⁵ In his *Prison Notebooks* (1947), Gramsci engaged in a series of historical and theoretical inquiries into the conditions that make revolution possible within modern states, such as Italy, where a certain level of popular consent had already been established. He used the term "hegemony" to characterize a form of intellectual and moral leadership through which the ruling class becomes embedded throughout society. Rejecting the economic determinism central to classical Marxism, Gramsci presented a more nuanced political analysis that took into account the variability of historical contexts. He integrated Marxist thought with neo-idealist perspectives on practical subjectivity, outlining a revolutionary strategy that focused on cultivating a new collective identity (Bottici 2023).

influencing how they understand and respond to complex social realities (El Aidi & Yechouti 2017, 5).

Gramsci's insights seem to evoke Foucauldian notions of power/knowledge in which he argues that, beginning with Descartes, Western philosophy has been primarily concerned with uncovering the nature or essence of truth and knowledge. Philosophers have traditionally posed questions such as: "What is knowledge? Or what constitutes truth?" However, Foucault (1980, 66), following Nietzsche, shifts this inquiry; he contends that the central philosophical concern is no longer the identification of a reliable path to truth, but rather an investigation into the complex and contingent history of truth itself. This includes examining the origins and consequences of the "will to truth" and exploring how truth is entangled with power relations and their historical manifestations (Haugaard 2022).

Foucault approaches "power" not as a fixed object awaiting theoretical definition, but as a methodological tool he employs to critique and move beyond conventional understandings of power, which he thought were no longer adequate for interpreting the historical conditions they aimed to explain. At the same time, however, he offers various conceptual frameworks, such as sovereign power, disciplinary power, biopower, pastoral power, and governmentality, which all seem to track the historical and modern formations of power (Keser 2024). Foucault traces the mechanisms of power employed by the modern Western state back to the institutional power structures of the Christian church. He identifies four key aspects of pastoral power that focus on individuals: the promise of salvation after death, a readiness to sacrifice for the community, continuous care for both the community and each individual, and intimate access to and influence over individuals' minds. This salvation-oriented form of power laid the foundation for the modern state's protection-oriented model. In its secular transformation, pastoral power was reconfigured into political terms: offering security and well-being in this life, expanding public institutions to serve the populace, and advancing knowledge about human beings both collectively and individually (Foucault 1980, 67-70).

Reading "Sailing to Byzantium"

Yeats's poem presents itself to readers through the title, "Sailing to Byzantium," a phrase that, grammatically, denotes "setting out on a sea voyage, leaving port" (OED) toward Byzantium. The title has often

been interpreted symbolically, primarily from historical and biographical perspectives (Karamitev 2020; Sharma 2021). However, in this analysis, my focus is on the concepts of power relations and cultural hegemony. The verse introduces readers to a heterotopic space, once occupied by a group of men depicted as old, who are gradually supplanted by the young:

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

The opening lines of the stanza depict an image of a "country," a conceptual and symbolic space where "old men" no longer belong to it and replaced by the presence of the "young," who are evocatively likened to "birds in the trees". These figures of youth, part of the "dying generations," are entangled in a temporal cycle devoid of transcendence. Metaphorically, the contradictions of "youth and old" seem to evoke the Gramscian notion (1971, 57) of cultural hegemony and shifting power from one group of intellectuals to another:

The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership.' A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate,' or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups.

Moreover, their "song," which politically seems to be a symbol of vitality and meaning, eventually becomes a residue of repetition rather than a marker of the poetic expressions. Semiotically, this shows the systems of power and how they operate. The subsequent lines: "the salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas / Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long," offer an ekphrastic evocation of nature in its fullness. The juxtaposition of "salmon-falls" and "mackerel-crowded seas" creates a nexus between vertical and horizontal movement: the salmon's struggle upstream suggests aspiration, endurance, or perhaps an upward trajectory of life's meaning, while the mackerel crowding the horizontal sea implies mass movement, abundance, and lateral expansion without direction. These contrasting movements metaphorically reflect two different groups of intellectuals,

the elderly (the former ruling class) and the young (the current dominant group), each subject to the same system of mortality: “begotten, born, and dies”. From a semiotic standpoint, this dual movement encodes shaping society and the power relations among the individuals. The linguistic pairing of water, fish, and seasonality establishes a system of signs which shows the class structure in terms of power. This aligns with a Gramscian reading of cultural hegemony, in which dominant values, sensuality, youth, productivity, marginalize other ways of being, such as contemplation, memory, and spiritual permanence. The significations of “song” and “music” invite readers to explore the cultural hegemony and power relations in the text as they operate as metaphors for *language* and its hegemonic function. Thus, language plays a central role in political discourse, serving as a means of persuasion and manipulation even within the dialectic relation between the text and the reader. As Rolan Barthes (1977, 148) explains:

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader.

Through carefully chosen words, political leaders communicate their ideas, influence public opinion, and rally support for their goals. Tools, such as rhetoric, speeches, and propaganda illustrate the ways language is employed in politics to shape and influence audiences (Rahmani & Saeed 2024, 2063). From this perspective, “song” is not merely an expression but a distraction, part of the sensual music that seduces the body and silences the intellect. Language, then, is reduced to a chain of signifiers, inert like the “monuments of unageing intellect,” dislocated from authentic meaning, reduced to spectacle, and embedded in the cultural machinery of power:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

The verse reflects the integration of cultural hegemony and heterotopia through the depiction of the "aged man" as a "paltry thing," likened to a "tattered coat upon a stick". This image critiques the hegemonic social order that marginalizes the elderly, valuing physical vitality and sensuality over intellectual or spiritual worth. Such expressions elevate the reader's thoughts to a level where they begin to perceive both temporal and spatial shifts across generations. Drawing on Gramsci, one might consider how the intellectual class, particularly aging or dissenting intellectuals, is often excluded from dominant culture unless they conform to its common norms. Yet, despite this cultural marginalization, the text offers a counterforce: the soul of the aged man is urged to "clap its hands and sing," even louder, in response to the disintegration of the body, its "mortal dress". Here, Foucauldian power becomes crucial in understanding how individuals are shaped by discourse and institutions. The term "mortal dress" holds layered semiotic meaning. On the surface, it signifies the decaying physical body within the natural cycle of life and death. However, from a deeper layer, it can be read as a kind of institutional costume; a marker of the roles imposed by political, religious, or cultural authorities. These evocations seem to be linked to the "singing school," which depict ideological institutions, analogous to what Louis Althusser describes as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as schools, churches, and other cultural systems that reproduce dominant ideology.⁶ This interplay between power and knowledge, central to Foucault's philosophy, which is evident in the lines that follow: "studying," "mortal dress," and "monuments". Each carries connotative weight, suggesting that beneath the literal meaning lies a system of signs tied to historical authority, sacred tradition, and institutional memory. Together, these expressions reveal a semiotic network that exposes the philosophical link between aging, cultural erasure, and the resistance, which seems possible through spiritual or intellectual transcendence. Therefore, the narrative "I" declares that "[he/she has] sailed the seas and come [to] the holy city of Byzantium". At this point, the voice within the text becomes problematic, as it semiotically introduces ambiguity regarding the identity of the 'I'. It may represent a shifting voice oscillating between

⁶ From Louis Althusser, "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 142–7, 166–76. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York and London: Monthly Review Press.

the unknown speaker and the reader.⁷ This flow invites a post-structuralist reading in which subjectivity is destabilized, and the speaker's identity becomes a site of interpretive negotiation. From this perspective, "the holy city of Byzantium" may be read not only as a symbolic space of spiritual and artistic transcendence but also as a metaphor for the text itself. The poem, like Byzantium, becomes a heterotopic space, another space, where power, time, and identity are reorganized. In this sense, the act of reading becomes an investigation into how cultural power shifts across generations and how intellectual authority is both constructed and challenged within literary discourse. The narrative voice presents a series of religious images in the verse:

O sages standing in God's holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.

The religious imagery here invites readers to interpret history as a metaphor and to engage with broader philosophical questions: for instance, the expressions "God," "holy fire," and "gold mosaic" may show actual historical transitions, particularly the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire. However, these images can also be read theoretically as representations of hegemonic power, particularly the role of both traditional and organic intellectuals, who are symbolically portrayed as the "singing-masters" of the soul. At this point, the poem seems to ask the fundamental question of historiography: does history have inherent meaning? In this context, as one reads a literary text, a historiographical paradox emerges in the intersection of history and fiction; however, the narrative often appears to transcend the actual historical events it invokes (Pillai 1997, 836). Thus, the narrative voice seeks not only wisdom but also a synthesis of power and knowledge, as seen in the merging of the sacred ("holy fire") with the authoritative ("singing-masters"). This integration reflects the inseparable and evolving

⁷ In his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes challenges the idea of the author's dominance over a text, asserting that the voice emerging from the text itself undermines the concept of a single, original creator (Barthes 1977).

relationship between religious and political ideologies. This unresolved riddle, the search for truth and transcendence, has made the speaker's "heart...sick with desire". The terms "soul" and "desire" can be examined through Hegelian recognition (Kojève 1969), where the soul's longing is shaped by its encounter with otherness and by the dialectical structure of self-consciousness.⁸ In this light, the dialectic relation between "old men" and the "young generation," and between "God's holy fire" and the "singing-masters," presents a paradox of authority: integrated yet contradictory modes of power. Ultimately, the speaker relates cultural hegemony to the evolution of human consciousness, particularly in the line: "...and fastened to a dying animal / it knows not what it is". These expressions not only reflect temporal and spatial shifts but also show the Hegelian notion of self-recognition and the analogy between animals and human being.⁹ In doing so, the verse reveals an "artifice of eternity," a constructed, ever-shifting system that reflects both mortality and the illusion of permanence. Eventually, the language of the text depicts the intersection of art, history, and the dominance of political ideology:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

The narrative voice continues to reflect on shifting power in human civilization by turning away from primitive life, as expressed in the lines, "once out of nature I shall never take / my bodily form from any natural thing". These phrases suggest an ideological apparatus through

⁸ Alexandre Kojève played a key role in bringing Hegel's ideas to 20th-century French philosophy, profoundly impacting numerous prominent French thinkers who participated in his 1930s seminar on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in Paris. He concentrated on Hegel's philosophy of history and is particularly recognized for developing the concept of the "end of history" and for laying the groundwork for what became known as "existential Marxism" (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d.).

⁹ According to Hegel, humans resemble animals at the level of natural existence; however, what distinguishes human beings is their capacity to achieve self-consciousness through social, historical, and cultural developments (Schuringa 2022).

which dominant religious and political doctrines shape individuals' identity. Moreover, the language evokes the notion of Cartesian dualism,¹⁰ which distinguishes between the mind, a thinking, non-material substance, and the body, an extended, non-thinking material substance. As Byzantium symbolizes civilization, art, and historical continuity, the ideological dimension becomes central, highlighting how cultural values and hegemonic ideas shape the reader's vision of transcendence and the privileging of the ideological over the natural. Consequently, the speaker aspires to take a form "wrought" from gold, as crafted by "Grecian goldsmiths," a reference to the skilled artisans of ancient Greece, renowned for their mastery in goldwork and intricate enameling. This transformation symbolizes the influence of high civilization and aesthetic permanence. The image of keeping the "drowsy Emperor awake" points to the political function of art and intellect across historical epochs. At this point, the text evokes the intersection of political and religious shifts over time and can be read through the lens of Gramscian cultural hegemony, where artistic creation becomes a means of both reflecting and resisting dominant ideologies. The expression "golden bough" metaphorically elicits an ekphrastic vision of Byzantium, with its rich architecture and historical civilization, now subject to shifting political and religious powers that "sing[s]" to its lords and ladies. The narrative voice concludes with the expressions "of what is past, or passing, or to come," which evoke the constant flux of power and cultural hegemony. Political and religious ideologies continually shape individuals' thoughts, creating a dialectical relation between the eternal values of art and the temporal authority of emperors.

Conclusion

W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927) engages with deep issues related to cultural hegemony, heterotopia, and shifting power within human civilization, rather than merely historical or biographical narratives. In this essay, I approached the poem through a semiotic lens and theoretical frameworks grounded in Foucault's notion of power

¹⁰ In dualism, the mind is distinguished from the body, though different periods have focused on different aspects of the mind. During classical and medieval times, the intellect was seen as the aspect least explainable by materialist accounts. From Descartes onward, however, the primary challenge to materialist monism became consciousness itself, with phenomenal consciousness or sensory experience often treated as its most typical example (Robinson 2020).

relations and Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. The expressions invited me, as a lector, to decode the philosophical and cultural riddles embedded in the text and to explore their hidden meanings. Understanding these theories enables readers to add another layer of interpretation to Yeats's work, revealing the complex interplay of culture, power, and artistic transcendence.

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Comteist philanthropy in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*: An evaluation

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Abstract: George Eliot in *Silas Marner* portrays the protagonist as a heroic character who is brave, generous and intelligent. Through this novel, Eliot expresses her desire to create sympathy for the wounded humanity. This is a reflection of the altruistic view of the world proposed by Auguste Comte. This study examines Comte's view of philanthropy in *Silas Marner*. In doing so, this article goes through Auguste Comte's altruism philosophy to analyse *Silas Marner*. This study evaluates the contest of the nineteenth-century European society and the author's intention to depict an ideal physiological state of mind. The characters and plot have been monitored from a very close view to examine each and every move in order to get a clear picture of the society. The findings highlight that 19th century Europe was poverty-stricken, engulfed by socio-economic crises and at the same time however, it was the time of new thought and technologies. In this regard George Eliot in this novel, desires to show a path for humanity to get rid of the sufferings.

Keywords: philanthropy, humanity, Auguste Comte, altruism, human suffering, new thought

Introduction

"I have taken *Silas Marner* as the book in which to study the art of its author because here she is at her best. *Silas Marner* is a short work, but it has abundant interest and less preaching than the later novels" (Fairley 1913, 221). *Silas Marner* is a Victorian novel composed by George Eliot which emphasizes on Christianity, morality and social values. The author provides a very complex setting for the novel. Silas Marner is a weaver who lives in early 19th century England. It was a time when weavers like him made profits by producing handmade goods in England. However, during the 1830s and 1890s industrial revolution came and it caused a massive economic change all over

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England. It was the time when handmade goods were transformed into machine-made products. The technology became advanced and made it easy and quick to produce products like woven cotton. It also allowed a huge number of products to be produced within a short time with less effort. As a result, mills and factories began to grow rapidly throughout England. The transformation was so fast that we can see at the end of the story, the village of Lantern of Yard was completely transformed into a manufacturing hub. This sudden change in Lantern Yard reflects the picture of the whole of England and how the industrial revolution changed the profession of weaving and the life of the weavers like Silas Marner.

However, the most striking dramatic element of the story revolves around the substitution of the weaver's gold by an unwelcome child, Eppie. Regarding the plot's aesthetically and philosophically appealing aspect of justice and moral logic, Shoshana Knapp (1986, 444) asserts,

The events have a perfect symmetry: the loss of one object is matched by the gain of another, and the central substitution is framed by two other crises of trust, the first of which (William Dane's betrayal of Silas) entails a defeat and the second of which (Eppie's loyalty to Silas when she is acknowledged by Godfrey Cass) entails a victory. The arrival of the child Eppie replaces the gold stolen by Dunstan Cass; the love of the adult Eppie repeals the treachery of William Dane. The Cass brothers lose what they stole (the gold) or did not value (the child), and they are punished with interest: Dunstan loses his life, and Godfrey loses his second child and all potential children.

This perfect symmetry of loss and gain underscores that at the core of George Eliot's *Silas Marner* lies a powerful narrative that sheds light on the facets of redemption, selflessness, and the transformative power of altruism. The famous philosopher and sociologist Auguste Comte first coined the term 'altruism'. The idea was to introduce an opposite term of 'egoism'. 'Altruism' is associated with nineteenth-century thinkers who brought their ideas along with the controversial conceptual framework. This conceptual framework aimed at critically analysing ancient questions related to philosophy, religions and ethics. Before this, there was another prevailing term known as enlightenment moralism which had been the manifestation of arguments regarding the relationship between self-serving passion and benevolent ethical emotions. The authors like Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville realised that all human actions are derived from their self-interest. However, this view did not go uncriticized by scholars such as Joseph Butler who thought that generosity was as basic a principle of human

action as self-interest. Hence, one might interpret *Silas Marner* as a story that upholds an ethical standard in which every action bears its subsequent consequences.

Literature review

Different academics provide differing perspectives on Eliot's *Silas Marner* illuminating the narrative as a criticism of social conventions and an advocacy of principles centred around the human condition. Hera Kim (2020, 179), for example, argues that Eliot brings back her past from the Lantern Yard not only to criticise Victorian conventions regarding gender roles but also to create a confrontational past and present. In order to do so, Eliot uses Marner's memory of the spectral past that constantly questions and intervenes his gender identity in the Victorian context. Hence, Marner's masculinity should be seen as a critical intersectional collage of temporality and gender role that intervenes the troubling presence of the Victorian binary gender system. The humanistic overtones of the story highlighted by Kim's view of Marner's masculinity as a challenge to Victorian gender standards, aligns with Koumakpai and Barnabe's vision of constructing a society built on the welfare of individuals.

Koumakpai and Oladjehou (2016, 1250) comment, George Eliot, in this novel, is convinced of the great value of human generosity, love, and compassion. It highlights the principles of benevolence and compassion by using many characters. Humanism as a theme of literature can also be seen through religious aspects. In terms of law, many texts have been published in order to safeguard human beings, especially women. The author endeavours to establish a society based on the welfare of human beings. At the same time, she puts an emphasis on the social environment that connects members of the community through conventional values, which are displayed as an incomparable hub of values to uphold the humane development of society.

On the other hand, Anna Lindhe's (2016) study of human compassion as an effective tool in numerous domains of life is connected to Dylan Black's interpretation of *Silas Marner* as a story that transcends generations and explores themes related to human fragility as well as kindness. The novel's importance of dealing with human feelings and attitudes is further highlighted by Black's emphasis on Silas Marner's character being significant on a worldwide scale, which aligns with Lindhe's belief that compassion is

fundamentally necessary. Black (2008) says, “George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* depicts a tale that crosses the boundary of time and it tells us about spiritual downfall and rebirth, of human vulnerability and greed, and of compassion and determination”. Empathy, according to Lindhe, has come out to be a ubiquitous concept in areas ranging from politics, law, and business ethics to medical care and education, to name just a few. Empathy is thought to be beneficial in almost every sphere of life and the lack of it usually creates chaos and anarchy and sometimes it may be related with psychopathy and crime. Several perspectives, including evolutionary ones, are based on the view that empathy is an evolved faculty, vital to humankind’s cooperation and hence survival. In other words, empathy is thus often considered to be useful, indispensable, and even morally good (Lindhe 2016,19).

Kristen A. Pond (2013, 691) finds a curious moment in middle of George Eliot’s novel *Silas Marner*. Marner, when the theft of his gold was discovered, he runs to the Rainbow Inn, the village’s popular gathering place, in order to tell them about the theft and demand justice. According to the scholar, “This is a climactic moment that can be described as the climactic in the plot; as readers, we turn the page with mounting anticipation: how will the villagers react to the strange weaver’s first intrusion into this most sacred of spaces in Raveloe?” Anna Neill’s explanation of the characters’ limited consciousness and repeating history is consistent with Pond’s interpretation of Silas’ entry into the Rainbow Inn. *Silas Marner* is a unique sort of novel, and the readers can read it as a story about the problem of expressing a consciousness with limited capacity for imaginative reach and where all cognitive events are shaped and dominated by the unknown (Neill 2008, 940). In the midst of limited viewpoints, this integrated vision emphasises the importance of particular fresh situations as growth in character catalysts.

One may see Josephine Macdonagh’s examination of hospitality in *Silas Marner* as a mirror of the more general subject of empathy and human values that has been covered by other academics. In her perspective, the act of accepting or rejecting strangers may be linked to themes of empathy and societal inclusion, supporting the notion that Eliot’s writing explores intricate human interactions. Macdonagh (2020, 11) remarks, “What makes the engagement with the idea of hospitality even more pronounced in this work is the fact that Silas’ acceptance in the village is precipitated by his own adaptation to the values of open hospitality”.

Auguste Comte's definition of altruism, which emphasises unselfish concern for the wellbeing of others, can be related to Jo Carruthers' interpretation of *Silas Marner* in connection to the regenerating power of nature and the good influence on love and caring. In the story Eppie is presented as a light of hope and rejuvenation for the despondent and alone Silas. Carruthers emphasises the notion that Eppie restores love and pleasure to Silas's life. He explains,

Silas Marner is full of natural images of growth and vitality that insist that human life needs to have a similar forward trajectory to thrive. Although it is clear that Silas's love for his adopted daughter is the key to his renewed life, the novel also emphasizes the regenerative power of nature and its positive influence on the kind of nurturing care that Silas and Eppie represent (Carruthers 2020, 116).

Given that Silas' well-being is positively and regeneratively impacted by Eppie's presence and affection, this metamorphosis may be understood as a manifestation of altruism. She positively impacts his general wellness by helping him to overcome his emotional and self-imposed seclusion. Comte's theory of altruism advocates for people to put other people's needs ahead of their own, as seen by Eppie's unselfish treatment of Silas throughout the book. Her manners and behaviours exemplify the selfless idea of behaving in the interests of others before oneself. Silas' selfless love and concern for Eppie are an example of the kind of deeds that benefit the community at large as well as Silas.

In addition, Carruthers' reference to the natural progression and liveliness depicted in the novel, is consistent with Comte's view that societal peace and collaboration are essential to the advancement of mankind. When people unite in a spirit of mutual assistance and kindness, the regenerative force of nature may be understood as a metaphor for the potential for human growth and advancement. Thus, a community built on collaboration and altruism may prosper and advance as a whole, just as Eppie's presence revitalises Silas.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach regarding data collection and analysing data. The aim of qualitative research varies with the disciplinary background, such as a psychologist seeking to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. Qualitative methods examine the why and how of decision-making, not just what, where, when, or "who", and have a

strong basis in the field of sociology to understand government and social programs. This study intends to analyse the novel *Silas Marner* written by George Eliot in order to find out the presence of altruism. The study is also reliant on some secondary sources like books, articles, research papers and internet sources.

Research questions

Throughout the procedure of this study, this research follows a close textual reading of Eliot's *Silas Marner* focusing on the two open-ended questions in order to find a productive outcome from the whole effort. The questions are associated with the objectives of this research that helped reach the ultimate goal. These questions have been answered on the basis of the plots and contexts portrayed in *Silas Marner* by George Elliot. The questions are:

1. How is altruism depicted in *Silas Marner*?
2. How does altruism play a significant role in solving bigger human problems?

Presence of Comte's philanthropy in *Silas Marner*

The novel *Silas Marner* by George Eliot is a story of a weaver who can be defined as a miser and a misanthropic. He, unfortunately, loses his stash of gold however, a baby girl comes into his life who has bright golden hair. The weaver has an intense love for the child and this love can be defined as 'altruistic love'. According to Vaillant, altruism is "vicarious but constructive and instinctually gratifying service to others."

Usually, altruism is thought to be complete selflessness like the humanitarian works of Mother Teresa or Silas Marner to adopt an orphan Eppie. But altruism is a much more complex idea as it is associated with altruistic love. The biological father of Eppie is Godfrey Cass who conceals his identity as he marries the woman he loves after the death of Eppie's mother. It is clear that Cass does love his daughter and has no intention to abandon her completely as we see him giving Silas and Eppie some gifts.

The author of *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins ([1976] 2006, 60) thinks it is natural that Cass loves his biological child, and he gets an evolutionary advantage by supporting Eppie to propagate his genes. On the other hand, Silas has no such advantage as he is not the biological father of Eppie. He feels intense love for this golden-haired adopted child which is nothing but altruistic love. Eliot describes:

“Ah,” said Dolly, with soothing gravity, “it's like the night and the morning, and the sleeping and the waking, and the rain and the harvest—one goes and the other comes, and we know nothing how nor where. We may strive and scrat and fend, but it's little we can do after all—the big things come and go wi' no striving o' our'n—they do, that they do; and I think you're in the right on it to keep the little un, Master Marner, seeing as it's been sent to you, though there's folks as thinks different. You'll happen be a bit moithered with it while it's so little; but I'll come, and welcome, and see to it for you: I've a bit o' time to spare most days, for when one gets up betimes I' the morning, the clock seems to stan' still tow'rs ten, afore it's time to go about the victual. So, as I say, I'll come and see the child for you, and welcome. (Eliot [1861] 1999, 135).

From this description of the author, the question may come to our mind whether the love and affection of Silas for Eppie is totally unconditional. This golden-haired little girl gives Silas meaning of life and brings a feeling of joy for him. She also helps him get a social life in Raveloe, where they live. Eliot describes:

The gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer, deafened and blinded more and more to all things except the monotony of his loom and the repetition of his web; but Eppie called him away from his weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, reawakening his senses with her fresh life, even to the old winter-flies that came crawling forth in the early spring sunshine, and warming him into joy because she had joy (Ibid, 140).

Silas sets an example of altruistic love by adopting Eppie and raising her as his own child. Although he has no desire for worldly possessions in exchange for adopting the beautiful child, he gains love, joy and true meaningful life. Love is such an emotion which is invaluable and cannot be purchased with worldly properties however; it makes us affluent in true sense and gives us a reason to live for. Thus, altruism is not selfless sacrifice for anyone. It brings a much bigger gift for our life than our material possessions and enriches our life in many ways. Altruistic love provides benefits for both the sides who give and receive it and so we cannot define it as a total selfless act of human being.

George Vaillant ([1977] 1998, 91) in his book, *Adaptation to Life*, suggests that “It is not thought less of yourself, it is thought of yourself less” which paves the way for sublimation. It is natural that we think of our interests however, at the time of thinking of others in an altruistic way, it brings positive outcomes for all of us. This brings a unique kind of love which is a love for humanity in the world. Altruistic love can bring peace and happiness in the world and can be

the solution to many problems that we face in the modern era as Vaillant believes, “The reliable presence of people who love us facilitates our perception and tolerance of painful reality [like Silas Marner] and enriches our lives” (Ibid, 28). The world will no longer be engulfed by hatred and war if altruism takes a place in our mind.

Silas Marner is a demonstration of both ‘egoist’ and ‘altruist’ human behaviour which are exposed through the actions and thoughts of the characters. The egoists are the people who have morality based on their personal interest and they tend to perform such duties that bring material pleasure and temporary rewards. In the words of the author:

So, year after year, Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being. His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended. The same sort of process has perhaps been undergone by wiser men, when they have been cut off from faith and love—only, instead of a loom and a heap of guineas, they have had some erudite research, some ingenious project, or some well-knit theory. Strangely Marner’s face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube, which has no meaning standing apart. (Eliot [1861] 1999, 19).

On the other hand, an altruist desires to have pure happiness of the soul by thinking about the welfare of others without any material gain. The author in this novel intends to address the existing prejudices of society with a view to the enlightening society. Eliot dreams of a world where avoiding social responsibility brings misery and pain; however, carrying out responsibility like Silas's adoption of the child Eppie is the way of true happiness which cannot be compared with worldly possessions.

This study intends to analyse the characters and their actions of the novel *Silas Marner* to draw a line between the individuals who avoid responsibilities and the people who adopt responsibilities to get the world view of the author. There is also another group of people according to Hardy who acknowledge that they have the responsibilities offered by life, but they don't actively perform the duties. Eliot divides *Silas Marner* into three distinctive parts and all three parts refer to three different stages that a society must go through according to the author- theological, metaphysical and positive which

are obviously influenced by her reading of Comte. This division also corresponds to the journey of Silas "from superstition, through infidelity to faith".

The Calvinist community of Lantern Yard is the representative of 'egoism'. This community has been formed based on the fear of God and strong trust on the supernatural power of prayers. This unquestioned belief on supernatural power can be so destructive for a society which is shown by the actions of William Dane. Dane betrays Silas and by doing so he ignores his responsibility to the community and to his best friend because of fulfilling his material desire to marry Sarah. Eliot depicts two types of conflicts regarding human interest—the conflict between performing or ignoring duties and the conflict between religious belief and religious practice in the same context. Sarah, the fiancé of Silas and William Dane, his friend of him both abdicate their God-given responsibility 'to love others as much as you love yourself'. The irony of fate is that Silas trusted these people by investing love. Silas does feel that the love of his fiancé for him is decreasing. However, it is also the reality that at Lantern Yard charge of theft against Silas was brought by William Dane and Silas's membership was solemnly suspended.

This psychological dilemma establishes religious beliefs as an inflexible moral code which hardly cares about human feelings. Therefore, adopting this moral code paves the way for further immorality and corruption as we see the Lantern Yard community does not accept the change of feeling of Sarah for Silas and so, Dane goes for dishonest means to fulfil his desire. Eliot shows the reader a contrasting picture to the egoist and self-centred community of Lantern Yard by presenting altruistic morality of the Anglican church of Raveloe. The Anglican Church is not founded based on strict empirical application of the biblical texts. Rather, it is formed based on 'fountains of love and divine faith' and it guides people spiritually to provide them with true comfort of soul. As the author describes,

During this discursive address Silas had continued motionless in his previous attitude, leaning his elbows on his knees, and pressing his hands against his head. Mr. Macey, not doubting that he had been listened to, paused, in the expectation of some appreciative reply, but Marner remained silent. He had a sense that the old man meant to be good-natured and neighbourly; but the kindness fell on him as sunshine falls on the wretched—he had no heart to taste it, and felt that it was very far off him (Eliot [1861] 1999, 85).

Such differences according to Eliot accounted for the wellbeing of the community. The character of Squire Cass is considered to be a responsible man who carries out his responsibilities to the neighbours. However, Squire Cass begins to ignore his familial duty after the death of his wife. The villagers think,

Raveloe was not a place where moral censure was severe, but it was thought a weakness in the Squire that he had kept all his sons at home in idleness; and though some licence was to be allowed to young men whose fathers could afford it, people shook their heads at the courses of the second son, Dunstan, commonly called Dunsey Cass, whose taste for swopping and betting might turn out to be a sowing of something worse than wild oats (Ibid, 23).

However, eldest son Godfrey Cass does not consider it to be the kindness of his father. Godfrey Cass has been presented as a young man who is selfish and weak, contrasting the altruistic behaviour of Silas Marner.

Godfrey's was an essentially domestic nature, bred up in a home where the hearth had no smiles, and where the daily habits were not chastised by the presence of household order. His easy disposition made him fall in unresisting with the family courses, but the need of some tender permanent affection, the longing for some influence that would make the good he preferred easy to pursue, caused the neatness, purity, and liberal orderliness of the Lammeter household, stunned by the smile of Nancy, to seem like those fresh bright hours of the morning when temptations go to sleep and leave the ear open to the voice of the good angel, inviting to industry, sobriety, and peace (Ibid, 32).

His habit of ignoring the truth and escaping from reality makes him a reluctant egoist who avoids his duties to his first wife and her child. He is too cowardly to reveal the existence of them to his father and he is unable to admit his fatherhood when he sees the child in Silas' arms at the Red House party. Godfrey's escaping mentality is completely revealed when he disowns his daughter Eppie and at the same time he fears that Eppie's mother might be alive. According to David Carroll this is the central point of the novel which provides a turning point in the lives of both Godfrey and Silas. Silas' fifteen years of misery and isolation during the time of worshipping gold instead of God, comes to an end when he decides to adopt Eppie. At the same time, it gives Godfrey a 16 year long deceptive period in his life since he feels free to marry Nancy Lammeter. Additionally, the selfishness and moral apathy exhibited by Dunstan Cass stand in stark contrast to the generosity demonstrated by Silas and Eppie. It is evident from his

stealing of Silas' riches that he had no respect for the adverse effects that his actions would cause to live. People around Dunstan experience pain and sorrow as a result of the events that he sets off. To the altruism and moral principles that Silas and Eppie represent, his actions stand in sharp contrast.

Silas takes responsibility for Eppie when she is a helpless child having no one to look after. When Silas falls sick in his old age Eppie finds it her responsibility to take care of him. However, Godfrey chooses a childless marriage which turns out to be a bad decision and he confesses, "I wanted to pass for childless once, Nancy-I shall pass for childless now against my wish". Eliot wants to show the difference between taking and escaping responsibility. The way that Godfrey chose will make him bear the bitter consequences for a long time. The author depicts the egoist characters in this novel as disrespectful and narrow-minded. Godfrey ignores his responsibilities with a view to keeping a peaceful environment in his father's house. His brother Dunstan too abandons his responsibilities to live an easy life with little effort. Dunstan has no regret as he misappropriated the rents and blackmails his brother. Therefore, Dunstan appears to be an extremely immoral man according to the morality standard of Eliot and so he faces the most disgraceful punishment. The author feels it is her authorial responsibility to ensure justice to subjugate the evil.

Silas adopts Eppie but he does not know anything about parenting. In this circumstance, Dolly Winthrop appears with a helping hand to teach him how to take care of a child. Dolly guides Eppie to be christened and clothed and in this way, she teaches Silas about the personal and social welfare of a child. This altruistic behaviour comes from her simple faith as follows, "eh, there's trouble i' this world, and there's things as we can niver make out of the rights on. And all as we've got to do is to trusten, Master Marner – to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten ... as it must be so" (Ibid, 158).

She does not need a conscious effort to be altruistic; rather, her understanding of right and wrong comes from her instinct and she performs her duty naturally. As Dolly discusses the life events of Silas, it helps Silas to accept his present life. Being the judge of the characters Eliot tries to ensure that all of them get punishment or reward according to their actions. In doing so, she presents the picture of a society which is divided into several parts- people adopting responsibility. Silas is immensely rewarded in the long run as he

carries out his social responsibility as a human being by taking care of Eppie as he himself asserts,

Eh, my precious child, the blessing was mine. If you hadn't been sent to save me, I should ha' gone to the grave in my misery. The money was taken away from me in time; and you see it's been kept—kept till it was wanted for you. It's wonderful—our life is wonderful." Silas sat in silence a few minutes, looking at the money. "It takes no hold of me now," he said, ponderingly—"the money doesn't. I wonder if it ever could again—I doubt it might, if I lost you, Eppie. I might come to think I was forsaken again, and lose the feeling that God was good to me (Ibid, 181).

However, the reward is not something material. The gift he gets is much more than material possession and it provides him with true peace and contentment. On the other hand, Godfrey Cass is punished with childlessness for his decision to escape his responsibility. Eliot creates a moral framework in the world she created in the novel in order to demonstrate a simple justice system of the nature of action and reaction. Eliot intends to show the interdependence of the people of the society and how the adoption of responsibility brings about a positive outcome and the vice versa brings suffering in the long run.

Conclusion

Silas Marner presents hoards of gold which are stolen, and the time was obviously a historical period when the industrial revolution was taking place in Europe and paper money was replacing the coins and metals. This novel has an ethical message to humanity which is influenced by the great thinkers of the 19th century like August Comte, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx. This novel associates 'abstraction' of gold with the modern economy where 'giving' and 'sharing' has little cost but it produces realistic values which benefit the whole society. George Eliot presents a historically relevant ethical story based on humanity and social sympathy. The author places human relations over material possessions in terms of achieving true peace of mind. Silas Marner loses his gold, but he gets the golden-haired little girl Eppie and Eppie fulfils his life with love and compassion. Silas takes care of Eppie as an orphan, and he is rewarded for this selfless deed. The great thinkers of the 19th century thought social sympathy and the sharing of wealth can bring peace in the world. The tendency of exploiting the workers in the factories and benefitting a small group of people during the industrial revolution played a major role in creating discrimination and mistrust in the society which is still

prevailing in the 21st century. Humans are yet to be freed from the exploitation of the social elites. Therefore, *Silas Marner* as a moral fable influenced by August Comte's theory of altruism has a universal appeal.

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Indentured diaspora (*Girmit*) in Mauritius: Histories, legacies, and contemporary implications

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Abstract: This paper explores the history and impact of Indian indentured labour migration to Mauritius during the 19th and early 20th centuries. After the abolition of slavery, British colonial authorities introduced the indenture system to meet labour demands on sugar plantations. The paper examines how workers from North and South India entered the system through recruitment processes that often involved deception and coercion. It describes their daily lives, characterized by strict regulations, limited freedoms, and racial discrimination. Despite these hardships, many labourers formed new communities, preserved cultural traditions, and contributed significantly to the development of modern Mauritian society. The study also looks at how places like *Aapravasi Ghat* commemorate the history of indenture and how these historical connections continue to shape Mauritius's identity today. By highlighting both the exploitation and resilience of indentured laborers, the paper illustrates their central role in the island's colonial and postcolonial history.

Keywords: indentured labourers, Indian diaspora, colonial labour migration, Aapravasi Ghat

Introduction

Indenture, as a historical phenomenon, cannot be understood merely as the aftermath of slavery or as a transitional mode of labour. It must be approached as a structure of power, mobility, and racialized governance embedded within the broader logics of colonial capitalism. In the case of Mauritius, indentured migration became a key site where imperial systems of control intersected with the personal struggles of dislocated bodies. Yet, beyond its economic function, indenture produced a complex repertoire of memory, kinship, and resistance

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what Paul Ricoeur might call ‘the poetics of memory’ and what Michel Foucault would trace as the microphysics of power. The Indo-Mauritian experience, emerging from this entangled past, reveals how diasporic identities are not just forged by movement but also by the layered processes of negotiation with land, law, and legacy. This essay draws upon material culture, and critical historiography to argue that the indenture system in Mauritius generated a unique archive of cultural and political subjectivity one that continues to shape the island’s national consciousness and diasporic imagination. Indians were recruited as indentured labourers during the 19th and early 20th centuries and transported to distant colonial territories such as British Guiana, Mauritius, Trinidad and Natal, Suriname, and Fiji both the recipient nations and the Indian subcontinent were significantly impacted by these migrations. By fusing their country’s customs with the realities of their new surroundings, the *Girmitiyas* established new communities, profoundly changing the social and cultural landscapes of these areas. The term *girmit*, a slang term meaning agreement, which refers to the contracts they signed for fixed-term labour, is whence *Girmitiyas* got their name. Through the description of their lives, the cultural and social changes brought about by their relocation and displacement are highlighted. As we see, readers would be reminded of the fortitude and flexibility of these early migrants by the particularly potent tales of agency and resiliency. Their long legacy is demonstrated by the way their experiences continue to influence modern diasporic identities (Khan 2024). The beginning of *Girmitiyas* is itself a beginning of a new world of slavery. This historical record of *girmitiyas* can be traced back on the date of 9th September 1834. On this day the very first 36 Indians extremely poor by economy and ruined by the future were caught by some *arkatias* (recruiters) in Calcutta. They were asked if they would be willing to emigrate to Mauritius in the hope of good fortune. This would be possible if they would agree on certain conditions and signed it on. They would be working on a period of 5 years or 10 years accordingly to their agreement. They were convinced in such a manner that they would be collecting money and digging gold from the island called then *miritchdvip*, just situated not so far from Bengal coast. These people agreed on this because they had already in Calcutta in the hope of work and all they needed is the work. Then they were made to appear before the chief magistrate of Calcutta Police Court, who would probably read out in a language they were alien to get their thumb on the agreement

paper. After seeing no objection from them and signed documents, they were authorised for emigration from Calcutta to Mauritius. These men became the torchbearers of over a million indentured labourers who left India for 82 years destined to different British colonies across the continents. Most of them were from North India, some from the unprosperous region of Chhota Nagpur plateau and Bihar in 1860s then also from Eastern United Provinces in the 1970s onwards. Most of them were economically coerced and represented lower class strata in the rural North Indian society. These people were the first victims of economic vicissitudes and victims of natural calamities. In those also migration was not new to the Indian people, for it was seen that even in pre-modern era they would move from one place to other in search of better living. This would happen due to the droughts, floods and also the constant depredation of taxes by the ruling authorities. The only difference would be seen that this migration would be within the Indian subcontinent and indenture would be beyond the physical boundaries of the subcontinent (Lal 2000, 99-101). The British colonial authorities attempted to prove that indenture system was not the form of slavery but an attempt of their employment and to protect the interests of indentured. On the contrary to this fact the indenture system remained inherently oppressive (Mishra 2009, 233). Now we will see that how the system of indenture promoted its emigration from the subcontinent, which in turn limited the mobility of the labourers. The colonial authorities made some changes and started recruiting them in a controlled mechanism. This became more strictly and moved towards the form of bond slavery. It was also seen earlier that many of them, were compelled to leave their native place and also because of their financial difficulties which made people believe that they had enrolled into the system voluntarily. But throughout the hiring process, some people also fell prey to 'deception and subterfuge.' Stories of kidnapping and deceit were common, and there is proof of many types of malpractice and abuse in the hiring process. Some were duped into believing they were 'in the Company service, doing Government work,' and they would not have enrolled if they had known differently (Anderson 2009, 99).

Informal networks of local recruiters such as *kanganis* in the South and *arkatias* in the North played a crucial role as intermediaries in the recruitment of low-income Indians under the indenture system. These middlemen were central to the colonial labour supply mechanism, operating as the first link between impoverished villagers and the

global circuits of indentured migration. However, the recruitment practices soon revealed two primary motives of the British colonial authorities: first, to establish an efficient system for mobilizing labour from the subcontinent, and second, to ensure the steady fulfilment of labour demands in the colonies even if it meant resorting to deceptive and coercive practices such as kidnapping and fraud. These methods, while effective in maintaining the supply chain, significantly tarnished the image of the indenture system. The credibility of indentureship came under increasing scrutiny, fueling campaigns by anti-indenture lobbies that condemned its exploitative nature and called for its abolition. The recruitment phase was identified as the most vulnerable point of misuse within the indenture system. Although colonial authorities later formalized recruitment, establishing a bureaucratic framework with officially appointed agents and sub-agents, the potential for abuse persisted. These agents operated through a hierarchized structure: recruiting from rural districts, assembling groups at nodal transit points, transporting them to the port of Calcutta, and finally overseeing their embarkation to overseas colonies. In theory, these agents bore the responsibility of ensuring that all emigrants were voluntarily migrating and were adequately informed about their destinations and the nature of their employment. In practice, however, the gap between policy and execution was stark, with many recruits being misled or inadequately prepared for the hardships ahead. The geographic origins of indentured labourers within India were varied, although over time, certain regional patterns became prominent. Initially, recruitment was concentrated in the northern parts of the subcontinent, particularly Bihar and the eastern districts of what was then the United Provinces. The primary source districts in Bihar included Chhapra, Shahabad, Champaran, Gaya, and Patna. In Uttar Pradesh, the districts of Varanasi, Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Basti, Bahraich, and Jaunpur emerged as significant recruitment zones. Over the decades, recruitment extended to the tribal belts in Eastern India and eventually reached the southern and western parts of the subcontinent. In the south, areas such as Chingleput, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, North and South Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, and Visakhapatnam became key catchment areas. Similarly, the coastal Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra also emerged as a notable source of indentured labour (Mishra 2009). In the early phase of the indenture system, the emigrants represented a mixed group from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Over time, however, a regional

pattern of destination-based preference began to emerge. Labourers from North India particularly from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh were predominantly dispatched to colonies such as Mauritius, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malaya (Malaysia), and Burma (Myanmar). On the other hand, indentured workers from southern India were primarily sent to Fiji, British Guiana (Guyana), and the colony of Natal (in present-day South Africa). These patterns were shaped both by colonial administrative preferences and by the evolving labour demands of the plantation economies in each destination (Ibidem).

Historical background and the rise of indenture

The abolition of slavery in the British Empire inadvertently gave rise to another exploitative system indentureship. In Mauritius, slavery formally ended in 1838, but as early as the 1820s and 1830s, colonial planters had begun sourcing long-term contract labour from India to fill the vacuum. Though a minor percentage of indentured labourers came from China, Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa, the majority were recruited from the Indian subcontinent. Between 1834 and 1909, an estimated 452,000 indentured labourers arrived in Mauritius, many of them men, women, and children. The transformation of Mauritius into a major sugar-producing colony coincided with global economic shifts. The demand for sugar surged after Britain removed trade restrictions in 1825 that had previously protected Caribbean sugar. Following two consecutive hurricanes in 1824 that devastated other crops such as coffee and cloves, Mauritian planters turned to sugarcane as a more resilient agricultural commodity. By the 1860s, nearly 20% of the island's cultivable land was covered with sugarcane, and Mauritius emerged as the leading sugar-producing colony, contributing over 6% of global output (Allen 1999).

Theoretical framework and methodology

Mauritius occupies a central role in global migration, notably in the history of indentured labourers for sugar plantation and agricultural pursuits. The abolition of slavery in 1833, inaugurated a vast and sustained experiment as indentured labourer. Khal Torabully's *Voices from the Aapravasi Ghat: Indentured Imaginaries* provides a poignant reconsideration of indenture history, offering a nuanced reinterpretation of the intricate dynamics of indentureship. His work foregrounds the diversities of ethnicities within the indentured diaspora, thereby contributing to the richness of Mauritius' cultural

tapestry. Over time, Mauritius evolved into a bustling hub for commerce, trade, and diplomacy, shaped profoundly by its diasporic communities. Today, the descendants of Indian indentured labourers who constitute nearly 65 percent of the population are widely recognized for their industrious ethos and progressive vision. This study situates Indian ethnicity and diaspora within Mauritius' socio-cultural fabric and considers its broader ramification on global migration history.

The analysis is grounded in a multi-theoretical framework that situates indenture as both a product of empire and a site of cultural creativity. Using the postcolonial theory and Michel Foucault's notions of discipline and power, the study interprets the indenture system not as a natural labour contract but as a mechanism of surveillance and regulation of migrant bodies. The archival sources including colonial registers, ordinances, and administrative correspondence are used to reconstruct recruitment practices and plantation discipline. To counterbalance the colonial archive, the research draws upon James C. Scott's theory of everyday resistance, emphasizing how indentured workers resisted domination through subtle acts such as desertion, cultural persistence, or reworking of religious practices. The subaltern studies provide an additional lens, directing attention to silences in the colonial record and privileging the fragmented voices of indentured. The cultural and memorial dimensions of indenture are approached through Memory Studies, particularly Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* and Marianne Hirsch's theory of post-memory. The *Aapravasi Ghat* is thus examined not merely as a historical site but as a living repository of collective memory, where rituals, commemorations, and oral narratives continue to transmit the legacies of indentureship across generations.

Methodologically, the research employs textual analysis of literature, and ethnography of everyday cultural practices, illustrative how the descendants of indentured Indians negotiate belonging within a multi-ethnic society. Finally, the study adopts a comparative historical approach by situating Mauritius such as Trinidad, British Guiana, and Fiji. By combining these theoretical frameworks with archival, ethnographic, and comparative methods, this inquiry does more than reconstruct a labor migration history. It interrogates the structures of domination, strategies of resistance, practices of memory, and diasporic transformations that continue to shape Mauritius today.

It positions Mauritius as both a microcosm of colonial modernity and a vital node in the global history of migration and diaspora.

The diversity of indentured in Mauritius

‘By the sweat of their brows, their trials, tribulations, toils and tears, the indentured labourers transformed the British colonies (including Mauritius, the first indentured colony).... They are our ancestors, we carry their names, their blood flows through our veins, they form an integral part of our origins and identities, our history is a continuation of their history...as we are their inheritors.’ (V.S. Naipaul, descendant and great scholar of indenture, born in Trinidad). The initiative of indenture was private and controlled by British planters and Franco-Mauritians from January 1826 to December 1842. During this period, it is estimated that 1,751 indentured labourers arrived in Mauritius under five-year contracts, primarily working on sugar estates, and a few in Port Louis (Peerthum 2017). According to records at the Mahatma Gandhi Indian Immigration Archives and the Mauritius National Archives, the first Indian indentured labourer to arrive in Mauritius was a 45-year-old Bengali Muslim named Mahomod (or Mohameth), who landed with his two sons, Ali and Hamad, on 23 January 1826. Hailing from Birali village on the outskirts of Calcutta, he was recruited by Captain Gaston of the colonial government to serve Mr. Oliver, a British manager at Gaillardon’s Company, at Pointe aux Piments Estate. By 1836, Mahamod was employed as a head servant in Captain West’s household, and in 1839, he purchased three arpents of agricultural land near Grand Bay to begin independent farming. With the support of his sons and the help of other former immigrants, he cultivated crops and supplied meat to the Vale Sugar Estate. By 1856, Mahamod and his family owned 31 arpents of land near the Vale Sugar Estate, purchased for 1,250 piastres, with Captain West as the sole guarantor. Mahamod’s success made his family one of the earliest prominent Indo-Mauritian landowning families in the Pamplemousses district. He passed away in 1876 at the age of 95 after a long, productive life as a head servant, small estate owner, and community leader. Captain West honoured him with an obituary in *Le Mauricien*, a rare gesture during the imperial age, especially from a British official to a former indentured labourer. Mahamod’s journey inspired further migration, encouraging others to come as contract workers to Mauritius.

Vijaya Teelock, a prominent scholar of indenture, observes that in the early phase, ‘Uninterruptedly, the Indian contractual labourers were introduced in Mauritius in small groups at the request of individual local planters’ (Ibidem). In the initial years, these early migrants from India and China were often employed in domestic roles such as babysitters, semi-skilled, and skilled labour under two- or four-year agreements. Companies like Thompson and Company played a pivotal role in these experimental recruitment efforts.

Regulation, recruitment, and the rise of indenture

As slavery faded out, Mauritian planters sought an alternative labour source to meet the increasing demand of the booming sugar industry. They supported the agreement-based indenture system over free labour to ensure a guaranteed and renewable supply of workers. This phase featured more structured, government-regulated recruitment and travel sponsorships. Legally, labourers were required to sign contracts in their home regions that specified the duration and nature of work. However, illegal practices such as forced recruitment, deception, and even kidnapping drew criticism from anti-indenture activists and reformers, who demanded its abolition. The Recruitment was the most misused aspect of the system. As noted in the *Report of Mr. JP Woodcock* (November 19, 1836), included in the *East Indian Labourers Bill 1838* (Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library), malpractice was rampant. In response, a more formal system developed with officially designated recruitment agents, sub-agents in rural districts, and port verification officers. These intermediaries were tasked with ensuring that emigrants left voluntarily and were well informed about their destinations and job conditions. The three major recruitment ports in India were Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras.

Although the colonial government oversaw departures, some labourers were clandestinely shipped from French-controlled Puducherry. Emigrants came primarily from present-day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, and Tamil Nadu, with later migrants from Haryana and other regions. Over time, a pattern emerged: South Indians were sent mainly to Ceylon, Myanmar, and Malaya, while North Indians were deployed to Natal, Fiji, Suriname, and the Guianas. During the early period, emigrants from various regions were dispersed to different colonies, reflecting both the diversity of Indian society and the expansive reach of British colonial labour policies (Mishra 2009).

A prominent indenture site: Bras d'Eau

The estate of Bras d'Eau holds one of the oldest archaeological records of plantations in the world that used enslaved labour. Privately held from 1786 until 1904, it now functions as a national park. This investigation focuses on the household compositions and domestic configurations occupied by enslaved and later indentured workers. Around 550 immigrants were placed to work on the Bras d'Eau estate in the mid-nineteenth century (MNA HA101: 263, 267; House of Commons 1847: 187; de Joux 1865: 147). Among them, women and children laboured alongside men who formed the majority of the enslaved population. Interestingly, although women were not legally permitted to sign indenture contracts, their presence increased significantly over time. Records indicate that women comprised around 11% of the labouring population in the 1840s, rising to 25% by the 1860s. This shift was due to colonial policies that mandated a minimum percentage of female passengers aboard ships transporting labourers. A similar rise was seen in the number of children, particularly in 1847, when 61 boys and girls (11%) were born on the estate (Haines 2019, 16).

Between enslavement and indenture: Continuities in landscape and labour

The indentured workers were placed in, and rebuilt, spaces previously occupied by enslaved people. This created a material and spatial continuity that blurred the transition between the two regimes. The misconceptions of colonial authorities about indentured labour and their relationship to land may have stemmed from the plantation's legacy of slavery (Haines 2019, 2). The material landscape of Mauritius changed only incrementally, resisting any clear temporal divide between the eras of enslavement and indenture. While Bras d'Eau's history originates in the slavery period, it shares architectural continuities with plantation sites across Africa and the Indian Ocean. However, the rising influx of Indian indentured workers gradually altered its character. Comparative studies of households allow archaeologists to trace everyday patterns and demonstrate the diversity of lived experiences within domestic spaces (Franklin 2020). The design of homes at Bras d'Eau reveals how the material and spatial infrastructure from the slavery era served as the foundational framework for indentured labourers' habitation (Haines 2019, 2).

Postcolonial identity and ongoing diaspora bonds

Mauritius's path to independence was shaped significantly by political pressure from India and international allies. However, a unified sense of nationalism has always been fragile. Ancestry, class, religion, and ethnicity continue to influence the island's political and social structures. As a result, diasporic identity has been deeply embedded in Mauritius since its emergence as an autonomous state. In 2015, the French Embassy and the Government of Mauritius commemorated the 300th anniversary of the French presence on the island, emphasizing enduring Francophone ties. France remains a key partner in infrastructure, education, and trade. It has helped fund major projects, including roads, a power station (1992), and the digitization of government services. France continues to be a major market for Mauritian textiles and a supporter of development initiatives (Metz, 1994). India, too, has played a central role. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described Mauritius as *Chhotta Bharat* (Little India) during his 2015 visit. India supports a range of development sectors from reducing Mauritius's dependency on sugar and tourism, to aiding in IT, health, and infrastructure. Educational and cultural initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre (RGSC), and Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture (IGCIC) all receive Indian backing. Indian-funded projects include the Metro Express, ENT hospitals, and social housing. Scholarships are also provided to Mauritian students pursuing higher education in India.

China and the Chinese-Mauritian diaspora

The Chinese community has also played a prominent role. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce was established in 1908 to protect Chinese rights and promote culture. China continues to assist Mauritius in technology, culture, education, and infrastructure. Its support includes building stadiums, bridges, and airport terminals. The opening of a Chinese Cultural Centre in 1988 further strengthened these ties. Chinese scholarships help Mauritian students and professionals pursue higher education abroad. Yet, building a cohesive diasporic link has proven more difficult. Some in the Creole community believe that the economic successes attributed to the Indian diaspora during the colonial era overshadow the traumas of African slavery (Lowe Swift 2007). This has spurred the Mauritian government to actively promote African and Creole heritage.

Recognizing African and Creole legacies

To balance historical narratives, Mauritius has made efforts to uplift African and Creole contributions. The Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, established in 1986, plays a central role in celebrating African identity. In 2008, *Le Morne Brabant* mountain where enslaved people leapt to their deaths to escape colonial capture was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The *Le Morne Cultural Landscape* now serves as a powerful memorial to resistance and suffering. Mauritius maintains strong ties with the African continent. It is a member of the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). While debates continue over which diasporic relationships should take precedence, Mauritius has benefited greatly from all of them particularly in education, development aid, trade, and cultural preservation (Ramtohul 2021). These enduring connections have helped maintain the island's linguistic, cultural, and economic vitality.

Conclusion

Indian indentured labour marks a pivotal moment in colonial history one where mobility and coercion were tightly interwoven. The *Girmitiyas'* migration was shaped by economic desperation, structural violence, cultural adaptation, and a remarkable resilience. Though colonial officials framed indenture as a voluntary and regulated system, the lived experiences of these labourers reveal a reality that closely mirrored slavery. From deceptive recruitment to harsh plantation life, the indenture system stripped individuals of autonomy, imposed racial hierarchies, and subjected many especially women to discrimination and abuse. Yet, amidst the brutal conditions, the *Girmitiyas* forged new identities and communities. They maintained, modified, and created cultural traditions that would shape the social fabric of countries like Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Fiji. In this sense, the legacy of indenture extends beyond the plantation economy it lives on in the language, religion, cuisine, and politics of these diasporic societies. Scholars who study indenture today not only expose the structural injustices of the system but also foreground the agency and cultural contributions of these migrants. The history of indenture, therefore, is not simply one of victimhood but also of endurance, adaptation, and cultural innovation. In Mauritius, the indenture system was central to reshaping the island's demography

and cultural identity. Indian migration under indenture led many to settle permanently, giving rise to a multi-ethnic society with strong diasporic consciousness. Postcolonial Mauritius, with its relatively stable democratic framework and institutional recognition of diverse histories, illustrates the long afterlives of indenture. The state's efforts to commemorate the abolition of slavery and the arrival of indentured labourers through national holidays reflect a politics of inclusive memory. Yet, the persistence of ethnic mobilisation in politics underscores the challenges of building a shared national identity in a society born of multiple diasporas.

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The cultural alienation in *Eating People Is Wrong* & *Türkler Almanya'da*

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Abstract: This paper explores the concept of cultural alienation in the context of migration through a comparative analysis of Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People Is Wrong* and Bekir Yıldız's *Türkler Almanya'da*. Bradbury's novel explores the challenges faced by foreign students from former colonies studying in England in the 1950s, highlighting their struggles with cultural clashes and social acceptance. Yıldız's novel, on the other hand, focuses on Turkish workers in Germany in the 1960s, examining their experiences of alienation due to language barriers, cultural differences and societal discrimination. Through the lens of postcolonial theory and concepts of alienation articulated by thinkers such as Ahmet Cevizci, Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, this study explores the psychological and social impact of migration on individual identity and cultural integration. The study also highlights how both groups experience feelings of estrangement and dislocation within their host societies, ultimately leading to a sense of alienation. By comparing these two novels, the paper sheds light on the persistent issues of cultural alienation in the context of migration and offers insights into the wider implications for contemporary society.

Keywords: cultural alienation, immigration, displacement, *Eating People Is Wrong*, *Türkler Almanya'da*

Introduction

Emigration, migration and immigration have been important phenomena for humanity for a long time. People are constantly leaving their own countries and going to live in another country for different purposes. To describe the difference between these three close and related words, it will be useful to look at their dictionary meanings. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, emigration is "the act of leaving one's own country to go and live permanently in

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another country". Migration is "the movement of people to a new country or area to find work or better living conditions" and immigration is "the process of coming to live permanently in a country other than the one in which you were born" (oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Accordingly, in *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959) by Malcolm Bradbury, some foreign students come to England from colonial countries for university education in the decolonization period just after the Second World War in the 1950s. On the other hand, *Türkler Almanya'da* (1966) by Bekir Yıldız deals with Turkish migrant workers who went from Turkey to Germany to support German industry in the early 1960s after World War II. Thus, both novels in this paper deal with migration and its related issues. In particular, the alienation of the immigrant characters in both novels from their new socio-cultural environment in a diasporic country is the focus of this paper.

The issue of alienation in general has been an ongoing debate since the years following the second half of the 20th century, especially after the Second World War, until today. This period is also called the decolonization period for European countries such as England, France, Spain, and Portugal. Since *Eating People Is Wrong* deals with foreign students from ex-colonies and *Türkler Almanya'da* deals with Turkish workers in a foreign country, first some general definitions of the term and then its cultural dimension will be evaluated below to better understand the problem of alienation in both novels.

Ahmet Cevizci (2005, 1728) defines alienation as an action or development that distracts or alienates someone or something from someone or something else. In particular, it is also defined as deviation from normal in psychiatry, the feeling of alienation from society, nature and other people around him/her in contemporary psychology and sociology. In philosophy, alienation is the process by which things and objects appear strange, distant and uninteresting to the consciousness, to the things that previously interested it. It is also indifference, lack of interest, and even boredom or disgust toward people with whom one has a friendly relationship. In addition, alienation has an isolationist dimension. It occurs when people feel alienated or disconnected from the norms and values of society when they feel excluded or lonely in social relationships. Alienation is also defined as "the sense of estrangement from society or the self that has been identified in philosophy, social science, and literature as a central feature of modern life" (Quinn 2006, 17). Marx also emphasizes the

term with dissatisfaction of factory workers with their work as a meaningful expression of themselves depending on capitalist conditions (Ibidem). In other words, in capitalist economic systems, workers who produce things feel that they do not have any ownership rights over the things they produce. Thus, “workers are alienated from the products of their labour” (Klages 2012, 5). After these literal definitions of the term, we will now focus on the cultural side of alienation.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002, 9) the displacement of immigrants from their homelands to unfamiliar diasporic lands (through migration, enslavement, transportation, and indentured labour) makes them culturally denigrated according to the supposedly superior racial or cultural model they encounter. Certainly, this creates a cultural alienation in both immigrant and host people. The main reason for this cultural clash is some ambivalent feelings of the immigrants:

Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better ‘then’ or ‘now’. Ambivalence towards the future: whether to retain a ‘myth of return’ or to design a new project without further expected movement built in. Ambivalence towards the ‘host’ society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. (White 1995, 3-4)

On the other hand, Frantz Fanon (1963, 222-223) asserts a relationship between the cultural alienation of the colonized natives to their literary products. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he points out that the history of the emancipation of the colonized consists of three phases. In the first assimilation phase, the colonized writes entirely from the colonizer's point of view. In the awakening phase, the native remembers only his past conventions and culture. However, he evaluates the past literary works from the point of view of the colonizer. In the third phase of the struggle, the native intellect composes its own revolutionary and nationalist literature. In contrast to Fanon's phases, Homi Bhabha uses the term “in-between” to contest a hybrid cultural identity for immigrants from Third World countries in European diasporas. According to Bhabha (1994, 1-2), new signs of identity, innovative sides of cooperation and contestation are possible for future Western societies. Similarly, Soren Frank (2008, 133) states that the immigrant, deprived of his homeland, language, and culture, seeks a new identity and personality in the diaspora. This new being is usually a result of the inter-negotiations of the people who construct

the society. Moreover, in the period of decolonization, many immigrants from the former colonies of Britain have been pushed to England; and as Çelikel (2011, 9-10) states, most of them have felt alienated, during hybridization process in the British culture. The main reason for this is that they are imaginatively excluded in the host country and they “may well live in new places, but they can be seen as not belonging there and disqualified from thinking of the new country as their home” (McLeod 2000, 212). All in all, it is clear that immigrants, whether they go for better living conditions or temporary jobs, encounter some cultural and identical problems in the diasporic countries that they move in. Therefore, according to the brief discussion of cultural alienation and identity problems above, first *Eating People Is Wrong*, and then *Türkler Almanya’da* will be evaluated.

Cultural alienation in *Eating People Is Wrong*

Eating People Is Wrong (1959) is a novel by Malcolm Bradbury, also known as a campus novel. In addition to being academic, the novel is also autobiographical. Bradbury inspired the subject of this novel from the University of Leicester, where he went as a student in 1950, he also characterizes Stuart Treece, the novel's protagonist, as himself in his twenties (Bradbury 2021). In addition, the setting of *Eating People Is Wrong* is an unnamed provincial university in England, characterized as a red brick university, and the period is the postwar 1950s. The protagonist of the novel, Stuart Treece, is a professor in the English department, by the general tendency of campus novels (Turan 2021, 247). As a campus novel and because of the social and political conditions of 1950s colonial England, there are many local and international students in this red-brick university. Nevertheless, the academic life in the educational institutions defined as Red Brick Universities in England at that time was not very bright for the students who studied there, no exception for English or other nations. For example, an English student named Louis Bates, a working-class and economically low student feels inferior and marginalized in campus life. He uses self-defence mechanisms to overcome this feeling of marginalization, as “he cried, throwing an intense, soulful look in Treece’s direction, I’m just explaining the conditions under which I live. I mean, these are my terms, and they’re what I think will make me do well here” (Bradbury 1962, 17). Like Bates’s discomfort on campus, despite being a British citizen, other international students,

such as those from Africa, also have problems of acculturation and origin. In particular, Eborebelosa, a West African, spends his days locked in the toilets. One evening, as the vice chancellor was about to leave for home, someone broke a window in the bathroom:

The Vice-Chancellor looked up, surprised, and nervous, and in the broken window, a frightened black face appeared. 'How do you do, sir,' said the face. 'I am in prison in the toilet.' 'Who are you ? ' said the Vice-Chancellor. 'Eborebelosa,' said the blackface. 'Are you a student here?' 'Yes, indeed,' said Eborebelosa (Bradbury 1962, 25).

Eborebelosa is one of Stuart Treece's students, and Treece knows him well. He comes from colonial West Africa to be educated in various subjects. Since he belongs to a terrorist group dedicated to driving the British out of Africa, he is particularly interested in making gunpowder and time bombs. At the Vice Chancellor's request, Treece talks to him about his toilet locks:

'Now, tell me, why do you hide in the lavatories?' he went on. 'Well, it's silly, isn't it? You can't go on hiding in lavatories all your life, can you? How many public lavatories are there in your country?' Eborebelosa was not roused even by this sally. 'Probably not many. You'll be hard put to it, won't you? Or is it just because you're in England that you hide in public lavatories?' [...]

'Are you afraid of something? If so, you must tell me, and we'll put it right. Are you unhappy?'

Eborebelosa nodded his head in quick movements.

'Why ? ' went on Treece. 'What's troubling you ?'

'I am despised by all,' he said suddenly in a deep clipped voice. People laughed at him, he said, because he was black and the other Negroes at the University did not like him because he was the son of a chief. He asked them for presents and they wouldn't bring him any. (Bradbury 1962, 27)

The above quote is striking from the point of diasporic problems, including cultural clashes. As stated above, Eborebelosa is an African black man who comes from a colonial third-world country to this British provincial university to study. However, the host country and its society do not welcome him. As a result, he feels physically and then culturally alienated in England. The physical alienation comes from his skin colour. He is black, and all black people here are accepted as strange and dangerous. We can understand this from the labelling of his native people as terrorists. Then this kind of physical exclusion from British society makes him culturally alienated as well. He feels himself to be different and inferior to British citizens, here to

British teachers and students. As a symptomatic result, he then locks himself in the toilets. It is clear, then, that both physical and cultural alienation become obsessive-compulsive neurosis. Next, Eborebelose tells Stuart Treece that he is the son of a chief in his village in Africa, and if people do not recognize him that way, he thinks he is nothing. Then Treece asks some questions about his accommodations in England:

‘Those are lodgings,’ said Treece. ‘That is not your house. What did you do there? Did you tell the landlady it was your house?’ ‘Yes,’ said Mr Eborebelosa. ‘What else did you do? Did you damage anything?’ ‘I have dogs to sleep in my bedroom. People also.’ ‘Women?’ asked Treece. ‘Some women; some men,’ said Eborebelosa.

‘You must be more thoughtful,’ said Treece. ‘We have great difficulty in finding landladies who are willing to accept Negro students as it is.’

‘A ha,’ cried Eborebelosa. ‘You see, sir, you see. You do not accept us.’ (Bradbury 1962, 28)

In the above, it is striking that Treece describes Eborebelose as negro instead of African or black. This situation reflects the general attitude of the British people who considered Africans inferior in the 1950s. As mentioned above, the 1950s was the beginning period of colonial migrations from ex-colonial countries to England and these diasporic movements started with the educational migrations of students. Thus, Eborebelose has some adaptation problems to university life and British society related to the cultural clash of the two nations. Moreover, the cultural clash that Eborebelose faces has two dimensions. On the one hand, Eborebelose sees himself as superior to the other black students because of his father's chief position. On the other hand, the British teachers and students are unhappy with Eborebelose's self-image and the abnormal behaviour mentioned above. At this point, Stuart Treece warns him like this: “You may be an important person in your country, but here you can only gain respect by the way you behave and the kind of person you are” (Bradbury 1962, 29). The result, however, is Eborebelose's cultural alienation and disillusionment, which leads to his obsessive-compulsive neurosis of locking himself in the toilets. Similar to Eborebelose's cultural clash above, there is another disturbance between Stuart Treece and other black students at one of the English Department's tea parties that Stuart Treece organizes for the foreign students:

A group of Negroes, who had been chatting quietly in one corner, dressed in their native robes, had to pray to Allah - or someone like that - in ten minutes and wanted to know where there was a consecrated room. 'We have no consecrated rooms,' said Treece, embarrassed. No consecrated rooms! Here, said the world, is a man who gives a party for foreign students and fails to provide a consecrated room (Bradbury 1962, 34).

The cultural clash above stems from the religious differences between the two nations. Here, neither Stuart Treece, representing the British, nor the African students know much about each other's way of performing religious rituals. Moreover, this situation is compatible with Stuart Hall's (1990, 223) first moment of black representation. He "shows how diasporic communities have used unifying and homogenizing modes of representation in response to some of the less welcome experiences of diaspora". The African student group in the tea event above is collectively acting and reacting against the social and cultural traditions of the host country. Thus, a cultural clash emerges at the point of understanding and tolerance between the black immigrant students and the British academics. From now on, similar cultural and social conflicts in *Türkler Almanya'da* will be treated comparatively in the following.

Cultural alienation in *Türkler Almanya'da*

As mentioned above, there are many black colonial students in *Eating People Is Wrong* who come to England to study. Similarly, *Türkler Almanya'da* tells the story of Turkish immigrants who went to Germany as foreign workers in the early 1960s. The author Bekir Yıldız is one of the leading figures of immigrant literature in Türkiye and *Türkler Almanya'da* is the first novel of this genre in Turkish literature (Koyuncu & Asutay 2018, 2). In addition, *Türkler Almanya'da* is an autobiographical novel and it narrates Bekir Yıldız's own work experience in Germany for four years. Like Yıldız himself, the protagonist Yüce goes to West Germany as a guest worker in the early 1960s (Töngür & Çevik 2021, 905). Thus, the act of migration in *Türkler Almanya'da*, unlike educational point of *Eating People Is Wrong*, is based on a financial issue. In his first year in Germany, Yüce is alone, but later his wife comes to Germany with their two daughters to support him economically. In the beginning, Yüce works in different factories in difficult situations and positions as the author Yıldız did himself. After that, he starts working as a printer in a printing factory. With the help of his wife, he managed to collect the money for a

printing press in four years. Then, again as the author Yıldız did himself, Yüce buys a printing machine from the factory where he works in Germany and returns to Türkiye.

As mentioned above, the protagonist Yüce migrates from Turkey to Germany in the early 1960s as an immigrant worker with a large group of Turkish people to support the industrial and economic situation of West Germany after the Second World War. However, when they first arrive in Germany, they encounter the social and cultural conflicts that arise from the national traditions and way of life they were used to:

Welcome. This is the city of Munich, Germany. In a moment, this group will be put on a train to Heidelberg. They will meet you there. You will go to the factory. After that, you'll learn the rest there. Look after each other. Some of you disappear. If something like this happens to you, you can ask around, don't get trampled, don't shout and scream. No one will be interested in you. In such cases, stay where you are, like a nail. Here the immobile person stands out so that you are recognised as a foreigner (Yıldız 2012, 21).

The German officers address the above statements to the group of Turkish workers coming to Germany for the first time. However, the voice speaking above represents the authority of the host country, which warns the immigrant workers in a childish and insulting way. The protagonist, Yüce, goes on to recount another striking situation on the train as they travel from Munich to Heidelberg:

We were both ashamed and afraid to move around too much on the train. Our fear was because our ties to the caravan could not tolerate being stretched out. Our embarrassment was due to our one-inch beard and the horrible expression on our faces, black with coal dust, which our locomotive had produced from Istanbul to Belgrade (Yıldız 2012, 21).

It is striking that Yücel's shame and anxiety here are very similar to the cause of Eborebelosa's confinement to the toilets discussed above in *Eating People is Wrong*. As Eborebelosa hides and withdraws from public view, Yücel avoids walking in the corridor and confines himself to his compartment so as not to be exposed to the other German travellers on the train. Yücel's confinement is particularly evident when he first sees the factory where he will work:

Seeing the factory, located 20 kilometres from Heidelberg, from a distance, we felt a sense of loneliness and isolation, which our two-day journey had increased even more. I felt as if I was going to be taken to a prison because of the air of guardianship of the Germans who took us there (Yıldız 2012, 21-22).

Just as Eborebelosa feels alienated from the physical environment in *Eating People is Wrong*, Yüce feels alienated from the physical conditions of the working environment in the host country. There is also a cultural and social conflict between the Turkish and German ways of life:

Only 8-10 people out of forty drank the beer. The German asked in amazement:

“Why don’t they drink?”

I told him that drinking was a sin and that some of them wanted water.

“But is beer a drink? There is no water to drink here. After a while there’s plenty of water in the hut they’ll take you to. But this water is undrinkable, you will bathe in it...”

When I translated the German words to my friends, some of them swore, and some said: “So it is true that there is no water here... How can there be fertility where there is no water!” they grumbled. (Yıldız 2012, 22-23).

Similar to the black students in *Eating People Is Wrong* above, it is clear that both culturally and socially, the traditional way of life of the German people is different from that of the Turkish workers. Therefore, cultural and social differences in traditions and way of life create a conflict between the two parties and affect the adaptation period negatively. Besides, there is also a striking incident when the German authorities face Turkish workers for the first time to distribute a convenient professional position to each of them:

He wouldn’t have liked my thin, delicate anatomy. With a hard expression: “Give me your hands,” he said. I put my hands out, and he said, “Come closer.” I came closer. The director checked my hands with his huge hands, looking at their size, whether they were small or big, soft or hard. And then he turned to the men next to him, who were all stubborn-faced: “Very soft and small,” he said. (Yıldız 2012, 24)

It is clear that the way the director treats Yüce, the Turkish worker, is derogatory. He examines the worker’s hands as objects and expresses a negative attitude towards them. Furthermore, the work position offered to Yüce is also problematic for him:

“You will work in the magazine,” said the director.

I didn’t understand the specific meaning of this word, so I asked the interpreter:

“What is a magazine, sir?”

The interpreter replied: “The warehouse where the machine parts are stacked.”

He replied:

I was angry, and despite the two huge diplomas my hometown had given me, I could only fit in the warehouse.

“No way, no way,” I said, “I have two diplomas. My last diploma is from the School of Printing. Why don’t you tell me they don’t run it?”

Interpreter: “It is shameful to dislike work here. It is arrogant to object to work. Will someone else do the job you don’t like?” (Yıldız 2012, 25)

Yüce’s displacement and disillusionment with the job he is offered is in line with Marx’s views on capitalism as stated above. Although Yüce is skilled in printing, he has to work in a position that he doesn’t want. Thus, it is clear that Yüce is alienated from his work. All in all, similar to the ones that the foreign ex-colonial black students in *Eating People Is Wrong* come across, the negative situations and attitudes that Turkish migrant workers face in the above examples constitute a cultural and social clash for both Turkish migrant workers and German host populations. The final outcome of these cultural and social clashes is seen in the form of alienation, displacement and self-confinement of the immigrants within the host society.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of Malcolm Bradbury’s *Eating People Is Wrong* and Bekir Yıldız’s *Türkler Almanya’da* explores the concept of cultural alienation in the context of migration. Both novels, set against the backdrop of post-colonial and migratory experiences, illustrate the profound challenges faced by individuals who find themselves in culturally and socially alien environments.

In *Eating People Is Wrong*, some black students came from the colonies to study in England in the 1950s. Coming from very different cultural and social backgrounds, they face very difficult conflicts in the host society’s way of life. In particular, the South African Eborebelosa wants the same opportunities as a chief’s son that he had in his homeland. He also wants to marry Emma Fielding, one of his English classmates, as his fourth wife. At the same time, a group of black students at a tea party need a special room for their Islamic prayers. Naturally, Eborebelosa’s selfish requests and those of other black students create a major cultural and social clash between their own and the host society. As these demands are not satisfactorily met by the host country and its people, the ultimate result is the dissatisfied, disillusioned and alienated migrant students in the host society. Even Eborebelosa hides in the toilets as an escape. Similarly, the immigrant workers in *Türkler Almanya’da* encounter a very different cultural and

social environment in the host country, Germany in the 1960s after World War II. The Turkish workers were despised and treated with contempt when they first settled in Germany. Like Eborebelosa above, the Turkish workers feel trapped and confined in the host society. So, like Eborebelosa, they avoid contact with any German authority. In particular, the protagonist Yüce has become alienated from his workplace because the director disregards his education and diploma.

Through the lens of postcolonial theory and the concept of alienation articulated by thinkers such as Ahmet Cevizci, Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, and Homi Bhabha, this paper has highlighted the psychological and social impact of migration on individual identity and cultural integration. Both novels underscore the persistent problem of cultural alienation, revealing how migrants' aspirations and cultural identities clash with the norms and values of host societies. By comparing these two narratives, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the broader implications of cultural alienation in migration contexts. The analysis highlights the need for greater social acceptance and integration strategies that recognize and respect migrants' cultural identities. This comparative approach not only enriches the discourse on migration and alienation but also offers insights into the ongoing challenges faced by migrants in contemporary society.

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Re-memory and the self-fragmentation of the dying subject in Max Ritvo's *Four Reincarnations*

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Abstract: This paper discusses *Four Reincarnations* by Max Ritvo as a poem of death, memory, and disintegration of self under terminal illness. The research is placed in the framework of the theory of trauma, the philosophy of illness and memory studies and offers an interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of how the work by Ritvo reinvents identity in crisis states. Trauma theory sheds light on the recursivity and fractured quality of his voice, in which traumatic experiences reappear in fragmented ways. The philosophy of illness emphasises the intrusion and vulnerability of the body that explains why Ritvo makes pain and decay disruptive and transformative. Memory studies and concept of narrative identity, position the poems as recursive interactions with the past which disrupt linear time but facilitate the ongoing reorganization of self. Close reading reveals that the article uses reincarnation, memory looping, and self-splitting as poetic devices that both dissolve and resist. It is argued that Ritvo makes dying a poetics of survival and creative reconstruction, in which fragmentation itself becomes a survival strategy. The article is an addition to the modern literature on illness and literature, which introduces the work by Ritvo as an influential intervention in the trauma, mortality and power of art to recreate identity discourses.

Keywords: re-memory, self-fragmentation, dying, philosophy of illness, Max Ritvo, *Four Reincarnations*

Introduction

Literature and illness intersectionality is a crucial location of interest in the medical humanities, providing a platform where human experiences of suffering, mortality and memory become sensible through aesthetic formulation (Wong 2023 & Awogu-Maduagwu

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2021). Sickness cannot be simply reduced to the biomedical line of definition: sickness is also an existential and psychological condition that redefines relationships between the subject and body, time, and self (Greco 2019; Osimen, Ehibor, Daudu & Alofun 2025). It is primarily in poetry, as a privileged location in the symbolic articulation, that it becomes particularly powerful. It serves both as a witness and as imaginative therapy: it documents the immediacy of corporeal crisis and recreates the crisis in the metaphorical and aesthetic frames that render endurance, however precarious, a possibility (McNichols & Witt 2018; Ilogho et al. 2020). An example of this duality is to be found in Max Ritvo's *Four Reincarnations*. Composed during the immediacy of terminal illness, the collection shows how lyric form can investigate the precariousness of embodiment, recursiveness of memory and splintering of selfhood in manners that do not succumb to reductive pathographies of despair.

Four Reincarnations cannot be reduced to a chronicle of pain. Rather, it stages a sustained meditation on mortality and the persistence of identity under the threat of annihilation. Composed in what may be described as the “strange light of dying young”; the poems chart the oscillation of selfhood between coherence and fracture (Tronson 2017, 55). A crucial conceptual lens for apprehending this oscillation is Toni Morrison's theory of *re-memory*, which conceives of the past not as a linear archive but as a recursive force that insistently reorganises the present (Sy 2021, 241). Ritvo's lyric voice dramatizes this very dynamic: memory dislocates and returns, disrupts and rebuilds, dissolves identity and simultaneously reconstitutes it.

Within this aesthetic economy, reincarnation operates less as metaphysical doctrine than as a generative poetic metaphor. It becomes a trope for imagining the survival of selfhood amid catastrophic change. In “Dawn of Man”, the haunting persistence of “phantom wings” signifies transformation without resolution, while in “Poem to My Litter” the self is grotesquely multiplied into fragile namesakes that externalise risk, finitude, and legacy. Across such instances, the body ceases to function as a coherent container of identity, emerging instead as a porous field in which selfhood strains toward continuity. Memory inscribes itself upon this body, whether through intrusive sensations that shadow pleasure in *The Senses* or through the spectral imagery of shared breath in “Living It Up”. Humor and irony, in this context, are not diversions but strategies of survival: gestures through which the poetic voice reclaims agency in the face of dissolution. The

result is a poetics where corporeal decay and metaphysical speculation coexist, creating a dialectic between suffering and imaginative resilience (Onwuka, Uba & Fortress 2019).

This study is anchored in three theoretical frameworks. They are trauma theory, the philosophy of illness, and memory studies. Trauma theory elucidates how Ritvo's lyricism enacts the belated, recursive return of unassimilated experience, fracturing linear temporality and destabilising identity (Caruth 1997). The philosophy of illness foregrounds the intrusive presence of the body in pain, emphasising how language both strains against and extends the limits of articulating embodiment. Memory studies, particularly Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity alongside Morrison's *re-memory*, underscore how the self is perpetually refigured through acts of storytelling and recollection (Ricoeur 1988; Pettersson 2024; Udoette 2023). Collectively, these frameworks situate Ritvo's work within broader discourses of suffering, identity, and the transformative capacity of language.

The research advances the argument that *Four Reincarnations* does not narrate closure but persistence. Ritvo transforms dying into a poetics of imaginative survival, wherein fragmentation itself becomes the condition of endurance. This study demonstrates how poetry not only represents but reconfigures the experience of illness. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship at the intersection of literature, trauma studies, and medical humanities, illuminating how lyric expression expands cultural understandings of mortality, vulnerability, and the resilience of the human spirit.

Reincarnation as poetic and psychological metaphor

Max Ritvo's *Four Reincarnations* employs the notion of reincarnation as a flexible metaphor for fragmentation, repetition, and the continual remaking of the self within the experience of terminal illness. Rather than a doctrine of religious rebirth, reincarnation functions as a way of imagining identity that is undone and reconstituted in cycles of dissolution and recovery. In "Dawn of Man", the speaker recalls a metamorphosis:

After the cocoon I was in a human body
instead of a butterfly's. ... I called that time,
overwhelmed with the ghosts of my wings, sleep. (Ritvo 2016, 81)

The image of phantom wings highlights how remnants of a former self linger, echoing trauma's recursive return. Ritvo's language suggests that the self never stabilizes; instead, it fractures, remembers, and remakes itself, mirroring the processes of illness where continuity is constantly threatened yet reasserted in altered forms.

This recursive sense of rebirth extends to the manifestation of multiple selves within the collection: child, lover, patient, witness, and ghost. The "child" self emerges in moments of innocent wonder that sit uneasily against the backdrop of suffering. In "Dawn of Man," the speaker confesses, "My thoughts remained those of a caterpillar, I took pleasure in climbing trees" (Ritvo 2016, 81), revealing a yearning for simplicity even while acknowledging the body's broken transformation. The "lover" self is present in "Hi, Melissa," where intimacy becomes prophetic:

When I kiss your ankle I am silencing an oracle.
The oracle speaks from the hill of your ankle. (Ritvo 2016, 41)

Here affection entwines with mortality, suggesting love as both anchor and revelation. The "patient" self comes through in "The Senses," where heightened bodily awareness is immediately undermined:

Everything feels so good to me:
my wool hat,
the cocoon of dryness in my throat. ... But I keep having thoughts—
this thought always holding at bay the next thought
until it sours into yet
another picture of dissatisfaction. (Ritvo 2016, 23)

Pleasure turns to anxiety, capturing illness as both sensory and cognitive disruption. Meanwhile, the "witness" self observes with dark humor, exposing suffering through irony. In "Poem to My Litter," Ritvo describes lab mice carrying his tumors:

I don't have any children.
I named them all Max. First they were Max 1, Max 2,
but now they're all just Max." (Ritvo 2016, 35)

This grotesque humor distances pain while acknowledging its inescapable reality, turning clinical experience into a metaphor for self-multiplication and loss. This spectral voice lingers between presence and absence, embodying the anticipation of nonexistence. The "ghost" self appears in poems such as "Afternoon," where death is spoken from its threshold:

When I was about to die
my body lit up ... And I am missing everything living
that won't come with me
into this sunny afternoon. (Ritvo 2016, 109)

Literalized reincarnation through embodied persistence beyond the human

Reincarnation in *Four Reincarnations* is not merely a spiritual or metaphorical cycle but often literalized as consciousness persisting in altered forms, a response to the body's betrayal by cancer. This literalization allows Ritvo to explore survival beyond physical dissolution. In "Dawn of Man," the speaker undergoes a jarring transformation:

After the cocoon I was in a human body
instead of a butterfly's. All along my back
there was great pain—I groped to my feet
where I felt wings behind me, trying to tilt me back. (Ritvo 2016, 33)

This reincarnation is visceral, marked by a painful mismatch between caterpillar consciousness and human form, critiquing embodiment as an absurd, ill-fitting vessel, akin to Camus's existential absurdity. The speaker's "thoughts remained those of a caterpillar" (Ritvo 2016, 33), suggesting a literal carryover of prior identity, where reincarnation becomes a defiant act against bodily annihilation. This persistence, though uncomfortable, underscores resilience: the self-endures through imaginative reformation (LaCapra, 2014, 32).

A more clinical literalisation emerges in "Poem to My Litter," where the speaker's tumours are transplanted into mice:

My genes are in mice, and not in the banal way
that Man's old genes are in the Beasts.
My doctors split my tumors up and scattered them
into the bones of twelve mice. (Ritvo 2016, 30)

This scientific reincarnation extends identity into animal proxies: "We watch each mouse like a crystal ball" (Ritvo 2016, 30). The speaker names the mice "Max," hoping "some good in you is of me" (Ibid., 31), blending irony with tenderness. Critically, this literalizes reincarnation as genetic dispersal, a biotech proxy for spiritual continuity, but it also critiques medical futility:

I wish it was perfect, but sometimes the death we see

doesn't happen when we try it again in my body. (Ritvo 2016, 30)

The mice “bleed to death” while the speaker retains “both my legs” (Ritvo 2016, 31), highlighting the gap between proxy and reality. Ritvo’s vision transforms reincarnation into a “hard-won” survival mechanism, where consciousness clings to fragmented vessels, echoing posthumanist ideas of distributed identity (McNeil & Haraway 1992).

Memory looping through the cyclical haunting of past and future

Memory looping, where past experiences and future anxieties cycle non-linearly, is a key mechanism in Ritvo’s poetry, reflecting the temporal disorientation of illness. Triggered by bodily decay, these loops trap the self in recursive patterns, serving as both torment and tether. In “Plush Bunny,” the speaker confronts a shrinking future:

My poor little future,
you could practically fit in a shoebox
like the one I kept 'pecial bunny in
when I decided I was too old to sleep with her. (Ritvo 2016, 73)

The memory of enclosing the stuffed bunny loops into anxieties about death:

I'd put a lid on the box every night.
I knew she couldn't breathe—she was stuffed,
but I thought she'd like the dark, the quiet (Ritvo 2016, 73)

This act mirrors the speaker’s entrapment in cyclical memory, projecting into an afterlife where “the eye traps it so where heaven should be / you see shadows” (Ritvo 2016, 73). Critically, this looping aligns with Freud’s repetition compulsion, where trauma (here, illness) demands replay, preserving identity but fragmenting it across time (Freud 2015). The poem’s cosmic dispersal, “space falls apart when you have unlimited time” (Ritvo 2016, 73) suggests that memory looping ensures continuity at the cost of coherence, feeding into reincarnative forms.

In “Poem in Which My Shrink Is a Little Boy,” memory looping takes a cosmic dimension:

You're the reincarnation of my psychoanalyst.
For all eternity we've switched off as patient and doctor. (Ritvo 2016, 56)

Past lives invade the present “Last life, you were at the zoo, and a monkey / tied your laces together” (Ritvo 2016, 57) blurring temporal boundaries. The poem’s irony, reducing divine order to “Velcro shoes” (Ibid., 57), critiques therapy as an endless cycle of unresolved trauma, while the looping structure “our souls twinned through countless bodies” (Ibid., 56) ties memory to reincarnation. This cyclical haunting, where “our chats are as important to God / as your thalamus is to you” (Ibidem), underscores how memory looping sustains the self but exhausts it, suspending identity in a “complex, multi-layered present” (Ibid., 51).

Fragmentation as imaginative survival

Self-splitting, where the consciousness fragments across forms, is the culmination of literalized reincarnation and memory looping, reflecting illness’s assault on wholeness. In “The Curve,” the speaker grapples with a cosmic force, “call it X,” that creates inadequate bodies:

gum around the bones,
a rash of gold or black,
eyes like blisters
leaking fondness. (Ritvo 2016, 19)

Language splinters the self looping into memories of a bicycle ride where sheens blur like “two bodies making love” (Ritvo 2016, 20). The speaker becomes “Skinny, hairy-chested, / made of pellets of rice” (Ibidem), a fragmented vessel embodying complication:

We imagine a vertical meadow
complicated into our world needlessly
but complication is all X ever wanted for us. (Ritvo 2016, 20)

Critically, this splitting rejects purity as illusion, aligning with Butler’s notion of identity as performative multiplicity. The self’s dispersal across forms ensures survival through fragmentation, a resilient response to bodily decay. In “Touching the Floor,” splitting is corporeal:

I touch my palms to the floor
and granite bulls surge up my arms
and lock in my shoulders. (Ritvo 2016, 85)

The body yields to mind with bulls falling “into a well, / their faces falling apart” (Ritvo 2016, 85). Memory loops in futile longing while reincarnation emerges in the speaker’s shift: “I used to want infinite

time with my thoughts. / Now I'd prefer to give all my time / to a body that's dying from cancer" (Ibidem). This critiques Cartesian dualism, favoring bodily persistence, and ties self-splitting to reincarnation as imaginative dispersal, where the self reforms in new vessels to transcend physical limits (Kirmayer 2024, 18)

Temporal collapse and broader context

Ritvo's poetry situates themes within a broader exploration of temporal disruption, where illness obliterates linear time, forcing past, present, and future into collision. In "Afternoon," the sensation of impending death triggers a looping query: "What am I missing?" (Ritvo 2016, 69). This blurs past vitality and present decay, with life flashing as 'all the wishes being granted in a fountain / at the same instant' (Ibidem). The future is imagined grimly in "The End," where the moon is "dark / like it had taken too many pills" and "all the animals went blind" (Ibid., 83), looping into existential doubt: "I wondered, at one point, / if I had in fact killed myself— / if death just meant spending / all your time with your past" (Ibidem). This temporal collapse, echoing Morrison's "re-memory", underscores identity's fragility, suspending the self in a fractured, multi-layered present. Irony and dark humour amplify this disruption, as in "Poem to My Litter," where the grim setup of tumor-bearing mice becomes absurdly tender: "I want my mice to be just like me. I don't have any children. / I named them all Max" (Ibid., 31). Medical imagery vividly captures deterioration, yet humor deflates despair, critiquing survival's absurdity. Ritvo's work transforms annihilation into imaginative rebirth, with self-splitting, memory looping, and literalized reincarnation affirming resilience: the fragmented self endures, endlessly reforming across forms and times (Scarry, 1985).

Irony and dark humour in Ritvo's poetry function as psychological armour, allowing the speaker to confront immense pain and the certainty of death with a semblance of control. Facing a body ravaged by cancer, the speaker wields wit to mock the absurdity of his condition, creating distance from despair while simultaneously exposing it. In "Poem to My Litter," the speaker describes transplanting his tumours into mice named "Max":

My genes are in mice, and not in the banal way
that Man's old genes are in the Beasts.
My doctors split my tumors up and scattered them
into the bones of twelve mice. (Ritvo 2016, 30)

The dark humour peaks as the speaker notes, “They bust open the legs of the mice. Who bleed to death” (Ritvo 2016, 31), anthropomorphizing the mice as “little Maxes” and ironically aligning their fate with his own:

I want my mice to be just like me. I don’t have any children.
I named them all Max. (Ritvo 2016, 31)

This self-referential jest mocks medical hubris and the inevitability of death, aligning with Freud’s view of humour as a defense against suffering, where laughter sublimates pain into rebellion. Yet, the humour is transparent: naming the mice “Max” humanizes the experiment, revealing the speaker’s longing for legacy and connection, thus exposing vulnerability beneath the wit. This transparency underscores how irony serves as a conduit for anguish. In “Zyprexa, the Snow Pills,” the speaker’s brain becomes “a suit of zippers, / soberly shutting” (Ritvo 2016, 87), a surreal image that mocks the numbing effects of medication while hinting at mental fragmentation. The humour barely conceals the desperation of a consciousness “too many wounds to zip up” (Ibidem). It is also noted that illness often forces a confrontation with absurdity, where humor becomes a way to “say the unsayable” (Sontag 1978, 45). Ritvo’s irony invites empathy by straining under the weight of reality, revealing a “profound emotional landscape” where pain is too raw for direct expression (Ritvo 2016, 30). The absurdity of joking about death highlights the speaker’s attempt to reclaim agency, making the reader complicit in both the laughter and the underlying grief.

Medical imagery and bodily deterioration as memory triggers and narrative devices

Medical imagery and bodily deterioration in *Four Reincarnations* are not mere descriptors but structural elements that drive memory and narrative, grounding the collection’s metaphysical explorations in the visceral reality of illness. The clinical details of cancer treatment become a somatic vocabulary, triggering memories that redefine the speaker’s past through the lens of present decay. In “Radiation in New Jersey, Convalescence in New York,” a medical procedure sparks a memory loop:

I awoke on a table with a blue cylinder pressed to my neck.
From deep inside the cylinder I heard a sound

like a trembling man
opening the smallest can of soup
a can with only one green bean in it. (Ritvo 2016, 59)

The sensory detail of the cylinder evokes a surreal memory, blending clinical sterility with emotional isolation, as the “green bean” symbolizes diminished vitality. This aligns with Toni Morrison’s concept of “re-memory,” where physical sensations summon past experiences that invade the present. The body’s pain thus becomes a portal, collapsing temporal boundaries and forcing the speaker to relive healthier selves or lost connections through illness’s distorting lens.

Bodily deterioration also serves as a narrative device, charting the speaker’s journey toward death with clinical precision filtered through lyrical subjectivity. In “The End,” the speaker observes, “I have a dark bruise on my body / where a tail would come. / If I put pure water in my mouth / and cough it out, it’s mud” (Ritvo 2016, 84). This vivid imagery of decay maps the body’s decline as a narrative arc, echoing Susan Sontag’s observation that illness becomes a “metaphor for mortality” (Sontag 1978, 13). The physical progression dictates the emotional and philosophical landscape, as in “Touching the Floor,” where “granite bulls surge up my arms / and lock in my shoulders” (Ritvo 2016, 85), signaling bodily failure that prompts existential reflection:

I used to want infinite time with my thoughts.
Now I’d prefer to give all my time
to a body that’s dying from cancer. (Ritvo 2016, 85)

This corporeal focus grounds abstract themes in the undeniable reality of a dying body, ensuring reader connection to the speaker’s visceral truth.

Ritvo’s interplay of irony, dark humour, and medical imagery constructs a portrait of a self under siege, where psychological defenses and bodily realities converge to confront dissolution. Irony shields but reveals vulnerability, as in the tender absurdity of naming mice “Max” (Ritvo 2016, 31). Medical imagery, as in the “blue cylinder” or “dark bruise” (Ibid., 59, 84), triggers memories and drives narrative, anchoring the speaker’s fragmented identity in the corporeal. Ritvo’s poetry masterfully depicts a self-unmoored from conventional temporal progression, where the past, present, and imagined future converge and collide. The experience of illness frequently obliterates the seamless flow of time, forcing the speaker into a fragmented

existence where memory becomes fluid and predictive anxieties loom large. The past does not simply recede but actively invades the present, often triggered by bodily sensations or internal states. This “re-memory,” as theorized by Toni Morrison, where personal history insists on its presence, is palpable in poems where a current physical discomfort might suddenly transport the speaker to a moment of past vitality or trauma. For example, a fleeting sensation might unlock a vivid childhood memory, blurring the boundaries between healthy past and ailing present. Simultaneously, the dying self frequently projects into an imagined future, speculating on post-death existence or the impact of their absence. This future can be fantastical, grim, or ironically mundane, as seen in the various “reincarnations” where the self is imagined as something else entirely. This temporal collapse underscores the fragility of identity, demonstrating how the linear narrative of a life is fractured by the immediacy of illness and the impending end, leaving the self-suspended in a complex, multi-layered present.

In “Poem to My Litter,” the speaker anticipates death by adopting a darkly humorous, detached perspective on his own mortality, imagining a future where his ‘progeny’ (mice named Max) also face their demise. The line, “they bust open the legs of the mice. Who bleed to death” (Ritvo 2016, 31), speaks from a present observation that collapses into a generalized, almost biological inevitability, while projecting forward:

Next time the doctors plan to cut off the legs
in the nick of time so the tumors will spread. (Ritvo 2016, 31)

This is a speaker simultaneously in the present (observing the mice) and inhabiting a future beyond his own death. “Living It Up” similarly plays with temporal shifts, reflecting on immediate bodily sensations while always aware of the encroaching future. The poem notes “we must learn to share a bed, / we must learn to share a body” (Ritvo 2016, 18), shifting from a present of shared vitality to an intimate coexistence with an intangible, encroaching emptiness, suggesting a future state of bodily dissolution:

The money is running out.
We will have to split one needle
this winter—one end for me,
one end for air. (Ritvo 2016, 18)

Irony and dark humor as psychological defences

One of the most striking features of Ritvo's poetics is his adept use of irony and dark humour, which function as sophisticated psychological defenses that simultaneously expose profound vulnerability. Facing immense physical pain and the certainty of death, the speaker often employs wit as a shield, a means of asserting agency and maintaining a semblance of control over an uncontrollable reality. This humour is rarely light; it is often acerbic, surreal, and tinged with a deep awareness of absurdity. For instance, in "Poem to My Litter," the speaker's grotesque experiment with the mice, followed by his detached observation of their death, allows him to externalize and process his own mortality with a chilling, yet oddly comforting, irony:

I want my mice to be just like me. I don't have any children.
I named them all Max. (Ritvo 2016, 31)

The humour here functions as a protective layer, allowing the speaker to mock his own fate and transform the tragic into the darkly comedic. However, these defenses are transparent. The irony exposes, rather than conceals, the underlying pain, fear, and desperation. The humour often serves as a conduit for vulnerability, allowing the reader to glimpse the raw anguish that necessitates such a strong psychological barrier. It is a way of saying, "This is too painful to speak of directly, so I will make it absurd." The speaker reveals his profound emotional landscape, inviting empathy precisely because the defense mechanism is so visibly strained by the weight of his reality.

Psychic disarray and non-linearity of memory

Ritvo's formal choices mirror the psychic disarray and non-linear memory of a self-grappling with mortality. Enjambment and stanza breaks emulate the recursive, insistent force of memory, aligning with Toni Morrison's "re-memory," where past experiences invade the present unbidden (Morrison 1987). In "Living It Up," enjambed lines connect bodily sensation to existential dread:

The bed is on fire, and are you laughing?
You leave the bed
and leave me without thought. (Ritvo 2016, 17)

The break after "bed" shifts from visceral imagery to emotional abandonment, echoing how illness triggers memories of loss. Stanza

breaks, as in “The Senses,” leap from sensory pleasure to mental fragmentation:

my mind
like a black glove
you mistake for a man
in the middle of a blizzard. (Ritvo 2016, 23)

This abrupt shift mirrors memory’s non-linear intrusions, where physical sensation summons disjointed thoughts, denying the reader stable footing.

Surreal imagery amplifies this effect, externalizing internal turmoil. In “Holding a Freshwater Fish in a Pail above the Sea,” the speaker’s struggle to protect a koimorphs into a dreamlike absence:

You aren’t here
but I’m aware
that somewhere
you have moved. (Ritvo 2016, 26)

The enjambed, halting lines and surreal fish imagery reflect a consciousness fractured by illness, where memory loops between present pain and past connections, collapsing temporal boundaries. These formal disruptions immerse readers in the speaker’s disoriented landscape, embodying the non-linearity of a mind under duress.

Structure of the collection as a reincarnatory spiral

The collection’s structure eschews linear progression for a reincarnatory spiral, reflecting the speaker’s cyclical journey through multiple selves. Rather than a chronological or thematic arc, *Four Reincarnations* revisits motifs like bodily decay, love, and existential musings with variations, suggesting continuous dying and becoming. The titular “four” implies multiple iterations, yet the collection’s four sections do not resolve neatly; instead, images like bulls, birds, or tumors recur with altered tonalities. For example, the “three black bulls” in “Black Bulls” (Ritvo 2016, 35) echo the “granite bulls” in “Touching the Floor” (Ibid., 2016, 85), but shift from mental anguish to physical failure, spiraling through different facets of collapse. This cyclical structure aligns with Judith Butler’s view of identity as performative and iterative, constantly re-formed through repetition with difference (McIntosh & Butler, 1991).

Poems like “The Watercolor Eulogy” and “Poem to My Litter” revisit love and legacy, but through shifting lenses—e.g., a “glowing

shroud” (Ibid., 27) versus “Max” mice (Ibid., 31) suggesting the self as a composite, “re-stitched” across incarnations. The collection’s non-linear progression invites readers to experience this recursive unfolding, not as a journey to a singular end but as a spiral of remembering and re-imagining. This structure reinforces the resilience of identity, which, as Timothy Donnelly notes, “haunts” through its multiplicity, becoming “a necessary and sustaining part” of the reader’s understanding of life (Ibid., 6). Ritvo’s poetic form embodies the fragmented, non-linear experience of illness. Ritvo constructs a portrait of a self that persists through fragmentation, defying mortality with imaginative resilience.

Conclusion

Max Ritvo’s *Four Reincarnations* is a remarkable testament to a poetics of dying, where the poet navigates the terrain of terminal illness with rare intellectual sharpness and emotional honesty. The collection is deeply engaged with memory, presenting it as both a source of solace and an instrument of dissolution. Ritvo’s voice is distinctive in its combination of candour, dark humor, and inventive form, shaping a narrative of selfhood that is at once fragmenting under the weight of disease and persistently reforming through art. The poems embody a tension between continuity and collapse, reminding readers that the self in the face of mortality is both unstable and enduring. Memory is central to Ritvo’s exploration of dying, operating as a recursive force that grounds the speaker while simultaneously unsettling him. It offers comfort by recalling moments of intimacy, vitality, and human connection, anchoring the speaker to a past self that precedes the devastations of illness. At the same time, memory disintegrates stability, as recollections return in distorted and fragmented forms, breaking down coherent identity. Ritvo’s treatment of “re-memory” exemplifies this tension, highlighting how the insistent resurfacing of personal history reshapes the present in unexpected and often painful ways.

Beyond personal testimony, *Four Reincarnations* reveals broader implications for how poetry confronts mortality. Ritvo offers a linguistic framework for articulating experiences often deemed beyond words, exposing the psychic disarray and temporal collapse of chronic illness. His use of irony and humor is not merely defensive but serves as a shared lens of vulnerability, making the unbearable bearable through the absurd. Even as the body deteriorates, memory enables the

refiguration of identity in fractured but meaningful ways, demonstrating that life's story can be continually reimaged through art. This assertion ensures the endurance of the self in its very fragmentation. Future studies could situate Ritvo alongside poets of illness such as Jane Kenyon or Jack Gilbert, illuminating varied treatments of pain, spiritual struggle, and mortality. His place among posthumous voices also raises critical questions about reception, legacy, and the ethics of reading a final statement of life.

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Subverting the Anthropocene and Capitalocene in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* while heading towards proto-Symbiocene

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Abstract: Hardy's novel combines various temporal layers, the nostalgia of the fleeting past (the warm, idyllic natural landscape), the present when the author ponders over the demise of the traditional ecosystem and the transformation of his own self, and the temporality of "afterwards" (Lanone 2022), the future in which he will not participate and will not watch over nature and its idyllic atmosphere. This survey applies Glenn Albrecht's notions of solastalgia, terraphthora and terranascia (2019), three neologisms which he invented to define the psychosocial effects of environmental degradation, to the analysis of Thomas Hardy's *Tess*. Various scenes from this novel present either pessimistically or nostalgically the social and environmental consequences of industrialization. Each of these fragments criticizes the destructiveness Hardy observed in the Wessex landscape, as well as the spiritual, moral and economic changes brought about by this degradation, or provides the remedies to address these issues. While nowadays Hardy's views may be viewed as outdated, we can learn from his recognition of ecocidal dangers which were evident more than a century ago, thus we can presume the Victorian writer was heading towards the proto-Symbiocene.

Keywords: Anthropocentric, Capitalocene, solastalgia, Symbiocene, ecofeminism

Introduction

The Anthropocene is a term used in defining an era in which the humans have been designated as the ones who forcibly dominate earth and greatly influence the bio-geophysical processes. This concept also defines a new geological epoch in Earth Sciences whose effects (climate change, biodiversity loss, mass extinction of fauna and flora, the presence of microplastics in various ecosystems) have impacted the

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planetary system (Crutzen & Stoermer 2000, 17-18). Academic interest in the Anthropocene has been intensified by the growing awareness of its impact in the public sphere, thus transforming this term into a socially and politically constructed idea which once again stresses upon long-standing socio-economic inequalities.

However, we concur with Donna Haraway (2011) and Jason Moore's proposal (2015) of considering the Capitalocene as the geohistorical epoch during which capitalism was a central element in the making of the climate crisis. The conceptual use of Capitalocene originates with Andreas Malm (Moore 2017, 237-279) who agrees with Karl Marx that capitalism with its imperative accumulation of capital pushes towards the re-shaping of various environments and towards the exploitation of both humans and the natural world, transforming them into 'cheap' resources. After studying the Capitalocene thesis, we consider that the expansion of capitalism forced the degradation of the environment and the commodification of land and labour for capital accumulation. The power structures specific for the Capitalocene also emphasize "the appropriation of unpaid work/energy delivered by women, nature, colonies" (Ibid, 247) which invites us to offer an ecofeminist reading of literature.

The ecofeminist reading of different novels underlines the way in which women and animals/ nature suffer more severely than men the ecological catastrophes, the destruction caused by industrialization, the effects of developing economies, of patriarchal cultures. Ecofeminism is a term coined in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* and later developed by Greta Gaard in her essay "New Directions for Ecofeminism" (Gaard 2010, 643-665) that revealed how men, due to their superior position in patriarchal societies, are responsible for the women's oppression and for the destruction of nature. The newly developed environmental ethics has led to casting a light on several novels regardless of the biological sex of the authors.

Despite being a male author, Thomas Hardy's work can be subjected to an ecofeminist reading due to his interest in environmentalism, in conservating the natural landscape and local communities. The prevailing patriarchy and capitalist development of the Victorian society specific to the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene threatened the heroine (Tess), but also the animals and the land. Patriarchy by advocating only for the rights of males has "led to the degradation of nature land and animals along with the

marginalisation of groups including but not limited to women, children and people of colour” (Regan 2023). Moreover, capitalism aggravated the women’s oppression, as it was only interested in getting productivity at any cost; women were considered weak because many of their attributes were not valued by the pragmatic society and their apparent ‘worthlessness’ subjugated women even more and disproportionated the women’s rights in society. A key concept of the Capitalocene is the ‘cheap nature’ which defines the process through which natural elements (water, earth, forests, animals) and some categories of humans are constantly exploited, devaluated and degraded so that they become more profitable for the capitalist expansion.

According to Richard Kerridge, Hardy’s works employ a type of ecocriticism which is not necessarily preoccupied with an abrupt withdrawal from society, but more with nature writing (Kerridge 2001, 126). However, Anna West (2016), Peggy Blin-Cordon (2016, 1) and Annie Ramel (2015, 33) emphasize Thomas Hardy’s concern for animals, for the close relationship between animals and women, insisting on the author’s repetitive attempts at providing a voice for these vulnerable beings that were often silenced or given just a strangled voice. Besides his interest in the conservation of species, rather than adopting a sense of anthropomorphism (the projection of human feelings on the nonhumans), Hardy implies that humans imitate the animals’ violence; however, animals kill to survive, but men’s killing turns into slaughter which endangers the biosphere. Furthermore, the author endows certain objects (steam engine machineries) with hyperpowers that appear to threaten both the idyllic landscape (like Talbothays dairy farm) and the female body (as it happens at Flintcomb Ash).

Subverting the Anthropocene and Capitalocene through an ecofeminist reading

The ecological dimension of Hardy’s work emerges in his attempts of rejecting the humans’ central position in nature (the Anthropocene), thus forcing his readers to re-evaluate the status of non-human beings. Hardy’s protagonists are known for their strong empathy for the suffering of animals. Both Anna Feuerstein (2018) and Marie Bertrand (2022) sensed how Thomas Hardy “encouraged more equality between animals and humans” and made his characters sympathize with the animal condition: this would be the reason for which Tess described

Prince's (the horse's) killing as a murder, blaming herself for falling asleep, though it was not her responsibility to take the bee-hives to town – it was her father's carelessness and alcohol addiction; later, when she kills animals again, the writer underlines the pheasants' miserable state – having been hunted down and wounded by hunters in the forest – so, the birds were practically offered mercy by Tess, thus the woman is absolved of murder again. These episodes make Hardy an advocate for a better treatment of animals making their killing “the origin of crises or plot twists” (Blin-Cordon 2016, 2), rather than showing his ecocritical perspective through a type of anthropomorphism found in fables, where this was meant to serve for moral purpose. Tess is continuously defined as “a wholly organic character whose consciousness and body were born from the earth, as an early fictitious spokesperson for posthumanist thought” (Ibidem) as it can be seen in:

she could answer no more than a bare affirmative, so great was the emotion aroused in her at the thought of going through the world with him as his own familiar friend. Her feelings almost filled her ears like a babble of waves and surged up to her eyes. (Hardy 1965, 194),

although her nicknames – “genuine daughter of nature” as Angel calls her (Hardy 1965, 120) or “a child of the soil” as her mother thinks of her (Ibid, 369) – indicate how strongly her body is embedded in the natural landscape, making Marie Bertrand believe that “she was not simply born from but made of” nature (Bertrand 2022).

Based on these phrases with which Thomas Hardy defines Tess' connection to nature, Md. Nuruzzaman (2017, 154) calls the heroine “the other self of nature” because each time Tess attempts to start fresh after every tragic incident in her life, she somehow fails because of the Anthropocene's harsh treatment of her: after several misfortunes (Prince's death, Tess' seduction by Alec D'Urbervilles, her son's birth and death, her deception by Angel Clare, the forced move from her childhood home), the human beings are the ones who prevent her from evolving. Moreover, Tess, as a human being, never tries to control nature, consequently, the ecofeminist reading of the novel is based on how the heroine struggles to survive the harsh situations that are not her or nature's doings, this suggesting that Tess is a victim of the Capitalocene. The woman's oppressors are the same abusers who control and colonize nature, therefore one can “see Tess and nature as a surrogate of each other” (Ibidem).

We concur with Eithne Henson (2011, 127) that “Hardy’s landscapes are inescapably gendered” especially when one reads fragments like this:

But those of the other sex were the most interesting of this company of binders, by reason of the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times. A field-man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it. (Hardy 1965, 87–88)

The writer emphasizes the clear difference between the man and the woman and how they both relate to the environment; if a field man can preserve his individuality, this is not the case of a field woman who loses it and is assimilated in the field she is working on. By losing her individuality, the woman becomes a mere object which can be exploited by men just like the field itself. The patriarchal mindset objectifies the female body, abuses it and never allows it to evolve into a whole human being. Her frequent embedment into the Wessex soil makes Tess a sure victim of the male characters who threaten, abuse and deceive her, thus stifling her and allowing her no other option than letting her womanhood/femininity be absorbed by the natural world.

Besides destroying the landscape, the mechanized agriculture is depicted by Hardy as a patriarchal figure that tortures the female body, too:

barely visible was the red tyrant that the women had come to serve—a timber-framed construction, with straps and wheels appertaining—the threshing-machine which, whilst it was going, kept up a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves. (Hardy 1965, 269)

Though the scientific progress specific for industrialization was meant to help women-workers and reduce their effort, at Flintcomb-Ash, this machine produces the opposite effects. “The inexorable wheel continuing to spin” (Ibid, 270) refers not only to the machine components, but it could also symbolize the hastened passing of time in capitalism, when workers are no longer treated as human beings, but as tools, as accessories. Women “serve” a “despotic”, a “tyrant” whose demands put pressure on their bodies, shortening their lunch break because the machine’s endless consumption of stacks of straw does not allow them to leave their positions: “A hasty lunch was eaten as they stood, without leaving their positions, and then another couple of hours

brought them near to dinner-time” (Hardy 1965, 270) and because Farmer Groby “insisted upon their being on the spot thus early to get the job over, if possible, by the end of the day” (Ibid, 269). Both man and machine demand the women to serve their purpose, to get the work done as quickly as possible so that the Capitalocene should accumulate the necessary profit out of these ‘cheap resources’: “For some probably economical reason it was usually a woman who was chosen for this particular duty” (Ibid, 271). The women are required not only “the endurance of their muscles”, but also of their nerves as “the penetrating hum of the thresher thrilled to the very marrow all who were near the revolving wire-cage” (Ibid, 270), trying to control body and mind, by keeping both constantly focused on what the threshing-machine demands from the female workers.

On Farmer Groby’s personal orders, Tess is placed in the most difficult position – on the platform of the threshing machine to untie the sheaves of corn handed on to her by other people: “It was the ceaselessness of the work which tried her so severely, and began to make her wish that she had never come to Flintcomb-Ash.” (Ibid, 271). If other women, like Marian or Izz,

could stop to drink ale or cold tea, to exchange a few gossiping remarks while they wiped their faces or cleared the fragments of straw and husk from their clothing; for Tess there was no respite; for, as the drum never stopped, the man who fed it could not stop, and she, who had to supply the man with untied sheaves, could not stop either. (Hardy 1965, 271)

Moreover, Farmer Groby objected to Tess being replaced by other women, thus, it becomes quite evident that the man used the machine to entrap the female body and to punish Tess for eluding his sexual harassment. For not accepting her body to be touched by Farmer Groby, Tess must accept the ceaseless shaking of the machine, its noise and smoke. So, the machine abuses the female body instead of the lecherous man, and agriculture becomes an inhuman activity for both the land and the women.

Furthermore, the “red tyrant” (as the threshing machine is called) is controlled by an engineer who “serves only fire and smoke” (Ibid, 270) and is not interested in being a part of the agricultural world: “hardly perceiving the scenes around him, and caring for them not at all” (Ibid, 271). He does not want any “intercourse with the natives” (Ibid, 270) or “the autochthonous idlers” (Ibid, 271) and has come to this village to “discompose its aborigenes” (Ibid, 269). This kind of behaviour and

the use of such terms remind us of colonization and foreground Thomas Hardy's proto-ecofeminist attempt to show how the Capitalocene man colonizes both the land and the woman's body. The engineer displays the mindset of a white supremacist who abuses the land for the sake of productivity, who scorns the natives out of colonial purpose, and who subjugates the women's body with the help of the machine he steers. Unknowingly, the engineer becomes Farmer Groby's accomplice in his sexual harassment, thus helping another man to colonize the woman's body. Groby's gesture of selecting Tess for the most difficult tasks comes as his punishment for her because she resisted his sexual harassment on the road to Flintcomb-Ash. To further abuse the woman's body and mind, the author re-introduces Alec D'Urbervilles in the text exactly when the female body is plagued by the endless shaking of the threshing machine. Consequently, the patriarchal Anthropocene dominates and harms the heroine through sexual harassment, as well as through agricultural work, thus allowing us an ecofeminist reading.

Hardy's Proto-Symbiocene inclinations

As Thomas Hardy is seen as having a rather sceptic view on the progress of science and technology of the 19th century, he signals the irreversible changes caused by the man's invasive practices during the Anthropocene. If in the early stages of the novel, Wessex seems unaffected by modern science and technology, and "natives are happy with their pagan mindset, poverty and simple way of living" (Blin-Cordon 2016), later the new machines brought in the village disturb the rural inhabitants because this new technology forced them to change their lives and ruined their harmonious relation to nature. Hardy's men prove their inability to foresee the consequences of their actions, or to feel the pain they inflict on others (non-humans or women). Therefore, he directs the readers' attention to the fauna and flora because he desperately wants the readers to observe more carefully the ecosystem which deserves to be preserved, and which includes humans as considerate collaborators, not as hubristic landowners. The novel presents itself as "a performative wake-up call" (Lanone 2022).

The Symbiocene is a conceptual framework in philosophy, coined by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2019, 20-33) used to define an envisioned future era where humans and non-humans (particularly fauna and flora) will be living in a balanced

relationship as companions rather than indulging in the former power structures as colonizer – colonized or exploiter – exploited. The word derived from the Greek “symbiosis” (living together) and “-cene” (the geologists suggest nowadays that this suffix derived from the word “new” should indicate the recent geological eras) means the reintegration of human deeds or activity into the natural world and natural processes. This future geological epoch rejects the Anthropocene with its extractive, exploitative and disruptive characteristics and focuses on regenerative practices and on the co-existence and co-evolution of the human and the natural world meant to ensure a long-term viability. In Thomas Hardy’s novel, we can trace the principles of symbiosis based on the mutually beneficial relations that can be established between the humans and other forms of life, consequently, his work can be considered proto-Symbiocene. By offering an ecofeminist reading of *Tess*, we also intend a profound conceptual shift from the male dominance and human exploitation of the natural resources to a model of shared existence, suffering, reciprocity. Hardy’s proto-Symbiocene is marked by his rejection of the pre-industrial past, by a practical integration of machines and humans within natural systems for mutual benefits and with deep consideration for the environment.

Talbothays represents the pastoral idyllic world of Wessex which Hardy was so fond of, though not neglecting the ordinary work from a dairy farm. The readers can sense the writer’s solastalgia when he depicts this space pervaded by a sense of togetherness, bringing humans and animals together, heading to a Symbiocene-like interconnectedness. This is a space where the Anthropocene is weaker because Dairyman Crick is presented as a gentle patriarch, and the farm functions as an organic microcosm, as close-knit community. The sensory images employed either to ooze eroticism or to share the readers certain annoying details of daily life are meant to emphasize the direct and strong connection between nature and certain characters. For instance, the dairymaids live, work and sleep with “the smell of the cheeses in the adjoining cheeseloft, and the measured dripping of the whey from the wrings downstairs” (Hardy 1965, 96). Furthermore, the male author depicts Tess with the attributes used for elegant ladies, though she is just a dairymaid, engulfed in the natural world: while milking the cows, Tess is seen by Angel like “a cameo cut from the dun background of the cow” (Ibid, 126). Furthermore, the activity of milking – though a process where milk is just a commodity and the

dairymaids strive to produce more – in Tess’ hands transforms into a tactile metaphor meant to indicate the rhythmicity of the work: she presses “the udders so gently as to be a rhythmic pulsation only, as if they were obeying a reflex stimulus, like a beating heart” (Ibid, 126–27). In the Symbiocene of Hardy’s Wessex, human actions or emotions nurtured by humans are repositioned in a special relationship with all living beings to enhance mutual interdependence, or mutual affinity; thus, it comes as no surprise that Angel woos Tess “at the cow’s side, at skimmings, butter-makings, cheese-makings, among broody poultry, among farrowing pigs—as no milkmaid was ever wooed before by such a man” (Ibid, 153). Human development will not harm the other species and will include nature every step on the way, without insisting upon pragmatic activities: the cows are “maddened by the gad-fly” (Ibid, 126) and during the hot summer, the flies “in the kitchen were lazy, teasing, and familiar, crawling about in unwonted places, on the floor, into the drawers, and over the backs of the milkmaids’ hands” (Ibidem). We figure Tess’ life at Talbothays as a proto-Symbiocene experience as the text insists upon the farm’s restorative quality: the heroine’s body is rejuvenated, gains vigour and energy and is attuned to the blooming summer.

Tess’ rootedness in the Wessex soil is further presented when she sees “the surrounding hills [...] as personal to her as [...] her relatives” (Hardy 1965, 37), consequently her relation to nature transforms the environment into one of her family members which evolves into “deep compassion and care for the whole nature” (Vakoch & Castrillon 2014, 131). Later, she is compared to a replanted tree, this organic metaphor being meant to root Tess even further in the Wessex soil and blur the boundary between the human identity and the flora:

she was, for one thing, physically and mentally suited among these new surroundings. The sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous stratum on the spot of its sowing had been transplanted to a deeper soil (Hardy 1965, 129).

Even Tess’ sexual abuse by Alec D’Urbervilles is also depicted with an agricultural metaphor: “Tess’s passing corporeal blight had been her mental harvest” (Ibid, 124), which indicates that she draws her energy, her experience or her force from nature or soil. The woman’s traumatic sexual intercourse and the subsequent pregnancy are translated in the soil being violated by the mechanized agriculture and the ulterior crop being harvested after a few months. This ecocritical perspective (partly

ecofeminist) comes as a plea for the fragile ecosystem on the side of the road that was destroyed by motorcars or other machineries used in agriculture.

After each episode of harassment by various men, Tess finds refuge in nature and decides to disguise herself so that she should not stand out at all. Wearing old, rugged clothes and cutting off her eyebrows, Tess intends to minimize her sex-appeal so that she should be in harmony with the environment:

Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a field-woman pure and simple, in winter guise; a gray serge cape, a red woollen cravat, a stuff skirt covered by a whitey brown rough wrapper, and buff-leather gloves. (Hardy 1965, 280)

The landscape is “pure and simple” (Ibid, 280) in winter (when covered with snow), and this is what Tess wants others to believe about her; she does not thrive for a different status – she intends to share the position with the non-humans. This is her new attempt to enter the Symbiocene, to foster a close relationship to nature. In conclusion, the natural world seems to objectify a woman and to annul her individuality as much as the patriarchal society does. Yet, the natural surroundings underline even more that women, by being treated like the non-humans, in the same abusive way, are clearly perceived as non-men.

To navigate the subversion of the Anthropocene and the transition towards a possible proto-Symbiocene, we resort to Albrecht’s (2005, 41-55) concepts such as solastalgia, terraphthora and terranascia. When we connected Glenn Albrecht’s and Thomas Hardy’s contribution to the environmental anthropology, we intended to demonstrate how a philosopher and a Victorian writer place the human emotions at the centre of the environment assessment. We think that both provided important critiques in the environmental discourse, as well as a semiotic framework that directly links the human psyche and emotions to the ecological conditions. When analysing Thomas Hardy’s work, we resorted to Albrecht’s development of a lexicon designed for psychoterratic states. The term “psychoterratic” was coined by Glenn Albrecht who wanted to find a name for the emotions one feels when one witnesses the degradation of nature be it on a minor or a global scale (Quarum 2020, 89). The term literally signifies “earth psyche” being formed of the Greek “psycho” (psyche) and the Latin “terra” (earth). On a different level, both Albrecht and Hardy felt

that the Anglophone world needed to express the emotions experienced in the human-nature relationship in an era of huge ecological changes. We consider that Albrecht's neologisms were designed to fill the void sensed by Thomas Hardy when he wanted to express his characters' experiences and emotions regarding various environmental issues. We think that Thomas Hardy intended to transform his private anxiety concerning the degradation of nature into a public concern, thereby endowing his characters with solastalgia and inspiring his readers to collective actions to protect nature.

Solastalgia

According to Glenn Albrecht (2005, 41-55), solastalgia is "a feeling of desolation or melancholia about the emplaced and lived experience of the chronic deterioration of a loved home environment". So, taking into consideration this definition, we recognize Tess' homesickness, while she is in comfortable places, but still not at home; for instance, the sense of familiarity and safety from Marlott is destroyed when she leaves this place. After Prince is killed, the whole atmosphere from her home is ruined, and comfort is lost. It is also the moment when solace is lost, as she is aware of her parents' inability to properly provide for the whole family. After coming back from Trantridge, when Tess is pregnant with Alec's child, Marlott instils in her a sense of isolation, of powerlessness because she senses the destruction of the rural Wessex and of her idyllic past: she no longer fits the image of Marlott from the first pages of the novel, her body has been abused in the same manner as the Wessex landscape suffers transformations due to the mechanized agriculture.

Almost at a leap Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman. Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice. [...] it became evident to her that she could never be really comfortable again in a place which had seen the collapse of her family's attempt to "claim kin"—and, through her, even closer union—with the rich d'Urbervilles. At least she could not be comfortable there till long years should have obliterated her keen consciousness of it. Yet even now Tess felt the pulse of hopeful life still warm within her; she might be happy in some nook which had no memories. (Hardy 1965, 99)

Tess' solastalgia is Thomas Hardy's nostalgia for the pastoral Wessex, thus the loss of comfort and safety from the past can be traced in each space Tess navigates throughout her life.

Marian succumbs to solastalgia, too, when she works with Tess at Flintcomb-Ash because she misses the relaxing working atmosphere from Talbothays, where the seasons allowed the young women's bodies to flourish like the vegetation, where the rhythm of life was attuned to the natural cycle:

they were talking of the time when they lived and loved together at Talbothays Dairy, that happy green tract of land where summer had been liberal in her gifts; in substance to all, emotionally to these. [...] And thus, though the damp curtains of their bonnets flapped smartly into their faces, and their wrappers clung about them to wearisomeness, they lived all this afternoon in memories of green, sunny, romantic Talbothays. (Hardy 1965, 304)

At Flintcomb-Ash, the young women had to endure a harsh winter, and besides being forced to work outside in such arctic temperatures, inside, they had to endure the unhealthy air of their dwelling invaded by snow and the wind outside. The women's nostalgia for Talbothays is enhanced by the extreme cold, which "chilled their eyeballs" "penetrating to their skeletons" (Ibid, 240) which seems to be the counterpart of the heat from the dairy farm with its "Ethiopic scorplings [which] browned the upper slopes of the pastures" (Ibid, 149). Solastalgia is manifested through the repetition of the words that indicate the lush vegetation from Talbothays in direct contrast with the fields full of stones, "composed of myriads of loose white flints in bulbous, cusped, and phallic shapes" (Ibid, 304) which explain the name of the current working space, Flintcomb-Ash. Some pages later, Marian remarks:

"How I should like another or two of our old set to come here! Then we could bring up Talbothays every day here afield, and talk of he, and of what nice times we had there, and o' the old things we used to know, and make it all come back a'most, in seeming!" Marian's eyes softened, and her voice grew vague as the visions returned. (Hardy 1965, 311)

It is the "nice times" from Marian's words that make us identify the women's solastalgia, their melancholy about the lived experiences from a loved environment. Both female characters realize that these memories would remain only vague visions, thus they try to adapt to this new space, wrap themselves in warm pinafores to prevent men and weather from abusing/ aggressing their bodies.

Terraphthoric forces in Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Terraphthora, a word formed from the Latin “terra” (earth) and the Greek “phthora” (destruction), literally means “earth destroyer”. It refers to the forces that cause the destruction of the earth, and indicates the actions or the social systems that facilitate the degradation or/and the destruction of various ecosystems. Glenn Albrecht suggested that, by identifying these forces, one should be more capable of overcoming them (Albrecht 2019, 33). Terraphthoran humans in the Anthropocene fail to establish a fair human-nature relationship and their actions do not support all living creatures, on the contrary, we witness the mistreatment, the abuse and even the destruction of the non-humans and of the land.

For instance, men’s invention – the steam-powered machines are presented by Hardy as intruders, as violators of everything is pastoral in the Wessex biotope. Both Annie Escuret and Catherine Lanone struggle to offer their personal ecofeminist perspective by tracing the “joint enslaving of land and female body” (Escuret 2007, 38) when Tess goes from the pastoral agricultural activities in her community to the harsh labour at Flintcomb Ash where the woman’s body is crushed under the mechanical exploitation. In fact, the whole novel emphasizes the parallelism between women and animals because the patriarchal abuse and violence have as victims both the human and the non-human, so, Tess’ uprooting and suffering caused by economic factors might be defined as “eco-grief” (Lanone 2022).

The first mentioning of a machine appears at Marlott: the reaping machine impended the peasants with its “two broad arms of painted wood” and “formed a revolving Maltese cross” that seemed “to have been dipped in liquid fire” (Hardy 1965, 73). Yet, the presumption that we are dealing with an invention of industrialization disappears when the author insists upon the details that engulf the reaping machine in the natural environment: the machine “rose from the margin of yellow cornfield hard by Marlott village” (Ibidem) as if it were a part of the landscape. Elements from nature appear to merge with this apparently menacing machine to support the author’s intention to protect the rural world: horses pull this machine, setting a slow pace adjusted to the humans; the women’s flapping bonnets are compared to the revolving arms of the reaping machine; the paint of this machine smeared humans and gains intensity in the sunlight; people pick up the ears of corn left behind by the machine; ultimately, machine and people take a break for breakfast and lunch to alleviate the suffering of the land.

These brief moments and small details conceal Thomas Hardy's intention to maintain a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

The steam engine is introduced gradually in the text: first, as a peripheral experience at Talbothays when Tess and Angel load the milk containers in the train to London; then, the machines gain a central role in the mechanized agriculture at Flintcomb Ash. Changes are impeding due to industrialization, and the ominous image of the steam engine subversively looms over Tess' life. When rural work is not hindered by mechanized forces, it brings pleasure and tranquillity in people's lives, and readers observe this at Talbothays; Tess can rebuild her life and sense of self, and she re-gains her strength and vigour. However, at Flintcomb Ash, work disintegrates her body and soul, and the land is relentlessly fragmentated by the machines. The threshing-machine exhausts both the land and the workers, abusing them like "a greedy ogre" (Lanone 2022): the sheaves which in Marlott were tied by human hands, are here "gulped down by the insatiable swallower" (Hardy 1965, 275); the Anthropocene insults nature by transforming the immense stack of straw into "the faeces of the same buzzing red glutton" (Ibidem). Words like "gulp down", "insatiable", "glutton" emphasize the demanding tone of the machine and its endless consumption which turns humans and plants into commodities that can be digested as this engine was "fed by (engine-)man and Tess" (Ibidem). Hardy's text suggests that people and nature were mutually exploited, devalued by the Capitalocene represented by the threshing machine – "the long red elevator like a Jacob's ladder, on which a perpetual stream of threshed straw ascended, a yellow river running uphill" (Ibid, 276), while the workers "began to grow cadaverous and saucer-eyed" (Ibidem). This ceaseless consumption seems to be supervised by a God-like authority, since the author reminded his readers about the divine initiative to connect heaven and earth through Jacob's ladder as God's response to the failure of the people from Babel.

Technical words are added to the description of this machine to stress upon its speed and efficiency, as well as upon the scientific progress specific for the Capitalocene: "His fire was waiting incandescent, his steam was at high pressure, in a few seconds he could make the long strap move at an invisible velocity" (Ibid, 270). However, the speed of this machine is unnatural, inhumane, intended to symbolize the massive consumption advocated by capitalism. The

automatic rhythm of the threshing machine is Hardy's way of acknowledging the industrial North which invades the rural microcosm and replaces the natural order of Wessex by transforming the idyllic hearth into a dark chimney like a furnace that produces the same type of ash, soot and heat:

The long chimney running up beside an ash-tree, and the warmth which radiated from the spot, explained [...] that here was the engine that was to act as the *primum mobile* of this little world. (Hardy 1965, 269)

The threshing machine metaphorically defined with a Latin term ("*primum mobile*") induces alienation (Lanone 2022) into the small, insignificant bucolic world and signals a crisis of values, since this machine acts like the wheel that allowed other wheels to move, that would probably bring more technical devices in this rural landscape.

The industrial North is also represented by the coal that feeds the 'radiating warmth' of the engine which stands as a landmark for the terraphthoric forces that bring pollution to the countryside and ruins the pastoral landscape. Aside from the earth's degradation, the machine appears capable of dehumanizing people, as in the case of the engineer who is presented just as

a sooty and grimy embodiment of tallness (269), a creature from Tophet, who had strayed into the pellucid smokelessness of this region of yellow grain and pale soil, with which he had nothing in common, to amaze and to discompose its aborigines. What he looked he felt. He was in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke; these denizens of the fields served vegetation, weather, frost, and sun. He travelled with his engine from farm to farm, from county to county, for as yet the steam threshing-machine was itinerant in this part of Wessex. (Hardy 1965, 270)

Anybody who is connected to the industrial world is seen as hellish, as evil (Tophet: hell) because it destroys ecosystems with its "hot blackness" (Ibid, 269) or is ready to unleash disaster. The idyllic beauty of the Wessex landscape has so far been untouched by pollution, being still perceived as "smokeless", a highly agricultural space filled with "yellow grain". The well-known Victorian opposition, nature vs. culture, abounds the writer's text to let the readers decide what path they want to follow: the terraphthoric Anthropocene (that serves only "fire and smoke" that disturbs the Indigenous, who was part of the agricultural world) or the Symbiocene (that served vegetation, weather, and seasons). Insisting on the contrast between the messenger of the industrial North and the pastoral space,

Thomas Hardy, once again, shows its solastalgia for the old Wessex, acknowledging his helplessness in preventing progress from intruding this landscape. The engineer seems to suffer from “the ache of modernism” (Ibid, 105), leading a nomadic life by travelling from village to village, distancing himself from any attachment to a space, being totally alienated because of his dehumanization. The engineer, a true agent of the Capitalocene, shows his contempt towards the natural world by refusing any interaction with “the natives”, “the autochthonous idlers” (Ibid, 270) or the “aborigenes” (Ibid, 269) and by refusing any close bonds with “the agricultural world”: “The long strap which ran from the driving-wheel of his engine to the red thresher under the rick was the sole tie-line between agriculture and him.” (Ibid, 271) We concur with Catherine Lanone’s thesis about colonization and the British Empire in the 19th century, when she notices how “the machine is beginning to colonize the rural South” (Lanone 2022).

Terranascient humans in the novel Tess of the D’Urbervilles

Terranascia is another term created by Glenn Albrecht for a better understanding of the Symbiocene expansion. It comes from the Latin words “terra” (earth) and “natura” (to be born), so, it literally means “to foster life on earth”. Terranascient humans in the Symbiocene function as earth nurturers, thus fulfilling their role on this planet to generate symbiosis from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic level. A person is an active terranascient human when one is preoccupied with the protection and conservation of the natural world and supports a balanced relationship between humans and other forms of life.

As we have already explained when analysing the threat brought about in the natural world by the mechanized agriculture, terraphthorans find themselves at war with the environment they live in because terranascient humans tend to block terraphthoric actions of exploiting, devaluing nature. Sensing a close relation between women and nature, it is no surprise that Thomas Hardy’s female characters manifest psychoterratic emotions more often than men do. For instance, at the Slopes, old Mrs. Stoke-d’Urbervilles shows terranascient inclination when she transforms the hens into her pets and cares for them as if these were her babies. In this community of fowls, Tess herself is encouraged to show the same tendencies when she is “appointed as supervisor, purveyor, nurse, surgeon, and friend” (Hardy 1965, 47) of these hens. Both women are not exposed to the

pragmatic side of the life of the Stokes-d'Urbervilles: the degradation of the true descendants of this family; the buying of the title and of a new mansion; the speculation and money lending, which soon proves to be the source of income for the *nouveau riches*. Women are confined to private spaces; thus, they find their escape (or possible revenge) in nurturing animals. When the old Mrs Stoke-d'Urbervilles chooses hens as her pets, she banishes the Anthropocene from the thatched cottage to leave room for the birds:

an enclosure that had once been a garden, was now a trampled and sanded square. The house was overrun with ivy, its chimney being enlarged by the boughs of the parasite to the aspect of a ruined tower. The lower rooms were entirely given over to the birds, who walked about them with a proprietary air, as though the place had been built by themselves. (Hardy 1965, 47)

Nature gains back its territory, once the humans allow it: the ivy, the boughs, the birds – all confirm the terranascient tendencies, although the Anthropocene voices its discontent through the former tenants. Words like “parasite”, “ruined”, “overrun”, “trampled” connect the current degradation of the cottage with the usurpation of the old family by the new owners. The author symbolically places Tess in this position at the poultry-farm, since she comes from a degraded version of the d'Urbervilles: the degradation of the name (into Durbeyfield) and the loss of the family fortune mirror the decayed cottage, and nature overcomes culture.

We can say there is an emotional war between terranascians and terraphthorans through which the author tries to convince his readers to foster soliphilia (commitment / fight for environmental justice). Thomas Hardy is aware of the dominance of capitalism in the 19th century (or in ecological terms, he was aware he was living in the Capitalocene), therefore, we might find numerous examples in his novel which indicate the terraphthoric forces in action. Yet terranascient forces, or simply said, nature also reacts against the ones who abuse it, thus it shows its destructive side each time human beings attempt to mis- or (ab)use the natural world or its representatives. Terranascient humans can detect the destructiveness of the terraphthorans, so they will try to oppose these forces. As a true “daughter of nature” (Hardy 1965, 120), Tess finds her revenge against the maltreatment she receives from different men: Alec's murder can be regarded as a demonstration of this type of revenge, when nature's/ Tess' patience ends after having endured so much abuse from the male

exploiter, from the Anthropocene. Tess' violent reaction against her exploiter was compared by Nuruzzaman (2017, 151) to Moby Dick's final revenge against the crew of the *Pequod*. Herman Melville's novel also highlights nature's atonement against the human beings who pursued and were obsessed with the killing of the white whale. Another example could be Frank Schatzing's *The Swarm* where nature severely punishes the human beings for having destroyed the marine ecosystem.

Again, nature teaches Angel Clare a lesson for deserting Tess and for not understanding her innocence in the act of seduction which was provoked by a representative of his sex. Without caring about his wife's destiny, Angel seeks to fulfil his dream as an "emigrating agriculturist" (Hardy 1965, 280) and intends to start afresh by setting up a farm in Brazil. Tess, as a representative of nature, would be degraded by

the shade of his own [Angel Clare] limitations [...]. With all his attempted independence of judgement this advanced and well-meaning young man, [...] he was yet the slave to custom and conventionality (Hardy 1965, 280).

As Angel prepares to arrive in Brazil, he is "drenched with thunderstorms and persecuted by other hardships" (Ibid, 294), these coming as a punishment for not forgiving Tess and because "in considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire." (Ibid, 281) Nature in Brazil prevents Angel from finding a safe and pleasant position, and in this environment, his health cannot endure the harsh conditions. It is as if nature rejected the Anthropocene fearing the dramatic changes that could be brought by Angel. A possible explanation for Angel's failure in Brazil lies in his dream of becoming a farmer; he would become another colonizer of nature (a possible agent of Plantationocene, of the "extractive and enclosed plantations" with "devastating transformations of diverse ecosystems" (Haraway 2015, 162) because he intends to violate the earth the same way as other farmers did: through deforestation, overgrazing, habitat destruction, overexploitation of land, etc. Moreover, this comes as a reminder that he left Tess to become a victim of men and hard work at Flintcomb Ash. Only when he realizes the injustice done to his wife, he can accept a radical transformation in his life, and he is ready to accept Tess as she is. In this instance, his realization that he could not live without Tess (without the representative of nature) transforms him

into an agent of Symbiocene, by fostering a cooperation, an acceptance of nature rather than by preferring a competitive relationship. He no longer thinks of himself as the Anthropocene, on top of the hierarchy, but he longs for becoming equal to Tess, thus, he longs for the Symbiocene.

Conclusion

During a long period in human history, we have witnessed how an industrial-technological society emerged and grew addicted to progress, how this society achieved its success based on the natural resources. The forced production of the Capitalocene made some humans rich, yet it also harmed the earth through pollution, climate change and sometimes species extinction.

What we intended to illustrate in this paper, was the degradation of everything connected to the natural world. Apart from animals and plants, Thomas Hardy shows his readers how women, due to their close relation to nature, become the victims of the Anthropocene; impoverished, corrupted and seduced, women stand fewer chances to survive unless they maintain a harmonious relationship with nature, unless they enter the Symbiocene. Displacement seems to loom Tess' journey throughout the novel: because of the agricultural depression of 1880s in England, she is forced to move from place to place as in a mechanical movement, implicitly being denied attachment or any close relationship to space. Seasonal work implies not only migration, but also the emergence of solastalgia. Tess' constant uprooting shows the degradation of the rural world and confirms the exploitation of women and nature through the Capitalocene – a kind of work which, though mechanized, proves to be inhuman. At Talbothays, where Tess and the other dairy girls are not aggressed by machines or by men, the woman can rejoice her youth and passion; yet, at Flintcomb-Ash, as the steam engine replaces the sense of community with a strong desire for productivity, the women are harassed and exploited in the same way as land is violated by machines. For all creatures connected to the natural world, the solution to escape abuse is to embrace the Symbiocene and become a terranascian.

Thomas Hardy was generally believed nostalgic or conservative or environmentalist; however, his interest in the woman's body, in its exploitation, together with the exploitation of animals and land make Hardy a proto-ecofeminist writer or allow the readers to consider him as greening the humanities.

The conceptual transition from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene is one ambitious project for any researcher because, besides analysing the literary work, one must extend the work into the field of economics, environmental studies, history, sometimes politics in order to envision a framework where humans are less interested in progress and technology, and develop a close relationship with the environment they inhabit.

For Hardy's transition, we needed to demonstrate his subversion of the anthropocentric model that placed humans as superior to nature, and to emphasize his intention of entering the Symbiocene which encourages humanity to stay deeply embedded in nature, to show preoccupation for a healthy planet, and to preserve untouched the ecosystems. In the end of the novel, Angel and Liza-Lu (a pseudo-Tess) leave the urban space and are expected to embrace a more rustic existence, since the rural world "is built on regenerative practices, and on a deep cultural appreciation for the interconnectedness of all living beings" (Albrecht 2019, 54):

The prospect from this summit was almost unlimited. In the valley beneath lay the city they had just left, its more prominent buildings showing as in an isometric drawing; [...] further off, landscape beyond landscape, till the horizon was lost in the radiance of the sun hanging above it. (Hardy 1965, 487)

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**Philosophical complexities and economic realities of mothering:
A Nigerian mother's travails and tenacity in
Funke Akindele's *A Tribe Called Judah***

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Abstract: Motherhood and mothering are universal commons that depend on locale-specific philosophies, economic realities and global worldviews for their manifest similarities and dissimilarities in manifestations and interpretations. Globalization increasingly influences mothering perceptions, thereby making mothering progressively a syncretism of locale-specific norms and multicultural ideas. This paper examines critically the authorial articulation of motherhood and mothering in a Nollywood film *A Tribe Called Judah*, to highlight the polemics of familial dysfunction vicious cycle, plausible reasons behind instances of negative mothering, and its impact on children. This paper argues that the social construction of reality theory is a pertinent articulation in explaining rationales informing the authorial classification of mothering in *A Tribe Called Judah* as one of the following: negative, positive, retrogressive, progressive, dysfunctional, functional, good, or bad. This paper utilized an interpretive approach in analyzing selected scenes in *A Tribe Called Judah* by cross-referencing them with selected portrayals subsuming relevant suppositions in other studies. In the end, this paper reaffirms the importance of girls' pre-mothering nurturing as a non-negotiable obligation. In addition, this paper observes with dismay the banality and indifference that define realities of troubled-mothers and how their society blames them when familial dysfunction becomes evident. Our view is that Jedidah's travails and tribulations are avoidable and unfortunate. Her mother's derisive lampoons typify the injustice child-mothers like

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Jedidah endure. Her father's actions represent entrenched opprobrium, selfishness, and sanctimonious proclivity elucidating Jedidah's Nigeria. Lastly, Funke Akindele's creative vision in utilizing *A Tribe Called Judah* as an enduring space for an interrogation of motherhood and mothering validates the utility of film as an efficacious platform that enables conscientious portrayal of pertinent social realities.

Keywords: film, philosophy, motherhood, mothering, Nigeria

Introduction

Beyond scholarly contributions in journals and books on mothering and its realities by philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists and humanists; creative filmmakers are also contributing plausible articulations adding to the expansion and deepening of knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews on mothering. The utility of film as an efficacious platform for meaningful interrogations and sharing of pertinent ideas about societal issues is an unambiguous reality globally. In Nigeria, film is "a tool that has been" and is being "effectively employed in x-raying every aspect of the Nigerian society" (Odi 2016, 165).

Films in many ways like other art forms represent the realities in the societies that produce them. In films with mothers as part of the cast, surely, the mothers' actions expectedly will relay shades and nuances of mothering and, according to Carl Jung, mothers play very crucial roles in children's unconscious minds because the 'mother image' embeds in the children's psyche, and continually generates several fundamental unconscious contents (Ibid. 508).

Jung and other philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Erich Newmann and Gottman, et al. variously opine that a mother's emotion particularly her exteriorities, which are supposedly projections of her interiority, influences her child's inclination formulation and aggregation. Their suppositions accord on the basis that motherhood enables profound flow between a mother and her child. Newmann (1955, 4-5) notes that a mother's interiority relays her exteriority of mood and emotions – which gradually calibrates her child's consciousness through involuntary inculcation and adaptation. In academic circles, discourse on filmic portrayals of social realities such as 'motherhood' and 'mothering' have continued to receive significant attention, however, paucity of studies touching on filmic portrayals of dysfunctional childhood as a variable that contributes towards dysfunctional mothering in Nigerian subsists. Thus, this study will be

focusing on an interpretive analysis of the intersecting suppositions and articulations that situate dynamics and variables of mothering in the film *A Tribe Called Judah*. Therefore, our priority is to share our interpretation of some salient authorial articulation linking motherhood and mothering in *A Tribe Called Judah*, to highlight some subsumed contestations and polemics as a means of deepening understanding of the alluded variables that intersect and influence mothering in the film's story. In addition, some suppositions and articulations in *A Tribe Called Judah* that embody the philosophical contextualization of practical mitigation processes for dysfunctional families are also included in our discussion.

A Tribe Called Judah

A Tribe Called Judah is a Nollywood film with Lagos and Kano as sites of action. The director and producer Funke Akindele narrates a story, which revolves around a Nigerian single mother's travails and her attempts to remain sane and afloat in her battle against the intense adversity that her Nigeria represents. The protagonist, Jedidah remarkably has five children from five different men, who incidentally are from five different tribes in Nigeria. Jedidah's intense problems started when she got pregnant inadvertently before marriage at the age of 16 with an Igbo man named Kalu. Jedidah's father, Rev. Simon Judah became very livid and he furiously denounced her. He chased her away, forcing her to move in with Kalu despite a passionate plea by his wife who wants Jedidah to remain with them and have her baby. Rev. Judah laments bitterly that his career as a pastor has taken a massive knock by Jedidah's fornication and pre-marital pregnancy. He argues that if he allows Jedidah to remain at home, his career will tarnish irredeemably, hence, in obstinate resolve he disowns her. Jedidah largely disoriented, ashamed, and heartbroken relocates to Kalu's house. Though Kalu indifferently welcomed Jedidah, unexpectedly he secretly fled, abandoning Jedidah who was 17 with a son Emeka. As Jedidah's mother stepped in and began to take care of Emeka, Jedidah gets entangled with Sani a Hausa man from Kano who got her pregnant. After staying with Jedidah awhile, Sani took her to his family in Kano for an introduction and marriage proposal but his family resolutely declined to support his intent to marry Jedidah because they had betrothed a Hausa girl for him. Again, Jedidah reverted to single motherhood with a second son Adamu, and soon after, she met Boma, and they began a romantic relationship which

produced her third son Pere. Boma took very good care of Jedidah, sadly he passed on abruptly after a year of being with her. Once more a single mother, Jedidah met Lekan Isiaka, whom she employed as a private tutor to her sons. As the days went by, Jedidah began to fantasize about an enduring intimate relationship with Lekan because she wanted him to be a father to her children and a husband to her. As she went beyond fantasy, Lekan impregnated her leading to the birth of her fourth son, Oluwashina (Shina). Thereafter, Lekan unexpectedly flees from Jedidah taking a few of his belongings and a couple of Jedidah's valuables to Ibadan without trace. This saddened and depressed Jedidah, thus, she began drinking alcohol heavily. In one of her numerous visits to her usual drinking joints, she met a man and because of alcohol intoxication, she engaged in an unprotected impromptu sexual intercourse with him leading to pregnancy and her fifth son Ejiro. After Ejiro's birth, Jedidah who became very disenchanted with men, remained a single mother and continued her struggle to take care of herself and her five adult sons. At the point the film's story commenced, Jedidah was managing her own tricycle business with a fleet of three tricycles; Emeka was a sales rep at a furniture shop, Adamu a security officer in a mall, Oluwashina a gangster, Pere a pickpocket and Ejiro a student.

Theories and perspectives on mothering: Relevant highlights in *A Tribe Called Judah*

As we relayed in the beginning of this paper, Funke Akindele's *A Tribe Called Judah* articulates archetypal realities and variables that define a single mother's mothering travails in Nigeria and her creative tenacity and philosophy in a less heart-warming cultural and economic space. The film's story portrays plausible intersections linking variables such as Nigeria's ethnic fault lines, poor human nurture, and human nature's inevitability in each individual's behaviour as core variables that propel and sustain pervasive multi-dimensional melancholy entwining dysfunctional single motherhood syndrome in Nigeria.

A good number of studies indicate that definitions of mothering practices across generations and cultural milieus by different races within locale-specific worldviews and philosophies vary significantly; hence, some mothering practices remain consistently fluid and flexible while some are not (Collins 1994; Glenn et al. 1994; Finch 2007; Afflerback et al. 2013; Frederick et al. 2019; Byrt & Dempsey 2020;

Morgan 2020; Carroll & Yeadon-Lee 2021). On definitions of mothering (Bicchieri 2006, 2017; Finch 2007; Daly 2016 and Morris et al. 2015), variously present mothering as various ways of thinking, feeling, and doing that accord and replicate locale-specific social constructs, intersecting wider shades of meanings, worldviews, and philosophies that relay “cultural scripts, codes, and institutionalized ways” (Daly 2016, 52). John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2005, 428) describe motherhood as a “term encompassing the practical realities and social significance of being a mother”. Motherhood connotes the process of being a mother with its central expectation, which is mothering. Consensus in the above-mentioned scholarly contributions is that mothering is a natural reality for women; however, there are contestations regarding the intersecting aspects such as the criteria defining mothering as either functional or dysfunctional, the variables that determine how mothering will turn out, the best processes for the mitigation of dysfunctional mothering, and the practical ways of sustaining positive and functional mothering. The actions a mother or a woman takes that are describable as taking care of her children and other people's children are mothering. Mothering is a set of practices that are primarily family-focused but intersects inevitably with the economy and well-being of the immediate community (Morgan 2011; 2020).

The philosophy of mothering learned from the aforementioned studies requires a mother to embody a comprehensive knowledge of children's needs, which aids her in articulating needs and desire specificity of her child or children. In addition, more trajectories of mothering philosophy highlight that mothering yields better results when mothers are physically and emotionally present and decidedly attentive. Therefore, satisfactory response to a child's needs intersects with a mother's mothering knowledge deep and density. According to Christine Odi (2016, 194) “motherhood in the Nigerian society is greatly esteemed and held sacred” thus, “it is at the same time an institution in which the mothers most times are treated with less than the dignity, respect, and humanity they deserve from the society”. While Odi points at ‘the socio-cultural construct of motherhood as a topic that attracts differing arguments, where some scholars describe the condition of motherhood as the pinnacle of any woman's existence’, others suggest that motherhood remains a major source of women's oppression. Motherhood according to Molatokunbo

Oluwaseunfunmi Olutayo (2021, 978) remains highly venerated in different African cultures, and in her elucidation, she notes:

The general picture that seems to portray the female gender from the Western perspective presents the oppressive image of women in society. On the contrary, despite cultural flow as a result of globalization, certain insinuations and indeed realities among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria portray a privileged status for the female gender. ‘Iyaniwura’ mothering is gold, in Yoruba society and indeed the world over shows the value attached to mothering. The psychological impression made on yet-to-be mothers prepares them for privileged statuses despite possible negative experiences in mothering.

Olutayo suggests that mothering “in most cases, is seen as an act, which starts from when a woman gives birth, to the period her children start to have their babies” and “the image of the mother is culturally elaborated and valued in most societies” (Ibid., 979). Despite the influence of globalization and its efficacy in propelling social worldview aggregation, mothering across national contexts and in various settings such as in biological families, foster families and motherless babies homes have continued to remain largely a gendered thing (Bianchi & Milkie 2010; Bianchi 2011; Goldscheider et al. 2015; Evertsson & Grunow 2019; Scarborough et al. 2019; Valiquette-Tessier et al. 2019; Arendell 2000; Few-Demo & Allen 2020; Ehmer 2021). Another subsisting global reality is that parents particularly mothers are expected to invest their resources, time, energy and sacrifice their leisure in lure of child rearing, to establish strong attachments with them by attending to their needs, wishes, and desires to the best of their abilities (Hays 1996; Ennis 2014; Faircloth 2014; Hamilton 2016; Berghammer & Milkie 2021; Hulen 2022). The widely acknowledged worldview is that both proper and improper factoring and execution of mother-related functions and expectations will inevitably lead to positive or negative outcomes respectively for the family and society (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Cialdini & Trost 1998).

Locale specific realities of motherhood and mothering metaphors in *A Tribe called Judah*

To look at the wider systems of meaning within a locale-specific social ideology of motherhood and mothering as regards to the efficacy of mothering on children as suggested in *A tribe Called Judah*, we observe that the socio-economic consequences of the mothering outcome on Pere and Shina are negative. This is because Pere turned

out a pickpocket whereas Shina became a vicious gang-member. As a pickpocket and a vicious gangster, Pere and Shina respectively are dysfunctional men and societal ills. Their actions create social insecurity and restiveness that lead to economic loss to individuals, communities, and the State.

Regarding mothering outcomes and realities, scholars suggest that mothering outcomes are likely to be influenced by mothers' and familial circumstances, contexts, and categories such as single motherhood (Robinson et al., 2018), lesbian motherhood (Biblarz & Savci 2010; Bos & Gartrell 2020), mothers of children with disabilities and various health challenges (van Wyk & Leech 2016), and mothers with violent partners (Hardesty & Ogolsky 2020). No doubt, these studies have profoundly influenced the articulation of the complexities that revolve around the supposition that similarities are bound to exist in the approaches women adopt in their mothering, however, exactness in approaches is highly unlikely. Jedidah's circumstance as a single mother places the entire load of child rearing on her, which exacts significant toll on economic wellbeing. Jedidah is a mother who emanates from a dysfunctional circumstance to become a 'child-mother' after family abandonment in a time she was in a desperate need for compassion because her psychological dexterity was utterly battered. Her misadventures in men and mothering are products of her poor cognitive density in matters concerning romance and its aftermaths. Part of her negative experience in motherhood and mothering is the betrayal by men she shared intimacy with. The level of inconsistency men such as her father and her several romantic partners such as Kalu, Sani and Lekan exhibited depressed and traumatized her. The manner the above-mentioned men and biological father of her children abandoned their child co-rearing responsibility for her indicated that Jedidah's society requires to institute and execute regulations that makes its mandatory to biological fathers to share in child co-rearing burden. The natural and social construction of reality in the film's story suggests that positive mothering entails giving a lifetime of service towards reproducing, guiding, nurturing, and managing others' lives.

In mothering psychology, studies suggest a growing philosophy towards pro-neo-liberalism mothering inclination, an idea that elevates mothers' pro-choice autonomy and self-optimization (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Joecks 2021; Lewis 2001; Lightman & Kevins 2021; Eva-Maria Schmidt 2022). According to M. F. Belenky et al.

(1986, 157) “By focusing our attention on the family and the mother's role (an institution devoted to the care, connection, and human development), we might help to bring a different language into the study of psychology”. Constance A. Barlow and Kathleen V. Cairns in their study, which characterizes the psychological experience of mothering, particularly highlights the challenges and opportunities that childbirth and child-rearing offer to women. They observe that mothering experience “involves a continuous re-evaluation of attitudes, beliefs and personal characteristics which provide opportunities for personal growth and development” for the mother and child (Barlow and Cairns 1997, 232). The idea here is that mothering propels individuals to care for young ones who depend on such care to develop and thrive positively. Barlow and Cairns observe that “cultural myths about mothering suggest that mothers are endless sources of nurturance to their children, an expectation that may be difficult for mothers to sustain in that childrearing can often evoke emotions such as indifference, cruelty, envy, possessiveness, and resentment” (Ibid. 233). Here, we can see the evidence of mothering starting from the birth of a child and lasting until the death or permanent separation of the mother and her child.

In *A Tribe Called Judah*, Jedidah continued her mothering even when her children were adults. Similarly, Jedidah’s mother exhibited continual life-long mothering towards Jedidah. Barlow and Cairns opine that essentially in different cultures “mothers are expected to know instinctively how to raise children and inadequate mothering is usually believed to be the source of children's problems and suffering” in life (Ibidem). Usually, society expects mothers such as Jedidah to care for their children competently and relentlessly. Jedidah’s mother observes that her grandchildren Pere and Shina, whom she did not train, turned out dysfunctional because of inadequate mothering by her daughter Jedidah. Let us pause and look critically at the above supposition by Jedidah’s mother. Clearly, this supposition is a scathing lampoon directed at Jedidah. It is also a self-exoneration, which dumps all the blames of evident dysfunctional behaviour by Shina, and Pere on Jedidah’s poor mothering. The comment by Jedidah’s mother is evidential of sanctimonious penchant by individuals and the society on mothers such as Jedidah who began their journey in mothering from the dysfunctional dimension. Jedidah’s best ability in mothering is classified as poor and bad by her mother’s comment, however, the contestation here is if Jedidah’s mother provided apt and flawless

mothering to Jedidah, how did she easily get lured into fornication and pre-marriage pregnancy at the age of 16? From our observation and very dependable field study reports, mothering could be a happy or a sad experience, thus Barlow and Cairns note that “Western culture presents mothering as fulfilling to women in ways that no other experience can” (Ibidem). Consequently “women are, therefore, seen as individuals who can effortlessly engage in the task of emotional giving, and are likely to feel inadequate and guilty when they cannot meet this ideal, or when their children experience problems” (Ibidem).

Mothering psychology is a complex reality and studies suggest that women by virtue of nature and the value of nurture can cope sufficiently with multi-tasking circumstances (Ruddick 1984). Conceptually, mothering competency emanates from cognitive capacity and process; there is a need for proper cognitive development of the girl-child who naturally becomes a mother in time, for her to achieve adequate positive mothering. For instance, Jedidah becoming sexually active and pregnant leading to pre-marriage childbirth at 17 is a scenario that suggests that she was a child who happened not to be ready for the complexities of mothering because she was cognitively immature. Linking the significance of cognitive maturity to mothering sufficiency, A. B. Balaji et al. (2007, 1388) observe that “parenting involves several mental health costs, including time, physical and emotional energy, conflicts with other social roles, the economic burden of childrearing”. In addition, Balaji et al. note that “hardships are especially salient for women, who are often the primary caretakers of children, and compounded if they are also single parents” (Ibidem). According to Suniya S. Luthar (2015, 295) “being a good enough mother is very hard work”, therefore being consistently “a good enough mother to children across a period of decades is a challenging task at best, and one enormously taxing for parents experiencing stressors such as mental illness in the family or prolonged poverty”. Jedidah’s lack of prolonged passionate support after her first pregnancy by her father and her romantic partners propelled her to seek respite and refuge in alcohol which damaged her kidney. More so, Jedidah experienced prolonged poverty without harbouring plausible hope. Scholars such as Luthar strongly prescribe well-articulated support systems and approaches for vulnerable individuals in circumstances similar to Jedidah’s. Thus, Luthar explains:

I would like to see front and centre, an unambiguous emphasis on ensuring the well-being of those primarily charged with raising the next generation: typically, mothers. This must be done in all 'at-risk' groups, defined as individuals who are statistically more likely to show adjustment problems than people in the general population (Ibidem).

Those who will be responsible for raising the next generation are the young girls and their training should be included in academic curriculum, so that proper tending should not be left to their biological parents alone. The expression 'this must be done in all-risk group' suggests that those who are products of dysfunctional homes such as Jedidah will require a different kind of specialized help system and support. Jane Knitzer (2000) in her contribution contends that a dysfunctional home can propel psychological imbalance in children, therefore the need to support at-risk young girls who may eventually be mothers will go a long way in reducing the vicious cycle of familial dysfunction. Knitzer affirms the importance of relationship-based interventions for mothers trying to raise children in the face of serious adversities, including chronic poverty and psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Shonkoff and Fisher (2013, 1645) observe that interventions offered to vulnerable girls are ways of "promoting resilience in young children who experience high levels of adversity" and that such support approaches "depends upon the availability of adults who can help them develop effective coping skills" which Jedidah did not get.

Conclusion: Dysfunctional mothering's cost to economy

Even though mothering remains widely viewed as an individual activity of the mother who chooses approaches convenient to her, it is pertinent to point out that studies indicate that bad or negative mothering is not just bad or negative for the family; ultimately, society usually bears the brunt socially and economically. To elaborate on this point of view, we draw from Carl Jung's supposition which argues that within the collective unconscious, a mother can be viewed from multiple trajectories; one is a mother being "all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, furthers growth and fertility" and the second trajectory is a mother that "devours, seduces, and poisons" (Jung 1959, 82). A positive mother embodies positive ideals such as purity, superior morality, and selfless devotion to her family and other families. According to John Carroll (2001, 114), a mother subsumes the potentiality of good and bad, hence, mothering can be the root of

many kinds of personal and societal ills or the solution. Therefore, the girl-child requires proper training for her to be able to recreate positive ideas and practices when she starts mothering. The idea here is that improper management of homes can lead to familial dysfunction, just as Rev. Simon Judah's family, which produced Jedidah, and Jedidah produced social ills and dysfunctional individuals in Pere and Shina – a clear indication of a vicious cycle.

This paper relied on the story presented in the film *A Tribe Called Judah* to highlight and discuss some instances of positive and negative mothering. The paper adds to existing studies elaborating different realities of motherhood and mothering, the factors that influence both positive and negative mothering, and how to provide mitigation to negative mothering through functional approaches.

The paper reaffirms the priority of proper pre-mothering training for girls, and the need for proper intervention mechanisms for accidental mothers or unfortunate mothers as a means of ameliorating the vicious cycles of familial dysfunction. This paper adduces that the film *A Tribe Called Judah* is a deep and dense articulation of subsisting salient concerns surrounding mothering and motherhood in different climes and specifically in parts of Nigeria.

Philosophically, we observe that the creatively crafted attributions in the film's story concerning Jedidah reflects the nexus of truth, the idea of wrong, the notion of a better humanity, the power of conviction, the energy in voice, and the practical utility of cognition as themes that encapsulate trajectories of discourse that speaks volume about quality of humanity. Philosophy as a universal common is evidential in daily permutations and practice of every articulate human; hence, Jedidah despite her dysfunctional circumstance, her philosophy drives her views and actions. Philosophy explains the basis of human reflection, conviction, thinking, ideology formation, and its re-aggregation. Among Jedidah's prominent philosophies is her adoption of 'no matter what we do, to some or many, it is good, or to some or many it is bad'. The philosophy suggests that the reality of life is about a sufficient understanding of your observers' desire at any point in time if you would receive fewer knocks, blows, and wounds. The study opines that support mechanisms are vital for pre-mothering training, which could be in communities, clinics or professional settings. More so, the need to train professionals such as social workers and psychologists that will be available for those in immediate need of

support towards sharing struggles from travails of dysfunctional single motherhood.

Another philosophy by Jedidah is encapsulated in the expression ‘what will be, will be’. In these few words, Jedidah shares her conviction and the question is ‘what is her philosophy relaying about her circumstance and her social environment? Can we say that her philosophy generates disillusionment and hopelessness, or does it point at the mundane as vanity? Philosophies are indoctrinations individuals receive and assimilate from homes, streets, schools, media, meditation, literature, and peer chats, so where did Jedidah receive has? Another question is where did a child-mother such as Jedidah receive her worldview about ‘mothering’ and for her misadventures and triumphs who takes the blame or commendation respectively? Poignantly, when any mother begins mothering, she can only give what she possesses. No one gives what he or she does not have. Lastly, this paper affirms that film is an efficacious medium through which filmmakers can interrogate and convey societal realities.

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Between Eros and Thanatos: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*

Rangoli Agarwal, Shuchi Agrawal and Reena*

Abstract: This paper offers a psychoanalytic reading of Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012) through Sigmund Freud's theory of the death drive, as introduced in his seminal essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920). Strayed's memoir, chronicling her 1,100-mile hike along the Pacific Crest Trail following her mother's death and personal disintegration, becomes a rich site for examining the dialectic between Thanatos and Eros. The narrative reveals a compulsive repetition of pain, risk, and isolation—what Freud identifies as the psyche's unconscious pull toward death and dissolution. However, this drive coexists with an emerging movement toward survival, connection, and pleasure, reflecting Freud's conception of Eros as the opposing, life-affirming force. The paper argues that Strayed's physical journey is a literal enactment of the psychic struggle between melancholia and mourning, as theorized by Freud in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" ([1917] 1957). Through this analysis, *Wild* is situated not merely as a tale of healing but as a text that dramatizes the complex interplay of destructive and restorative drives within the grieving self. The study contributes to the intersection of psychoanalysis and contemporary trauma memoirs, and proposes *Wild* as a compelling example of the Freudian death drive at work in modern autobiographical literature.

Keywords: trauma, memoir, psychoanalysis, Freud, Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*

Introduction

In her 2012 *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, Cheryl Strayed narrates her transformative solo journey along the Pacific Crest Trail in the aftermath of personal devastation. Following the untimely death of her mother, the disintegration of her marriage, and years of impulsive, self-destructive behaviour, Strayed embarks on

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an 1,100-mile hike through unforgiving terrain, seeking not just escape but survival. What unfolds is not simply a tale of physical endurance, but a profound psychological confrontation—one that echoes Sigmund Freud’s dialectic of Eros and Thanatos. Strayed’s memoir dramatizes the tug-of-war between the compulsion toward death and the will to live, situating *Wild* at the intersection of trauma, grief, and the psychoanalytic self.

The journey itself becomes a symbolic stage for psychic struggle. Strayed writes, “I was twenty-six years old and an orphan, too. An *actual stray*, a stranger had observed a couple of weeks before, when I’d told him my name and explained how very loose I was in the world” (Strayed 2012, 3). This admission by her sets the tone for a narrative, right in the beginning of the memoir, being driven as much by emotional collapse as by physical collapse. Her physical suffering, particularly the painful consequences of ill-fitted boots, becomes a metaphor for the masochistic repetitions of the death drive: “And all the while, those boots had blistered my feet and rubbed them raw... They had become not so much inanimate objects to me asexual tensions of who I was” (Ibid, 5). This compulsion toward self-punishment and risk mirrors Freud’s concept of Thanatos, the unconscious pull toward pain, regression, and dissolution. Yet, this drive does not exist in isolation. It is countered, however tenuously, by moments of vitality, self-recognition, and hope: “I’d started walking in the Mojave Desert and I didn’t plan to stop until I touched my hand to a bridge that crosses the Columbia River at the Oregon-Washington border with the grandiose name the Bridge of the Gods” (Ibid, 6). The trail, stretching 2,663 miles long, is a crucible for Strayed’s mourning process, where the isolation of grief becomes the very path toward psychic reintegration. As she reflects, “The wanting was a wilderness and I had to find my own way out of the woods. It took me four years, seven months, and three days to do it. I didn’t know where I was going until I got there” (Ibid, 27), positioning her trek not merely as geographical, but as deeply internal and symbolic.

This paper applies Freudian psychoanalysis to *Wild*, particularly his theories from “Mourning and Melancholia” (Freud [1917] 1957) and “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (Freud 1920) to argue that Strayed’s narrative embodies the dialectical tension between Eros - the life instinct, and Thanatos - the death drive. Through this lens, *Wild* emerges not just as a memoir of healing, but as a literary enactment of melancholia transformed by mourning, and a raw, compelling

illustration of the Freudian death drive at work in contemporary autobiographical literature.

Mourning and melancholia: Psychodynamic struggles

Freud's seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia" offers a foundational distinction in psychoanalytic theory between two responses to loss. While mourning is a healthy, time-bound process where the ego eventually relinquishes the lost object, melancholia is pathological. In melancholia, the object-cathexis is not released; instead, the ego identifies with the lost object and turns aggressive energies inward, resulting in self-reproach, guilt, and psychic fragmentation. As Freud ([1917] 1957, 246) writes, "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself". Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* becomes a compelling narrative of this dialectic, demonstrating the complex psychological terrain between grief and healing, between a melancholic fixation on her deceased mother and the gradual movement toward mourning via the symbolic and literal journey along the Pacific Crest Trail.

Strayed herself explicitly frames the death of her mother as the moment her life unravelled. "Watching my mother die and having to live without her, that was the hardest thing I'd ever done." (Strayed 2012, 95) This trauma is not merely a source of pain but the origin of a profound psychic rupture that would instigate an inward spiral in which her marriage collapses, her family dissolves, and she turns toward drug use and sexual recklessness. These reactions function not merely as narrative devices but rather reflect Freud's concept of melancholic compulsion. Freud describes melancholia as a condition in which "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object" (Freud [1917] 1957, 249). This process results in a form of internal self-destruction indistinguishable from self-loathing. According to Freud, melancholia involves the replacement of the emotional loss of the loved object with identification: "In this way, an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego altered by identification" (Ibidem). This dynamic is clearly evident in the memoir *Wild* as Strayed's identity undergoes disintegration. She relinquishes her married name and consciously adopts the name 'Strayed,' a symbolic reflection of her psychological state. The name itself, she writes, means: "*to wander*

from the proper path, to deviate from the direct course, to be lost, to become wild, to be without a mother or father, to be without a home, to move about aimlessly in search of something, to diverge or digress" (Strayed 2012, 96). The very name signals the melancholic disorientation, where the self and the lost object merge in the unresolved space of psychic mourning.

Strayed's self-destructive choices, particularly her heroin use and indiscriminate sex, are not random. They function as compulsions, echoing Freud's later articulation of the 'repetition compulsion' in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (Freud 1920), where trauma manifests as a drive not toward mastery but toward re-enactment of suffering. "...compulsion to repeat [is] something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides" (Ibid, 23). Strayed's repeated immersion in pain-emotional, physical, and sexual, functions as a melancholic holding onto the trauma of her mother's death.

Cheryl Strayed's decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail can be understood as both literal and symbolic—a ritualized enactment of working through grief. In psychoanalytic terms, it resembles melancholia which Freud describes as follows: "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245). The trail functions as an analytic space: a shifting terrain across which Strayed must confront and eventually relinquish her melancholic attachment. Her journey reflects the painful and prolonged transition from melancholia to mourning, a process marked by psychic labour and the acceptance of symbolic loss. This is further evidenced by Strayed's own reflection: "Perhaps the impulse to purchase the PCT guidebook months before had been a primal grab for a cure, for the thread of my life that had been severed" (Strayed 2012, 95). The 'thread' metaphor recurs as she hikes: "I could feel it unspooling behind me—the old thread I'd lost, the new one I was spinning" (Ibidem). The act of walking, physically forward, mirrors a psychic reintegration—a narrative rethreading of selfhood disrupted by traumatic loss.

Strayed's memoir also dramatizes the Freudian idea that mourning requires memory work. In his 1914 essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," Freud outlines the process by which the subject moves from traumatic repetition to symbolic processing. "...the patient does not remember anything of what is forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he

repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud 1914, 150). Strayed frequently engages in this form of working-through, recalling episodes from her past—her mother’s optimism, her impoverished childhood, her failed marriage—not in a linear sequence but through spontaneous, sensory-laden flashbacks. The trail, in this way, becomes a site of deferred processing, echoing what trauma scholars term *nachträglichkeit* or deferred action, where the trauma becomes fully traumatic only in retrospect. Even her dreams and internal monologues operate as spaces of psychic mourning. In one vivid recollection, she says, “I was her daughter, but more. I was Karen, Cheryl, Leif. Karen Cheryl Leif. Our names blurred into one in my mother’s mouth all my life” (Strayed 2012, 13). The symbolic fusion of self and sibling identities under maternal love further evidences Freud’s point that melancholia often coexists with narcissistic identification. Her mother’s death, therefore, is not just a loss of a person but a dismembering of the psychic scaffolding of the self.

Notably, *Wild* never presents mourning as complete. Rather, healing is framed as incremental and cyclical. Trauma theorist Dori Laub observes that, “Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect” (Laub 1992, 69). Strayed’s return to key memories, her verbalization of pain in the wilderness, and her solitary encounters with grief align with this notion of re-dramatization, when she revisits the moment when her mom is diagnosed with cancer: “We didn’t exchange a word. Not because we were so alone in our grief, but because we were so together in it, as if we were one body instead of two” (Strayed 2012, 12). The language fuses identities, underscoring the melancholic fixation and hinting at how deeply intersubjective her grief remains.

Through this psychodynamic lens, Strayed’s physical suffering in the form of the blisters, the lost toenails, the hunger, also gains metaphorical weight. These bodily marks of distress externalize what psychoanalysis would recognize as internal lacerations of melancholia. The trail strips her down and literally wounds her, enacting a corporeal form of grief. Yet, paradoxically, this same physical pain becomes the medium through which Strayed can begin to re-anchor herself in the world. As Freud noted, mourning requires that “reality-testing has

shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object” (Freud [1917] 1957, 244). Each step Strayed takes becomes a reality-testing manoeuvre, a working-through of loss.

In the end, *Wild* enacts what Cathy Caruth describes as trauma’s disruption of narrative coherence—a structure governed not by linear progression but by rupture, repetition, and belated meaning-making” (Caruth 1996, 4). By situating Strayed’s journey as both an unconscious compulsion and a conscious confrontation, we see her movement from Freud’s melancholia toward mourning—not through forgetting, but through the labour of remembrance and the painful reshaping of self.

Eros rising: Encounters with nature, others, and self

In his essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud introduces the concept of Eros as the life drive, a force that seeks to “combine organic substances into ever larger unities” (Freud 1995, 43). This drive stands in opposition to Thanatos, the death drive, which aims to return the organism to an inorganic state. Cheryl Strayed’s memoir *Wild* exemplifies this dynamic interplay, illustrating how the protagonist’s journey along the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) becomes a conduit for the reactivation of Eros, facilitating healing and self-reintegration.

Strayed’s initial foray into the wilderness is marked by physical and emotional turmoil, indicative of Thanatos at play. However, as she progresses, the natural environment begins to exert a restorative influence. She writes, “The universe, I’d learned, was never, ever kidding. It would take whatever it wanted and it would never give it back” (Strayed 2012, 209). This acknowledgment of nature’s indifference paradoxically becomes a source of solace, allowing her to relinquish control and embrace the present moment, highlighting a shift from the compulsive repetition of past traumas to the acceptance of life’s unpredictability.

Freud posits that the pleasure principle governs the psyche’s pursuit of gratification, but it is the reality principle that tempers this pursuit, aligning desires with the constraints of the external world (Freud 1995, 7). Strayed’s journey embodies this transition. Initially driven by the desire to escape pain, she confronts the harsh realities of the trail, leading to a recalibration of her expectations and desires. This alignment with the reality principle signifies the resurgence of Eros, as she begins to seek sustainable sources of pleasure and fulfilment.

The physical challenges of the PCT serve as metaphors for Strayed's internal struggles. Her encounters with extreme weather, wildlife, and physical exhaustion mirror the process of working through psychic pain. Strayed's perseverance through the trail's hardships reflects this therapeutic process, as she confronts the rawness of her grief and gradually integrates it into her evolving sense of self. Interpersonal connections along the trail further catalyse Strayed's healing. Her interactions with fellow hikers and trail angels provide moments of human connection that counterbalance her isolation. These relationships, though transient, offer glimpses of mutual support and understanding, reinforcing the life-affirming aspects of Eros. Freud notes that love and social bonds are manifestations of the life drive, contributing to the cohesion of the ego and the community. Strayed's reflections on her mother's death reveal a shift from melancholic fixation to mourning. She writes, "I didn't know where I was going until I got there" (Strayed 2012, 27), indicating a movement away from compulsive rumination toward a forward-looking orientation. This transition aligns with Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia, where mourning involves the gradual withdrawal of libido from the lost object, allowing for new attachments and growth (Freud [1917] 1957, 244).

The natural environment plays a pivotal role in facilitating this mourning process. The vastness of the landscape and the rhythm of walking create a meditative space for introspection. Strayed observes, "I did not feel sad or happy. I didn't feel proud or ashamed. I only felt that in spite of all the things I'd done wrong, in getting myself here, I'd done right" (Strayed 2012, 189). These affirmations signal the reconstitution of the ego, as she internalizes a sense of agency and resilience. The trail becomes a transitional space where the boundaries between self and environment blur, enabling a reconnection with the life drive. Scholarly analyses support this interpretation. In a phenomenological-psychoanalytic study, researchers found that individuals often experience a profound sense of kinship with nature, describing feelings of being "kindred with nature," which fosters a reconnection with the self and promotes psychological healing (Schweitzer et al. 2018, 7).

Strayed's narrative arc culminates in a moment of symbolic rebirth. Upon reaching the trail's end, she reflects, "I had arrived. I'd done it. It seemed like such a small thing and such a tremendous thing at once" (Strayed 2012, 309). This declaration signifies not only the completion

of her physical journey but also the culmination of her psychic transformation. The integration of her experiences along the trail consolidates a renewed sense of self, characterized by acceptance, resilience, and openness to future possibilities. The final line of her memoir states, “How wild it was, to let it be” (Ibid, 311). It serves as a poignant embodiment of Eros in its purest form.

Wild serves as a compelling case study of Freud’s dual-drive theory in action. Strayed’s journey illustrates the oscillation between Thanatos and Eros, with the latter ultimately prevailing through the processes of mourning, ego reintegration, and the establishment of new libidinal investments. The interplay between the individual psyche and the natural world underscores the therapeutic potential of embodied experiences in facilitating psychological healing.

Conclusion

Cheryl Strayed’s memoir, *Wild*, thus offers a profound narrative of personal transformation, encapsulating the oscillation between the life drive (Eros) and the death drive (Thanatos) as conceptualized by Sigmund Freud. Through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, Strayed’s journey along the Pacific Crest Trail can be interpreted as a manifestation of the dynamic interplay between these opposing forces, illustrating the human capacity for resilience and self-reconstruction in the aftermath of trauma.

Freud’s essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” introduces the concept of the death drive, positing that beyond the pursuit of pleasure, there exists an unconscious drive toward destruction and a return to an inorganic state. This compulsion manifests in behaviours that repeat traumatic experiences, often to the detriment of the individual's well-being. In *Wild*, Strayed’s initial descent into self-destructive behaviours, substance abuse, promiscuity, and reckless decision-making can be seen as expressions of Thanatos, reflecting an unconscious desire to annihilate the self in response to the profound loss of her mother. However, Freud also identifies Eros as the countervailing force to Thanatos, encompassing the instincts for survival, reproduction, and creativity. Eros seeks to bind individuals together, fostering cohesion and the continuation of life. Strayed’s decision to embark on the arduous journey of the PCT signifies the activation of Eros, representing a conscious effort to move away from self-destruction toward healing and self-discovery.

Throughout her journey, Strayed confronts the rawness of nature and the solitude of the trail, which serve as catalysts for introspection and emotional processing. The physical challenges she endures mirror the internal struggle between Eros and Thanatos, as she grapples with grief, guilt, and the desire for self-preservation. The repetitive act of walking becomes a form of sublimation; a defense mechanism wherein unacceptable impulses are transformed into socially acceptable actions. By channelling her pain into the physical exertion of hiking, Strayed engages in a therapeutic process that facilitates the integration of her traumatic experiences. The concept of mourning, as delineated in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," further elucidates Strayed's psychological journey. Mourning involves the gradual withdrawal of libido from the lost object, allowing the individual to invest in new relationships and pursuits. Strayed's reflections on her mother's death evolve over the course of the memoir, transitioning from paralyzing sorrow to a more nuanced understanding of loss. This progression signifies the successful navigation of the mourning process, enabling her to re-engage with life and form new attachments.

Moreover, Strayed's interactions with fellow hikers and trail angels underscore the role of interpersonal connections in reinforcing Eros. These relationships, though transient, provide moments of empathy and support, counteracting the isolating effects of grief. Freud emphasizes the importance of love and social bonds as manifestations of the life drive, contributing to the cohesion of the ego and the community. Through these encounters, Strayed experiences the restorative power of human connection, further facilitating her psychological healing. The culmination of Strayed's journey is marked by a sense of acceptance and self-reintegration. Her arrival at the trail's end symbolizes not only the completion of a physical endeavour but also the resolution of an internal conflict. By confronting her pain and embracing the challenges of the trail, Strayed reclaims agency over her life, embodying the triumph of Eros over Thanatos.

In conclusion, *Wild* serves as a compelling case study of Freud's dual-drive theory in action. Strayed's narrative illustrates the oscillation between the destructive impulses of Thanatos and the life-affirming forces of Eros. Her journey along the PCT becomes a metaphorical and literal path toward healing, demonstrating the human capacity to transform suffering into growth through the mechanisms of mourning, sublimation, and interpersonal connection. This psychoanalytic reading of *Wild* underscores the enduring relevance of

Freud's theories in understanding the complexities of human behaviour and the potential for resilience in the face of profound loss.

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LITERATURE AND ART STUDIES

The way to death in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Anton Chekhov's "The Man in a Case"

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Abstract: Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) short stories have become the cornerstones in the field of short fiction writing. Mainly influencing the feminist writing of her epoch, Chopin's short stories like "The Story of an Hour", "Désirée's Baby", "The Storm" and many others have established her as one of the most prominent short story writers. Another distinguished short story writer of the same period was Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), a famous Russian author, whose short stories make the readers smile and, at the same time, question themselves. His most popular short stories – "The Man in a Case", "Gooseberries", "A Woman's Kingdom" and many others – depict a simple life but present the author's richness of articulation and narration. This study will analyse Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) and Anton Chekhov's "The Man in a Case" (1898) in terms of the processes that lead the protagonists to their deaths. The comparative study of these two short stories will show that the protagonists in both works go through three main temporal-psychological dimensions: suppression, freedom (change of state), and death. Mrs. Mallard and Belikov, suppress their true selves until a particular point in their lives. After they eventually experience a sense of vague and short freedom and a radical change of state, they suddenly die. This study will analyse the tools of suppression, the ways to freedom and transformation, and the processes that lead the main characters to death. The study will conclude that the close temporal paradigm of the authors paved the way for Chopin's and Chekhov's similar understanding of the concept of freedom.

Keywords: Kate Chopin, Anton Chekhov, short story, "The Story of an Hour", "The Man in a Case"

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Introduction

Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) name has been associated with her novel *The Awakening*. What is more, "[s]ince its publication in 1899, *The Awakening* has been the touchstone of Kate Chopin's literary reputation" (Ewell 1986, 1). The novel has put Chopin among the eminent short story writers of all times. Kate Chopin was born into an upper-middle-class family in St. Louis where she lived in a Creole neighbourhood. She got married when she was twenty and had six children. After her husband's death, Kate had to earn money, so she started writing short stories. Having been exposed to various cultures in Louisiana, where she moved after marriage, Kate Chopin was receptive to different lifestyles and socio-cultural frameworks. Hence, her short stories are charged with the robust voices of such backgrounds like Creole, black, or Indian. Furthermore, "Mrs. Chopin was an instinctive teller of stories. There can be little doubt that her writings gained in freshness through her method of drawing more or less unconsciously upon her various gifts" (Seyersted 1980, 130). Hence, the overbrimming and culturally alive and aware productive self of the author should not be overlooked. Chopin was an undaunted writer, especially if the time of her writing career is taken into consideration. "Her earliest stories show a marked concern with psychological realism, especially psychological portraiture of women at odds with the world, and distanced or amoral narration" (Papke 1990, 23). Indeed, as it is obvious with reference to her novel *The Awakening*, it was Chopin's incisive project to write about women. "For her and for her favored authors, art was a form of self-expression that was seemingly amoralistic in its choice of subjects but also extremely radical in that she felt there were no subjects true to the life of the writer that could or should not be presented" (Ibid., 24). In other words, Kate Chopin's focal point was to show life as it is. And it is mostly about intrepid, sometimes overlooked, female characters who try to withstand the perilous conditions of this world. Chopin's fiction "is regularly focused on the way that people shaped by their social environment seek to carve out better lives for themselves" (Koloski 1996, 8). Chopin's stories are charged with an energy that evokes desire to fight against rigid social norms and paradigms. Most of the times, her stories bring some voices from reticence and obliquity.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was born in Taganrog, in southern Russia. While in Taganrog, Chekhov became enchanted with theatre and this initiated the world-wide legacy of such important plays like

The Seagull, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, and *Uncle Vanya*. “The great playwright of the future had his first encounter with the theatre at the age of thirteen. The play was *La Belle Hélène*” (Laffitte 1974, 52). In 1879, he enrolled in a medical school. Parallel to his studies, Chekhov wrote prose. And as early as 1884, Chekhov learned that he had tuberculosis, from which he eventually died when he was only 44. Chekhov has been accepted in Europe and America as a seminal figure in drama, but he was also a brilliant short-story writer. Chekhov is a unique and quintessential prose writer of all times. Nabokov called him “a Russian intellectual of the Chekhovian type” (Nabokov 1989, 27). Chekhov was a self-identifying author both in prose and drama.

He belongs firmly in the main tradition of Russian literature as Wordsworth or George Eliot belong in the English tradition. Like theirs, his art extends the expressive possibilities of his chosen forms to the point where they seem innovatory, while at the same time drawing deeply on the resources of a civilization and its language and finally of a national history itself, embodied in character and idiom (Hahn 1979, 39).

Chekhov’s talent lies in his ability to imagine something that is encompassing eternity and, at the same time, to refer to something that binds humanity to its roots. Chekhov’s short stories are commendably bold, but reticent, suave, but down to earth, and extraordinarily entertaining. Chekhov’s stories are momentous fragments of life that reveal everything that is elusive, in the shadow, or garbled.

Chekhov liked helping people and his profession paved the way for his charitable activities. “He never billed the poor. When a cholera epidemic threatened, he organized a campaign of preventive medicine. . . . For two years he wrote very little, because of his work in fighting cholera. He led a campaign against famine” (Meister 1988, 5). He loved helping those in need and wryly criticized those who were smeared with corruption, dishonesty, lie, or deceit. He condemned “laziness and self-indulgence of his fellow-men, of their slothful life in which everything is shallow, stupid, and commonplace” (Patrick 1932, 658). His arduous journey to Sakhalin Island through Siberia, which worsened his health and was utterly lethal, was done for the sake of Chekhov’s ideals. “Finding a purpose to life through socially useful activity was one of the main themes expressed at the time of the Sakhalin trip (Borny 2006, 33). Chekhov wanted to experience Russia’s most precarious conditions. “By way of self-justification he

invoked his disgust with literary infighting, his need for a change of scene, his responsibility as a writer to experience Russian reality in all its horror, his interest in the possibility of doing a scientific study of the convicts in Siberia” (Troyat 1987, 115). Seeing life in all its vividness in many parts of Russia and abroad enriched his artistic output, though.

The Chekhovian grasp of Russian life is staggering: in this respect, as in many others, he cannot be compared with anyone. It would seem that there is no profession, no class, no corner of Russian life into which Chekhov has not peered. He set himself the task of giving a picture of all of Russia, because he thought of her and loved her as a whole (Eichenbaum 1987, 23).

In other words, Russia with its beauty, reality, and horror can be read and understood through Chekhov’s works. Surely, “[m]edical practice brought home to Chekhov with remarkable fullness the horror of life, the cruelty of nature, and the impotence of man” (Grossman 1987, 34). It was precisely his profession of a physician that opened his eyes to the realities of his surroundings. Probably, that is why “Chekhov came to be known as the bard of twilight Russia” (Freedman 1988, 1).

The aim of this study is to analyse Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (1894) and Anton Chekhov’s “The Man in a Case” (1898) in terms of their main characters’ existential processes that end in their deaths. In this study I claim that both stories depict the same pattern of life: ineffective agency (obvious or implied), freedom (or change of state) for an instant, and the unexpected or self-induced death.

“The Story of an Hour”, which according to Toth (1990, 252), is Chopin’s “most radical” story, was firstly published in *Vogue* on December 6, 1894, as “The Dream of an Hour” and later it was reprinted in *St. Louis Life* on January 5, 1895, as “The Story of an Hour”. Chopin’s controversial short story challenged the verbal traditions of that epoch as it discontinued the main normative endeavours and the literary canonization of the standard makers. The story is about Louise Mallard and her reaction to the death/life news about her husband Brently Mallard. When Louise hears about her husband’s death from her sister Josephine, she firstly feels grief and goes to her room. After a while, Louise revives at the thought of unexpected freedom, which drives her into an emphatic thrill. However, her joy is briskly supplanted by an unanticipated shock when she sees her husband alive. Louise, who has struggled with heart

disease for a long time, dies from a heart attack because of the figure of the alive husband foisted on her.

“The Man in a Case” is the first story in Chekhov’s *The Little Trilogy* book. The other two stories are “Gooseberries” and “About Love”. “The Man in a Case” initially was published in a magazine *Russkaya Mysl (Russian Thought)* in 1898. The story is narrated by Burkin to his friends in the countryside. Burkin tells a story of his colleague Belikov, a teacher of Greek. Belikov is characterized by his declarative holding on to numerous official/non-official conventions, social regulations, hierarchies, or supremacies. And what is more, he circumstantially expects others around him to scrupulously follow what he does. His colleagues, who are totally jaded of Belikov’s dominant and inconsiderate participation in their private lives, come up with a fanciful project of marrying Belikov to a just arrived at the town, young and cheerful Varenka, who is a sister of their new colleague Kovalenko. It is hard to believe but both parties agree, and a complex relationship is initiated. While the enterprising colleagues observe the mininarrative of Belikov’s and Varenka’s burgeoning love affair, Belikov’s expectations from Varenka are deflated as he confronts her free manners, robust joy and profound self-indulgence. Eventually, when, on these grounds, Belikov comes to Kovalenko to warn him about Varenka’s inappropriate behaviours, he is sent down the stairs. Pathologically regulations- and honour-minded Belikov lands right in front of Varenka, who inadvertently starts laughing at the sight. Unable to bear such offence, Belikov goes home and dies within a month.

Lack of autonomy

“The Story of an Hour” is “a fine introduction to the imaginative universe of Kate Chopin’s short fiction, a universe governed by a vision that is informed, intelligent, and compassionate, sensitive to ambiguity, far ahead of its time in the late nineteenth century and, in ways, still ahead of its time today” (Koloski 1996, 4). It is a very short story that embraces the whole female world and its problems. “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death” (Chopin 1976, 198). This is the first sentence of Chopin’s short story. The narrative suggests that people around Mrs. Mallard foresee the consequences of the news for Louise. It is not Louise who decides; everything is already arranged for her. Louise is

not given the agency, and this is obvious from the beginning of the story. “Indeed, in Chopin’s world view and fiction, the marginalization of women’s lives and desires, the consequent alienation of these individuals within and from their social collectives, becomes the central issue, the boundaries suddenly brought into sharp, clear focus” (Papke 1990, 33). What is more, as it widely appears in critical works on Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, the woman lacks her identity; she is presented through the familial abstract badges of her husband. So, using the husband’s familial name structure for the female main character at the beginning is Chopin’s strategy. She erases female identity to foreground the problematics of the oppressed. She invites the female reader to see such details like Elaine Showalter (1984, 39) in her article “Women’s Time, Women’s Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism” claims that Chopin’s *The Awakening* led to “‘awakening’ itself”. Another thing that strikes the reader in this first sentence of the short story is Mrs. Mallard’s heart problem. In fact, it is closely related to the previous discussion of the female oppression. Physical inconsistencies or health concerns just dissolve the ambiguity related to female weakness; they enrich the belief that women are potentially weak. Or as Distel (2018, 70) claims, “Louise’s body is simultaneously a site and source of shame. . . . it is potentially uncontrollable”. Thus, those, who see women weak in almost all aspects, are ridden with the belief that autonomy for a woman can be calamitous.

The next long paragraph after the first sentence is a contrived (by the author) narrative system that depicts ostensible “cares” about Mrs. Mallard’s health after she hears about untimely loss, but at the same time unveils the convention of jaundiced view on women. Indeed, the text space allotted for the paragraph that talks about the way how the news was told to Mrs. Mallard is larger than that allocated for Mrs. Mallard’s reaction to her husband’s death. The narrative unfolds in this paragraph in a way that shows that Josephine and Mr. Mallard’s friend Richards care about Mrs. Mallard and try to find the best appropriate way to disclose the sad news. They are worried about her. But the next short paragraph dislocates Mrs. Mallard’s weakness, undercuts the others’ expectations and adds an emphatic action on the part of Mrs. Mallard.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent

itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her (Chopin 1976, 198).

The unsettling moment for a conventionally driven public in this paragraph is Mrs. Mallard's wild cry, which implies her uncontrollable nature. When she goes to her room, after a long period of thinking she realizes her "self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!" (Chopin 1976, 199) The moment of self-assertion implies her inability to assert herself hitherto. In other words, Mrs. Mallard's contemplation brings forth a congealed form of her typical dependence. Distel (2018, 67), who analyses Chopin's story from a Foucauldian disciplinary theory, argues that the "Mallard home is the seat of Brently Mallard's power". The narrative implicitly conveys Mrs. Mallard's garbled condition in relation to her incarceration in a patriarchal discourse: "There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature" (Chopin 1976, 199). Through the narrative overbrimmed with the remarkable sense of upcoming joy and freedom, Mrs. Mallard is seen contemplating on her happiness. And from this contemplation it is seen that up to now she has gone through the process that daringly suppressed her identity, freedom, happiness and joy.

Even when Josephine worries about her sister and asks her to open the door and let her in, there is an implied context that ruffles one's thoughts: "Louise, open the door! I beg, open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing Louise? For heaven's sake open the door" (Chopin 1976, 200). Louise is not allowed autonomy. Conventionally driven Josephine unwittingly (or not) becomes the mouthpiece of the system that dislocates female power. A formulaic expression – "What are you doing Louise?" – reassures Louise's confinement in a male oriented world. It is a world that makes Mrs. Mallard "shudder" at the thought "that life might be long" (Ibidem). It is the world where Louise does not want to stay for a long time because of her life with her husband. And now this world is totally deflated leaving the trajectory of freedom, which, after all, is not long termed because Mr. Mallard happens to be alive. The last blow on Louise's autonomy comes from Richards who tries to hide Brently Mallard from his wife in the last scene. This tiny act is the reflection of

a sinewy and devastating manipulation of a woman's agency. She must be protected, she must be cared for, or she must be away from harshness of reality outside of her house. All these acts are delusive; they create a protective wall for a woman, but it is ostensible.

As regards Chekhov's protagonist Belikov, his lack of agency is also obvious, though the source of it may vary. Borny states that "Chekhov appears to have hated extremism of any sort" (2006, 42). And "The Man in a Case" is precisely about such extremism. Belikov is an extremist in his obsession with rules and regulations and Chekhov's portraiture of Belikov is incisive. Yet, "Chekhov did not pose as a moral teacher" (Patrick 1932, 658) in this story, but Belikov does. And as Pritchett (1988, 8) claims "[h]e represents something that had been a chronic evil in Russian life". Belikov is an audacious construct in a narrative in that he patterns the most radical choices and behaviour of a particular mentality. This mentality is clearly defined by the narrator of the story Burkin at the beginning of the narrative: "hermit-crabs and snails, are always trying to retire into their shells" (Chekhov 2002, 47). But this is not the complete signification of such a mentality. I should quote a long explanation of Belikov's appearance and mentality to deliver the exact picture:

He was remarkable for one thing: no matter how fine the weather was, he always went out in goloshes, carrying an umbrella and wearing a warm, wadded overcoat. And his umbrella he always kept in a case and his watch was in a case of grey chamois, and when he took out his penknife to sharpen his pencil that, too, was in a little case. Even his face seemed to be in a case, for he always kept it concealed behind the turned-up collar of his coat. He wore dark spectacles and a warm waistcoat, and he kept cotton-wool in his ears and he had the hood raised whenever he got into a cab (Chekhov 2002, 48).

Belikov's sombre appearance suggests his burden of duty that he must perform. His sophisticated system of life controls him and he is constrained in its paws. He is afraid of being exposed. The cases that Belikov almost frantically takes out or puts in are the reminders of his imprisonment in his fears, anxieties, traumas, or insecurity. Although it seems as if Belikov behaves like this because he wants to keep everything under control, it is precisely he who is kept under strict control. He is not free to behave as he wants to; he has buried himself prematurely into a coffin. And this is not a metaphorical statement. "Belikov's bedroom was like a little box and curtains hung round his

bed. When he went to sleep he would pull the blankets over his head” (Chekhov 2002, 50).

Belikov is projecting on to the physical appearance his authentic perturbed self because he “tried to confine in a case” his opinions too (Ibid, 48). He is obsessed with rules and regulations, “bulletins and newspaper articles in which something was prohibited” (Ibidem). When somebody disobeyed any rule, there is always Belikov lurking somewhere to spy and warn. Belikov stifled everybody around him. He holds that it is his responsibility to make people follow the rules. His favourite phrases are “I shouldn’t wonder if something unpleasant would come of it” (Ibidem) and “it will reach the ears of the trustees” (Ibid, 55). So, Belikov has a particular corporeal authority in mind when he follows the rules. When somebody committed “transgression and deviation”, it “plunged him into dejection (Ibid, 48); observing people is a pressing issue for Belikov. He visits his colleagues, “but it was plainly a heavy burden for him to come and sit with us, and he only did it because he considered it his duty as our comrade” (Ibid, 49). At one point it is possible to see Belikov as a surreal automatic robot that performs its functions in a downbeat manner. Indeed, Belikov is captured in a relentless whirl of social machinery that accepts the function of controlling everybody as its primary aim. What is interesting is that Belikov is successful in his odd exploits because “teachers were afraid of him. Even the director feared him. . . . The whole town!” (Ibidem)

When there occurs a possibility of Belikov’s marriage, everybody in the town thinks that it can change him. Yet, “he did not change his way of living one atom. On the contrary, his resolve to get married affected him painfully; he grew thin and pale and seemed to shrink still farther into his case” (Chekhov 2002, 52). Marriage is sharing, but for Belikov it is impossible. His life is arrested in the unending circle of establishment of regulations and the strict and solemn acts of obeying them. Falling in love, having emotional bonds, or branding himself as a husband means violation of his arrested condition. Marriage means an extra risk of committing something undesirable or being ridiculed. Belikov is afraid to make a choice, a choice to love, to share his life with somebody else, or to indulge in absolute freedom. And one of the reasons of his fear to transcend his contemporary reality, presumably, is his perception of Varenka. This is the beginning of the ending, indeed, as will be seen in the forthcoming parts of this study. Varenka, if seen from Belikov’s point of view, exhibits a dissipated behaviour.

When he sees Varenka ride a bicycle, his “face turned from green to white, and he seemed paralysed” (Ibid, 54). Although not scurrilous in his intentions, but with a dry poke Belikov exclaims: “Is it proper for schoolteachers and women to ride bicycles?” (Ibidem) Varenka’s boisterous nature unsettles Belikov and all his philosophy of life. He cannot accept the fact that people behave in accordance with their freedom.

A drop of freedom or a change of state and death

“The Story of an Hour” is a story of an hour when Mrs. Mallard experiences her heightened sense of freedom presumably for the first time. The story is mainly about what she goes through during one hour – indulging in the beauty of nature, imagining living only for herself, seizing an opportunity to enjoy gleeful future. The story “details a very ordinary reality and conscientiously analyses that moment in a woman’s life when the boundaries of the accepted everyday world are suddenly shattered and the process of self-consciousness begins” (Papke 1990, 62). When Mrs. Mallard starts to perceive her triumphalist sense of freedom, she, nevertheless, feels “pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul” (Chopin 1976, 198). This exhaustion is the remainder of her previous life that banished freedom, autonomy, choice from Mrs. Mallard’s existence. But now is the time of freedom; the trees emphatically hail “new spring life”, “the delicious breath of rain” (Ibidem) alludes to a poignant mood of happiness, and sparrows’ twittering promise resplendent future. And the open window through which Louise meets her new life is a symbol of “possibility of freedom and self-discovery” (Khan, Shah, Khan 2022, 27). “‘Free! Body and soul free!’ She kept whispering” (Chopin 1976, 199). Mrs. Mallard’s one hour of freedom is like a drop of water in the desert for her. “[S]he was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window” (Ibid, 200). Looking at Chopin’s story through the lens of Irigaray and her concept of the divine, Tseng claims that Louise as a “female divine can be seen as representing woman’s own ideals, self-representations and horizons, beyond the confines of patriarchal hegemony and paternal law” (2014, 32). In other words, Louise is able to transcend her immediate surroundings.

Kate Chopin’s uniqueness – or her “effective weapon” as Cutter (1994, 18) calls it – lies in her ability to meticulously depict female pernicious patterns of existence in a patriarchal world through the

language that elucidates how the female character perceives her freedom. The story does not convey the images of downtrodden and meek women under the authority of a grisly man. And this is exactly what Berkove (2000, 152) states when he claims that Louise is an “unreliable protagonist” who has “unrealistic expectations of absolute freedom” (Ibid, 158). Yet, Louise’s imaginative drop of freedom tells a lot. Brently Mallard’s image is limited – “little travel-stained, composedly varying his grip-sack and umbrella”, “amazed” (Chopin 1976, 200) at the reaction of the others. It does not mean that his agency is limited. According to Distel (2018, 67), “Brently’s exertion of disciplinary power is subtle . . . essentially invisible . . . because, according to Foucault, the person who exerts power does not need to be visible”. In other words, if analysed from a Foucauldian perspective, the story projects female suppression. Hence, Mrs. Mallard’s emotional outburst does not allow the reader to overlook the possible oppressive circumstances in her life.

There is something that frightens Louise though: “There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name” (Chopin 1976, 199). It was something that she experiences for the first time in her life – freedom and self-assertion. “It is frightening because it is not of her true womanhood world; it reaches to her from the larger world outside” (Papke 1990, 63). According to Podlasli-Labrenz (2016, 65), who analysed Chopin’s story in terms of Sartrean Existentialism, what Louise experiences is existentialist anguish. Being unfamiliar, the feeling makes Louise alert. “She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will – as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been” (Chopin 1976, 199). Louise is not strong enough, though, to come against this new feeling. “The habit of repression has so weakened Louise that her glimpse of freedom – her birthright – does not empower her, but leaves her unable to cope with the everyday reality to which she is abruptly restored” (Ewell 1986, 90) – her death at the end.

In the last scene of the short story, Mrs. Mallard dies, presumably of a heart attack. And the last phrase “of joy that kills” (Chopin 1976, 200) encompasses an elusive essence of Mrs. Mallard’s fundamental reality. The ironic phrase is the reflection of the others’ belief, which Chopin suavely integrated into the narrative. For Mr. Mallard, Richards, and Josephine, Mrs. Mallard dies because her heart becomes

overbrimmed with joy after seeing her husband alive again. What Louise goes through in this one hour is unintelligible for them. However, for Louise, the chance of being absolutely free just slips through her consciousness forever. “For Chopin, each individual – particularly each woman – possessed infinite potential for self-fulfillment and expression but also, at the same time, the greater possibility for self-compromise and self-destruction” (Papke 1990, 30). Although some critics believe that the end of the story does not clearly say whether Mrs. Mallard sees her husband or not (Cunningham 2004, 49), Brently’s entrance through that door is a peculiar deflation of Louise’s dream and it leaves her beneath a heap of suppression, authorial interference, and garbled condition. The key idea here is the fact that from now on it is impossible for Louise to go back to her previous existence. The supremely important freedom turns to be a fanciful dream and this transformation perturbs Louise and leads to her untimely death. “Far from being a melodramatic ending, the conclusion both informs and warns: should a woman see the real world and her individual self within it only to be denied the right to live out that vision, then in her way lies non-sense, self-division, and dissolution” (Papke 1990, 64).

When it comes to Chekhov’s story “The Man in a Case”, it is not possible to say that Belikov becomes free in the same sense that Mrs. Mallard does. In Belikov’s example, it is a change of state. The most abominable condition for Belikov is his being exposed, caught in an inappropriate circumstance. And he assiduously rips himself out of common social life for the sake of the life that fits into the official or non-official regulations. So, finding himself outside of such a life is a radical change of state for Belikov. At the same time, it is his reason to die, which is very close to what Colley experiences in William Golding’s novel *Rites of Passage*. When Belikov is kicked out of Kovalenkos’ house and sent down the stairs by Kovalenko himself, Belikov finds himself in condition that he has been escaping all his life:

The staircase was long and steep, but he rolled safely to the bottom, picked himself up, and touched his nose to make sure that his spectacles were all right. At the very moment of his descent Varenka had come in with two ladies; they stood at the foot of the stairs and watched him, and for Belikov this was the most terrible thing of all. He would rather have broken his neck and both legs than to have appeared ridiculous (Chekhov 2002, 56).

Finding himself in a surrounding where people disapprove his ideas and behaviour is a devastating circumstance for Belikov. He assumes that everything he does is worthwhile applause and acceptance. But the erratic and intrepid behaviour that Kovalenko exhibits towards Belikov unsettles the latter's whole world. Belikov idealises himself and keeps the town under his control; and Kovalenko disregards and ignores his truth. This was the first blow that Belikov gets. "It is the humiliation of the rebuff – not the fall down the stairs – that ultimately brings about Belikov's rather Gogolian death" (Freedman 1988, 4).

The next and the lethal blow comes from Varenka and her reaction to Belikov's fall. Belikov's fall is the destruction of his achievement that has cost him all his life, and it happens in front of the others:

As he picked himself up Varenka recognised him. When she caught sight of his absurd face, his wrinkled overcoat, and his goloshes, not knowing what had happened but supposing that he had fallen downstairs of his own accord, she could not control herself and laughed till the whole house rang: 'Ha! ha! ha!'

This pealing and rippling 'ha! ha! ha!' settled everything – it put an end to the wedding and to the earthly career of Belikov (Chekhov 2002, 56).

Belikov's despondent condition in this scene leads to his transformation. Belikov undergoes calamitous change that brings him to a recognition of the impossibility of living after this event. Belikov's bathos leads to his self-denial because his previous existence was utterly based on his self-idealised image. His being exposed in front of Varenka and the others is a moment of his so-called freedom from the stifling regulations, conventions, and rigid traditional patterns of existence. The difference between Mrs. Mallard and Belikov in this drop of freedom and transformation lies in their perception of it. While for Mrs. Mallard it is gleeful, for Belikov it is a catastrophe.

After the event, "he first took Varenka's picture off the table, then he went to bed and never got up again" (Chekhov 2002, 56). Belikov dies in a month. Although Belikov dies in a month, the force that drives him to his demise occurred in a moment. It was a moment of change of life. And being a very conservative man, Belikov cannot stand any kind of change. Belikov believes in the collective approval of his way of life and seeing that there might be people who disapprove of his so-called correcting function leaves him utterly frustrated. Moreover, being exhibited as an animal in a circus, where people come to laugh and entertain themselves makes Belikov lose his faith in the meaning of life.

Conclusion

Believing that they have a stable and unified life, Mrs. Mallard and Belikov suddenly find themselves in an unpredictable condition after which they die. The two short stories analysed in this study – Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” and Chekhov’s “A Man in a Case” – seek to question human existence in terms of its relation to freedom, transformation, obsessions, fears, traumas, and social norms. “Chekhov’s aim was to make his readers and spectators aware of the stagnant, stupid and mediocre lives they all lived and, by doing so, make them aware that this was not the inevitable fate of humanity” (Borny 2006, 49). The theme of time also seeps into the contexts of the stories. Time’s unity disintegrates when Mrs. Mallard’s and Belikov’s moments of freedom and change of state are narrated as it loses its consistency. In other words, the moments become eternity for these characters. Mrs. Mallard’s and Belikov’s moments of freedom and change dismantle their previous existence, their depths of routine lives, and their ostensible selfhood. The illusions/disillusions into which they were thrown into, and which seemed to be sinewy are vaporised when they find themselves in the moments of transformation. These transient moments, nonetheless, are experienced just to move these characters into the realm of eternity.

To conclude, I want to claim that the proximity of temporal paradigms has created an affinity in Kate Chopin’s and Anton Chekhov’s understanding of the concept of freedom. Though Belikov’s moment of freedom confounds the reader a bit, the whole idea of freedom worked out in the story gives the same outcome. The freedom that Chopin creates for Mrs. Mallard is similar to the freedom that Chekhov provides for Belikov’s colleagues and the other characters in the town. Both stories vividly portray the fact that life is very short and that we should strive to expand our moments of freedom and transformation.

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Cooking the self: Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*

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Abstract: Food is a basic requirement for all living beings in the world. It is considered a significant factor in leading a life. Some people have food to satisfy their stomachs, while others have food to achieve their goals. Lévi-Strauss writes about food from different angles. This study employs Claude Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle Theory, which differentiates between the raw, cooked, and rotten as symbolic categories within a cultural system, to analyse Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997). In addition to providing sustenance, the novel's spices serve as a bridge for identity, memory and cultural transformation. The novel demonstrates how food significantly impacts people's lives, profoundly changing them and providing a sense of emotional fulfilment. This research paper provides insights into the influence of food on Tilottama's cultural evolution, from its natural state through the stages of raw, cooked, and rotten.

Keywords: raw, cooked, rotten, nature, cultural transformation, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Introduction

Famous Indian-American novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is esteemed for her lyrical prose and examination of the realities faced by South Asian immigrants. She has received praise from critics across various genres for her writings, which combine myth, tradition, and modern life. One of her fascinating novels, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), blends significant cultural understanding with magical realism. The novel exemplifies her distinctive storytelling approach, which unites East and West. The story takes place in a small spice shop in Oakland, California. It revolves around Tilottama, a mysterious woman deeply rooted in Indian rituals and in understanding the hidden

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qualities of Indian spices. She helps members of the Indian diaspora, who encounter struggles with their identity, love, and adversity in a foreign land, by drawing on her connection to spices. Tilo starts to question the rigid guidelines of her mystical order. She is forced to deal with the consequences of prioritising her own desires over her sacred obligations. The transition of food from raw to cooked and fermented serves as a metaphor for the transformation of cultural structures and the human journey from barbarism to civilisation, as Claude Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle Theory illustrates the relationship between nature and culture. He regarded food preparation as a coded system of meaning and argued that "the preparation of food is a form of language that reveals a society's structure" (Graf and Mescoli 2020, 465).

Divakaruni's narrative explores deeper social and psychological changes, particularly within the diasporic context, highlighting these through culinary ingredients, especially spices. As natural preservatives and antioxidants, spices also help prevent or reduce food deterioration and spoilage, thereby increasing its nutritional value. "From ancient times, spices have played a major role in the lifestyle of people from certain parts of the world" (Kunnumakkara et al. 2009, 1). "Different spices may help us with different troubles" (Divakaruni 1997, 71). Tilo, the mysterious main character, symbolises the transition from raw emotions to a spiritually cooked state that becomes rotten by desire and later evolves into cultural refinement, with spices serving as mystical aids and culinary purposes.

The raw: Tilo's feelings of alienation and unformed identity

In Claude Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle Theory, the raw refers to the pure and unchanging state at the emotional, cultural, and social levels. This idea is evident in *The Mistress of Spices* through Tilo's early identity and her customers' emotional upheavals. Initially, Tilo is in a raw emotional and spiritual state. Her journey begins with acts of violence, loss, and the confinement of her tragic infancy in India. The rawness is both physical and symbolic; she is unrefined and not yet shaped by the influences of spices and cultural norms that she later adopts.

The raw stage of Tilo depicts her transparency and sincerity before she undergoes changes. Her parents lose hope of having another girl-child when Tilo is born in a village in India. She grows up in circumstances that make her feel solitary. As she matures, she

discovers a mysterious power within herself. “I who had been last was now first. There was something else too, a deep wordless sorrow...” (Divakaruni 1997, 9). These lines reveal her loneliness and the purity of her existence. “Mother take back the power. Let me stay here with you. What satisfaction can be greater than to serve the one I love” (Ibid, 58). This reflects her unwavering love for her Old Mother on the mystical island. As Tilo remains pure, so are the spices. It is revealed through her words: “I will take them into the inner room, the one with no windows, where I keep the purest spices, the ones I gathered on the island for times of special need” (Ibid, 6). Not only are the spices pure, but Tilo’s heart is also. Tilo remains unprocessed, raw, and unaltered, like the raw spices, until she encounters Raven in America.

Tilo struggles between her desire and duty. To keep her mind and body in a natural state, she prefers to take Asafoetida as “it is an old traditional phytomedicine used to treat various diseases in different countries” (Shahrajabian et al. 2021, 36). It helps Tilo balance her cultural and spiritual life as a Spice Mistress in America. The spices store turns into a holy place enduring the rawness, depending on the immigrant's journey. “When your heart is crusted over with your own pain, it is easy to feel little for others” (Divakaruni 1997, 22).

The cooked: Transformation and adaptation

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, ‘cooked’ is a symbol of cultural transformation. Food in the hands of humans transforms from raw to a cooked meal with form and purpose. It signifies growth, healing, adaptation, and socialisation. It represents people undergoing transition into new cultural contexts or resolving internal difficulties through spiritual and emotional development. In this phase, transformation becomes possible. Tilo’s transformation is vibrant with the help of mystical spices. She is skilled in ancient mystical traditions and deeply grounded in their ritual, discipline, and structure, which essentially ‘cooks’ her raw powers into controlled and socially valuable skills. She is not merely born magical. Her abilities are evolving and being shaped, much like raw food is cooked to nourish others. “The cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw... in any cuisine, nothing is simply cooked” (Lévi-Strauss 2008, 37).

Cooking raw food varies by place, using local ingredients. Similarly, Tilo, living in a different location such as Oakland, California, endeavours to adapt her Indian identity and traditions to a multicultural, modern society. She merges her Indian heritage with the

realities of diasporic life, preserving the cultural elements while maintaining their core essence. Tilo controls the spices, which are natural elements that humans have transformed into something useful, symbolic, and social. Her evolution from a naive girl into a Spice Mistress with discipline reflects Lévi-Strauss's idea of cultural refinement and adaptation of nature. Her journey in America illustrates how food and people are culturally 'cooked' to adjust to the new world.

Tilo is 'twice-cooked' as she transforms from a selfless Mistress of spice to an ordinary woman who chooses personal love for Raven by breaking the rules. She seeks the help of sandalwood for comfort, lotus root for longevity, and 'makaradwaj' to become young and beautiful. Sandalwood "plant is considered sacred and its importance and usage are also mentioned in Vedas, Puranas, Buddhism, epics and scriptures" (S. Choudhary and G. Choudhary 90), and lotus... is regarded as a sacred flower grown as a freshwater aquatic plant" (Beni and Bajpai 2024, 134). "*Makaradwaj*, king among spices...who is the conqueror of time" (Divakaruni 1997, 261). Tilo develops her beauty in accordance with American culture and aspires to be as youthful and attractive as the city's bougainvillea girls. "Culture is a mediation of the relations between man and the world" (Lévi-Strauss 2008, 37).

The rotten: Dislocation and cultural decay

In Claude Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle Theory, 'the rotten' represents elements that decay due to neglect, interruption, or cultural rupture. It marks a shift in culture or emotions where identity begins to erode rather than develop. Tilo is a prime example of this stage. She starts as a devoted practitioner of a mystical discipline but enters a rotten phase by neglecting the rules of the spices laws she once regarded as sacred, and undergoes an inner unravelling. Driven by love and empathy for her customers, she touches them, breaking the rules of Old Mother once again. "It is not allowed for a Mistress to touch those who come to us" (Divakaruni 1997, 6). Eventually, she begins to see serving people as a form of mystical slavery and chooses the path of personal agency and love. She decides to defy the First Mother because she loves Raven. Occasionally, she unintentionally violates the rules. She uses spices to satisfy her personal desires and longings, which causes spiritual disconnection. Longing for the voice of spices, she questions herself, "Tilo are your powers leaving you" (Ibid, 181).

Her purpose begins to fade as she prioritises her personal emotions over her divine duty. The strength of the spices diminishes, leading to destruction of her shop and disorder among her customers. Tilo initially hesitates when Raven takes her hand, but she allows it. “I should not have permitted it. But how could I pull away. All those things you warned me against, First Mother, I wanted them” (Divakaruni 1997, 28). She remembers her Old Mother warning her about disobeying the Spice Mistress's principles while she was on the island. “Look well Mistresses. Once in a great while a Mistress, grown rebellious and self-indulgent, fails her duty and must be recalled. Warning is sent to her, and she has three days only to settle her affairs” (Ibid, 56).

Tilo succumbs to her own desires, which makes it difficult and perplexing for her to choose and provide her clients with the ideal spices for the perfect solution. ““When you begin to weave your own desires into your vision,’ the Old One told us, ‘the true seeing is taken from you. You grow confused, and the spices no longer obey you”” (Ibid, 72). To meet Raven again, Tilo once more breaches the Spice Mistress’s rule against crossing the store’s boundaries and enters America. She prepares by looking in the mirror, which is forbidden for them. ““Tilo have you gone crazy is this why you broke the rule of boundary and stepped into America. For this...And the mirror, though what I will need it for I cannot yet tell. No Tilo, not that most dangerous of forbidden things”” (Ibid, 130).

Under Lévi-Strauss’ ‘rotten’ concept of the culinary triangle, Tilo changes her eating habits to suit her own desires and experiences ecstasy within them. “When I drink (another Mistress rule I am breaking) the wine travels through me, cold and then hot, points of light that collect in the small space behind my lids, begin to flicker” (Ibid, 197). She offers her life to escape the guilt of breaking numerous spice rules, and she destroys herself with red chilli, a sign of devastation that also erases her identity as a Spice Mistress, but spices forgive Tilo. She tries to establish herself in a new role, despite the critical phase. Raven renames her Maya, and she attempts to establish herself in a new role, despite the fact that the phase is critical. Tilo reveals her lost mystical life to Raven and steps into a new life with a new name. ““Come on,’ I say to Raven, and hand in hand we walk toward the car” (Ibid, 317).

Rotting processes reveal issues of expressive stagnation and cultural decline. When trauma causes internal breakdowns, Tilo embodies a

state of decline. However, the novel suggests that decay can act as fertile ground for renewal and transformation, indicating that even this phase of life is not final.

Conclusion

The novel's characters embody the three metaphorical stages of cultural experience—the raw, the cooked, and the rotten—as interpreted through Claude Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle Theory. 'The raw' signifies unaltered identity and emotional vulnerability. At this stage, the character Tilo (in her early years) remains unaffected by societal changes, unsure of her place in society, and is characterised by suffering or displacement. Their unadulterated state marks the beginning of the emotional or immigrant journey.

'The cooked' signifies change and adaptation, an identity reshaped by emotional growth and cultural exchange. To live peacefully in a new country, individuals must shed their rawness and embrace new cultural and culinary practices, akin to how certain foods must be prepared and cooked before they are edible. Tilo uses self-definition and emotional resilience to find balance, strength, and voice. They become hybrid beings that are 'cooked' into multifaceted, adaptable identities rather than remaining entirely rooted in tradition. The process of rotting reveals issues of emotional stagnation and cultural displacement. When trauma causes inner breakdowns, Tilo represents a state of decay. Nonetheless, the novel suggests that rot can be fertile ground for rebirth and transformation, suggesting that even this phase is not the end.

By placing these characters within Lévi-Strauss's triangle, Divakaruni offers a deeper insight into the immigrant experience, where food, memory, emotion, and identity are all intricately intertwined. The spices in *The Mistress of Spices* become live symbols of transformation rather than merely magical ingredients or therapeutic aids. They demonstrate how individuals develop, change, struggle, and ultimately discover their own new identity.

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Digital diasporas and storytelling: Reimagining Black women's narratives in Adichie's *Americanah* and Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*

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Abstract: The twenty-first century has brought about a transformation in the ways diasporic identities are expressed, with digital platforms becoming essential spaces for identity-making, cultural negotiation and memory transmission. The earlier researches on diasporic storytelling were limited to oral traditions, novels and community narratives but the rise of digital media gave space for storytelling and diasporic narrative in digitally mediated settings. Hence, this paper explores how African women in the diaspora use digital storytelling in the form of vlogs, blogs, online forums and social media in order to reconstruct and claim silenced voices and create new cultural archives that challenge hegemonic narratives as well as redefine belonging thus showcasing how digital narratives create interactive transnational communities. The paper draws on to Black feminist thought of Bell Hooks, memory studies by Marianne Hirsch, decolonial framework of Walter D. Mignolo and utilizes Stuart Hall's theorization of cultural identity as 'becoming' rather than fixed and Paul Gilroy's conception of diaspora as transnational hybridity. The paper also investigates into contemporary digital diaspora theory of Jennifer Brinkerhoff showcasing textual interconnections between digital self-representations on platforms like blogs and social media dealing with migration, race, and gender with that to contemporary African diasporic fiction such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*. These digital platforms such as blogs movements and hashtags archive identity, trauma and resistance resonate very well with the narratives of Black women.

Keywords: digital diaspora, Black women's narratives, storytelling, digital media, memory and belonging

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Introduction

Migration and diaspora have been important aspects in the history of African people and their descendants, and have continued to impact both global cultural production and personal identity. Oral traditions, slave narratives and postcolonial literature have become the mediums through which stories about the diasporic experience have been passed on. These communicated stories transfer trauma, reserve, memories and help in regenerating sense of belonging. Digital platforms such as blogs, vlogs, social media, and online archives have transformed the whole outlook of diasporic cultural creation, they have helped largely in the swift trade of testimonies, the development of global networks, and the real-time archiving of events. These platforms show how memory is affected by the media that present it, reflecting what Astrid Erll (2011) terms as the ‘mediality of memory’ a notion that says memory can always be altered and modified by the medium through which it is communicated, be it oral tradition, films, writings and the Internet. Thus, digital storytelling permits African diasporic women to reclaim their voices, discard erasure and oppose the diminishing image that continues to exist in Western media about them. The paper explores how African women are vigorously redefining and transforming global conceptions of diaspora and identity in manners that bridge generational, cultural and geographic boundaries by placing digital storytelling as both a literary theme and a lived diasporic experience. These stories are not momentary, rather they are permanent repositories of memory, solidarity and resistance. By highlighting the value of digital media as a new frontier of diasporic narrative, it is providing a platform for African women to reclaim agency and imagine futures beyond racial and patriarchal limits.

Both the novels, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi are examples of how storytelling serves as individual testimony and a collective archive in the digital age when read in conjunction with real-world examples of diaspora blogs such as African Feminism, #BeingBlackAndMuslim, #AfricanAmerican and digital archives like African Digital Heritage. Ifemelu, the protagonist in Adichie’s novel *Americanah*, gives a literary model for comprehending how real African women negotiate and navigate identity in digital spaces by using blogging as a means to express the intricacies of race and diaspora. Thus, her blog becomes a narrative device as her online thoughts on race, beauty, and belonging

serve as a fictitious model of digital diaspora practice. In Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* inherited trauma, faith, and science are managed through digital networks, reflecting the ways in which diasporic individuals express hybrid identities through digital platforms. Gyasi presents narratives that resonate with digital testimonials of diasporic people navigating and negotiating intergenerational trauma and religious memory in digitally mediated scenarios.

The themes of migration, race, trauma and hybridity mingled with digital cultural platforms like blogs, vlogs, hashtags and online archives represents how identity and belonging are formed in digital diasporic spaces. Therefore, the two fields contrast with each other and are studied separately by the literary scholars hence very less research has happened that has analysed literature and digital practices together. Also, this lack is more striking with regards to African women, since their digital storytelling and personal narratives have yet not received much attention in the academic field. Thus, by doing a comparison between the selected novels and real digital narratives the present paper demonstrates how literature and digital media are part of the same storytelling continuum; and thus this highlighting African women's voices. Hence, digital platforms and literature collaborate and interact to create alternative cultural archives that reimagine diasporic futures. However, as per the data gathered from studies on the digital diaspora, the contribution of women specifically has received very less attention. Therefore, these platforms develop their base on literary and oral traditions and comprise these ideas about African women into the digital archives that are accessible universally. Although critics have analysed novels such as Adichie's *Americanah* and Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* for their themes of migration, hybridity, and trauma, some others have investigated the role of digital platforms in producing diasporic memory, but very few studies have combined both the strands. This gap is significant because both literature and digital media serve as counter-archives, allowing African women to recover their voices, negotiate belonging, and resist erasure. This paper fills that gap by adopting a comparative approach, reading *Americanah* and *Transcendent Kingdom* alongside digital cultural forms like blogs, vlogs, and online archives. The paper bridges the gap by exploring the association between African women's literature and digital cultural production and presents a theoretical framework, where Black women narratives can be understood as influential interruptions

that resists and counterattacks dominant discourses and reconstructs alternative archives of diasporic memory.

Theoretical framework

The paper employs the intersection of memory and diaspora studies of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Astrid Erll and Marianne Hirsch with digital diaspora theories of Jennifer Brinkerhoff. The paper also applies the decolonial and postcolonial frameworks of Walter Dignolo and black feminist thought of bell hooks to the study African women's narratives. Together these theories demonstrate how diasporic communities use online platforms. It examines the narratives of African women whether in literature or on digital media, highlights how resist and reclaim subjectivity, reconstruct memory and imagine futures. Paul Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic* theorizes diaspora as a transnational space of hybridity and circulation generating new cultural forms that surpass national boundaries. Gilroy rejects the notion that identity is connected only to one nation. In *The Black Atlantic*, he defines diaspora not as set 'roots' attached to a particular nation, but as continuous 'routes' created by transnational flows of people, memory, and culture. Although Gilroy demonstrates this through music, travel, and cultural interchange across the Atlantic, similar flows have now expanded into digital realms, where diasporic individuals maintain relationships, share testimony, and redefine belonging online. Adichie's *Americanah* mirrors this dynamic by using Ifemelu's blog, which serves as a digital 'route' connecting African, African American, and global readers in discussions on race and identity. Likewise, Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* depicts Gifty's struggle and dilemma with trauma, faith and science as part of a diasporic shift formed by both personal memory and the scientific records in lab notes and digital research. In both works, storytelling serves as an expansion of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which he defines as a transnational space which is formed by the actions of individuals, cultures, and ideas across nations. This space creates hybrid cultural platforms like digital media, music, literature and storytelling where identities are reformed through intersection of various cultural encounters. Hence, cultural identity is no longer defined by fixed origins rather filtered through the interconnected web of digital platforms.

According to Stuart Hall (1990), cultural identity is 'a matter of becoming as well as being' and he therefore argues that cultural identity should not be recognised as a fixed essence but as a process of

‘becoming’, which is always constructed within the representation. This insight is especially relevant in digital contexts, as diasporic communities utilize blogs, vlogs, hashtags, and online archives to express belonging and distinction. Ifemelu’s blog, in *Americanah*, demonstrates this process as she constantly redefines herself and addresses race, hair politics, and interracial relationships, creating a hybrid identity formed by her Nigerian roots and American experiences. Similarly, in *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty navigates through her Ghanaian immigrant culture, evangelical upbringing and scientific profession, demonstrating how identity is constantly reshaped across divergent cultural frames. When read along with contemporary digital platforms like African Feminism or #BeingBlackAndMuslim, these narratives demonstrate Hall’s assertion that diasporic identity is always ‘in process’ created through storytelling techniques that connect numerous cultural locales and forms of memory. The paper also applies Jennifer Brinkerhoff’s (2009), idea that digital diasporas are far more than just social spaces and they allow scattered communities to mobilize, retain their culture, and form global solidarity. This concept is critical for understanding African women’s digital storytelling. Platforms like African Feminism, the Natural Hair Movement and hashtags like #BeingBlackAndMuslim function as transnational spaces and platforms for women to tell their migration and identity stories while also building networks of solidarity that challenge mainstream narratives that dominate at global level. Ifemelu’s blog in Adichie’s *Americanah* implies this concept. By blogging about race, hair politics and diasporic belonging, she envisions a digital community that exposes systemic discrimination while reinforcing cultural identities. Similar to that, in Gyasi’s *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty’s balancing of science, faith, and inherited trauma is parallel to digital testimony in which African women define hybrid modes of belonging and survival. When placed together, these narratives highlight Brinkerhoff’s claim that online platforms expand diasporic identities into collective political and cultural efforts, converting individual voices into counter-archives of resistance and solidarity. Hence, these platforms show how memory is affected by the media that present it, reflecting what Astrid Erll (2011) terms as the ‘mediality of memory’ a notion that says memory can always be altered and modified by the medium through which it is communicated, be it oral tradition, films, writings and the Internet.

Lastly, the paper employs bell hooks' theory of 'talking back', which says speech is an act of talking back, a radical interference against silences that occurred in past. This theory of hooks is applied to the Black women in both the novels wherein the resistance to stereotypes and false narratives is expressed through the medium of digital spaces. Both the novels *Americanah* (2013) by Adichie and *Transcendent Kingdom* (2020) by Gyasi offer a deep investigation into migration, identity and the interactions between diasporic and digital life. Hence, these novels not only showcase identity negotiation in diasporic contexts, but also involve and connect with contemporary African women's digital storytelling practices. Online testimonials of migration and racism, in *Americanah* where Ifemelu's fictional blog and vlogs on diaspora highlight her politics are examples that reflect the act of 'talking back' where the black women's voices are imprinted into the archives that challenge and resists erasure. Additionally, Hirsch's (2008) concept of postmemory emphasizes how trauma endures through retelling across generations even in the absence of real experience.

Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative research methodology and does a comparative and contextual literary analysis of Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* within the theocratical frameworks of memory studies, diaspora studies, Black feminist thought and decolonial theory. Thus, the paper also applies interdisciplinary method by integrating literary studies with digital humanities that describes how online platforms influence memory and storytelling. Further, the close textual reading of the primary texts will be conducted to examine how the complexities of diasporic subjectivity are reflected in the narrative design, character growth and concepts. By placing the primary texts and digital practices within a unified framework, the methodology draws attention towards the continuum 'from page to platform' and answers three major research questions. First, in what ways do digital platforms serve as spaces for African women living abroad to convey their stories? The second question is, what connections exist between these digital real-time stories and these fictional texts literary representations? And third, in what ways do these practices support decolonial futures and subvert prevailing cultural narratives? Therefore, this interdisciplinary method provides a broader understanding of how storytelling, whether

it be digital or literary, functions as a practice of decolonial worldmaking, reclamation and resistance for African diasporic women thus projecting into a transmedia space in which narrative techniques advance and engage with digital diaspora practices.

Analysis

The paper analyses the interaction of diasporic identity, trauma, memory and belonging with the digital storytelling practices. The novels are placed alongside digital cultural mediums, for example in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's race blog is fictionalized as a digital diasporic narrative, emphasizing its purpose in addressing issues of race, gender and belonging. The protagonist Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant living in the United States, starts a blog titled 'Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black'. Through this platform, she narrates her experiences of race, belonging, and identity in a society that continuously excludes her and makes her feel like the Other. Similarly, *Transcendent Kingdom* showcases inherited trauma and the complexities of hybrid identity through digital and technological medium. Gifty, the protagonist in the novel records her experiments and observations in lab notebooks and digital databases. She contemplates about her career and says:

I didn't want to be thought of as a woman in science, a black woman in science. I wanted to be thought of as a scientist, full stop, and it mystified me that Katherine, whose work was published in the best journals, was content to draw attention to the fact of her womanhood. (Gyasi 2020, 83)

In this novel, the memory of family trauma is mediated through the language of science and digital research. Rather than retelling her brother Nana's death as a purely personal memory, Gifty reframes it through the medium of neuroscience, using brain imaging, lab notes and data points. This shows how memory can be reconstructed and presented through different mediums like digitally. In Adichie's *Americanah*, the blog functions as a digital archive of diasporic subjectivity as well as a narrative tool. With the help of the blog, Ifemelu is able to deal with the intricacies of identity in the United States, and she discovers that racial classification is impossible to avoid. Ifemelu is compelled to adopt the U.S. racial system, changing her identity from Nigerian to 'Black' in the American setting. This is in line with Stuart Hall's (1990) notion that identity is a process of

‘becoming’. Hence, identity is not a fixed but a process of negotiation, constantly constructed through representation. Ifemelu’s posts are interventions that manage and negotiate her constantly changing status as a ‘Non-American Black’, rather than static representations of identity. This is best expressed by her views on Black Hair politics. Ifemelu challenges the imposed standards and affirms Black womanhood through digital storytelling by questioning Eurocentric beauty conventions and sharing her journey back to natural hair.

She touched Ifemelu’s hair. “Why you don’t have relaxer?”

“I like my hair the way God made it.”

“But how you comb it? Hard to comb, Aisha said.”

Ifemelu gently combed her hair, dense, soft and tightly coiled, until it framed her like a halo.

“It’s not hard to comb if you moisturize it properly, she said, slipping into the coaxing tone of the proselytizer that she used whenever she was trying to convince other black women about the merits of wearing their hair natural.”

(Adichie 2013, 14-15)

This conversation directly dramatizes the politics of natural hair versus chemical relaxers, pointing towards the dominance of Eurocentric ideals of considering straight hair as beautiful and showcasing resistance for natural hair. Hence, it showcases how the act of ‘talking back’ (Hooks 1989) reclaims physical independence and choice against the Eurocentric standards of beauty. The fictional blog envisions real-world digital movements such as the Natural Hair Movement, where Black women with the help of YouTube and Instagram document similar changes. According to researchers like Oduor (2019) digital testimonies serve as collective archives that support belonging as well as challenge preconceptions. Ifemelu’s blog is a reflection of online communities such as African Feminism (2024), a collaborative blog where African women discuss resistance, gender and migration. Hence, these platforms show how memory is affected by the media that present it, reflecting what Astrid Erll (2011) terms as the ‘mediality of memory’ a notion that says memory can always be altered and modified by the medium through which it is communicated, be it oral tradition, films, writings and the Internet. In other words, memory is never pure. It always gets moulded by the mediums through which it is expressed. Erll defines that memory is told through oral stories will look different in comparison to memory told in a book, a film or on social media. Every medium adds its own layer of interpretation, understanding and representation to that vary

narrative. Therefore, when these Black diasporic women use digital storytelling via blogs, hashtags, vlogs or any form of social media, they are not just preserving memory but also reconstructing it in real time through these digital platforms. This way it gives some negotiated agency to these women to reclaim their silenced voices, fight against being erased and discard the stereotypical image of them as docile and marginalised by western media. Hence, digital platforms not just carry memory rather they change it and for the African women of diaspora, this change becomes a tool for empowerment and resistance. If narrated informally to friend, the same memory of hers would have felt less public and less formal in comparison to how its expressed to a larger audience through a digital platform. Therefore, the memory is not fixed and cannot be expressed through one medium or platform rather it is always converted from some form of personal memory into a digitally cultural memory. Hence providing a place or platform to African diasporic women to reclaim their voices, discard erasure and oppose the diminishing image that continues to exist in Western media about them with help of broader representation of stories into cultural memory via digital platforms. In these lines, Ifemelu is expressing and analysing her experience of being racialised in the U.S. and her blog posts functions as textual spaces of negotiation.

Similarly, Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*, demonstrates a different approach to narrate the trauma, personal memory and pain of a 28-year-old protagonist, Gifty. In this novel there is intersection of trauma with faith and science because Gifty interprets and expresses the personal memory of her brother Nana's addiction and her mother's depression through scientific data. She records her experiments and observations in lab notebooks and digital databases therefore the memory of family trauma is mediated through the language of science and digital research. Rather than retelling her brother Nana's death as a purely personal memory, Gifty reframes it through the medium of neuroscience, using brain imaging, labnotes and data points. This shows how memory can be reconstructed and presented to different communities like in this case, to the scientific community and how it can be archived in various forms. Gifty clearly defines her relationship with trauma despite not having been present during her mother's migration from Ghana. This further directs towards Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before. In other words, trauma is passed on and

communicated across generations and creates a memory so strong as if it is actually lived. Hence, in *Transcendent Kingdom*, trauma is mediated by science, demonstrating Astrid Erll's notion of 'mediality of memory' which says that memory circulates through cultural forms and in this novel, it circulates through the digital language of scientific research. In *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty's story shows how identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated across diverse frameworks of meaning. She picks science as her anchor that's why the novel is also a bildungsroman specifying Gifty's search for facts of the world, existence and life in a philosophical way and in future, with the help of a digitally and scientifically communicated manner.

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* theorizes diaspora as a transnational space of hybridity and circulation generating new cultural forms that surpass national boundaries. Gilroy rejects the notion that identity is connected only to one nation. Rather, he defines the Black Atlantic as a transnational space which is formed by the actions of individuals, cultures, and ideas across nations through slavery, migration and belonging. This space creates hybrid cultural platforms like digital media, music, literature and storytelling which does not belong to just one country but is a blend of various cultural practices from copious nations like Africa, America, the Caribbean, and Europe. Thus, Gilroy describes diaspora as a hybrid space where identities are reformed through intersection of various cultural encounters. Ifemelu's blog is a perfect example of this, as her identity shifts when she crosses borders, and she makes writing and blogging a medium to explain that transformation. Hence, the 'Dear Non-American Black' blog post of Ifemelu represents how race is seen differently in diaspora, and how digital storytelling through a medium like blog becomes a way of negotiating and reconstructing new diasporic identity. She resists the dominant U.S. racial discourses through her blog and creates a transnational space that affirms African diasporic identity. This act of resisting and reclaiming the history and identity erased by Eurocentric power is Walter Mignolo (2011) defines as 'acts of re-existence'. Ifemelu's opinion on interracial is dating further complicate diasporic belonging. She observes that dating white American men often required explaining her Nigerian identity, whereas dating African Americans revealed those cultural differences which she had not anticipated. These blog posts dramatize Hall's (1990) argument that diasporic identity is always a negotiation of difference, shaped by multiple layers of race, culture, and belonging. Hall (1996) claims that

diasporic identity is constantly a negotiation of differences formed by numerous layers of race, culture and belonging. Likewise, in Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty simultaneous dependence on neuroscience and faith subverts the binary between Western scientific rationality and African spirituality, demonstrating Mignolo's vision of epistemic disobedience.

Conclusion

African women's storytelling reclaims silenced voices, preserves memory, and constructs belonging within transnational contexts. In doing so, it affirms that storytelling is both archive of digital narratives of these women, anchoring their diasporic experiences while opening fictional space for decolonial futures. The experiences of Ifemelu and Auntie Uju in *Americanah* represent how African women cope with multiple systems of domination and subjugation in the transnational settings. In *Transcendent Kingdom*, protagonist Gifty's hybrid mingling of science and faith mirrors the multilayered challenges diasporic women experience in creating a sense of voice and belonging.

Hence, in both the novels as well as the real digital platforms, narratives by women represent how agency is negotiated under uneven frameworks. Storytelling develops as a multidisciplinary process for retaining and archiving identity, trauma, and belonging in both literary and digital contexts. Together, these stories show how African women's storytelling transcends novels and digital spaces, shaping diaspora counter-archives that reject erasure and foresee decolonial futures. The blog reflects how online platforms allow diasporic individuals to resist racial hierarchies and negotiate new forms of selfhood. As subsequently, Ifemelu's blog might be described as a type of digital home, a narrative space where personal experience transforms into collective memory. Thus, the paper examines diaspora through the lens of digital media. But in most situations, literature and digital testimony have been investigated separately, with the former as a fictional account and the latter as a lived cultural expression. However, African women's storytelling today surpasses these boundaries through novels like *Americanah* and *Transcendent Kingdom*. Hence, by reading novels and digital testimonies together, the paper highlights the continuum 'from page to platform' and emphasizes that postcolonial studies must account for digital media as vital sites of diasporic cultural production, alongside digital humanities

promoting the nuanced aspects of voice, form, and identity developed in literary studies.

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**On suffering in literature: The poet versus suffering.
Xhevdet Bajraj's *Lëngu i trëndafilave* (Rose Water), a test case of
Kosovo's Albanian literature**

Fatbardha Statovci*

Abstract: This article aims to address the universal phenomenon of suffering in literature. From the vicious circle in which good and evil counter each other as distinct entities, in principle suffering emerges as a product of the latter. The subject of widespread and profound discussion throughout the history of human thought, the notion of suffering still may provoke significant questions. This article will strive to offer a perspective on the nature of suffering in literature, which will enable a discussion around the perception of suffering in different phases bound up with human consciousness and the human condition, and thereby dig deep into its true meaning. On this level, the chief question has to do with the meaning of suffering in terms religious, philosophical and aesthetic. The discussion will go on to develop a thesis that art in the end is not simply individual, because it channels the fate of others, and will conclude with a concrete illustration of suffering in literature, in the shape of Xhevdet Bajraj's poetical work *Lëngu i trëndafilave* (Rose Water).

Keywords: suffering in literature, poet, poetry, homeland, exile, Xhevdet Bajraj, *Rose Water*, Albanian literature of Kosovo

Introduction

"Life may betray me, but never poetry. And I cannot betray poetry; it would be like betraying my own sorrows" (Bajraj in Kosovo 2.0, 2018). These two sentences, taken from one of several interviews given by Xhevdet Bajraj, set out clearly an idea widely elaborated in his poetry. The author creates an equivalence between poetry and sorrow (suffering), declaring them the same. Poetry is thus a synonym for suffering, and the language of suffering. The last war in Kosovo

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obliged Xhevdet Bajraj – seizing the opportunity given by the International Parliament of Writers and its programme for persecuted writers – to emigrate, first to France and then to Mexico, where he spent the rest of his life. The experience of war and its repercussions left ineradicable marks on Bajraj, widely reflected in his verse. In this way, his poetry emerges as a poetry of suffering for Kosovo, his homeland. In the same interview, Bajraj puts it thus: “I want to be worthy of the title “poet”, and to lend my voice to those in need” (Ibidem). The phrase further reinforces the sense of his empathy for the other, and helps us to understand more profoundly what it is that he strives to express in his writing. The experience of war, and the fear of it, are manifested in Bajraj as a perpetual anxiety and are key to reading and interpreting his poetry. As well as a deep pain, what he went through kindled in him an empathy for the collective fate, one that closely resembles his own: “The storm that caught us up during the last century has left terrible consequences, and we can feel that it might rise again. My experiences, and those of the people I’ve known, the pain that I and my people have felt, have led me to feel the pain of each of them” (Ibidem).

Finding himself away from home, far from Kosovo, Bajraj speaks with nostalgia and deep emotion. But, here are there, there are also indications of a despair about Kosovo’s fate even after the end of the war. Freedom has not worked out as he dreamed it might: he sees the misery of lost hope, and of the fear of tomorrow. Accordingly, Bajraj blends his own pain into his poetry, becoming one with the destiny of all – a mark of a deep empathy.

In 2015, the Nobel Prize for Literature was given to the Belorussian author Svetlana Alexievich “for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time”, with reference to her book *Voices from Chernobyl*, which speaks of the terrible history of Chernobyl, a great catastrophe that stunned the whole world. Svetlana gives life to this notorious event by means of voices telling of their experiences, and she does not write as herself: she speaks in their voices – indeed, she takes their personal histories and combines them within the work – becoming one with their suffering. Those unfortunate souls refuse to leave one in peace, and are heard echoing from a thick fog of desolation and confusion. Whenever you open the book, they are there, ready to articulate the terror that penetrated to their very bones. This chronicle of suffering tends to demonstrate literature’s great power in explaining the universality of suffering on

the philosophical level. Among other things, it may be said that literature is the path that leads to the other, that links to them and prompts to feel with them. In the end, how could otherwise be explained the above-mentioned work? It is a bridge that makes us one with the suffering of another, and rouses in us a dormant empathy.

Confronted with the question of what literature can do, Tzvetan Todorov (2007, 65-66) takes upon himself the mission of arguing the nature and self-sufficiency of literature and replies:

Literature can do many things. It can stretch out a hand to us in our deepest despair, guiding us towards other the human beings around us, enabling us better to understand the world and helping us to live.

If the starting point is the premise that “the goal of literature is to represent human existence” (Ibid, 75), then a possible conclusion is that literature and humanity (or more precisely that which humans represent by their nature) are bound by unbreakable bonds. Their point of conjunction is human life, reflected in all its nuances in literature and art. Through literature people are led to become one with each other, in their pettiness and greatness, in the sufferings and challenges of existence, in triumph and in trial. To put it more compactly, people contrive to establish a process of communication across distance, by which human life in its entirety offers itself an answer. Thus, Todorov’s definition, that literature fills the real world with meaning, it is really worthy at this point: “We are all made up of that which other human beings give us... those who surround us. Literature endlessly opens up this possibility of interaction with others, and enriches us without measure” (Ibid, 15).

Literature may serve as a kind of vessel into which passions and sufferings are poured. As such, it is linked directly with the discontents of human existence and its context. In a substantial majority of cases, literature is written as an attempt to escape reality, to be liberated from the burdens troubling the writer’s spirit: he or she is suffering from something overpowering, and this suffering finds satisfactory expression in literature. At this point the reader comes into it, experiencing the writer’s suffering – either finding themselves, or feeling empathy for the plight of another – and together they complete one another.

As a universal phenomenon, suffering has been addressed philosophically ever since antiquity, and even now the debates allow gaps for further discussions on the topic. The dilemmas that have been

stirred up relate to what suffering really represents, what it means to suffer, the meaning of suffering, and what is or should be a human answer to suffering. This article will attempt to analyse the phenomenon of suffering in literature, touching first of all on certain basic premises that attempt to define suffering, before moving on to its concrete and practical appearance in literature. To illustrate the latter point, this article shall devote close attention to a poetical work by the Kosovar author Xhevdet Bajraj.

Bajraj (1960-2022), a distinguished figure on Kosovo's cultural scene, was a poet, translator, dramatist and professor of literature in the Academy of Literary Creativity in the Autonomous University of Mexico City. His poetry has been translated into several world languages (including English, Spanish, Turkish, German, Slovenian, Hungarian, Danish and Polish) and he won many prizes. From 1999 until his death in 2022 he lived in Mexico City. The work to be considered is entitled *Lëngu i trëndafilave* (*Rose Water*), and as an example it corresponds ideally to the essence of our enquiry, because it is a work in which the depiction of suffering finds extraordinary form, and it is fertile ground for seeking landmarks in this *terra incognita* of the human psyche.

Suffering is meaningfully dominant in Bajraj's poetry: his verses are the most powerful legacy of this, and he says it explicitly. When asked about Kosovo – for him a *perpetually open wound* – and his migration to Mexico, he put it thus: "... I brought Kosovo with me; for me it was an open wound, a wound from which the blood still flowed, a wound continuing to leak pain and sorrow, and these naturally nourished my poetry" (Bajraj in Epoka e Re 2019). It is accordingly his feelings about Kosovo that will not leave him in peace, and that stir his poetic pulse. In consequence, his poems are poems of pain, of nostalgia, of trauma for his homeland – so far away, and yet borne deep within his heart. At the fork in the road between homeland and migration, Bajraj describes the idea of return in highly poetic terms, again a reflection of immeasurable impact on him: "When I come to Kosovo, with my very first step on that soil I feel like a child, so happy, so excessively happy, and I stay a month or so and when I'm parted from the country, I'm a sick old man" (Ibidem). Ricardo Romero Vallejo (2018, 69), a researcher of Bajraj's poetry and in particular of poetic imagery in his verse, takes care to emphasize the close link Bajraj had with Kosovo, even though he lived away from the country. He writes of this link: "He belongs to Kosovo, and he is

forever returning there, to his own soil, where he has a home. More than a home, he has a homeland... It is the home that comes back to him in dreams, the home of his childhood, the home of happy times.”

Having in mind the above context, the focus of this article will be the manifestation of suffering in literature and, beyond this, the relationship between the poet and suffering – the latter being what prompts him to write. The discussion will be guided by the notion of suffering in religious and philosophical terms, and by the idea that art is not always ‘narrowly individual’.

The poet versus suffering: Xhevdet Bajraj’s *Lëngu i trëndafilave* (*Rose Water*) as synonym for profound suffering

Xhevdet Bajraj conducted a substantial part of his creativity outside Kosovo, and the heavy burden of living far from his homeland weighed on his spirit until his death. When asked about this, Bajraj emphasized:

In any case, I carry my homeland with me wherever I go, like a traveller escaping a foundering boat who has one leg on his native soil, and now we are together everywhere, together with the living and the dead (Bajraj in ExLibris 2021, 2).

The fact that Bajraj lived his life in two different countries, two cultures very far apart from each other, makes his notion of patria more complicated than it appears at first glance. He was convinced that the homeland is something sublime, created and also carried with one:

You create and carry the homeland. Sometimes I snatch it up eagerly, sometimes it pushes me forwards. Even if I went back to Kosovo, it wouldn’t change anything, because now Mexico is a kind of homeland for me. Before I started to feel like this about Mexico, I thought that I was like some tree that they’d transplanted into a part of the world with very promising conditions, but that had been created for Kosovo and couldn’t flower or produce fruit far from Kosovo. After all these years in Mexico, and even if I were to return to Kosovo or Mexico, the same feeling would follow me. (Ibid, 4)

But however much the manifestation of this phenomenon allows room to declare the poet some kind of *citizen of the world*, this question has deeper roots. Bajraj seems to follow an anxiety that won’t leave him in peace either in his homeland or in exile: he is hostage sometimes to one, sometimes to the other. Nevertheless, from what may be read in his poetry, the conclusion is clear: his heart beats with his homeland,

and this is the source of his soul's suffering. Even his muse berates him for not being in his own country:

The muse drives me mad
saying that the poet shall sleep no more
without taming the wild lands
without returning to his own shore (Bajraj 2017, 41)

Life far from home is described in his verse as a “silent film”, and while survival becomes possible anywhere, flourishing can only happen in one's native soil. Bajraj's bond with Kosovo is a distinctive characteristic and it blossoms throughout his poetry.

Flicking through the pages of *Lëngu i trëndafilave* (*Rose Water*), the reader walks with the author through anxiety, gloom, pain and suffering – which becomes a collective name for the rest. All these phenomena colour the poetic sky grey, and this serves to emphasize the sense of melancholy. The cities, the people, the dreams, the smiles, the songs, the houses and the graves are all grey; the doves are grey and so are 364 days of the year – while the 365th is the death which, amid all the suffering, is the only form of escape and the gateway to peace (in the poem *The Hummingbird*). The way that everything keeps on turning is empty, and this emptiness causes the poet to vent his bile in dissatisfaction and suffering.

What kind of life is this/ in which the void is painful– are the opening lines of the poem *Emptiness*, which depicts a condition of stagnation in which people dwell in *life's black waters*, an image that summarizes the bleak landscape of existence. Once again grey predominates, representing melancholy, suffering, Baudelerian *spleen* and death. Death as a concept pops up all over the place in the work. In a world of suffering, everything is predestined to die. Even death itself. Life and death, these two chief entities, die; the human being is forgotten and departs in the company of a death that devours itself:

Childhood dies
First love
Youth
And then the days and nights die
The colours of the rainbow die
Birdsong
The bird itself dies
Dreams die, and age
And even
Life dies

And then a little time passes
And because it has nothing else to
Do
Death dies (Bajraj 2017, 52)

This poem, like the one entitled *Traces*, which expresses the angst of the threshold of death, is a burst of resounding despair. On behalf of his own people, the poet suffers *because we were not created to live life/ but death* (Ibid, 7). The lyric subject of the poem speaks as if overwhelmed by a state of sadness, which imposes the spirit of death and nothingness, in which life is reduced to just “a few remaining days”, carried in a sack as if they were the residue or surplus of time, and death seems predestined, a kind of curse established as companion to the subject and his people. In this poem the border between life and death, this being between the living and the dead, is fragile and almost transparent. In it three ages collide: the present, the past and the future – that which has been, that which is and that which is to come. In the poem *Three kinds of poet*, Bajraj classifies poets as those who look into the past and find it capturing their gaze, those who observe the corruption of the present and find it looking back at them, and those peer look into the future and perceive death smiling, “sitting cross-legged and smoking a peace-pipe for an unravelling peace”. These three kinds of poet are united by one thing: they are three dying as they write. Slavery pains the poet, but so too does freedom: he dies a little more each day, in disquiet, persecuted by the memories of the most recent war in his country. This condition finds its climax in the verses:

I have been dead for some time
but I have the impression
that I am dreaming what I write (Ibid, 24)

In the poem *The Refugees' Baggage*, Bajraj describes a personal saga of endurance, his own history as a refugee who flees into another country where he might be free. But complete freedom remains utterly elusive:

You took the telephone numbers of the dead
rivers mountains hills
the sky over the homeland
love and fear
in a plastic bag
and arrived in a new land
to live forever free (Ibid, 16)

– everything that might be carried is put in a plastic bag that will suffocate everyone, along with the person himself who is suffocated by suffering. He compares this predicament with the “winter of life” he feels himself: a lost liberty described in syntagm as “lost sun”, “the black light of the sun” or “the sun of night”. There is further critical evidence that, in thematizing the constant burden of war and terror, Bajraj begins in the personal and attains the universal. It is said of his poetry that: “Flowers, doves, apples and verses are generally, in his poetry, wild and dark. They depict death, in the homeland that war and violence have not managed to erase from history, the earth or humanity...” (Matoshi 2022). Wherever he looks it is cold, and the cold has overcome everything. The debris of the past aches fiercely in his spirit and everything that remains to him is included in a testament, the poetry itself, the weapon with which he might save the world, or at least himself. The poem *Sun of the exile*, characteristic of this discourse, he relates to the concept of freedom, something beyond the physical and taken as a category for spiritual liberation:

The freedom that surrounds me
is a beast
that devours me
under the sun of two worlds (Bajraj 2017, 13)

Just as the exile’s sun does not warm him at all, so likewise does freedom not satisfy him.

Kosovo is a land of flowers without scent. The past that has held him in a doorway waters the future with sewage. The poet suffers this, and his existence incorporates a state of serenity where nothing stirs, and a silence like that of the grave smothers the world around him: the sky has no colour, the river does not flow any more, the mountain is empty, the oak is dead, the snow is black, the flower has withered, the dog waiting for its master to come home is transformed into a phantasm and the doves are merely shadows – the veil of suffering enfolds this whole tableau with its images of death. A condition in which human wretchedness predominates and where an endless night is forever falling. And it is precisely this wound that infuses the poet’s verse.

The geography of Bajraj’s suffering is not parochial; it has nuances beyond the local – as far as the universal:

The history of humanity
is the same as the bleating of

a sheep running after its lamb
to the slaughter (Ibid, 26)

The poet empathizes with those who share a dark destiny: their lament is embraced in his own. He thus adopts the idea that we cling to the human, the humane, what is most noble in humans. To present this idea most clearly, in his poem *Humane* he writes:

We were all angels
then the Goddess sent her shadow
to put in our heads
just a tiny spoonful of brains
With that dose
hard to perceive
we become people
who eat people (Ibid, 9)

A world where cold reason reigns disturbs the poet, who returns to the traces of the primordial to frame a condition in which, as the famous maxim puts it, *man is wolf to man*.

In this harsh tussle with life, Bajraj huddles naked against the loneliness that overwhelms him and immerses him in suffering; he walks in darkness and sweltering heat as he gathers thistles in an attempt to kindle life once more, seeking the right word for the misfortune that leads humans towards suffering. His poem *The Coffin* is his edict, in the form of a testament for the reader:

When I die I hope they shall look for
the box of my black life
among my verses (Ibid, 80)

– a call to read and understand the poet through his poetry, uttered against inhumanity, the dehumanization of humans, war, injustice, oppression and above all against forgetting. He offers a plea that memories “not melt with the snow”, at risk as they are of being forgotten, because with forgetting human beings themselves disintegrate. Bajraj suffers and on behalf of this suffering he expresses his resistance. Such at least is the conclusion demonstrated by a reading of his poetic work *Lëngu i trëndafilave* (*Rose Water*).

Suffering as philosopheme (the semantic burden of suffering)

Seen from different perspectives, suffering can be explained as a universal phenomenon. It has been discussed in diverse tones across the centuries, and the definitions of it have varied according to the

basis of discussion. It has been apparent from the outset that suffering is an intrinsic element of humanity –in terms not physical (suffering from pain or sickness) but philosophical. In this sense it is bound up with the human spirit, and as such is challenging to explore. Discussion on suffering, in most of the cases, is related to its positive and negative aspects. From what is recognized as the genesis of human existence, suffering has been discussed in philosophical terms. In striving to give meaning to it, human beings have often linked it with the metaphysical sphere. According to the particular phase of human thought, the perception of suffering has altered relative to human consciousness and the human condition. According to the religious aspect, suffering has been portrayed as something that humans can never avoid. Through this prism, one suffers evil and good. From the religious perspective, suffering – sometimes also the consequence of sin – may take the form of a test. This latter definition can on occasion give the impression that the experience fills the metaphysical or existential gap caused by human suffering. Through this religious perspective on its origins, humans have found in scripture the consolation that suffering may principally be explained as a purging of sin or a trial that will be rewarded with peace in another world. Such at least is the message in the Muslim holy book, the Quran, which promises ease after suffering:

2. Have We not opened for thee thy bosom, 3. And removed from thee thy burden 4. Which had well nigh broken thy back, 5. And We exalted thy name? 6. Surely there is ease after hardship (*The Holy Quran*, 94:2-3-4-5-6).

In extreme circumstances, indeed, suffering is inevitable. In most such cases the individual turns to God for solace, or rebels against him. This can be seen in two concrete examples. The first concerns the Argentinian writer Ernesto Sabato: confronted with the death of his son, he gives himself to faith, parapsychology, esotericism, but none of them helps, and he says explicitly that “I wasn’t seeking God as affirmation or negation, but as someone who would save me, who would take me by the hand like a suffering child” (Sabato 1998, 97) The second, the antithesis of the first, is represented in the novel *Night* by Elie Wiesel; horrified by the extreme suffering of the concentration camp, he wrote: “‘For God’s sake, where is God?’ / And from within me, I heard a voice answer: ‘Where He is? This is where – hanging here from this gallows’” (Wiesel 2006, 90).

Buddhism, on the other hand, closely bound up with the idea that life is a cycle of unending suffering, teaches the concept of *dukkha*, translated as “suffering or the impossibility of satisfying all our desires (in Pāli, *dukkha*)” (Suzuki 2021, 37) – thus a condition in which not all of our desires are met. *Dukkha* – suffering – is one of the three recognized keys to life of Buddhism, and seen as a universal truth which is epistemologically self-explanatory. The notion of *dukkha* is linked to the dissatisfaction that leads to frustration, and thence results in an existential void, or in other circumstances a mere absence.

Seeking potential meanings for suffering, Stan Van Hooft begins his journey in ancient Greece with an explanation of how at the time it was linked to divine justice: that is to say, a situation in which divine law intervenes in human lives and punishes people with whom the Gods are dissatisfied; from there he moves on to the concept as seen through a religious prism, and specifically Christianity, the discussion starting with the idea of inherited sin – original sin, indeed – for which the one price was suffering. Christ himself was subject to this, his experience seen as “a paradigm of positive suffering” (Van Hooft 1998, 15). So, more or less, develops the idea that through the Messiah humanity is freed from original sin, and furthermore the Christian faithful are summoned by that sacrifice and share in the suffering, which is thereby given meaning. For Van Hooft, in consequence of that conviction “the Christian believes that salvation is achieved through suffering, whether their own or that of Christ” (Ibidem). In moral terms suffering is translated as a sacrifice designed by God for the achievement of salvation. Against this he sets another idea found in Christian doctrine, that suffering may turn into agony and “the victim of affliction is reduced to being a thing completely determined by the blind forces of causality” (Ibid, 16). Van Hooft also considers the subject from the point of view of the secular age, with the thesis that suffering has no providential meaning and has no kind of categorical link with theology. This divorces suffering from the idea of something preordained and inherently meaningful, so that whatever circumstances people find themselves in are coincidental and without divine purpose, thereby conclusively rejecting the transcendental character of suffering. At the end of his tour through the different phases of human thought – from Greek antiquity, through Christianity, taking in the stoics and Nietzsche whose attitude to suffering was acceptance (stoicism), ending in postmodernism which categorically separates suffering from the former definitions and sees it as bound up with a

crowd of circumstances that cannot be avoided because they do not depend on the individual – Van Hooft concludes:

Our own suffering awakens us to what the other is going through and thus creates in us the compassion through which relieving actions can be motivated. In this community of suffering, a meaning might yet be found for our own suffering. Perhaps all the meaning that suffering can have is that it teaches us to care for others. (Ibid, 19)

The explanation of suffering in philosophical terms is associated, to say the least, with two eminent names: Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer. Nietzsche is widely recognized as a harsh critic of previous morality and insistent that the existing chart of values should be torn up, because as he put it: “moral philosophy is the scabrous period in the history of the spirit” (Nietzsche 1968, 232). When he speaks of suffering, Nietzsche denies categorically its relationship to any kind of transcendental meaning. His attitude towards suffering is atypical, in the sense that the prism through which he sees it is unusual. While he accepts the existence of suffering and sees it all around the world and in every human, he believes that the confrontation with suffering shapes the human spirit. He thence concludes that “profound suffering makes you noble” (Nietzsche 2002, 166). Instead of giving oneself up to suffering, Nietzsche strongly suggested finding an alternative means of surviving in a world ruled by it. In this way, he seems to seek a kind of stoicism in the human faced with suffering. The notion that pre-existing morality needed to be re-evaluated, if not rejected wholesale, inevitably confronts humanity with suffering, “and when the Western world realizes this meaninglessness and purposelessness of human life it will be faced with nihilism” (Van Harvey 2016).

The attitudes of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are along the same lines when it comes to the idea that suffering is the entity that governs the world. Schopenhauer saw suffering as something necessary, which could not in any way be avoided because the very nature of human beings is such as to always be seeking something more, and the gap caused by that “something more” creates a void within humans, who must then be submerged in the waters of suffering. In any case, he does not see suffering stripped of meaning, and he does see a kind of positivity and purpose in it, unlike Nietzsche who treats it as bare of all meaning. In the context of suffering as a definition, Schopenhauer (2018) writes:

Unless suffering is the direct and immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim. It is absurd to look upon the enormous amount of pain that abounds everywhere in the world, and originates in needs and necessities inseparable from life itself, as serving no purpose at all and the result of mere chance. Each separate misfortune, as it comes, seems, no doubt, to be something exceptional; but misfortune in general is the rule.

Having embraced the idea that suffering is unavoidable, humans have claimed to invest it with meaning, seeing it as an integral part of life. In the end, “if there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete” (Frankl 1992, 76).

Having emigrated, Bajraj experiences the fate of the *patria* more deeply, and his life (for which read: his poetry) is wholly imbued with suffering. The poem *Marathon* (*Maratonë*) reinforces this idea, revolving as it does the idea of war, its consequences, and suffering in general, without mentioning suffering explicitly and instead obliging the reader to find it themselves:

I naturally got involved in sport
in the last spring of century
XX/ I ran a marathon and
More
with more paramilitary police and
soldiers
at my back
What's terrible is
I'm running still
more alive than many dead
I'm looking for the right word
to define
human misfortune (Bajraj 2017, 81)

And what better word to fulfil Bajraj's quest than *suffering*? His poetry finds space for bitter memories of the war, which continue to disturb him and which, were it possible, he would escape. His poetry can accordingly be read in particular contexts as testimony about what happened in Kosovo. The poem *Nineteen executed in Pedalishtë* (*Nëntëmbëdhjetë të ekzekutuar në Pedalishtë*) may be read in this light, rendering in verse as it does a real event from that war:

Mrs Lirije Imeraj testifies to
the Hague Tribunal
about how they killed nineteen members

of the Imeraj family
among them her husband and
her youngest son
Afrim was only two
when the solder hacked off his arm with
a bayonet
at that the child began to
cry and yelled
daddy
this man has taken my hand (Ibid, 70)

Depicted here is the terror imposed by the hegemonistic Serb occupation of Kosovo, which prompted the world to react and assist Kosovo's liberation. Scenes such as this are forever occupying the poet's mind and eclipsing his happiness, leaving him perpetually becalmed in suffering and melancholy – sometimes expressed figuratively, sometimes declaratively in his verse. In writing of Bajraj's poetry, Hector Carreto (2010) considers it "direct and everyday, uninfluenced by linguistic ornament". This assertion of his matches well with the volume of poetry under consideration, given that war and its consequent terrors can hardly be expressed in the decorative wording of language embellished with poetic devices.

This all tends to the observation that in Bajraj's poetry is widely manifest the notion that, in the end, 'art is not narrowly individual', preoccupied as it is – though sometimes the expression is nuanced – with the fate of the other, which resembles the fate of the individual.

The problematics of suffering as a phenomenon are elaborated in, and occupy the greater part of, Bajraj's poetry. His language is poetry, and poetry is the language of suffering, the strongest shield for an unendurable reality. Confronted by reality, Bajraj – with his 'closed heart', as the title of one poem puts it – suffers an immeasurable pain that has overwhelmed everything. War and then its consequences have left the poet incapable of peace and fulfilment. His verses, accordingly, are full of pain and misery:

Pain comes over us
as if it were the only thing that
we deserve (Bajraj 2017, 7)

Javier Vargas De Luna (2022), a scholar who have focused on Bajraj's work, have emphasized the idea that the last war in Kosovo, and what ensued, left its mark on the poet's identity and, furthermore, in his poetry too. In speaking of the man and his writing, Javier Vargas De

Luna writes: “The Balkan wars began to have another connotation for him; in fact, the conflict left extraordinary roots in the harsh lucidity of his poetry”.

The war in Kosovo, which Bajraj endured himself, engraved itself indelibly on his psyche; the traumatic experiences that followed captivated the gaze of the poet, who out of his pain speaks and versifies in lines that resonate with the echo of his suffering. With freedom proving unsatisfactory, because here and there in his homeland he perceives indications of a hopeless future, the poet writes:

... while a new mother
her blood frozen
has these eighteen years
in the middle of the Balkans
had a serpent suckling her breast
swollen with the milk of freedom (Bajraj 2017, 37)

The reference spans the period between the war and the publication of the collection, 1999-2017. The reader is to understand that the new mother – a figurative allusion to Kosovo, geographically at the centre of the Balkan map – has been left with frozen blood, paradoxically incapable of being nourished by liberation.

Bajraj’s suffering is doubled, because he is far from his homeland – an anguish that he feels in his very heart. He accordingly alleviates his pain by putting the homeland in his poetry, poetry seen as the language of the soul, for the sake of which he confronts his own suffering. Peace is impossible, while he is physically in Mexico and spiritually in Kosovo: “I have a home here/ and I have a home there/ and in both places/ human happiness/ is illegal” (Ibid, 56). Bajraj thus dwells between *here* and *there*, Mexico and Kosovo, and cannot find happiness; instead, he languishes in suffering. This being a spiritual condition for him, he aches to return to his childhood – in other words, the time when he was truly happy – but he can no longer find the way:

I long to return to
my childhood
but the breadcrumbs that I left
behind me
so that I could find the path
(nourishing myself with acacia flowers)
have been eaten
by the doves
that for some time now

have rested in peace (Ibidem).

Symbolized on the one hand is an era of innocence and peace (doves, acacia flowers), correlating to the idea of childhood and the desirable journey of return to that era, one which was to be overwhelmed by the poet's sufferings; and on the other is a human condition transfixed by suffering and pain. Plunged in suffering, the poet finds the path of return impossible, and is condemned to flounder in the boundless woeful waters.

“There is no narrowly individual art”

In one of his short commentaries of a philosophical nature, Ernesto Sabato (1964, 259) declares that “there is no narrowly individual art”. By this syntagm he aspires to expose the symbiotic relationship between the writer and the world that surrounds them. In principle, the writer takes from the world and gives to the world. Sabato believes that a writer's literary work is first of all the product of that writer's consciousness – or an element of it, at least – which links directly or tangentially with the external world. “Given that outside a person there is not only the material world of things, but also the society in which they live, art is – as *antonomasia* – social and communal” (Ibidem). For Sabato, in consequence, one cannot be limited to a description of art as merely individual, because of the kind of coexistence that exists between the artist and the world around. For this reason, he concludes that the artist is entirely complete at the point where they become one with the “shock” of their own people. This is possible where we manage to see and recognize our reality of similarities, to feel what another feels – in short to empathize with them. The link between the writer and those similar is close, and continues to generate a vivid communication. If the matter is considered sociologically, then it is reached the viewpoint that somehow “a writer inevitably expresses his experience and total conception of life” (Wellek and Warren 1949, 90). In the relationship between the writer and society, “the writer is not only influenced by society: he influences it” (Ibid, 97) because “art not merely reproduces life, but also shapes it” (Ibidem).

There is a symbiotic relationship, then, between the writer and society, which brings to light literary works as the final product of intercommunication. Schiller was not wrong when he declared that “the artist is the child of his time” (Schiller 2004, 42). The writer is the voice of their time, the voice that plumbs the depths of its own epoch and, making subject matter out of what is familiar and all around,

becomes a kind of spokesperson for the time. In developing his discussion of art and literature, and addressing the question of the creator and fantasy, Sigmund Freud (2015, 5) speaks of the curiosity that animates whatever the writer, whom he terms a strange personality, takes as subject matter and of “how he manages to touch us with it”. A potential answer, by analysing the example of the poet at the heart of this discussion, shall be given on the following.

As has been accepted, there are themes that link with the world that surrounds the writer and themes that link with their interior. In the first case the writer maintains links with their practical social context, and in the second they are preoccupied with what is within themselves. Xhevdet Bajraj draws the raw material for his writing chiefly from reality, and it is simple enough to connect the experiences of Kosovo society in a particular period of time with his poetry, which turns on a particular pivot: suffering. In this context, Bajraj himself writes:

I live in the birthplace of magic realism and within it it bears all the scars of the Albanian lands, especially those of Kosovo, and most especially those of Rahovec. From that pain my poems are born. They raise their heads as seedlings, and flowers of pain bloom with the face of the universal human (Bajraj in ExLibris 2021, 2).

Bajraj's poetry hangs on concrete circumstances, but in every case, it attains universality. It begins in the particular and goes to the general: it begins in the homeland and goes to the cosmos. The progression is established in steps: he begins with the nation, passes through his state and concludes in his birthplace. Having been displaced from his homeland since 1999, and migrated to Mexico – which he terms “the birthplace of magic realism” – he keeps wrapped in his soul the burden of pain about his own country, and from this his poetry is born. Bajraj is not shut in an ivory tower, preoccupied with himself and the problem of existence; he turns current reality into material for his writing and – more than his inner concerns – he articulates the collective experiences that have influenced him and others around him. But this does not render his literature social, much less political, and it would be a grave error to seek such a thing from a generalized version of his work. So, in this case, Sabato (1964, 147), in addressing the question of the writer as witness, writes:

Nothing is more mistaken than the search for social or political testimony in literature. One should write magnificently: just that, without any other attribute. Because in order to be profound the artist must unavoidably be for

themselves, for the world where they live and for the human condition of the people of their time and of their circumstances. And because man is a political, economic, social and metaphysical animal, in as much as his document will be profound, it will likewise be a document of the conditions of practical existence of his time and place.

The poetical work *Rose Water* echoes the sufferings that followed the last war in Kosovo, which did not allow the poet (for which read: people like him) to feel satisfied with the freedom that had been secured. Transformed into a psychosis, the war incessantly generates bitter memories, which do not permit spiritual peace. It has penetrated every dimension of human existence to the marrow, and in consequence spiritual ataraxia turns out to be impossible. In this way – whether as an attempt to create poetry as a drive to liberate himself from the anxieties of war, or as an appeal through the medium of poetry that the *experienced* can never be erased from life – Bajraj draws a portrait of the world of war, with dark nuances of an *ashen aesthetic*, representing a kind of spiritual spleen. As a result of this condition, in his fierce confrontation with life, Bajraj (2017, 31) would write: “Only the artists get their teeth into life/ when it tries to trample them down”.

In its depiction of life, now seen from the position of a survivor pursued by those bitter memories that can not be dissociated from his *persona*, Bajraj’s poetry captures humanity in its entirety, devoting attention not least to its most sensitive dimension: the world of childhood. Through this prism, two diametrically-opposite worlds confront each other: a bloody and unjust world created by war, and an innocent and gentle world which resonates with the spirit of the child. The poem entitled *The Smile* makes this clear:

When the shooting stopped
the girl dropped her bicycle and ran
to her father
There she was then
wiping the blood from his head
While he
so as not to alarm
his daughter
gave up the ghost
with a smile on his face (Bajraj 2017, 6)

The verse above delineates the contours of the contrast between the world of war and the world of childish innocence, with an intermediary

character – the *father*. He strives, even on the brink of death, with his last breath, to conceal the terrible truth of war from his daughter; he dies smiling. The image of the poem displays two opposite worlds, each with its own particular elements: the world of childhood depicted in the little girl playing with her bicycle, and the world of war represented by the girl's father, who finds himself taking the last gasp of life – a victim of pitiless conflict. The poem recalls, to some extent, the theme of Roberto Benigni's film *Life is Beautiful*, in which – by means of a fine and intelligent humour – the main character makes his son see *war* as a *game*.

The idea may be seen embodied elsewhere. The poem *The Doll* again echoes the notion of the two worlds in confrontation:

Although the occupying army has
withdrawn from the city
a six year-old girl
takes her doll
which is missing one leg
and shuts its eyes with her hand (Ibid, 11)

Again we have a child *character*, and childhood, with a characteristic element: a game with a doll. Figuratively, Bajraj versifies a terrifying situation precisely by emphasizing play truncated: the doll with a leg missing, the girl closing its eyes to represent death, etcetera. Everything speaks of the horror that accompanies war, even for the world's most innocent – children.

A liminal situation such as war is closely linked to another extreme: death. Accordingly, throughout Bajraj's verse death secures a certain predominance, becoming one of the most frequent motifs – if not the most. For what else should a human being think, faced with such a cataclysm as war? In the determination to render this idea in poetry, in *The Rooster of Death* Bajraj establishes a situation of inversion – creating, through metaphorical figures, a world turned upside down:

A rooster
heralding the day
was then dumbstruck
because
no one was roused
from death (Ibid, 36)

Thus there is the figure of the *rooster*, which in the normal order of things heralds the new day, and accordingly the waking from sleep,

consequently a situation where life and vitality triumph. But in this poem the situation is back to front: the rooster does not manage to herald the new day, for all its efforts, because there is no one to wake: the war has put an end to everything. The reader is prompted to ask: how might a poetic idea be created through the normal order of things when war has turned everything backwards? Bajraj himself seems to saying this, by means of the poem.

These are the recollections that pursue the poet in his life of lives, and he has no way to evade them. In his own words he is the *hunted*. The poem that takes this as its title outlines an over-burdened spiritual and emotional situation: the subject, an *emigré* because of the war, suffers from a spiritual barrenness which deprives him even of the will to live. This condition of spiritual inertia leads him to doubt his own humanity, assailing him physically as well as spiritually:

In the morning he did not know himself in
the mirror
he lacked the desire to live
his dreams had coloured with
drools of white
one by one every hair
on his head (Ibid, 66)

The poet's voice, hoarse with the dark visions that haunt him, emerges as a mere sigh, reflecting his spiritual condition, weary and apathetic. Bajraj best renders this sterile and hopeless state in the poem *Sigh*:

Colour abandoned the sky
the river stopped
the mountain struggled for life hollow inside
a withered flower was still
standing
and all of this gives life
to the sigh of death (Ibid, 69)

The atmosphere conveyed in these lines denotes a general wilderness: the sky is without colour, the river pauses its own flow, the mountain is empty, the flower is withered and, above all and paradoxically – contrary to what it ought to represent – the sigh of *death* gives *life* to this whole tableau.

From all of this, it is apparent that the poetry of Xhevdet Bajraj is a poetry of suffering, founded on concrete circumstances and striving to universalize a specific human condition. Bajraj writes verse because

reality pains him – in his words: “I write poetry to protect myself from life, from the pain that it causes me; I write because I don’t like reality. Since I can’t change it, I try to be shielded from it by art, by poetry” (Bajraj in Telegrafi 2021). Poetry, accordingly, is a kind of philosophy for saving himself from the bitter reality oppressing his country and, by extension, oppressing his inner self. For him, then, poetry is the only means of/ saving this world/ or at least/ oneself (Bajraj 2017, 21).

Conclusion

In conclusion, seen through a religious and philosophical prism, suffering emerges as a phenomenon with universal contours, being an intrinsic aspect of human existence. As such it is unavoidable and, because it is recognized as an integral aspect of life, humans are resolved to deal with it consciously, whether by philosophizing about it as idea or concept, or by exploiting it as a spring from which poetry (literature) may pour. The depiction of suffering in literature thus leads us towards the notion articulated by Ernest Sabato, who declares that ‘there is no narrowly individual art’ – a syntagm emphasizing the relationship between the writer and the world around, and the coexistence between them. The writer sees and feels the reality of the other, the resemblances, and becomes one with the other’s suffering; literary works emerge as a distinctive sign of empathy for the other.

The theoretical consideration of suffering as a concept linked directly to the essence of humanity aims to get to the core of the idea of suffering as a philosophical principle, thence attempting to reflect the depiction of suffering in literary, aesthetic terms through analyzing the poetry of Xhevdet Bajraj, a contemporary poet of Albanian literature whose creative activity was conducted in parallel in Mexico and Kosovo. In his poetry, consistent with the discussion above, it is apparent that the representation of suffering is bound up with aspects of actuality, which are the consequence of the war he experienced and its repercussions. A state of conflict – which brings identity to a crisis, risking its utter assimilation – undoubtedly has grave consequences for everyone. It is especially so for a poet, who sees the world differently, penetrating to its essence through profound philosophical and poetical meditations.

Suffering is often and justly defined as “soul pain” (Coulehan 2012, p. 227). Accordingly, the problem of suffering, like other problems bound up with what is called the soul and is thought to exist independently of the body, is complex and in need of broad

exploration – starting with the very nature of human beings. Humans are by nature vulnerable. The ephemerality of life and the elements that make up the constellation called life cause human existence to be incorporated in a suffering that sometimes becomes existential. Nevertheless, suffering should as much as possible be simply accepted, and a meaning should as much as possible be drawn from that. Perhaps it is precisely suffering that makes us human and reveals our true nature as beings. It may be that through suffering people comprehend each other and rouse empathy within themselves; that people are thereby encouraged “to reach another’s pain and to turn life into an absolute” (Sabato 2011, 144). For human courage disappears when we are isolated as beings in our pain, but reappears if “we plunge so deep into the reality of others that we cannot get out again” (Ibidem).

Bajraj sees the world with his heart; he perceives his age in its darkness. He recognizes Kosovo’s pain, and feels it in himself. So, he suffers and, to assuage his suffering, he writes poetry. Poetry is the language of pain and suffering; perhaps it is even impossible that it could emerge from a state of complete ataraxy. Bajraj gives himself to poetry with all his being as a path to the revelation of the Absolute, and through it there speaks the suffering of the deepest existential abysses inherent to life, “because poetry is the human being’s purest answer to the fundamental questions of life, love and death” (Bajraj in ExLibris 2021, 4). Confronted with the war against life, the poet chooses poetry, without worrying too much about success or the reader. Through his poetry he strives to be liberated from the burden he bears on his shoulders, in a quest to penetrate the darkness that has enwrapped his soul. So, in conclusion, his suffering emerges as a form of resistance and non-forgetting, and his poetry as a sky in which suffering and human empathy alternate, validated in a symbiotic relationship.

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Shamanism in English and Turkic Literature: A comparative exploration of spiritual journeys

Volha Korbit Salman*

Abstract: This article aims to investigate the perdurable presence of shamanic archetypes across world literatures with a particular emphasis on English and Turkic narrative traditions. As a manifestation of the primordial spiritual practice, shamanism provides a solid framework for understanding the tenacious engagement of humanity with transcendental experiences, healing rituals, the search for ultimate meaning, and cosmological order. In English literature, shamanic elements are instantiated through symbolic journeys, nature mysticism, as well as magical mediation, while core shamanic concepts of liminal passage and spiritual transformation are reflected in the recurrent motifs of a wise magician, sacred landscape, and heroic descent into supernatural realms. Although these elements oft appear transformed by the Western cultural lens, they, nevertheless, retain their fundamental connection to the original shamanic cosmology. Turkic literary traditions, in their turn, present a more direct embodiment of shamanic practice, especially in their epic narratives, in which the shaman appears as a central protagonist, personified by a healer/ seer/ guide of souls, whose rituals and spirit communications structure the narrative itself. Turkic literary works preserve all-inclusive accounts of ceremonial practices, spirit associations, and cosmic journeys, which reflect existing shamanic traditions of Central Asia. As a consequence, this article employs comparative analysis to reveal how shamanic consciousness persists as a vital literary force across varying cultures: English literature oft adapts shamanic motifs metaphorically, while Turkic traditions maintain their ritual authenticity. Both approaches validate the capacity of literature as a cultural construct to preserve and reinvent ancient spiritual paradigms that offer insights into the timeless search of humanity for meaning beyond material existence. At the same time, this article brings to the fore the enduring relevance of shamanism in the contemporary world as an indispensable element of cultural heritage and a universal symbolic language in world literature.

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Introduction

Shamanism is one of the oldest spiritual traditions of humankind that transcends cultural boundaries and demonstrates itself in various forms across world literatures. Shamanistic practices have influenced both Western and non-Western literary traditions with their roots in animism, ancestor worship, and mediation between the physical and spiritual realms. Indeed, shamanism constitutes one of the most archaic and prevalent spiritual paradigms that shape humanity and is characterized by the ontological emphasis on mediation between quotidian and numinous realms. Operating as a liminal figure par excellence, the shaman, in his turn, often engages in ritualized transcendence of corporeal boundaries to facilitate healing, divination, as well as cosmological equilibrium. In his influential work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964, 33), Mircea Eliade characterises the shaman as a “technician of the sacred”, whose ecstatic voyages, often induced via recourse to rhythmic percussion, incantatory practices or psychotropic substances, enable navigation of tripartite cosmologies, incorporating celestial, terrestrial and chthonic domains. Thus, shamanism represents what Mircea Eliade classifies as an “archaic technique of ecstasy” (Ibid, 4), wherein the shaman serves as mediator between human and spirit realms through ritualized trance states, as “the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (Ibid, 5). Yet, this sacerdotal function extends beyond a mere voyage of the spirit to encompass a complex soteriological role wherein the shaman serves as theurgist and communal healer. This blissful journeying is not merely symbolic but, at the same time, constitutes what Åke Hultkrantz (1993, 34) terms “a real, albeit non-ordinary, state of consciousness”. Hence, the shaman’s role extends beyond spirit voyage to include healing, as in Siberian traditions where the shaman “recovers the patient’s lost soul by searching for it in the otherworld” (Vitebsky 2001, 52). At the same time, the animistic substratum of shamanistic practice is of equal importance and manifests itself in the sacralization of natural phenomena, including topographical features, flora, and fauna, all participating in an immanent spiritual ecology. Furthermore, the spiritual union of the shaman with ancestral spirits establishes an intergenerational

continuum of esoteric knowledge, thus positioning the practitioner as both a custodian and a conduit of archaic wisdom. These constitutive elements that comprise ecstatic liminality, spirit mediation, rituals, and therapeutics form the hermeneutic foundation for examining shamanistic resonances in literary traditions.

Even though English literature predominantly emerges from a Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritage, it, nevertheless, incorporates shamanistic motifs, including spiritual quests, communion with nature, or encounters with the supernatural that reflect a universal human fascination with transcendence and problematize rigid secular/sacred dichotomies. The initiatory paradigm, presupposing the symbolic death and rebirth of the protagonist, constitutes a significant shamanistic trope. In the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (c. 700-1000), for instance, *Beowulf*'s combats against Grendel and the dragon surpass simple martial exploits, as they represent ontological struggles against chaotic forces that mirror the shaman's continuing battle against maleficent spirits. Accordingly, *Beowulf*'s descent into Grendel's mere evokes shamanic underworld journeys, with the poet describing it as "a place unknown to men, / where mist-steams rise and the trees hang / hoar and rotten over the weir of the waters" (Heaney 2001, 1361-1363). In a similar manner, the conceptualization of the 'wyrd' in the epic as an inexorable cosmic force further associates with the shamanistic conception of a predestined spiritual path, while the archetype of the shamanic necromancer that finds expression in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623), where Prospero operates as a Renaissance magus whose hermetic arts in general, and his mastery over the aerial spirit Ariel in particular, parallel the shaman's spirit conjuration techniques, especially when he declares that "I have bedimm'd / The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds, / And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault / Set roaring war" (Shakespeare 2004, 5.1.41-44). A similar line of reasoning may be applied to the fictional universe of J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium, comprising *The Hobbit* (1937) and the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), in which Gandalf embodies the Odinic wanderer archetype and with his vatic wisdom and capacity for astral travel, as demonstrated in his post-mortem transfiguration, recalls the shaman's role as a mediator between mortal and divine spheres. Indeed, Gandalf undergoes a shamanic death-and-rebirth, returning "as Gandalf the White" (Tolkien 2002, 98) after his battle with the Balrog - a motif paralleling "Siberian shamanic initiatory death" (Eliade 1964, 33). As

a result, Tolkien's world of theurgy, with its distinct cosmology and mythic narratives, offers a structured spiritual framework echoing the oral and written traditions of Central Asia and Siberia. The literary sacralization of landscape presents another significant point of convergence. From the oneiric forests of Arthurian romance to the enchanted topography of Romantic poetry, English literature persistently constructs nature as a sacred space, with Tolkien's sentient arboreal beings, such as Ents, and geomantic locations, such as Tom Bombadil's estate in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), constituting some of the most systematic literary instantiations of shamanistic animism within the Western canon.

Turkic shamanistic traditions, in their turn, present a more explicit and systematized integration of shamanic praxis into narrative structures, particularly within the oral epic tradition. The 'kam'/shaman emerges not merely as a supporting character but as an axial figure in works like the Kyrgyz medieval *Epic of Manas*, in which shamanic interventions frequently determine the course of heroic quests, while shaman's drum is oft described as "the horse that carries him to the upper world" (Dioszegi 1968, 214), thus emphasising the fact that "the shaman's ascent repeats the cosmic climb of the mythical First Shaman" (Campbell 1949, 257). This narrative centrality reflects the shaman's sociocultural role as a spiritual leader and a repository of ethnic memory, recorded in the explicit shamanic invocations of the following sort: "Oh, spirits of the ancestors, / Lend me your strength!" (Prior 1995, 112). At the same time, Turkic literary traditions contain vivid representations of the ritual praxis. The Altai *Maaday-Kara* epic, for instance, which attained its completed form by the fifth century BCE, meticulously documents shamanic healing ceremonies, spirit propitiation rites, as well as divinatory procedures, offering what amounts to an ethnopoetic transcription of lived spiritual experience. This ritual accuracy distinguishes Turkic shamanistic narratives from their more metaphorical Western counterparts, presenting scholars with invaluable texts for the study of Central Asian spiritual epistemologies that depict shamans as the "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" (Otto 1958, 12) and serve as literary conduits for humanity's perennial engagement with the numinous. In addition, the universal motif of the 'axis mundi' or the 'world tree' provides structural coherence to Turkic shamanistic narratives. This cosmogonic symbol, which parallels the Norse Yggdrasil and other Indo-European world trees, serves as a framework and a channel for the shaman's

inter-realm crossings via “climb[ing] the cosmic tree or pole, which is the axis mundi, connecting the earth with the sky” (Eliade 1964, 168), while zoomorphic tutelary spirits, particularly the wolf and eagle, function as guardians in these narratives, just like the she-wolf Asena, “revered as a totemic ancestor and guardian spirit guiding shamans and warriors alike” (Findley 2005, 38), or symbolize “the upper world and act as a messenger between the earthly realm and the heavens” (Smith 2019, 74), thus underscoring the deep totemic structures underlying Turkic spiritual consciousness.

Despite the presence of ostensible disparity between the two literary traditions, a comparative examination reveals profound isomorphic structures underlying these paradigms. For that reason, this article examines shamanistic tropes and ritual modalities extant in English literature by associating them with the foundational principles and themes characteristic of Turkic shamanism, comprising but not limited to the hero’s spiritual journey, the role of the shaman as a mediator, and the sacred connection to nature. Furthermore, the article examines archetypal similarities and unique cultural expressions of shamanism in English and Turkic literary traditions, aiming to demonstrate how ancient spiritual practices inspire universal narratives of transformation, healing, spiritual progress, and cosmic balance that exist beyond any culture and time.

Shamanic archetypes in English Literature: From medieval to postmodern ecstatic mediation

As has been mentioned in the previous section, the shaman functions as a “technician of the sacred” (Eliade 1964, 33), traversing spiritual realms through ecstatic trance to mediate between human and divine spheres. Being rooted in prehistoric animistic traditions, the shamanic archetype has demonstrated remarkable adaptability due to its capability to evolve across literary periods and cultures reflecting shifting epistemological and spiritual paradigms - English literature being no exception, as shamanic motifs, from the medieval period to postmodernism, comprising tropes of ecstatic journeying, ritual death/rebirth and nature communion, interrogate the metaphysical crises of its respective historical eras. From the initiatory trials of *Beowulf* (c. 700-1000) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1375-1400) to the fragmented visionaries of postmodern fiction, shamanic consciousness persists as a literary preoccupation, even as its manifestations shift in response to cultural and religious transformations, comprising the

medieval and Renaissance assimilation of shamanic motifs into Christian frameworks, as well as the Enlightenment to postmodern reconfigurations of the shaman as a figure of spiritual authority, psychic crisis and ironic divinatory revival.

The Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, alongside its syncretism and apparent Christianization of medieval and Renaissance shamanism, manifests one of the most remarkable literary embodiments of shamanic initiation. The Green Knight's supernatural attributes, particularly his decapitation and revival, align with Eliade's (1964, 33) concept of "initiatory dismemberment" that serves as a core element of shamanic vocation narratives across Siberia and Central Asia. His challenge to Arthur's court establishes a ritual framework wherein Gawain undergoes a "liminal passage" (Turner 1969, 95), thus traversing a wilderness that functions as a "geography of the sacred" (Hultkrantz 1993, 47). The anonymous poet's depiction of the liminal landscape as "the werbelande wod that waches the water, / the rogh, rakel rokkes ther rennynges fall" (Tolkien & Gordon 1967, ll. 2166-2167) transforms the natural world into a spiritual testing ground, while Gawain's encounters with Bertilak's wife and the magical girdle replicate Siberian shamanic trials where a "candidate must resist spiritual corruption to prove his worth" (Vitebsky 2001, 89). Thus, the poem preserves shamanic structures while adapting them to Christian chivalric ideals.

Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (1592) dramatizes early modern anxieties surrounding shamanic power in an increasingly rationalized world and, therefore, reflects the Renaissance crisis of shamanic authority. Faustus embodies what Wouter Hanegraaff (2012, 215) terms the "broken magus", or a figure who possesses shamanic techniques, as in "Now that I have obtain'd what I desire, / I'll live in speculation of this art" (Marlowe 2003, 1.1.79-80), but lacks the spiritual integrity that legitimizes traditional shamanic practice. The moral framework of the tragedy transforms Faustus into an anti-shaman, as where Siberian shamans journey to the underworld to retrieve lost souls (Eliade 1964, 210-215), Faustus descends into damnation to parody this redemptive function. Faustus's failed necromancy reflects the suspicion of the Reformation of mediatory figures, yet the enduring power of the play stems from its paradoxical nostalgia for precisely the kind of sacred mediation it condemns - a tension that, as Stephen Greenblatt (1980, 110) observes, reveals "the Renaissance simultaneous attraction to and

repulsion from magical thinking”, exposing a cultural ambivalence toward ecstatic mediation.

Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590) presents a more systematic exploration of shamanic archetypes through its contrasting magical figures of Merlin and Archimago. Merlin exemplifies the “benign shaman-seer” (Ginzburg 1991, 143), whose prophecies guide Britomart much as “Siberian shamans direct their communities through divination” (Vitebsky 2001, 52). Hence, his hermetic knowledge, being safely contained within Christian providentialism, represents an authorized form of shamanic mediation. Conversely, Archimago embodies demonized sorcery, while his illusions - “He fram’d a snowy substance in such wise / As Una’s shape to all appearance right” (Spenser 2001, I.i.45) - recall Eurasian narratives of malevolent spirit-workers. This dichotomy reflects the “crisis of differentiation” (Thomas 1971, 252) between legitimate and illegitimate supernatural practices typical of the period, illustrating how shamanism was fragmented in Reformation England, when certain ecstatic practices were absorbed into Protestant mysticism while others were condemned as diabolical.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the persistence of shamanic motifs in English literature, yet within the prism of the Enlightenment process of rationalist demystification. Accordingly, it was John Milton who in *Paradise Lost* (1667) presented Satan as a fallen shamanic mediator, whose soliloquy - “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (2005, IV.75) - captured the anguish of corrupted spiritual mobility, while his underworld descent parodied the shaman’s remedial journey. Where traditional shamans “heal through underworld journeys” (Eliade 1964, 5), Satan’s descent deconstructed this function, as his “dark materials” (Milton 2005, II.916) perverted sacred mediation into eternal rebellion. Yet the eighteenth century also produced counter-narratives reclaiming ecstatic vision, as William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), which explicitly positions the poet as the shaman: “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite” (Blake 2008, 14). Hence, Blake’s esoterically illuminated books, with their mythic systems and contrarian “Proverbs of Hell”, constitute “a new kind of shamanic text” (Raine 1968, 112), resisting Enlightenment rationalism through deliberate esotericism.

The ensuing period of Romanticism succeeded in fully reclaiming the shamanic consciousness, particularly manifest in its reverence for

the animistic vitality of nature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) casts the mariner as a cursed shamanic figure, whose compulsive storytelling - "Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns" (Coleridge 2004, ll. 582–583) - mirrors the shaman's communal role. In addition, the symbolic economy of the poem, with the slain albatross acting as a spirit guide, and the blessing of water snakes echoing animistic rituals, aligns with Siberian shamanic narratives, in which "the shaman recovers the patient's lost soul by searching for it in the otherworld" (Vitebsky 2001, 52). Similarly, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850) frames poetic inspiration as shamanic vision, in which the 'spots of time' passages - "There are in our existence spots of time... / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue" (1979, XI.258-262) - parallel the shaman's "non-ordinary state of consciousness" (Hultkrantz 1993, 34), thus turning the Romantic poet into a vessel for transcendent experience.

The shattered cosmologies of Modernism produced equally fragmented shamanic figures. Thus, T.S. Eliot's Tiresias in *The Waste Land* (1922) - "I Tiresias, though blind... / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest" (2001, ll. 228-229) - embodies the image of the modernist shaman, represented by a crippled seer amidst cultural ruins. The collage of Tarot, Hindu mantras, as well as Arthurian fragments utilized in the poem mimics broken shamanic rituals that reflect "the debris of outworn creeds" (Frazer 1922, vi). Similarly, even though D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) attempted a neo-shamanic revival through its protagonist's initiation into Aztec-inspired rites - "she felt her soul passing into the greater soul of the god" (Lawrence 1995, 312) - the novel revealed the modernist "yearning for what it cannot truly reclaim" (Torgovnick 1990, 132) and highlighted the paradox of seeking ecstatic unity in a disenchanted age.

The advent of Postmodernism led to a radical change in the literary treatment of shamanism, handling it with characteristic irony while preserving its core motifs. In this connection, Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), featuring Tyrone Slothrop, whose psychic disintegration parodies shamanic prophecy - "His dreams have been changing... They are no longer his" (Pynchon 2000, 26), and whose body mysteriously predicts V-2 rocket strikes, becomes "a shamanic map of the military-industrial unconscious" (Coward 1980, 97), rendering spiritual mediation absurd in a world ruled by paranoia and technology. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), in its turn, offers a

feminist and ecological reclamation of shamanic identity, in which the protagonist's visionary breakdown - "I am not an animal or a tree... I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow" (Atwood 1998, 192) - echoes Mircea Eliade's (1964, 168) description of shamans who "symbolically become the cosmic tree". In this way, Atwood transforms this archetype into an act of ecological resistance. As a result, from the Green Knight's medieval initiatory trials to Margaret Atwood's postmodern representation of the shaman as an eco-visionary, the shamanic archetype has been continually reconfigured to reflect the metaphysical anxieties of each period of English literature. For this reason, no matter whether a healer, a madman, or an ironic commentator, the literary shaman endures, but not as an anthropological relic, but as Joseph Campbell's (1949, 381) "living symbol of transcendence", which demonstrates the unbroken fascination of literature with liminality, ecstasy, and, above all, the human yearning to bridge the material and spiritual worlds.

Shamanic archetypes in Turkic Literature: From ancient epics to modern narratives

Shamanism constitutes a primordial and pervasive framework within Turkic spiritual systems, oft functioning as an ontological link between the human and spirit worlds, wherein the shaman, generally known as 'kam', 'baksı', or 'oyun' operates as a multivalent ritual expert, simultaneously carrying out the rites of a healer, a poet, and a mediator of cosmological forces. For this reason, this section employs a diachronic and hermeneutic approach to trace the metamorphosis of shamanic archetypes within Turkic literary production that ranges from pre-Islamic oral epics to contemporary narrative fiction, thus illuminating the adaptive resilience of these motifs amid shifting socio-religious paradigms. Turkic literary traditions provide a prominent corpus for the examination of shamanic epistemologies, owing to their deep structural overlapping with animistic and Tengriist cosmologies that existed before the advent of Islamization and subsequent syncretic transformations. A close textual analysis of early Turkic works, spanning *The Book of Dede Korkut* that encompasses a repository of Oghuz Turkic mytho-poetic consciousness to the modernist existential narratives of Chinghiz Aitmatov, elucidates the mechanisms by which shamanic consciousness has been both preserved and reconfigured within literary discourse. At the same time, the appropriation of theoretical frameworks from comparative religion, ethnopoetics, as

well as postcolonial historiography enables this study to demarcate the continuity of shamanic tropes and cross-examine their hermeneutic resignification in response to hegemonic religious and cultural shifts. This allows one to posit Turkic literature as an ever-evolving site of mnemonic and imaginative negotiation, in which shamanic archetypes function as stratified markers of cultural memory, despite their relentless subjection to aesthetic and ideological reinterpretation across temporal and geopolitical divides.

The Book of Dede Korkut, composed between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, comprises an important corpus of Oghuz Turkic oral literature and preserves “archaic techniques of ecstasy” (Eliade 1964, 5) through its numerous liminal figures. Although Dede Korkut operates primarily as an ‘aksakal’ or a wise elder, his capacity to “pronounce binding oracles that determine the fate of heroes” (Lewis 1974, 23) mirrors the role of the shaman as “a technician of the sacred” (Eliade 1964, 33). Thus, when the childless Dirse Han is granted a son, Dede Korkut performs a naming ritual that combines shamanic and Islamic elements: “Let this boy’s name be Boğaç... May his life be long, may his tree be tall, may his grey horse never stumble, may his sword never shatter!” (Lewis 1974, 57). Similarly, the narrative on Bamsı Beyrek exemplifies the classic shamanic initiation, as his symbolic death through imprisonment and subsequent rebirth through escape reenact what Vitebsky identifies as “the shaman’s underworld journey to rescue souls from Erlik Khan’s realm” (2001, 52), in this way “imitat[ing] the paradigmatic descent of the first shaman” (Eliade 1964, 112). At the same time, the animistic elements in the text, particularly the “sacred tree that bleeds when chopped” (Lewis 1974, 147), demonstrate “the Turkic shamanic habitus’ persistent substratum” (Basilov 1992, 78) lying beneath Islamicized narratives.

The Kyrgyz *Epic of Manas*, whose oral traditions were compiled over centuries, with written redactions emerging in the nineteenth century, contains pronounced shamanic elements, particularly in its depiction of heroes who obtain supernatural assistance, thus underlining the position that “the shaman’s role as an intermediary between the human and spirit worlds finds narrative expression in the epic’s heroes, who rely on omens and dreams for guidance” (Hultkrantz 1993, 47). Manas himself is frequently guided by visionary experiences, including his dream before the battle against the Kalmyks, in which “the spirits of his ancestors appeared, foretelling victory” (Prior 1995, 112). Similarly, his companion Bakai assumes a

divinatory role, which allows him to interpret signs and advise Manas, thus carrying out the function that might be compared to “the Siberian shaman’s advisory and prophetic duties” (Hultkrantz 1993, 47). The epic also incorporates ritualistic practices rooted in pre-Islamic Turkic shamanism, such as the invocation of ‘tülber’ or spirit horses, as well as prayers to Tengri, the sky god, which are reflective of “the shaman’s mastery of ecstatic journeying and communication with supernatural entities” (Eliade 1964, 5), while another passage describes Manas summoning his ‘tülber’ before battle and calling upon “the swift steeds of the ancestors, born of wind and fire” (Prior 1995, 156). These elements emphasise the syncretic blending of shamanic cosmology in the epic with later Islamic influences.

The Islamization of Turkic peoples led to the assimilation of shamanic archetypes into Sufi traditions, and it was Ahmad Yasawi, one of the founding fathers of Turkic Sufism of the twelfth century, who composed ‘hikmets’ or wisdom poems, which synthesized Islamic mysticism with shamanic ecstatic practices. His verses depict spiritual ascents or ‘mi‘raj’, which structurally resemble the shamanic soul journey that can be defined as “the shaman’s ability to transcend corporeal limitations and traverse cosmic realms” (Eliade 1964, 5). Hence, Yasawi’s (2021, 29) declaration of “I soared to the Divine Throne, my soul a falcon unleashed” emulates the celestial voyage of the shaman. Yasawi’s voluntary seclusion in an underground cell, known as ‘chilla-khāna’, replicates the shaman’s initiatory isolation, a process generally described as “a symbolic descent into the underworld, preceding spiritual rebirth” (Eliade 1964, 33). Yet, even though Yasawi retains the shaman’s communal healing role, he reorients it toward Islamic devotion, thus exemplifying “the Islamization of indigenous Turkic religiosity” (DeWeese 1994, 58), the syncretism of which is evident in his injunction: “Heal not with talismans, but with the Name of the Truth” (Yasawi 2021, 72).

The same line of reasoning may be applied to an influential thirteenth and fourteenth-century Sufi poet Yunus Emre, who integrated animistic motifs into his mystical work *Dīvân* (c. 1280-1320) to reflect shamanistic traditions prevalent in pre-Islamic Turkic culture, as exemplified in the following couplet: “I befriended the mountains / I became a companion of the clouds” (Emre 2009, 87). Hence, this animistic worldview echoes with an assertion that shamanistic elements persist in “folklorized remnants” (Hultkrantz 1993, 112) of ostensibly monotheistic frameworks, while the

personification of nature mirrors the “ritual engagement of the Turkic shaman with ecological entities as sentient, divine forces” (Basilov 1992, 45).

Chinghiz Aitmatov’s contemporary novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980) reconfigures shamanic tropes within a Soviet modernist framework, in which the protagonist Burannyi Yedigei, a Kazakh railway worker, performs the rite of ‘zhylau’ or lamentation, standing for a ritualized mediation between “the living and the dead” (Aitmatov 1980, 87). At the same time, the cosmic allegory in the novel, wherein an interstellar empire enforces collective amnesia, mirrors the “battle of the shaman against historical erasure” (Clark 1999, 112), in which the ‘mankurt’ or a traumatized slave stripped of memory functions as an anti-shamanic figure, embodying the rupture of modernity with ancestral consciousness. Therefore, this trope inverts the traditional role of the shaman as the “custodian of collective memory” (Levin 1996, 54). In addition, contemporary Kazakh and Altai writers deploy shamanism as a counter-discourse to postcolonial modernity. Thus, Rollan Seisenbayev’s *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (2019) interrogates post-Soviet anomie through ‘aruaq’ or spirit symbolism, which frames shamanic revival as “a return to the dastan (oral epic) as historical testimony” (2020, 211). Similarly, Altai authors like Borongot Uzut-ool embed ‘kamlanie’ or shamanic chants into prose to “reassert pre-Islamic cosmologies” (Van Deusen 2004, 73). To conclude, Turkic literature demonstrates an unbroken fascination with shamanic archetypes. Whether as epic heroes, Sufi mystics, or modern anti-colonial symbols, the shaman persists as a literary figure who transcends time and ideology, and his literary afterlife continues to evolve.

Conclusion

The shamanic archetype is prevalent across English and Turkic literary traditions as a transhistorical mediator between material and spiritual realms. Comparative analysis reveals structural parallels in their exploitation of shamanic motifs destined to address initiation rites, spiritual mediation, as well as cultural preservation. Both medieval English literature and Turkic epics feature liminal figures undergoing symbolic death/ rebirth transformations and exhibiting remarkable adaptive capacity, in this way demonstrating the cross-cultural hermeneutic value of the archetype. English literature transmutes shamans into Renaissance necromancers and Romantic seers, while

Turkic traditions synthesize shamanic ecstasy with Sufi mysticism. This morphological flexibility draws attention to the semiotic potency of the shamanic archetype as an effective tool for metaphysical inquiry.

In modernity, both cultural and literary traditions employ the shaman as a diagnostic tool for cultural fragmentation. In this connection, English modernism employs fractured shamans reflecting spiritual alienation, while Turkic literature instrumentalizes shamanic memory against colonial eradication. Contemporary rearticulations further demonstrate the conceptual mobility of the archetype since postmodern English texts reconfigure shamans as eco-visionaries, while post-Soviet Turkic writers reclaim shamanism as a decolonial praxis. As a result, the enduring discursive hegemony of the shamanic archetype reaffirms its status as a diachronic and transcultural hermeneutic framework, the one that refracts ontological crises and, at the same time, reconstitutes itself as an epistemic site for negotiating the dialectics of tradition and modernity.

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Cognitive unreliability in the narrative of Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*

Subhashini G. and T. Alagarasan*

Abstract: The study examines the narrative's multifacetedness and how it represents the cognitive unreliability of the nameless narrator in Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Haruki Murakami, in his renowned Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, known as "Wall and Egg," poignantly critiques the powerful political system of the world, linking it to a formidable stone wall, and representing individuals as fragile who inevitably collide with unyielding forces like corporate, governmental, and quasi-governmental organisations. This metaphor underscores the vulnerability of individuals in the face of oppressive societal structures. It is a novel which is fragmented with a first-person narrative, which constantly shifts from the present to the past. And later, it gets entwined with the history of sheep in Japan, and metaphysical elements. Cognitive unreliability is a blend of narrative unreliability and cognitive narratology of the narration. It focuses on cognitive dissonance, genre conflict, and intratextual conflict present in the narrative. It tries to further explore the perception, memory and emotion manifested within the narrative. The inconsistency represented in the narrative shows the psychological distortion created by Murakami to dissonate the reality of the characters.

Keywords: cognitive, dissonance, psychological, distortion, multifacetedness

Granted, everything I tell you now is mere words. Arrange them and rearrange them as I might, I will never be able to explain to you the form of will the Boss possesses. My explanation would only show the correlation between myself and that will be done by means of a correlation on the verbal level. (Murakami, *A Wild Sheep Chase*)

Introduction

The historiography of narrative or narratology is quite nonlinear in process; emphasis on narrative that first appears in Vladimir Propp's

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analysis of folktale, and the identification of *ostranenie* by Victor Shklovsky show ‘how’ the narrative functions. The profound growth of narrative function shows an inclination towards the concept of ‘Embodied Mind’ by Francisco Varela. As per Monika Fludernik, Russian formalism is considered to be the childhood era of ‘Proto narratology.’ In French structuralism (1960s-1980s), the narrative analysis focus on spatial and temporal qualities of the narratives as explored by Gerard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, and Roland Barthes. According to Monika Fludernik, this French era is supposed to be the golden age of narratology. Postcolonial narratology is a second-generation narrative term coined by David Herman, where narratology becomes interdisciplinary, integrating ideological, cultural, historical, feminist, and cognitive perspectives. According to Dan Shen, narratology has evolved from structuralism to poststructuralism, from formalism to contextualism and from classical to postclassical approaches. Notably, despite being a postcolonial form, *cognitive narratology* emphasises the analysis of narrative structure and abstract pattern. Ansgar Nünning puts forward a narratology that shifts textual analysis to a dynamic interplay between the spatial and temporal qualities of culture, text, and the reader’s cognitive process. In the words of Farmasi Lilla,

... traditional narratology, the object of narratological research is not the “what” but the “how of storytelling, which means that researchers should pay attention to structures and workings (how is it represented, with what strategies, etc.) instead of the content of a narrative (i.e. what it is actually about). This approach allows narratologists to theorise about universal themes and problems, such as the narrator or the plot in general. Postclassical narratologies, especially feminist or postcolonial approaches, often focus on the “what” of narratives, and even add the “why” to their most important questions, hence “contaminating” the previously clear and objective field with ideologies and relativism according to some proponents of classical narratology. Cognitive approaches- to which this thesis wishes to contribute- in this respect seem to return to the examination of the old “how” of traditional narratology. (Lilla 2019, 25)

Unreliable narration, in contrast to reliable narration, challenges the credibility of a narrative by deviating from established norms and conventions or expectations, thereby creating ambiguity and uncertainty. According to Kathleen Wall, reliable narration involves sticking to conceptual facts, language should be transparent, and there should be a constructive alignment of thoughts. In contrast, an unreliable narration is characterised by its challenging, disrupting,

disorienting effects which question the rational expectation and blur boundaries. There is an internal contradiction between the utterance and the action of the narrator, who is detached. Silke Catherin Zimmerman's "Intratextual Dissonance" highlights inconsistencies within the text, such as shifts in narrative voices, temporal or logical incoherence, and extratextual frameworks like the reader's mind, aporias, etc. This research paper analyses the unreliability of the Nameless Narrator in Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* at the cognitive level.

Cognitive narratology is a postclassical narrative approach that examines texts through the nexus between narration and mind. It is "transmedial" in nature, focusing on the perception, memory, and emotion manifested within the narrative. This approach explores how narrators shape events, recall and construct narratives, and make sense of what they experience. Cognitive narration examines how narrative representations reflect and shape mental processes, revealing the dynamic interplay between perception, experiences and cognitive organisation. The shift in emotion, memory, and thought often evokes a state of 'cognitive dissonance' that leads to an unreliability in the narration.

Cognitive unreliability refers to the intersection of *cognitive narratology*, which examines the mental processes behind a narrative, and *unreliable narration*, challenges the conventional code of conduct or conceptual facts within a narrative. This research paper aims to analyse cognitive dissonance in narration, genre conflicts, intratextual dissonance involving alternative and conflicting voices, and temporal inconsistencies within the narrative. A text might be considered reliable when it aligns with known psychological frameworks, historical facts, or scientific principles.

The nameless narrator in *A Wild Sheep Chase* does not evidently display any traits of cognitive dissonance. However, the narrative's fragmentation and tension between the first-person perspective and shared or embedded narratives (such as those of the Rat, the Black-Suit Guy, and the Sheep Mam) generate a dissonant structure. The narration oscillates between history, memory, and metaphysics, producing cognitive dissonance not within the narrator's mind but the entire narrative structure and, upon close examination, within the reader's mind. The 'signifier' (narrative) tends to create a 'signified' (narration) that is elusive in nature.

Murakami Haruki gensho is translated as “Haruki Phenomenon,” delving into the *Kokusai-ka* (internationalisation) and *gurobaruka* (globalisation) of Murakami Mania that has spread all around the world. This phenomenon is characterised by Murakami’s unique ability to captivate a global audience with his narratives. His characters are often portrayed as alienated to an urban lifestyle, which exhibits a distinctively detached taste that resonates with broad and diverse readers around the world.

A Wild Sheep Chase (2003), translated by Alfred Birnbaum and initially published in Japanese in 1982, begins with the nameless narrator reading an obituary of an unidentified woman from his college days, described as “who would sleep with anyone” (Murakami 2003, 5). He is a 29-year-old man, bored and lonely, living with a nameless cat and running a PR agency with his friend, an agency that, like many other elements in Murakami’s world, remains unnamed. Murakami’s tendency to withhold names is a dominant feature of his narrative style. A name provides a sense of identity and certainty; without one, a character becomes subaltern, subordinate, insignificant, or even erased from recognition. Murakami himself states that “Cognition that is the fantasy, the man cut in” (Ibid, 120): the real fantasy is not the Boss’ idea, but rather ‘cognition’ itself. It is believed that humans can truly understand and define reality through thinking, but it is an illusion.

Review of literature

Several scholars have examined Haruki Murakami’s *A Wild Sheep Chase* through the lens of philosophy, existential reality, and historical consciousness. Laura Emily Clark explored Japanese masculinity through Mikhail Bakhtin’s heteroglossia and R. W. Connell’s hegemonic masculinity. Japanese salarymen are seen as ideal from the outside, but internally they exhibit the signs of convenience’s sake-fragmented, contradictory, and plural voices. Such a difference will offer cognitive unreliability. Rhys Tyers appraises Murakami’s *A Wild Sheep Chase* as a metaphysical detective novel which subverts traditional detective novels. The maze of unreliable narrative does not have epistemological closure. This dissonance deliberately disorients the reader’s mind. Furthermore, David Joel Benhammou’s thesis is a historical exploration of sheep and its relation to the Japanese war and Hokkaido. Sheep’s diabolical nature resembles ideological and institutional control over people. It is an embedded narrative where realism, surrealism, and historical consciousness are layered, yet it

remains unreliable. None of the works explore cognitive unreliability, which is explicitly presented in the narrative. This research attempts to bring out cognitive unreliability in the narrative.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research method grounded in literary and theoretical interpretations. The study focuses on Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* to expound on the dissonant narrative, which leads to cognitive unreliability. The primary source of the research is the novel itself, examined in accordance with the selected theoretical and critical framework. In the theoretical grounding provided by Ansgar F. Nünning's concept of unreliable narration, David Herman's concept of cognitive narratology, and Leon Festinger's 'cognitive dissonance' are applied to the narrative. This framework can highlight the cognitive unreliability in the narrative.

Cognitive dissonance in the narrative

'Cognitive dissonance' is a term first introduced by Leon Festinger in 1957. It discusses psychological disequilibrium, in which the person experiences a state of 'difference'. Barend Van Heuden explains it as the non-linearity of the mental state, with thought and action conflicting with each other. In Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the inconsistency transcends the psychological perspective since the dissonance happens at the level of narrative. The narrative is constantly dissonant throughout the story, caught between short-lived, arbitrary elements and a predetermined, non-coincidental definite order. The dream of a cow chasing a pair of pliers, parallel to the nameless narrator's search for the Sheep and his missing friend, named Rat. The dream itself is a symbolic representation of the narrative, both arbitrary and predetermined. The cow's search for pliers fails; thus, the absurd and existential quest of the narrator is quite Kafkaesque. As Joe Cooper (2007, 24) rightly points out, "an action is different from an attitude which, in turn, is different from an observation of reality".

When the narrator enters the "Warm" universe as Murakami portrays it, the narration becomes a symbolic representation of the Boss -the epicentre of the narrative. The narrative constantly moves in and out between the Building and the Boss: the Building, an ancient structure that has lost its original shape, stands solitarily detached from its surroundings and later evolves unquestioningly into an architectural marvel in its own right. On the other hand, the Boss is an ordinary man

from a farming family in Hokkaido, who, after being possessed by the Sheep, evolves into an immense power, almost like a mythical figure. The Boss turned into a quasi-governmental authority that can control the media, military and corporate.

A constant psychic tension is sustained in the reader through the fluid movement of the narrative between the temporal and spatial boundaries, such as the building, and the Boss is both aspatial and atemporal because mythical sheep bestowed his power, and the narrative refuses to stay grounded. Joel Cooper (2007, 4) in his work *Cognitive Dissonance*, states that this kind of "... dramatic inconsistency would create the state of cognitive dissonance." Even the Black Suit Guy warns the narrator that if he refuses to go on a search for sheep, his PR Agency will be demolished without a trace. This psychological coercion is "... caught in an inconsistency among their belief, behaviors, and observation of reality" (Ibid, 5).

Festinger divides cognition into "consistent" and "inconsistent", and the discrepancy is calculated by the degree of incongruence. Festinger and Carlsmith's (1959) case study came up with a term, 'induced compliance,' which discusses "the discrepancy between believing the task was boring but saying it was exciting created cognitive dissonance. But dissonance is not just about discrepancy. It is also about cognitions consistent with the behavior. The cognition about the inducement was such a cognition" (Cooper 2007, 17). After hearing the story of a sheep with a star-shaped mark on its back, and it has the power to possess people, the nameless narrator states that "This all has got to be, patently, the most unbelievable, the most ridiculous story I have ever heard" (Murakami 2003, 124). Nevertheless, the nameless narrator embarked on the quest for the sheep. This exemplifies a psychological dissonance between what the narrator believes and how he chooses to act. The bureaucratic language and the surreal logic of the Boss and his people disorient the narrator's autonomy. The intricate conflict between randomness and order keeps the reader in constant interpretational dissonance, reflecting the narrator's divergent reality.

In the seminal experiment of Elliot Aronson and Jud Mills, it is stated that "one way of reducing cognitive dissonance was to find something wonderful about the experience that would be inconsistent with, or justify, the suffering" (Cooper 2007, 22). In Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*, his cognitive dissonance in narrative creates an induced compliance. The narrative unfolds with a nameless narrator

who is in search of sheep, which follows as a series of inconsistencies and distortions that resist epistemic stability.

Moreover, psychological disorientation is evident not only in the nameless narrator, but also in *Rat* highlights the pervasive nature of the theme. Narrator is portrayed as someone who lacks a “religious temperament, or an artistic temperament, or a psychic temperament” (Murakami 2003, 78) and admits, “I think I’ve gradually lost my sense of time” (Ibid, 75). Murakami deliberately detaches the narrator from any spiritual or moral order (religious), emotionally flat and insensitive (artistic), and remains passive (psychic). The narrative is set in a nameless town in Hokkaido, and the narrative employs this ambiguous location to blur the boundaries between consciousness and the unconscious, reflecting Murakami’s distinctive narrative technique. These suggest that *Rat* is the one who initially comes into contact with the sheep or its power, but ultimately proves incapable of bearing it, thereby transferring the burden onto the narrator. His psychological instability, along with the ambiguous space of the nameless town, reinforces the narrative’s ongoing cognitive dissonance, where perception, memory and responsibility are constantly in flux.

In 1936, the Japanese Military ordered the sheep professor to come back to Japan from the Manchurian-Mongolian border. This return and the sheep professor’s background allude to the Japanese colonial invasion and displacement. During his return, he had a vivid dream in which a Sheep asked him to let it inside his body. Since it was a dream, the sheep professor passively agreed to the sheep’s vessel. His realm of consciousness was shattered as a consequence, showing a cognitive dissonance in the sheep professor because all the decisions are made by sheep. Despite thinking of it as phantasmagoric or hallucinatory, he believes that he was turned into a vessel, which shows that there was a consequent fracture between Lucidity and oblivion. Murakami’s plausible narrative is picturesquely centralised, that is, intangible, implausible and irreversible, and more verisimilar.

The time shift alternates between the time of *Rat*’s letter and the narrative present, where the narrator faces the consequences of the photo attached to the letter that *Rat* has given. The Nameless Narrator uses the photo offered by *Rat* as an advertisement for the life insurance company, which induces the anarchic figure, the Black Suit Guy, into the narrative, who blackmails the narrator into searching for the Sheep in the photo. Suddenly, the narrative concerns about the hills and mountains that are bulldozed to expand the cities and roads and the

chaos that initially shaped the world are currently nullified. The nameless narrator ponders over parenthood, and eventually the narrative turns towards authorisation of the river, which created the town from the beginning, not the town. These shifts between the narratives disrupt the coherence and logical meaning of the text. The text has a conflicting viewpoint, which shows a narrative unreliability.

Genre conflict in the narrative

Narratively, the genre conflict reflects a mutation between multiple thematic strands, where one can find a deliberate juxtaposition of different narrative forms that challenges traditional genre boundaries, producing a hybrid narrative that promotes fragmentation and resists categorisation. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the narrative is fragmented across various modes: the quest for the Sheep a “holy grail”-like the journey is interspersed with the historical account of sheep in Japan, the embedded narrative of the Rat, the spectre-like presence of the Sheep Man, Susan Naiper (1995, 96) in her *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, states that

...a quest for a phantom sheep which is both monstrous in its bizarre powers and ghostlike in its ability to summon up certain hidden aspects of modern Japanese history....

The complexity of the alien brings forth appropriately complex and memorable literary treatments. Indeed, fantasies of the alien in modern Japanese fiction contain some of the best and most powerful works of modern Japanese literature, especially in the short story form. Many of these fantasies are of what I term the “internal alien”, works where the alien presence is an interior, psychological one.

The sudden insertion of sheep history reveals that China introduced sheep to another East-Asian country, Japan during the Heian period. After the Ansei era, sheep disappeared. The nameless narrator and other characters who are disengaged from their roots, but quest for a phantom lead to the rediscovery of history, and “Japanese Empire’s prewar activities in Manchuria” (Murakami 2003, 206) that is something that the current Japanese people want to cut down from their memory. Murakami seems to parody and deconstruct the genre itself, turning the “quest” into a satirical and absurd narrative and the “detective search” into an introspective void, making the novel a metafictional commentary on storytelling.

The narrative elaborates: “... before the end of the late feudal period there probably was not one sheep in all of Japan; and that once

imported, sheep were subjected to rigorous government checks” (Ibid, 111). Moreover, there is a sudden commotion of the world’s mediocrity, which Murakami discusses. The exposition of Murakami’s mediocrity states that

In the beginning, the world was chaos, and chaos is not mediocre. The mediocratization began when people separated the means of production from daily life. When Karl Marx posited the proletariat, he thereby cemented their mediocrity, and precisely because of this, Stalinism formed a direct link with Marxism. I affirm Marx. He was one of those rare geniuses whose memory extended back to primal chaos. And by the same token, I have high regard for Dostoyevsky. Nonetheless, I do not hold in favour of Marxism. It is far too mediocre” (Murakami 2003,115).

Suddenly, there is a parallel narrative of how Boss becomes a quasi-omniscient figure, and how it is connected to mythical sheep, and a blood cyst, which gives Boss power and the American Intelligence’s interrogation of Boss. The Black-Suit Guy believed that the Boss might have undergone severe cross-examination, as he had resisted imperial government. In prison, if the prisoner tried to sleep, water would be splashed on their face, and they would be beaten with bamboo sticks or shone torch light on them, which leads to disrupting sleep patterns. This might be a plausible hypothesis for Boss’s blood cyst. Boss is the 3rd son of a farming family in Hokkaido. At the age of 12, Boss left home and went to Korea and returned to Japan as a right-wing activist and when he re-returned to Japan with blood cyst he was rise to the top ladder in Japanese hierarchy.

In short, Boss became “... a revolution of labor incarnating capital and capital incorporating labor” (Murakami 2003, 120). Usually, labourers and capital are separate in society. However, the Boss made a revolution where labour and capital became part of each other. “Crime-occult double” is a phrase taken from *A Wild Sheep Chase* itself, where Murakami’s narrator talks about a movie, but here the researcher considers the novel itself as a crime-occult double. The novel juxtaposes between metaphysical detective fiction, surreal-occult fiction, and historical fiction.

In the middle of nowhere, the narrative turns its gaze towards the origin, development and destruction of Junitaki Township as an embedded narrative. Now, a detailed account on Junitaki Township, which was a name given by the territorial government in 1889, people started living in 1881 with the help of Ainu Youth, a farmer group of

18, with the head of the family living there. Junitaki is a fictional location created by Murakami.

Shunya Yoshimi (2000) in his article “Consuming ‘America’: from Symbol to System” states that Tokyo Disneyland is a precedent symbolic representation of ‘Americanization.’ It is no longer a transformation but an internalised or mutated cultural influence that is embedded within the Japanese consumer society. Murakami’s characters are culturally re-coded in their lifestyle, consumer habits, and symbolic identification, and it is visible in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* ([1985] 1991). Murakami’s genre-blending internalises the philosophical reflection, like mediocrity or Mythical/Fantastical Biography of Boss or Junitaki Township documentary style narrative.

Intratextual conflict

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the unattributed cat of the nameless narrator is a symbol of narrative fragmentation in the postmodern tradition. In general, animals have symbolic names, attributes or functions that place them in a moral or allegorical context. However, Murakami twists this convention, offering a cat that is nameless like the protagonist’s own ambiguous identity. This lack of a name challenges the reader’s expectations, based on previous reads, producing a contradiction. Vanishing into this silence, without origin, the cat becomes a metafictional device, pointing out how the novel subverts not just plot and character but inherited literary form itself.

The narrator shifts focus onto the ‘stud ram’—the breeding male surrounded by females in a harem. On the surface, it sounds like a privilege, but the narrator considers the stud ram to become a symbol of objectification, exploitation, and pressure. The stud ram symbolises the Boss or any influential societal figure- seemingly revered, but ultimately a tool within a layer of a ruthless system. Once his strength is gone, he is no longer protected or respected. This reflects the novel’s broader theme: the illusion of power, the cost of being useful, the loneliness and disposability of those at the top, the violence of competition and dominance.

Conclusion

Murakami’s artistic creation and the topological schema of the novel are the unrepresentable core of cognitive movement. This echoes the common phrase ‘life is uncertain’ and it is unreliable as Monika

Fludernik (2005, 3) states "... tale of frustrated mastery over the symbolic 'other' the natural thus operated both as the prime signifier and the elusive signified". Eventually, the cognitive unreliability of the narrative becomes the *effet de réel* as Roland Barthes (1968) states in *The Reality Effect*. There is a constant representation of the narrative of narrative temporality (time) and spatial referents (place) that act as a simulation of reality, yet there is a metaphorical quest for oneiric chimerical sheep.

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A systematic review of the cognitive linguistics approach to critical discourse studies

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Abstract: This systematic review synthesizes the literature on the combination of Cognitive Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), also referred to as Cognitive Linguistic Critical Discourse Studies (CL-CDS). This review aims to map the theoretical rationales for this coupling, identify the general analytical frameworks used to combine CL and CDS, explore the main applications of CL-CDS, and trace its methodological history. Following the PRMA guidelines, we systematically searched Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar for publications specifying a date range of January 2005 to June 2024. The included studies were analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize overarching themes. The synthesis reveals that the fusion of CL and CDS offers an expansive and effective means of accounting for relations between language, cognition, and society. In this regard, CL presents a systematic, psychologically plausible toolbox for CDS researchers to analyze how ideologies are constructed, legitimized, and naturalized in discourse. Important CL concepts, including conceptual metaphor, framing, construal, and force dynamics, are applied consistently within a diverse range of socio-political topics, such as immigration, political protests, and national identity. The review also identifies important methodological advancements, such as the addition of multimodal analysis and the use of experimental research designs.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics (CL), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), systematic review, PRISMA

Introduction

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the field of linguistics underwent a ‘cognitive turn’ (Oswald 2014) as a result of a dissatisfaction articulated in the works of George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker, and others against the dominant trend known as Generative

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Grammar (GG), pioneered by Noam Chomsky. Within GG, language is studied as a biologically autonomous faculty that is distinct from, and not reliant upon, other internal cognitive capacities or external environmental stimuli (Hart 2020a; Wang 2019). Language is also examined modularly, assuming the “existence of different components of language that are learned in different ways” (Ellis 1997, 71). With the advent of Cognitive Linguistics (CL), language came to be seen as entrenched in the overall cognitive competencies possessed by humans.

CL draws from many theoretical frameworks unified by a common goal of understanding meaning construction and conceptualization. Major contributions include Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2002, 2008), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999), Force-Dynamics (Talmy 1988, 2000), Mental Spaces Theory (Fauconnier 1994, 1997), and Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). Despite their varied concerns, CL theories share common commitments. For CL, language is an integral part of human cognitive ability, symbolic in nature, usage-based, and motivated by our embodied engagements with the world (Evans and Green 2006; Johnson 1987). This perspective considers language a “window to the mind,” providing insights into the mental mechanisms that shape our thoughts (Fauconnier 1999, 96).

The “Missing Link” in Critical Discourse Studies

Alongside the cognitive turn was the emergence of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). Scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak understood language not just as an object to be studied but as a social practice. The goal of CDS was to challenge how language is used to enact and legitimize social inequality and domination (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993; Pešić 2024).

Although early CDS powerfully engaged in social critique, it faced a methodological issue. While adept at identifying ideological structures at the textual level, it lacked a sound theoretical account of the relationship between discourse and society (Gao 2025). Chilton (2005) indicated there was an important “missing link,” and he, along with Wodak (2006), bemoaned the “very evident absence of cognitive theories of meaning,” which impoverished the explanatory adequacy of CDS. The question of how linguistic structures shape cognitive processing and ideological understanding remained largely unanswered.

The argument for synergy: The emergence of CL-CDS

At the intersection of the cognitive-functional perspective of CL and the socio-political orientation of CDS, a new approach, CL-CDS, emerged. This theoretical blend has implications for the development of both fields. CL brings to CDS a rich and psychologically plausible toolkit to outline the cognitive pathway from text to ideology (Hart 2020b). Likewise, CDS brings to CL a critical, ethical purpose that compels it to consider not only how the mind makes meaning, but also for whose social benefit (Hart, Lukes, and O'Halloran 2007; Khir 2022).

This approach shifts the analytical focus from the text itself to the cognitive processes involved in interpreting and understanding discourse (Hart 2010; O'Halloran 2003). It recognizes that language actively shapes our conceptualizations of the world by activating and manipulating mental structures (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Langacker 2008). Crucially, CL-CDS acknowledges the embodied nature of cognition, where our understanding is grounded in physical experience, which is reflected in how we structure language (Johnson 1987).

Methodology

This systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive picture of this interdisciplinary field. The review seeks to answer the question: How has the intersection of CL and CDS developed the theory, methods, and applications of discourse analysis? The objective is to synthesize existing literature to map the theoretical foundations, analytical tools, primary fields of application, and recent methodological developments that define the field.

This review was conducted and reported according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.

Search strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar for literature published between January 2005 and June 2024. The search string drew on key terms from both disciplines using Boolean operators: “cognitive linguistics” or “cognitive grammar” or “conceptual metaphor” or “frame semantics” or “construal” or “force dynamics”, and “critical discourse analysis” or “critical discourse studies” or “ideology” or “political discourse” or

“legitimation”. Search results were screened in two stages: first by title and abstract, then by full-text review.

Eligibility criteria

Studies were included if they clearly applied or advocated for the integration of CL and CDS, theoretically or empirically. The review included peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and monographs published in English between January 2005 and June 2024. Studies were excluded if they focused purely on one field, were published outside the specified period, were not scholarly publications, used cognitive concepts only tangentially, or were grey literature.

Data extraction

For each included study, the following information was extracted: bibliographic details, publication type, theoretical framework, domain of application, methodological approach, and key findings regarding the relationship between language, cognition, and ideology.

Data synthesis

A narrative content synthesis was employed to analyze the extracted data. Results were categorized thematically to provide a coherent summary, with major themes including theoretical convergence, analytical tools, application areas, and methodological development.

Results

A recurring theme in the literature is the mutual benefit of integrating the two fields. The merger provides CDS with sophisticated and cognitively plausible analytical tools from CL, allowing for a more thorough and replicable analysis of ideology in discourse (Gao 2025). In turn, CDS offers CL a social and political consciousness, prompting a critical examination of its cognitive models (Wang 2019). This integration is often mapped onto a “cognition-discourse-society” triadic model, which facilitates exploration of the interaction between consciousness, language, and social structures (Gao 2025; Khir 2022).

Conceptual metaphor and framing

The theorization of metaphor as a primary method of conceptualization is a central component of CL-CDS (Musolff 2012). Metaphors are viewed as cognitive processes that structure understanding with ideological implications (Koller 2005). For example, research demonstrates how fire metaphors in media can delegitimize political

dissent by framing it as a destructive force (Hart 2018b). Similarly, frame semantics is used to explore how language activates conceptual “frames” that ideologically shape an event, such as characterizing protests as a WAR (Hart 2024).

Construal, force dynamics, and perspective-taking

CL-CDS also utilizes a broader set of tools to analyze subtle aspects of ideological meaning-making (Hart 2011a). Langacker’s concept of “construal”—differing ways of conceptualizing a scene—allows analysts to identify systematic differences in how the same event is represented, revealing sites of ideological reproduction (Hart 2013, 2011c). Talmy’s theory of “Force Dynamics” has been applied to domains like immigration discourse to uncover hidden ideological conceptualizations (Hart 2011a).

Immigration discourse

A significant number of studies use the CL-CDS framework to investigate media and political discourses on immigration. These studies analyze linguistic constructions of motion, agency, and metaphor to understand how texts create ideologically motivated representations of migrants (Hart 2010, 2020a). Research has examined force-interactive patterns that frame immigrants as a threatening force and news media representations that reify migrants as non-agentive beings (Hart 2011a; Coschignano, Minnema, and Zanchi 2023).

Political protest and conflict

The framework is frequently employed to analyze media reporting of political protest and conflict. Research has illustrated how linguistic framing can influence an audience’s assessment of blame and aggression (Hart 2013, 2016; Wong 2017). For instance, studies show how verb choices and information sequencing in news reports can shape how blame is distributed in protest situations (Hart 2016).

Multimodal analysis

Recognizing that communication is rarely purely verbal, CL-CDS has undergone a “multimodal turn,” integrating the analysis of other semiotic modes like visual images and gestures (Hart 2016, 2017, 2025). This approach is based on the premise that humans construct complex, multimodal mental representations.

Experimental methods

To move from qualitative analyses to empirically verified claims, scholars are increasingly using experimental methods (Hart 2020b). Experiments are designed to test the proposed ideological effects of specific linguistic constructions on readers (Hart 2011b). For example, studies have shown that changing verb constructions in reports about protests influences how audiences allocate blame and perceive aggression (Hart 2016).

Discussion

The amalgamation of CL and CDS has created a productive research paradigm that addresses challenges internal to each field. A major contribution is that CL provides CDS with a psychologically plausible and replicable account of the “missing link” between discourse and ideology. CL models offer systematic modes of analysis, increasing rigor and transparency (Hart 2011a).

Conversely, CDS provides CL with a necessary social and political consciousness, prompting inquiry into the power dynamics behind conceptual structures. It encourages a critical examination of who has the power to construct dominant metaphors like the “War on Terror” and urges a historical analysis of how such concepts have been used by particular ideologies over time. A critical perspective also points to discourse as a site of resistance, encouraging the investigation of counter-metaphors and alternative frames used by opposition groups.

The application of this integrated framework to various socio-political issues demonstrates its relevance. The emergence of multimodality and experimental methods represents a significant development, adding empirical weight to claims about the cognitive and attitudinal effects of discursive choices (Hart 2020b). However, challenges remain, including the need for clearer, unified frameworks that are accessible to researchers from different fields (Khir 2022; Zhao and Zhao 2024).

Conclusion

The intersection of CL and CDS has led to a rich and theoretically engaging area of study. This systematic review has established that the integrated CL-CDS approach provides impactful analytical frameworks for examining the complex relationships between society, cognition, and discourse. By systematically investigating the cognitive faculties involved in meaning production, researchers can provide

systematic evidence of the ideological properties of texts and their role in legitimizing social action. With methodological innovations in multimodality and experimentalism, CL-CDS is poised to remain at the forefront of critical language studies.

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The Picasso Effect: Contemporary Reinterpretations

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Abstract: In this article, we examine the significance of the Picasso effect from a multidisciplinary perspective and its impact on contemporary art through the example of Christian Jankowski. The renowned artist Picasso, constantly focused on his entelechy in the Aristotelian sense, often captured in his emerging art the essence of a moment within the chaos of his era. These genuine masterpieces transformed visual styles and infused aesthetics with artistic innovations that became models for future artists, as well as benchmarks for experimentation and performance from new angles that challenge the laws of formal logic. This phenomenon, known as the Picasso effect, is evident across all areas of human activity. Through his cultural cubism, visual artist Christian Jankowski is a prominent and distinctive exponent of the Picasso effect. His exhibition “NEUE MALEREI: Cultural Cubism”, at the Suprainfinit Gallery in Bucharest, is part of the artist's third series of conceptual paintings and offers an inverted perspective on Picasso's conceptual approach. The curatorial team from Quote - Unquote and the Suprainfinit Gallery showcases the German artist's ability to create unique visual artworks that embody his collaborative Cultural Cubism style.

Keywords: Picasso, Christian Jankowski, Picasso effect, collaborative Cultural Cubism

Introduction: The Picasso effect

Drawing on Ian Leslie's (2013) articulation of the “Picasso effect,” the concept can be understood as encouraging individuals to adopt multiple perspectives and to recombine parts of an apparent whole into new, unexpected configurations, an approach that can generate innovation. At the same time, a core implication of the “Picasso effect” is the importance of persistence and tolerance for social rejection in the early stages of creative work. In this sense, innovation depends not only on producing novel configurations but also on sustaining creative

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commitment when audiences or critics are not yet prepared to recognize the value of departures from established norms.

Margaret Heffernan (2019) explains the phenomenon of intentional blindness as a protective mechanism. Education must be understood in the sense of raising awareness about this phenomenon of deliberate blindness. Through diplomacy, we can counteract the fear of social rejection by adopting a new perspective. Ethical intelligence is the factor that can give us the courage to affirm what may be viewed with reluctance by those around us if we are convinced of the positive ethical effect of our attitude. In this constructive sense, the ethos behind the “Picasso effect” can be summarized as the idea that progress often requires pursuing what others initially judge impossible, persisting ethically even when creative departures from established norms are not yet fully valued.

The Picasso effect refers to narratives that become intertwined with philosophical concepts of good, beauty, truth, and justice, and remain imprinted in the collective consciousness because Pablo Picasso continually reinvented his artistic style, absorbing new influences and exploring different accepted or reinvented modes of expression.

The life and work of the artist in a synthetic vision from a psychoanalytical perspective

The personal life of Pablo Picasso supported some of the accusations brought against him regarding his uncontrollable anxious behaviour: participating as an involuntary spectator in the suicide of his comrade Carles Casagemas, which marked the beginning of the Blue Period in the artist’s work; disowning his friend Guillaume Apollinaire when they were accused of involvement in the disappearance of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre (Mailer 1995); machismo, “Picasso’s eight years of boredom” with Odette, his mistress and model (Richardson 1991); the so-called stylistic “schizophrenia” (Ansermet, apud Rosalind Kraus 2009) through the oscillation between naturalistic landscapes and drawings that included details similar to some found in the works of Ingres, Renoir, Cézanne as a way of continuing one of the inventions of Cubism, the collage, between the photographically distorted neoclassicism of 1920 towards which he was moving as a defence against the mechanomorphism in which he was involved through ready-mades (Ibid.); compulsive morning rituals-washing hands; superstitions, followed by recurrent expressions of doubt about one’s

own success; the manifest anxiety transmitted to his girl lover, the woman artist Gilot (Gilot & Lake 1990).

Picasso's artistic evolution followed an atypical route, as he was constantly confronted with his anxieties regarding the artistic value of his creations. The line: "Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working!" attributed to Pablo Picasso (Mailer 1995, 8) perfectly expresses the artist's conception of artistic creation.

In 1906, during the Roses Period, the era of the circus, with the clown artists, Picasso's line is precise, able to delineate the shape of the figure with a laconic narrative embossing.

Picasso's work named *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Picasso 1907), represents the first cubist work, a radical innovation, absorbed in a few years into the mainstream, in an unconventional Paris (Leslie 2013). A fortunate coincidence arose between the emergence of the genius called Picasso, his daring stylistic experiments that completely broke with artistic tradition, and the new art market willing to assume risks related to the era's changing mentality, as well as cultural and economic circumstances (Stoyan 2013).

In the next stage, for example, in the drawings of 1915, one notices the abandonment of the adroitly constructed line, adopting clumsy, thick and insensitive, almost primitive contours, which led to the idea of mechanomorphism conceived by Francis Picabia, who, in 1917 published in the avant-garde magazine, named *391*, a satirical portrait of the critic Maximilien Gauthier entitled "Picasso Repentant", parodying Picasso, indirectly accusing him of running away from Cubism, taking refuge in a "Picasso contre les Maîtres", in which the drawing appears burlesque (Kraus 2009). This unconsciously hostile confrontation with the great masters associated Picasso with the Freudian concept of reaction formation, indicating a psychological attitude of opposition to desire, rather than repression. However, his critics, who are followers of "Picasso et les Maîtres", believe that the painter has total conscious control over his creations. Some critics, such as Alain Bois (2008), also do not adopt either of the two options, considering that Picasso is a conscious "parodist", which allows the artist to assume several styles and manners simultaneously.

Picasso had the motto: "Give me a museum and I will fill it!" (Penrose 1958, 372) Exceptionally prolific as an artist, he went through numerous representative phases of his artistic versatility, foreshadowing the continuous evolution that characterized his work throughout his life.

Critics have defined these phases as the Blue Period (1901–1904), The Roses Period (1904–1906), African Influenced Period (1907–1909), Analytical Cubism (1909–1912) and Synthetic or Crystal Cubism (1912–1919), Neoclassical Period from the early 1920s, Surrealism, middle 1920's. His later works often combine elements of his earlier styles.

Among his most famous works include the Proto-Cubist work entitled *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (Salmon 1912) and the anti-war painting *Guernica* (1937). This powerful depiction of the bombing of Guernica by the German and Italian air forces during the Spanish Civil War is a remarkable modern work, documented in real-time.

However, what unifies Picasso's art is the tendency to overcome limits and communicate through art. Pablo Picasso was not just an artist; he was a revolutionary who holistically perceived the world, sometimes fragmented, from a multitude of angles, presenting it from different perspectives (for example, the portrait in which both the front and the profile appear) an idea that profoundly changed the notion of a fixed, singular perspective, experimenting with new ways of space and shape representation (Sgourev 2013). This multidimensional approach has given rise to some masterpieces that are intriguing and evocative, visually captivating and emotionally charged (Cramer & Grant 2020).

Exploring Picasso (which challenged the status quo, deviated from realism, and broke from primary notions of space, time, and form) allowed artists to move away from strict mimesis, encouraging them to experiment with various abstract artistic approaches and conceptual ideas (O'Brien 2014).

Picasso reinterpreted by Christian Jankowski

The year 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of Picasso's passing in the realm of the immortals.

In partnership with France, Spain decided to celebrate the artist and his work through an impressive program, which involved eight countries and 42 museums around the world, Romania being the only country in Central and Eastern Europe included in the large project, through the exhibition at the MARE Gallery.

The exhibition NEUE MALEREI (New Painting): Cultural Cubism (September 23 - October 21, 2023), by the German artist Christian Jankowski, from the Suprainfinit Gallery in Bucharest, perfectly synchronized with the Picasso Effect exhibition from the Bucharest MARE Gallery (September 27, 2023 - January 8, 2024), as if to

constitute a typical example of the effect that the personality and work of the great Spanish artist have on modern art.

The exhibition “NEUE MALEREI: Cultural Cubism” is part of the third series of conceptual paintings by artist Christian Jankowski and offers an inverted perspective on the master's conceptual approach. Picasso created the works starting from reality towards collage and creation through individual inventive, intellectual, and emotional effort. In contrast, Jankowski proposes a reversal of the conceptual route, starting from the collage created by AI from images of the archive of famous paintings on the Internet, towards a collaborative creation often involving a performative act and a vocalized reflection, which is then videotaped.

Christian Jankowski

Jankowski is one of Germany's leading contemporary conceptual artists, working primarily with video, installation, and photography; his art is associated with the New Gothic Art movement (Gavin 2008).

His art uses different media formats (video art, photography, and performance, often including painting, sculpture, and drawing). It is conceived in a continuous exchange with the formats used by mass media and the mechanisms by which they are produced. Jankowski's innovation lies in initiating collaborations between contemporary visual artists and other hitherto less targeted professional worlds, such as religion, business, politics and the entertainment industry, as well as experimenting with a reflective practice on the concept of collective creation regarding the role, its functions, and influences on visual art. The collaborative nature of his art means that each participant implicitly contributes to the final form of the work (Smith 2006).

Jankowski's works have appeared in numerous group and solo exhibitions, such as Ticket to Future with Joseph Beuys, Katinka Bock, and Jon Rafman in 2022; Bangkok Art Biennale in 2020; After Leaving | Before Arriving, Kaunas Biennial, Kaunas, Lithuania in 2019; KNOCK KNOCK, South London Gallery, London. Solo exhibitions include: Traveling Artist, Tübingen, Germany, 2022; Sender and Receiver, Fluntum Berlin, 2020; Weather Flag, Jose Garcia, Mexico, 2020; Family Constellation, Romania, 2020; Floating World, KCUA, South Korea, 2018.

In 2016, Jankowski became the first artist to curate the eleventh edition of the Manifesta exhibition in Zürich. He participated in the

1992 Venice Biennale. His works are part of numerous public and private collections (Manifesta 2016).

In 2020, the exhibition *Family Constellation* was curated by Quote-Unquote¹ (2020). The exhibition consisted of an assemblage of four mobile homomorphic works from logs carved by Jankowski's brother with a chainsaw, which could be moved to realize precisely what intra-family connections and tensions were discovered during online therapy sessions in which the brothers participated live, these being mediated by a psychotherapist from a distance via a monitor. Exhibitors watched these sessions and rearranged their sculptures in wood to signify their family connections (Jankowski 2020).

Jankowski reverses the technique used by Picasso in making Cubist collages

Since 2015, the artist has been employing a *mélange* of generative artificial intelligence (focused on utilizing a digital archive built on the typical characteristics of photographs of famous paintings) and painting. He sends an AI-made collage-like composition based on selections from archived photos to painters from Dafen, China (who do reproductions), specifying the exact size he wants, and they send him back the imitations. The dimensions of the newly created canvas are kept to those of the true masterpieces, but the new painting almost always leaves a stripe on the bottom or right side of the canvas untouched, depending on the proportion of the latest painting (Marinescu 2023).

Thus, the technique used by Jankowski to create works of collaborative visual art, based on the collage of photographic images mixed by AI and painted by Chinese painters, becomes an inversion of Picasso's collage technique.

Jankowski's exhibition concept from *Suprainfinit* is realized in a complex perspective, featuring a *mélange* of photography, painting, performance, and the presentation of living paintings. According to Cristina Vasilescu, "Such an exhibition has the potential to expand the creativity of artistic production in Bucharest, where artistic and non-

¹ Quote - Unquote is an interdisciplinary platform founded in 2019 by Irina Radu, Cristina Vasilescu, and Dan Angelescu, which Irina Radu and Cristina Vasilescu currently manage. The platform investigates the mechanisms of the uses of communication and its effects on the public in contemporary society through artistic practice and the intersection with other fields of activity.

artistic disciplines (in particular: sociology, anthropology, cinema, philosophy, psychology) are still very separate.” (Dobre 2023)

Special curatorial effects used in the realization of Jankowski’s exhibition by the curators of Quote-Unquote in partnership with the Suprainfinit Gallery

The poster, which announces the opening of the exhibition of the painter who assumes Cultural Cubism, is a typical one, without emphasis or claims of sophistication, but only with a simple trick such as the inverted signature of the name of the gallery in the mirror, in the upper left part of the poster.

The central image is a painting by Jankowski that alludes to how Picasso created portraits of women, utilizing a double perspective: from the front and the profile.

The conceptual painting in the NEUE MALEREI series explores and expands the visual techniques applied by Picasso in the realization of his creations, using so-called photographs as a performative process, which continues innovation through the use of digital photography, film, and video, which uses sensors that convert light into electrical charges, which are digitally analysed and then transformed back into images (Shusterman 2012).

The female characters in Jankowski’s works invite viewers into an active, rather than passive, contemplation process. The subjectivities of the female characters are strong, engaging the viewer in a stimulating, reflective, and self-meditative experience.

In many of Picasso’s paintings, women are portrayed as objects of desire, evoking glances that are insinuating yet also convey a fear-inducing factor through depictions that feature desirable expressions but with slightly depressing attitudes, set against a chromatic, sometimes gloomy palette.

By contrast, the paintings from the NEUE MALEREI concept are alive, vibrant, bizarre, and beautiful, but also strange.

The framework “Woman with Bird” reveals that, in this exhibition subspace, the curator does not adopt the idea of the White Cube (O’Doherty 1976) but prefers to use the blue-coloured wall as a massive *passe-partout* for the painting on canvas (Jankowski 1970).



Christian Jankowschi. 1970. *NEUE MALEREI – PICASSO VIII*, 2023, oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm.
FEMME AVEC OISEAU (WOMAN WITH BIRD), oil on canvas, sold by Gallery Red (from Palma de Mallorca), no info on who bought it. Courtesy of the artist and Suprainfinit Gallery

It impresses the difference between the contrasting textures, such as the rough blue wall and the delicate, coloured canvas combined with black and white portions that stylistically indicate an elaborate, complex paper architecture, spatially highlighting a futuristic mask and costume of a female model, who seems to be walking on a specially arranged stage like in a fashion parade, who advocates for the ecological idea of paper recycling.

As Jankowski expands the medium and the pictorial techniques used, he also reaches unexpected, caricature, but also joking ways of expression, in this way, contributing both to the expansion of the number of collaboratively participating subjects in the creative act and to their complete involvement, including in the act of reception of the work aimed at meditation and self-reflection, as implicit symbiotic effects of the receiving a Cultural Cubism type of work.

By contrast, the next frame reveals an exhibition subspace where the White Cube concept was chosen; the white, neutral wall is specially designed to highlight the chromaticity of the painting and not interfere with it, highlighting, in this case, the perfect harmony of the two portraits that reflect, on the one hand, two different types of human in the same posture and, on the other hand, the image of Picasso's specific technique in a certain period, of rendering the portrait through sometimes crude lines (Sims 1996), here evident in the deformed hands, the caricature eyes, but also the drawn moustaches, like a toothbrush - à la Hitler (which, however, also reminds of Duchamp with the moustaches à la Dali in his drawing – Mona Lisa. Knight 1991).

Interestingly, in a retro integralist view, this approach to the exhibition space can be interpreted more as a current space intended for housing. The white walls, a coffee table, an armchair, the typical potted flower in the corner of the room, and the two paintings, which are consonant with the entire architectural ensemble of the interior from both chromatic and spatial points of view, are perfectly matched.

The exhibition also features a reinterpreted version of the *Guernica* painting, which remains faithful to the original's actual dimensions (349.3 cm × 776.6 cm) and the subject of Picasso's masterpiece.

On April 28th, the newspaper *L'Humanité* presented the horrors caused by the bombings initiated by Hitler and Mussolini, accompanied by tragic photographs of the victims of the attack. The article imposed on the Spanish collective mentality, and not only the tragedy's dimensions. On May 1st, Picasso made the first sketches for what would become his famous work, *Guernica*. The first sketch, probably drawn in less than a minute, juxtaposes a bull with a bird, a highly stylized "Image of a horse and a woman holding a lamp".

Picasso's *Guernica* represents one of the most realistic documentations in art history regarding the "work in progress" because Dora Maar photographed each stage of the work's realization in the artist's studio on the rue des Grands-Augustins. The final painting, which depicts the Nazi bombing of the homonymous Basque city, transcends the historical event that deeply inspired and sensitized the artist.

The work quickly becomes a representation of the general revolt against the atrocities of war and a universal anti-war symbol through the symbolic fusion that the artist achieves between epic and realism. The primary meaning of *Guernica* is easy to decipher: a white bull - the Spanish totem (Larrea & Barr 1947) - stands motionless, blocking with its body the only escape route, in front of a collective catastrophe produced in a closed space, from which four women try desperately to get out. The death of a warrior and a child, the agony of a wounded horse and the cry of a bird, the spear thrust into the horse's body, and the broken sword and spear beside the soldier's corpse are all symbols of war. The final meaning is anguish, generated by despair, destruction, and death, and it is emphasized by the choral howl that unites all the characters in a gloomy atmosphere, highlighted by the absence of colours.

In the case of Jakowsk's new "Guernica", the painting covers only 40% of the canvas's surface, allowing the viewer to reinterpret the rest

of the canvas. The black-and-white part of the painting captures the agony depicted in Joel-Peter Witkin's 1987 black-and-white photograph (Witkin 1987).

The cultural Cubist painting, placed in a conventional exhibition space, impresses with its monumental size and its approach that defies the elementary rule of classical painting, which requires that the image cover the entire surface of the painting.



Christian Jankowski. 2017. *NEUE MALEREI – PICASSO I*, oil on canvas, 349 × 777 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Suprainfinit Gallery

The painting is segregated into two parts, which here are cut callous, contrastingly, at the level of plastic representation: image/non-image; visual symbolism in non-colour, black-and-white/ neutral, earthy colour; movement/immobility; commotion; noise/ silence; expression/ vacuum; disturbance/calm; emotion/ impassiveness; war/peace.

Considering that the exhibition space at Suprainfinit was insufficient for the gigantic dimensions of this painting, which represented, in my opinion, the fundamental painting of the entire exhibition, the curators chose an unconventional variant of exhibiting the painting, totally atypical, in a position oblique which does not offer the original perspective on the painting, but allows its reception from different angles, brightnesses, even different spatial positions, including from outside the exhibition space, through the large windows of the gallery, which allows viewing the painting to be possible both during day, in natural light, as well as at night, in Bucharest's nocturnal lights from Mântuleasa street.

Conclusion

The Cubism Cultural event exhibition, curated by Quote-Unquote specialists in partnership with the Suprainfinit Gallery, was supported by an EEA Grants 2014 - 2021 grant in collaboration with RO-CULTURE and the Goethe Institute in Bucharest. It was conceived synchronously with the commemorative “The Picasso Effect” exhibition at the MARE Gallery in September 2023.

The NEUE MALEREI concept, initiated by Jankowski, surprises with the playful spontaneity it offers in a Cultural Cubist vision, where collaborative conceptual activity achieves the desired effects, presenting the viewer with a complex vision of outstanding visual masterpieces, known and appreciated in the universal artistic and cultural world. Jankowski approaches a coded decoding of the messages intentionally transmitted by the visual artists concerned, in the case of Picasso, applying an inverted technique to treat the homonymous subjects.

The vast curatorial experience of the organizers of the exhibition NEUE MALEREI: Cultural Cubism is fully leveraged; it is subjected to extreme tests, which it passes with imaginative effort and courage, giving the viewer a chance to experience Jankowskian Cultural Cubism.

Even a simple, fragmented virtual visit to this exhibition is intriguing, delightful, and invites introspection, active contemplation, interactive questioning, and collaborative communication; therefore, the exhibition has achieved its goal of engaging the competent public and making them addicted to this type of experience.

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Nostalgia as emotional infrastructure in *Guócháo Cháowán*: Cultural memory, identity, and symbolic design

Flavia Luck and Jin Jiangbo*

Abstract: This article explores how *Guócháo Cháowán*, contemporary Chinese art toys, employs nostalgia as an emotional infrastructure to engage cultural memory, negotiate identity, and reimagine symbolic design. Through the analyses of cases such as PopMart's *SPACE MOLLY*, Rolife's *Nanci*, and *52Toys' Super Active Series*, the study examines how simplified forms, symbolic aesthetics, and culturally coded narratives transform these playthings into affective interfaces that reconnect consumers with reconfigured visions of Chinese heritage. Positioned at the intersection of tradition and modernity, *Guócháo Cháowán* exemplifies how visual storytelling and symbolic play are strategically employed to render cultural memory both emotionally accessible and commercially resonant. Nostalgia, in this context, emerges as a dynamic force that fosters affective engagement, supports cultural continuity, and enables playful reinterpretations of identity in the face of rapid social change. Framed within a qualitative and interpretive methodology, the article combines visual semiotic analysis with cultural discourse analysis to trace how restorative and reflective modes of nostalgia operate within these toys. The study demonstrates that *Guócháo Cháowán* does not merely replicate the past; instead, it mobilizes symbolic elements—colors, motifs, materials, and narrative references—that activate shared emotional memories while simultaneously aligning with youth-oriented visual culture and global design trends. Finally, the article argues that *Guócháo Cháowán* functions as cultural artifacts that extend beyond aesthetic appeal. They offer a powerful example of how nostalgia can be designed, circulated and experienced, not as mere longing for the past, but as a creative and affective strategy for negotiating cultural belonging in the global era.

Keywords: nostalgia, *Guócháo Cháowán*, cultural memory, symbolic design, Chinese identity

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Introduction: Reimagining the past; nostalgia in Chinese designer toys

In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch (1959, 143-144) posits that “the content of the ideal is a desire to return to the perfection of an imaginary past”. This conceptualization situates hope not as mere escapism but as a dynamic, culturally embedded force that mobilizes memory, imagination and affect to project alternative futures. Within this theoretical lens, nostalgia emerges not as passive longing, but as an active component of cultural production and symbolic engagement.

Guócháo Cháowán, culturally encoded playthings, materializes a collective desire for the recuperation and re-signification of Chinese traditions within a contemporary framework. Inheriting the emotional strategies of Hong Kong’s art toy scene and integrating the affective immediacy of *kawaii* aesthetics, these objects transform nostalgic sentiment into a structured semiotic practice.

Their emotional appeal is not incidental but deliberately designed: a strategic activation of symbolic play that bridges past imaginaries with future aspirations. Within the *Guócháo Cháowán* ecosystem, symbolic play becomes a mechanism for emotional investment and cultural re-articulation. Playful interaction with these designed objects does not merely evoke individual memories; it fosters a shared affective economy wherein cultural knowledge is both preserved and dynamically reconfigured. Thus, the emotional value embedded in these toys transcends simple consumer attachment: it constitutes a recursive feedback loop where nostalgia, imagination, and identity co-produce and sustain new cultural narratives.

This article explores how *Guócháo Cháowán* leverages nostalgia as an emotional infrastructure that shapes the visual language and symbolic function of art toys in contemporary China. These toys are not simply inspired by tradition; they transform it. The integration of traditional elements such as Hanfu, classical poetry, dynastic symbolism, and folk motifs into simplified, emotionally expressive forms, connects *Guócháo Cháowán* toys and players in a process of cultural reimagining. Nostalgia here becomes both a design strategy and an affective mode of consumption—bridging personal memory, collective heritage, and future-oriented identity formation.

Delving from visual culture and material semiotics, this study portraits how Chinese art toys act as cultural devices, objects through which cultural memory is performed, aestheticized, and circulated. *Guócháo Cháowán* - within the broader context of China’s evolving

design culture and youth consumer behaviour - emphasizes the role of nostalgia in sustaining emotional attachment, reinforcing identity, and enabling the reinterpretation of cultural narratives in a globalized marketplace. Finally, this article argues that *Guócháo Cháowán* exemplifies the transformative potential of nostalgia when embedded in symbolic play. As a dynamic reconfiguration of Chinese identity, these art toys materialize memory and desire, offering not a return to the past, but a playful and emotionally resonant reimagining of what cultural heritage can mean today.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in cultural analysis and visual semiotics. Its aim is to examine how *Guócháo Cháowán* toys function as affective artifacts that mediate nostalgia and emotionally engage contemporary Chinese consumers in processes of cultural heritage reinterpretation. The research draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from cultural studies, memory studies, material culture, and visual design theory, integrating them into a cohesive analytical framework that addresses both symbolic and emotional dimensions.

Given the layered nature of nostalgia, ranging from restorative to reflective, and the hybrid positioning of *Guócháo Cháowán* between tradition and innovation, a multi-method strategy is adopted. The analysis includes semiotic decoding of selected art toys, discourse analysis of brand narratives and consumer-facing material, and close reading of visual elements drawn from iconographic references and stylistic morphology. Particular attention is given to the emotional grammar of these objects: how nostalgia is encoded in symbolic motifs, colors, costumes, materials, and forms, and how these aesthetic choices invoke cultural memory and temporal imagination.

The case studies selected, PopMart's *SPACE MOLLY* series, Rolife's *Nanci* collections, and *52Toys' Super Active Series* Hanfu-inspired figures, were chosen for their direct engagement with Chinese cultural motifs and their explicit narrative framing around tradition, innovation, and emotional resonance. These examples are examined as cultural texts within a broader *Guócháo* discourse, which mobilizes nostalgia not merely as sentiment, but as a design logic and cultural strategy.

This approach is also sensitive to the material and symbolic hybridity of the toys under analysis. Rather than reproducing cultural

heritage in static forms, these products reconfigure it through strategic stylization, cross-cultural references, and emotional cues. The study thus foregrounds designer toys as cultural artifacts, objects through which cultural memory, affect, and identity are co-produced. Through these methodological tools, the research aims to reveal how *Guócháo Cháowán* toys embody a cultural logic of continuity and reinvention, and how nostalgia operates within this system as both a force of emotional attachment and a vector for imaginative reengagement with heritage.

Restorative and reflective modes of nostalgia in designer toys

From this perspective, nostalgia becomes a structuring emotional force within cultural practices. As Svetlana Boym (2007) articulates in *Nostalgia and Its Discontents*, the construction of past imaginaries, when intersected with contemporary desires, shapes how future realities are envisioned. Building on this, William Kurlinkus (2018) describes nostalgia as a multidimensional phenomenon that engages memory and tradition as tools for cultural reinterpretation.

Derived from the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain), the term was coined in 1688 by the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer to describe a pathological yearning for a home that no longer existed. Over time, it evolved from a medical diagnosis into a broader emotional and cultural phenomenon—revealing deep insights about modern human experience. Though often associated with loss, nostalgia also involves a romantic engagement with imagined or idealized pasts.

Nostalgia is intrinsically tied to modernity. It emerges in response to the anxieties provoked by rapid change and the concept of progress. As the pace of life accelerates, nostalgia functions as a counterforce: not simply yearning for a past space, but for a different experience of time—slower, more harmonious, and resonant with childhood or dream-like states. This aligns with David Harvey’s notion of “time-space compression” and Alvin Toffler’s concept of “future shock,” which illustrate how modern perceptions of time fuel symbolic behaviors, including emotionally driven consumption. The symbolic weight of such behaviors, as argued by Bourdieu (1986) and Baudrillard (1994), reinforces the value of emotionally coded material culture.

Boym (2007) distinguishes between restorative nostalgia—centered on reconstructing the perceived truth of the past—and reflective

nostalgia, which embraces ambivalence, complexity, and reinterpretation. In design, nostalgia becomes a lens for rethinking the present and reimagining possible futures. Kurlinkus (2018) emphasizes that nostalgia deepens user engagement with cultural memory, producing emotionally meaningful artifacts.

Designing memory: Cultural heritage in Guócháo Cháowán

Fredric Jameson's critique of the "nostalgia mode" in late capitalist culture argues that the commodification of memory results in flattened simulations of history. However, within *Guócháo Cháowán*, nostalgia operates in layered ways—both as aesthetic strategy and emotional affect. Like the *kawaii* aesthetic, which unconsciously elicits emotional flow states, nostalgia within these objects mobilizes memory to influence consumer choice. Examples of restorative nostalgia can be found in: PopMart's Chinese New Year Molly by Kenny Wong, which references Lunar New Year rituals, red color symbolism, and traditional lantern motifs (Image 1); Rolife's *Nanci Chinese Poems and Songs Series*, which integrates classical poetic elements, Hanfu, and imagery drawn from traditional painting (*guóhuà*) (Image 2) and 52Toys' *Super Active Series*, which features female figures in Tang-style Hanfu engaged in modern postures and hobbies—creating an interplay between dynastic heritage and contemporary youth culture (Image 3).



Image 1. Chinese New Year Molly By Kenny Wong x POP MART. Source: The Toy Chronicle



Image 2. Rolife's Nanci Chinese Poems. Source: The Toy Chronicle



Image 3 52Toys Super Active Series. Source: The Toy Chronicle

The design elements in all three examples evoke cultural symbolism associated with prosperity, celebration, and heritage. PopMart's Chinese New Year collection is particularly linked to the Lunar New Year and the presence of the color red is deeply embedded in Chinese tradition, symbolizing luck and happiness, while the lantern being held is often associated with unity and festivity. The second example,

Rolife's *Nanci Chinese Poems and Songs Series*, incorporates traditional Chinese aesthetics such as Hanfu (traditional Chinese clothing), ancient poetic motifs, and cultural references tied to nature (e.g., bamboo, plum blossoms, and cranes) which symbolizes harmony and continuity, vital components of traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. These elements, thus connect directly to China's literary and artistic heritage, drawing from classical poetry and 国画 (guóhuá-traditional Chinese painting). The third example, *52Toys Super Active Series*, showcase female characters dressed in Hanfu reminiscent of the Tang dynasty, which is iconic in Chinese cultural history for its elegance and artistry. Their hairstyles and accessories mimic those often depicted in traditional Chinese paintings and sculptures, evoking a sense of historical nostalgia. Their postures, on the other hand, respond to nowadays activities usually performed by the younger generations. We can assume that these figures partly integrate restorative nostalgia through the incorporation of traditional cultural motifs and its symbolic and cultural dimension, appealing to the collective memory of traditional heritage, while simultaneously targeting modern consumer behaviors. However, they do not reproduce the exact same materials and aesthetics of these traditions, they reinterpret them.

These examples reinterpret rather than replicate tradition. They draw on shared cultural memory while appealing to modern consumer aesthetics, thereby positioning the past as a mutable design resource.

Symbolic play and emotional consumption in contemporary Chinese toys

The SPACE MOLLY series by Kenny Wong exemplifies the prospective dimension of nostalgia, as articulated by Boym. Debuting on August 11, 2022, Kenny Wong's IP MEGA SPACE MOLLY embodies the spirit of a modern-day explorer, showcasing the importance of what it means to discover and rediscover "the things you find along the way". Keeping alive the soul of the art toy movement, this series was inspired by diverse artistic expressions which combined modern art, popular culture, and street art between others. With the promise of acquiring a unique story and design concept behind each product, artists who co-branded and cooperated convey their emotions and ideas about the promising future, and engage with consumers expectations of receiving not just a high- end plaything, but also an artistic experience. Back to the second form of nostalgia identified by

Boym, the reflective one accepts that the past cannot be truly recreated and instead, finds ways to reflect, interpret, or reimagine it. Nostalgia, in this regard, acts as a strategy for survival, especially for those in marginalized or displaced conditions. Embodied in *Guócháo Cháowán*, particularly on playthings like the SPACE MOLLY series, it makes of them not merely an artistic device but a way of coping with the impossibility of returning to an idealized time (Kurlinkusop 2018).

From this perspective, nostalgia can be positioned as an historical emotion, which attached, can become a form of memory practice. As memories are not statics, nostalgia becomes the driving force for continuous definition and reinterpretation. This evocative dimension, also mediates and assist at the reinforcement of cultural memories in the transmission and continuity of traditions throughout time.

Examples of such evocative dimension can be found on the MEGA SPACE MOLLY 400 As part of the brand's objective towards the innovation and inheritance of non-heritage culture, in 2022 PopMart released its first product entirely made of tin, MEGA SPACE MOLLY 400% Silver Sea Flower • Tin (银海生花•锡) (Image 4).



Image 4. PopMart MEGA SPACE MOLLY 400% Silver Sea Flower • Tin

It was produced in collaboration with the 1885 founded Malayan pewter manufacturer and retailer, Royal Selangor, who holds a tradition of casting craftsmanship for over 250 years. Aesthetically, its pattern design was inspired by the Chinese cloud pattern, which integrates Eastern and Western cultural elements. Its carving intends to showcase the collision between tradition and modernity.

As it proved that the artisticization of trendy play and craftsmanship have a profitable niche in the market as well as collection value, in 2024 they released the MEGA SPACE MOLLY 400% hidden gold without trace • Wood (藏金无痕•木) (Image 5).



Image 5. PopMart MEGA SPACE MOLLY
400% hidden gold without trace • Wood.
Source: PopMart.com

This project was born under the premise of injecting modern power into traditional elements to rejuvenate them. Evoking the spirit of the wood carving art, historically linked to the ancients' respect for nature, the MEGA SPACE MOLLY wood series integrated this traditional art into a new world, where young people are immersed in. In order to achieve this objective, the brand contacted Huang WangWang (黄旺旺), the fifth generation heir of a century-old carving family, and also founder of the national trendy brand Simutang (司木堂) to reimaging this traditional art from the field of *Cháowán*. He utilized a technique originated in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, mostly used on metal artifacts, in order to be able to mix wood with gold: it represented a cross- border dialogue between both materials, as according to the artist, “wood” is a symbol of the pulse of life, and gold injects vitality on Molly’s soul. Aesthetically, the artist not only worked on the surface of the plaything, but also integrated Chinese traditional motifs that added a “second skin layer” of significance. The

presence of the mythological Kui Long (夔龙) dragon at the back of the helmet guards Molly and recalls the armor warriors of the Shang dynasty. This pattern, added at the helmet also symbolizes a momentum of majesty and bravery. All in all, the artist interpreted Molly as wooden skin holy fighter, rendering into the laws of nature and protecting everything in the world.

At end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, PopMart announced the release of a non- tangible heritage series, the MEGA ROYAL MOLLY Florals China (Image 6).



Image 6. PopMart 2025 ROYAL MOLLY Florals China. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/>

Inspired in the ancient Chinese ceramic culture of Jingdezhen (景德镇) in Jiangxi province, it reproduced the traditional techniques of “porcelain rolling process” (轧道工艺) also known as “pickpocketing” (扒花). Developed during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, this ceramic decoration technique presents high technological difficulty, as it requires the porcelain to be fired at high temperature and extremely precaution in order to avoid scraps on the surface. The process refers to “pastel” to the use of glass white material as the background color, on which later is added a colored coat. “Rolling” is how carving is denominated, part of the process in which a tool like a rusty needle is used to carve fine phoenix tail lines alike, in order to draw ornaments like flowers, birds, landscapes between others, on the surface of the art piece.

Wang Xiaofeng, president of the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Association (中国非物质文化遗产保护协会), pointed out the relevance of this joint innovation between Jingdezhen ceramic culture and PopMart, providing new possibilities to the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture. The exploration of the brand in the collision of non-tangible repertoires of cultural heritage and integration of tradition on new trends, can be assume as a new modality of culture consumption aimed to endure the transmission of the culture of the era through playful artistic expressions.

These examples highlight how nostalgia functions not just as design inspiration, but as an aesthetic method for cultural survival, especially among younger consumers. The integration of historic symbols, materials, and iconography affirms cultural continuity while offering playful reimaginings of Chinese tradition.

The aesthetic politics of nostalgia in Guócháo Cháowán

As demonstrated, both restorative and reflective nostalgia reject the deterministic views of history and open space for negotiation, hybridity and collective participation. This process aligns with Hall's (1997) view of identity as continually reconfigured through temporal and cultural interplay. *Guócháo Cháowán* operates through this hybridity, where simplified toy morphologies combine Chinese symbolism with pop cultural references.

The result is a localized expression of globalization: a two-dimensional design culture influenced by Japanese character design and Western pop aesthetics. Contrary to Pohl's (2009) concerns about globalization's homogenizing effects, this hybridization enables cultural reassertion and expands the global visibility of Chinese design. Nostalgia here functions as both a memory practice and a forward-looking design strategy.

Economically, this is a deliberate counter-strategy to reclaim the narrative of Chinese aesthetics in a global market. *Guócháo Cháowán* toys not only appeal to new young consumers, but also transform passive audiences into co-creators of cultural memory, resonating with Carr's (1982) view of consumers as historical agents.

The behavior of these new generations of consumers, particularly among youngsters, reflects both Bourdieu's cultural capital dynamics and Canclini's hybrid modernities. Emotional investment and symbolic consumption drive value beyond aesthetics—narrating self-identity, national belonging, and creative continuity. The everyday satisfaction

of nostalgia-laden consumption becomes a subtle yet meaningful act of identity reaffirmation.

Conclusion

This study has examined how *Guócháo Cháowán* - Chinese art toys—operates as emotional infrastructures that mobilize nostalgia to engage cultural memory, negotiate identity and communicate symbolic meaning. Positioned at the intersection of tradition and modernity, these playthings reconfigure heritage into emotionally resonant forms, transforming collective memory into a site of playful interaction and aesthetic consumption. Rather than offering static reproductions of the past, *Guócháo Cháowán* materializes reimagined fragments of Chinese cultural identity, embedded in objects that resonate with contemporary consumer sensibilities.

Nostalgia, as demonstrated, is not treated as passive longing but as a dynamic cultural force. Through both restorative and reflective modes, it enables the revival and reinterpretation of traditional aesthetics, rituals, and narratives. The toys analyzed—such as PopMart's *SPACE MOLLY*, Rolife's *Nanci*, and *52Toys' Super Active Series*—encode symbolic elements that evoke shared cultural references, while simultaneously incorporating visual strategies that align with global design trends and youth-centered aesthetics. This duality situates *Guócháo Cháowán* within a hybrid design culture, where the emotional appeal of heritage is reconstructed through forms that are both nostalgic and future-oriented.

Visual storytelling, symbolic design, and simplified morphology function not only as aesthetic choices but as memory practices. These toys act as mnemonic devices that foster emotional engagement, allowing consumers to participate in the re-articulation of cultural narratives. In doing so, they facilitate the reinforcement of collective identity in a fast-changing and globalized environment.

Finally, *Guócháo Cháowán* portrays how nostalgia—embedded in symbolic play and visual culture—becomes a productive force. It bridges generational experience and cultural pride, enabling young consumers to engage with heritage not through preservation alone, but through reinterpretation. As this article has shown, the nostalgic design of *Guócháo Cháowán* is not simply a strategy of aesthetic reference, but a mode of cultural continuity—transforming designer toys into emotionally charged artifacts that animate memory, affirm identity,

and contribute to the evolving landscape of Chinese cultural expression.

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Contours and pluralism in Chijioke Onuora's *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* exhibition of Igbo Cosmology drawings, 2024

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Abstract: Chijioke Onuora is a Nigerian artist of Igbo ethnicity. With the thrust of artistic stoicism, this study critically examined Igbo existential pluralism in Onuora's exhibition of drawings at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (October 29 - November 29, 2024). The exhibition theme: *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* (*When something stands, another, also stands nearby*) signifies that things thrive in essential adjacencies. Findings reflect suppression of monism by juxtaposing geometric and linear images for pluralism. Illustration materials were charcoal and textile dye, on paper and fabrics. All the works were produced in 2023 and 2024.

Keywords: artistic stoicism, adjacencies, existential pluralism, Igbo, geometric, linear

Introduction

Like an octopus with many fronts, the problem with discussing Chijioke Noel Onuora is, choosing the aspect of his multifaceted creative life that should be put in front. The challenge of prioritization, therefore, makes research on Onuora seem like an engagement on many facades. However, since this review borders on his current art exhibition, which was specifically narrowed down to drawing, a front was found in his draughtsmanship potentials. Obodo and Okafor (2016) pertinently stated that critics define Chijioke Onuora as a

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“versatile artist who works in different mediums”. This definition aptly describes him. “When he is not involved in painting, sculpting or dying fabrics, he cracks jokes and tells stories” (Obodo and Okafor 2016, 105).

Chijioke Onuora, an accomplished artist, was born into the family of teachers, Rev. and Mrs Joshua Chukwuemeka Onuora of Ede village in Adazi-Ani, Aniocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, on 30th May, 1962. Whereas his art teaching proficiency and student-friendliness are his core sterling qualities, some art scholars ascribe the qualities to his parental background. Like his father who was also a choirmaster, he loves music and sings well, an attribute his mother also had. Chijioke Onuora was indeed, born to do creative things, storytelling inclusive. Over the years, he has successfully transferred his oral story telling gusto unto diverse art media for visual culture bearings. In his art, a lot of stories are told by manipulating intricately woven contours, thereby transmitting his feelings to the public. It also appears that Onuora’s musical mentality found solace in the Nsukka Art School’s popular pattern of linearity, as enshrined in the *Uli* idiom; a wedlock of idealism and expressiveness.

The various tools of Igbo cultural pedagogy are evident in Onuora’s drawings, especially in their didactics. The artist employs the folklores, proverbs and idioms that form parts of his rich Igbo tradition in capturing his themes and artistic thoughts, which are focused mainly, on human relationships, social responsibilities and morality. Some of his drawings familiarise more directly with his cultural background in their titles (Obodo and Okafor, 2016, 107).

Educational background

It was natural that a gifted artist, born to parents who were professional teachers and influencers of young people, went to school, to develop his talents. Chijioke Onuora, in the words of Nnamele (2018), had his primary education from 1968 to 1973 at Thomas Anglican Primary School, Oraukwu. By 1970 he was in elementary 2 but the Nigeria-Biafra war delayed his studies. Onuora recalled that by 1973, when he was supposed to be in secondary school, he was doing his primary 5. At this level he enrolled for the common entrance examination that took him to secondary school without taking the First School Leaving Certificate Examination (Ibid, 1).

Despite the delays occasioned by the war and its downstream unrests, Onuora forged ahead zealously, passing through Oraukwu

high school, for his secondary education, from 1973 to 1979. Enrolling at the Anambra State College of Education, Awka, to study Fine and Applied Arts, was not easy in 1979 but he was also able to scale through, for his National Certificate in Education, NCE. In 1983 he was admitted to study Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as a direct entry student, graduating in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts, BA degree in sculpture. In 1987 he registered for a Master of Fine Arts, MFA, degree programme in sculpture and graduated in 1990. Onuora's subsequent enrolment for a Doctorate, PhD programme in Art History at the same institution, and his promotion to the rank of a Professor, years after, was no surprise to all his past students and admirers worldwide. Bassey (2023) recalled Onuora as having responded thus, during an interview:

My formal art education began at Oraukwu Grammar School and was further nurtured at Anambra State College of Education in Awka, where I was taught by mostly graduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I finished from the College with a Distinction in Fine and Applied Arts. While studying for my degree programme at the university, a year later, I had the privilege of learning from accomplished artists like Obiora Udechukwu, Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor and El Anatsui, whose influences further shaped my studio art practice.

Close followers of Chijioke Onuora would not hesitate to acknowledge the influence of Seth Anku, a proficient Ghanaian lecturer in the department. Till date, Onuora's strokes look much like those of Seth Anku, with capacious touches of El Anatsui and Chike Aniakor's radical linearity.



Fig. 1. The artist, Professor Chijioke Noel Onuora in three stages of life:
pre-degree, degree/doctorial, post-doctorial

Source: Research; Alu et al (2024). Photo: Chijioke Noel Onuora

The Zaria rebellion as precursor to indigenous contents in post-colonial formal art learning in Nigeria

Chijioke Onuora is one of the contemporary cross bearers of the *Uli* art culture that the Nsukka Art School is today, known for. *Uli* itself is a child of ideological agitations held by some Nigerian art students in 1958 at Zaria, for intellectual independence. The undergraduate students of art in the Fine Arts Department of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, later re-named Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, at some point, rose up to challenge the British art pedagogies that dominated the learning curricula, as enshrined by the largely British art lecturers in the institution. In the forefront the Zaria agitations was its founder and leader, Christopher Uchefuna Okeke, more commonly known as Uche Okeke, a vibrant painter, poet and draughtsman. The founding members of the group were: Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Jimoh Akolo, Irein Wangboje, William Olaosebikan, and Simon Okeke.

But there were, initially, four student-artists that started the fight for conceptual and pedagogical freedom in art. According to Okeke-Agulu (2015, 2), the decision by four of the eleven students admitted in September 1957 to confront the status quo was nothing short of historic. These students came to Zaria with the ambition to become professional artists after their art training. They were not prepared to cede to their counterparts in other disciplines any claim to or of academic superiority, in part because they entered Zaria highly recommended.

The creative agitators went as far as organising extracurricular art exhibitions in which they showed a lot of works depicting considerable dosages of 'Nigerianness', at least to prove that they knew what they were agitating for. Those exhibitions, apart from marketing the young artists, also became part of the larger call for independence from British colonial rule. It was also predictable that most of them were going to become art teachers and social influencers, and they did. Uche Okeke who was also a poet, took his call for homeward thinking to his poems, likewise others in the category. The original four members of the group referenced above were: Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Jimoh Akolo. Much later, three students from the previous class: Yusuf Grillo, Simon Okeke and William Olaosebikan joined the group. In the years that followed, the likes of Okechukwu

Odita, Oseloka Osadebe, Ogbonnaya Nwagbara and Felix Nwoko Ekeada also joined. It did not take long before the fever of self-identification and Afro-centricism caught young Nigerian artists nationwide.

In the words of Alu et al. (2024, 55), “their guts came largely from the wave of independence that dominated the country then, and also, the need to be allowed to create art the Nigerian and African way”. There was, therefore, the cry for natural synthesis by the vibrant student-artists. “Natural synthesis means the mixture of indigenous visual art forms with some of the western ones considered useful at the moment”. The ‘Zaria rebels’, as they were also branded, was later to metamorphose into the ‘Zaria Art Society’.

It was therefore, not a surprise that Nigerian art schools where the Zaria rebels had gone to teach, after graduation, started to fuse in elements of traditional idioms to their art forms in teaching and practice. Those who went into personal practice equally did so with a lot of indigenous art-sense, signalling total shifts from the hitherto sought-after synthesis of Nigerian and Europeans concepts. The European art-sense, at some point, started giving way for Afro-centric conceptualisations in art. After the civil war, at Nsukka, Uche Okeke started to project the *Uli* art concept with so much vigour that it soon became a beacon of *Igbocentric* visual culture. He did so by exposing his students to the traditional roots of the *Uli* painting culture.

According to Ikwuemesi (2019, 4), “experimentation with *Uli* as a creative idiom by modern Igbo painters dates back to the late 1950s when Uche Okeke, an art student and a member of the Zaria Art Society, began to explore Igbo culture in his works, in a manner commensurate with the stylistic ideological rebellion of the Zaria Art Society”. It is good to note here that other members of the Zaria rebel group also went to explore traditional creative metaphors obtainable in their regions of the country, for art inclusivity. Ikwuemesi asserted further that “it was not until the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970 that *Uli* took a deep root in the art philosophy that dominated the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This was to be expected, since the immediate post-war period in Igbo land was a time when Igbo artists sought to vanquish the pains of loss and defeat, through the renewal of self and identity via a ‘forward-to-the-past’ philosophy”.

Ezeh (2005, 62) ascertained that during this experimentation, students, namely; Obiora Udechukwu, Paul Igbanugo, Ray Obeta, Bons Nwabiani, Osita Njelita, among others, were carried along. These

students along with the lecturers embarked on several field research trips in some Igbo communities where they viewed first hand *Uli* women painters at work, documented the *Uli* body and wall decorations and paintings, as well as incorporated the *Uli* motifs into their own studio works.

The *Uli* idiomatic signature at Nsukka as by-product of the Zaria rebellion

Uli is the name of the dye obtained from the indigo seed. The seed is first of all, broken or ground into a fine liquid paste, then used by Igbo women for body painting and mural plastering, which also translates to painting. In recent decades *Uli* motifs can be rendered with white chalk pastes on red-brown mud walls, to achieve easier contrast. The motifs created by Igbo women are largely drawn from totemic objects and animals in the immediate environment. Shapes that represent Igbo ideologies are also captured in the motif making. Linearity and geometricism are hallmarks of *Uli* illustrations, depending on what is being represented. According to Ikwuemesi (2019, 171), *Uli* is also the name of the entire art tradition in which the indigo dye or earth pigments were used. The word *Uli* equally functioned as an aesthetic determinant among the Igbo, referring to various connotations of beauty, intricacy and sense of design.

The Department of Fine and Applied Arts, now Fine and Industrial Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was established in 1961. It was like one of the institutional babies of the newly gotten independence, with lecturers and students who still had the mentality of freedom ringing in their heads. Irrespective of the upheavals at Zaria before independence, the Eurocentric art pedagogy issue of Zaria showed up again at Nsukka. This was not a surprise, as most of the earliest lecturers in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, were still foreigners who knew little or nothing about Afro-centric philosophy. In the words of Alu et al. (2024, 55), “regrettably, the art programmes of the Nsukka art school, like the Zaria art School, earlier on, were highly ‘Europeanised’. By Europeanisation we mean that the European art lecturers in the institution flagged art teaching structures that showed much Euro-centric educational curriculum”.

Years after independence in 1960, internal governmental crises started rearing up from different parts of the country, culminating in genocide killings, sectional agitations and military coups. The Nigerian political space was getting gloomier, and so were her educational

structures. If there were agitations about synthesizing Nigerian conceptual contents with few of the European ones before independence, for home identity, it remained to be imagined what the proportion of another looming agitation, for total 'Nigerianness' would be, after independence. But the challenge was the fewness of Nigerian art graduates available then. Besides, a wider scope of political unrest was brewing across the country, especially between the North and the East. In the wake of the upheavals leading to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war and its encumbrances, according to Alu et al. (2024, 396), "signs were high enough that schooling was going to be disturbed in the Eastern region, so, the expatriate art lecturers were driven away by the prevailing unsafe. After the war, when indigenous artists took over, artistic experimentation was combined with theoretical pedagogies to form the core bipod of the art learning structure in the institution" thus, Nigerian formally trained artists started taking over.

After the civil war, in the early 1970s, the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, turned to native art specialists to resuscitate her academic programmes. Uche Okeke was projecting Uli, a traditional body and mural painting linearistic pattern practised by Igbo women of South-East Nigeria, as an idiom and instrument of 'Nigerianness' in artistic conceptualisation (Alu et al. 2024, 396; 397).

It was, therefore, the *Uli idiom* that Uche Okeke planted in Nsukka that begat disciples over the decades till it got to the generation of Chijioke Onuora, a radical design explorer and multi-talented visual culture crusader. In projecting Uli linearity patterns beyond the original scope, unto more idealistic and intricately woven encompassments of Igbo philosophy, the *ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* mantra became an inevitable pole bearer for the 2024 exhibition.

Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya: The current voice of Chijioke Onuora

The art experimental trajectories unearthed by the Zaria Art 'rebels' clarion call for traditional synthesis of art forms and media stood and towered like a tree with many useful branches. From Uli, an indigo seed and pigment sourced by Igbo people for body and mural painting, and an Igbo art repertoire of a sort, to other forms of artistic liberalisations, Uche Okeke birthed an enduring art stylistic trajectory (Alu et al. 2024, 396).

The Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria have very rich and deeply rooted philosophical contemplations that guide everyday life. Chijioke

Onuora, duly showed an early thrust in standing his current solo art exhibition on the thematic pedestal of the Igbo adage: *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* (once a thing or an issue stands, another also stands nearby) meaning that things, issues, persons or even ideas, stand in co-existential twos or multiples. The exhibition which held from October 29th till November 29th, 2024 at the Museum of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was the first of its kind by Professor Chijioke Noel Onuora, in careering his drawing proficiency on fabric, not just on the conventional paper or board. In Nsukka, artistic experimentation seems to be developing on as many outlets as there are artists always in the wings. Onuora himself has taught and bred so many art media explorers over the decades.

In this exhibition, the renowned draughtsman, Chijioke Onuora, concentrated on stylisation of images, in manifold liberalistic abstractions. In essaying the thematic contents of the current art works by Onuora, attempt was made to discuss the social issues thrown up, in presenting the works both dialectically and otherwise. As one of the contemporary crusaders of the *Uli* art ideological doctrine, Onuora, in this exhibition, put forward a strong factual sentence; one in which pluralism in image making was pivotal.

With Uche Okeke as captain of the ship, and, later supported by Chike Aniakor, Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui, decades on, another generation of Nsukka art flag bearers emerged in the likes of Chijioke Onuora, Krydz Ikwuemesi, Eva Obodo, Chika Okeke-Agulu, Sylvester Ogbechie, George Odoh, Chukwuemeka Okpara and many more. (Alu et al. 2024, 56) On Chijioke Onuora, Obodo and Okafor (2016, 112), stated that there is something that defines his drawings as a kind of condensed representation of feelings. The strokes and patterns that form them are expressively vivid and contextually saturated with meanings.

Stoically speaking, the Zaria rebellion was as inevitable as it was essentially the springboard for the Nsukka paradigm, the post-independence civil unrests notwithstanding. Decades down the line, the likes of Chijioke Onuora are crusading artistic ingenuity and cultural independence that in turn, engenders interdependence.

Methods and materials

Research design

The content analysis research design was adopted for this appraisal because of the need to exhume ideological baselines and artistic

exertions for comparative analysis. Since content analysis could either be in the qualitative or quantitative form, this study toed the qualitative path. Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1278) acknowledged qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Patton (2002, 453) specified that qualitative content analysis is any data and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.

Theoretical framework

This study is predicated upon the Igbo existential theory of *Igwe bu ike* (There is strength in a multitude) upon which a vast majority of Igbo heterogeneous enterprises stand. The Igbo doctrine of monism, much as it abides within its cosmogony, does not preoccupy the people's mindset as much as pluralism. The *Ike otu onye* (One-man power) mentality, with all the possible credits it may ascribe to individuals who seemingly make solo achievements in life, is not regarded as much as the axioms that buttress pluralism. In fact, pluralism, for its mass communicative and contributory ascriptions, which further yield collaborative success, is of higher philosophical essence among the Igbo people of Nigeria.

Apart from the pluralistic axiom *Igwe bu ike* (There is strength in a multitude), there are others like; *Gidigidi bu ugwu Eze* (The glory of the king is in his multitude of followers), *Aka abuo jikoo onu, ha egbuo ijiji* (When two hands come together, they become capable of killing a fly), *Aziza ka mma n'ukwu* (The broom is more formidable as a bunch), etc. The pluralism-oriented *Ife Kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* being the theme of the current exhibition, readily posits the artist as thrusting in the direction of pluralistic co-existence.

Objectives

This paper sought to investigate the *Ife kwulu* (When something or an issue stands) proposal, and *Ife akwudebe ya* (another thing or issue also stands nearby) juxtaposition, in its portending of duality, with the thrust of breaking down the *ife* (thing) and the *nkwudebe* (standing close-by) in illustrative ideograms. In a layman's language, this study investigated the 'Whats' and 'Whys' doctrinal contents of Onuora's explorative illustrations.

Instruments and procedures for exhibition review

After attending the opening ceremony of the exhibition and interacting with the artist on October 29th, 2024, at the Museum of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, there was need to photograph the works for future references and discussions. For this purpose, Jibrin Ebeneazar, the official photographer for the exhibition and a technical staff of the department of Fine and Industrial Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka, was engaged. After compiling the photographs, they were tabularized and labelled accordingly, for contours and pluralism content analysis, then internet and archival search began, for related literature. The review was qualitative, Igbo cosmology-oriented and observation-based. Thus, the data gathering and compilation instruments were: digital camera, pen, paper, journal articles, books and internet sources.

The underpinnings of duality

Duality is a philosophical belief that things exist or stand in twos. This doctrine covers twosome stances in: oppositeness, contiguity, juxtaposition, superimposition, and the likes. They stand, not necessarily in halves or in some other fractions, but as full independent figures.

Some Igbo mythical stories of origins credit existence with a lot of duality. In fact, it is considered that if the *ihu na azu* (front and back) or *Ikwu na ibe* (kin and neighbour) of a matter gets exposed, it means that the whole sides of a story or an encounter has been told.

Drawing is primarily known to be paper based, and this aptly describes the drawings of Chijioke Onuora whose mastery of the use of charcoal is classical. However, the recent exploration of charcoal drawing on fabrics affirms his quest for doing old things in rather new ways, thereby creating room for comparative analyses.

The exhibition, *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* had on display, drawings made on two surfaces: paper and fabric. In addition, the drawings were made of two major art media: Charcoal and textile dye, forwarding the exhibition as thrusting pigmentation and contours. All the works on exhibition were produced between 2023 and 2024, another index that underpins duality. In not exerting the drawings in realistic forms, Onuora toed the paths of geometric and linear abstractions.

The art exhibition was a cynosure of all eyes, as the famous draughtsman took his skills to another level, in executing charcoal drawing on plane and dyed fabrics. Though intended to be an

exhibition of drawings, Onuora could not help allow some titbits of his textile design manipulations to manifest on some of the fabrics, for pigmentation and exploration purposes.

Other forms of pluralism

The very intricately woven flow of linearity manifested on the works of Onuora largely interfaced plurality, especially with the stylisation of the human figure. Apart from *Couple* and *Udo na ogwugwu* that represented duality, other works were depictive of triality, quadrality and other forms of Igbo cosmological pluralism. The Igbo theory of *onye akpotara, okpota ibe ya* (He who is brought soon brings another or He who is invited also invites another) is a strong basis for why pluralism is first of all, encouraged by duality. The *Igwe bu ike* (Crowd or multitude is strength) which lives on the mind of an average Igbo entrepreneur necessitates plurality and gently positions monism in some solitary situations.

In some instances, it is believed that in-between two existences is always an existence that consolidates the positions of the main two. For instance, between the *Ihu na azu* (Front and back) theory exists *etiti* (The middle). Without the *etiti*, there would be no evidence that *ihu* and *azu* exist and descriptively represent the oppositeness of the front and the back. The *Elu na ala* (Up and down, heaven and earth or high and low) theory of duality is consolidated also by the *etiti* (middle or hemispheric) stance. If there is no hemisphere, it is possible that there will be no difference between the heavens and the earth. However, the *Nwoke na Nwanyi* (Male and female or man and woman) duality doctrine, which naturally represents both genders of the human being, has no midway theory that consolidates it. The same applies to the *Mmiri na mmanu* (water and oil) oppositional duality theory. The point here is that it is not in all cases that duality is consolidated by a monistic doctrine that, in itself, seems to present 'threesomeness' in the course of manifesting duality.

Thematic and depictive imports of the works

The works of Chijioke Onuora in the current exhibition, justifiably, express the *Igwe bu ike* doctrine with detailed hierarchical positioning of persons of leadership, physical or spiritual. The persons represented on the works are both physical and metaphysical, depending on societal positioning. Also, while some persons of existential positioning are contemporaneously imaginative, others exist in the

Igbo metaphorical sense. The stylisation of images, human and spiritual, was very well in tandem with the tradition at the Nsukka School of Art where artistic experimentation holds interpretive sway.

The titles of the works were rendered in English or Igbo. The works titled: *We move*, *Entanglement*, *Continuous flow* and the *Umuada* series depict motion and fluidity, while others like: *Family* and the *Neighbours* series show stillness and rigidity in rendition. However, the *Ikoru na umu okorobia*, *Udo na Ogwugwu* and the Igbo market days of *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor* and *Nkwo* combined the impressions of both rigidity and fluidity.

Onuora, in attempting to dye some fabrics in bubble-like, linearistic and painterly *prima facie* before the fusion of charcoal drawing, successfully injected a considerable dosage of pigmentation into the rich contours on display. Some of the works that had textile dyeing and painterly precursors were: *Udo na Ogwuwu*, *Continuous flow I* and *Continuous flow II*, and *We move*. *Umuada I* and *Family* were executed with brown charcoal, making them look somewhat coloured and executed in shades of tea-coloured contours. Essentially, Onuora successfully made a fusion of drawing and textile art, with a little touch of painting. Though trained as a sculptor, Onuora's drawings on fabric capture one of his latest forays in mixed media art and explorations.



Fig. 2: ENTANGLEMENT

Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 80 x 50 inches. 2024

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 2 is a rightward horizontal cascade of contours, showing a mother figure with her kids closely wrapped around her, from the feet upwards, each, struggling for an upward holding on the mother's body. In showing pluralism, the work also looks like dream land sullenness between mother and kids.

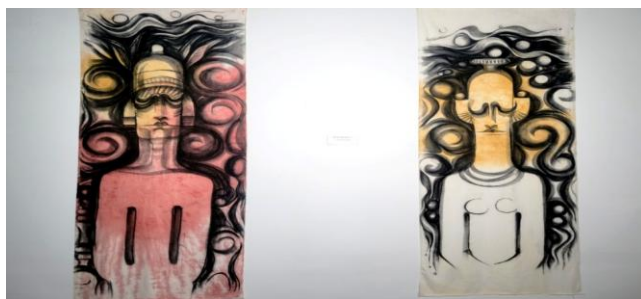


Fig. 3: UDO NA OGWUGWU
Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric Dim/Yr: 26 x 78, 27 x 78 inches. 2024
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 3 portrays the *Udo* and *Ogwugwu* male and female Igbo deities, submerged within thick contours of complaints by devotees, waiting for attention, or, being attended to. The husband-and-wife mythological stance possibly warranted why the artist depicted both of them on a single fabric surface. The verticality of the deities, suggest serenity and supremacy. *Udo* shows masculinity by looking stiffer and being bigger in size while *Ogwugwu* has breasts and an adorning beaded necklace. Both deities portray frontality and jointly represent duality in Igbo cosmology.



Fig. 4: EKE Fig. 5: ORIE Fig. 6: AFO Fig. 7: NKWO
Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 28 x 88.5 inches each. 2024
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

The four Igbo traditional market days are mythically connected. First, they constitute the *Otu izu* (one week) cycle of four days. The days, otherwise called market days, also have gender inclinations attributable to spiritual essence. Deities in charge of each market day have their priests and cultural custodians who serve as mediums between the

deities and man. Onuora carefully distinguished the female days, Orie and Nkwo with domestic utensils on their heads and circles that represent breasts, from their brothers, Eke and Afo who have thick and well projected foreheads and bearing brick-like burdens on their heads.

Eke is the *Okpara izu* (First son of the week), also known as *Isi mbido ahia* (beginning of the market week). In most Igbo communities, oath taking is conducted on *Eke* market days. One who dies on an *Eke* day is considered guilty of some offence. Child naming in Igbo land is traditionally determined by the market day of the child's birth. Such names as follows may be given to babies born on *Eke* market days: *Okereke* or *Okeke*: Male child of *Eke*. *Mgbeke*: Female child of *Eke*. *Nweke*: Child of *Eke*.

Orie is the *Ada izu* (First daughter of the week). Due to inclinations to fertility and commercial successes, the opening of the farming season in Igbo land is always fixed on *Orie* market days. Children born on *Orie* days may be given such names as: *Okorie* or *Okoye*: Male child of *Orie*. *Mgbaorie* or *Mgbaoye*: Female child of *Orie*. *Nworie* or *Nwoye*: Child of *Orie*.

Afo is the *Osote Okpara izu* (Second son of the week), it is usually a day for merriments. Masquerading, wrestling and other festivals are usually fixed on *Afo* market days, though, in some Igbo communities, occasions may not be fixed on *Afo* days for reasons peculiar to each community. Children born on *Afo* market days may be named as follows: *Okoroafo* or *Okafo*: Male child of *Afo*. *Mgbafo*: Female child of *Afo*. *Nwafo*: Child of *Afo*.

Nkwo is the *Osote Ada izu* (Second daughter of the week). Merriments are also done on *Nkwo* market days too. If one dies on an *Nkwo* day, he is considered as upright. In some Igbo communities, burial ceremonies are not fixed on *Nkwo* market days. Children born on *Nkwo* days may be given such names as: *Okoronkwo* or *Okonkwo*: Male child of *Nkwo*. *Mgbankwo*: Female child of *Nkwo*. *Nwankwo*: Child of *Nkwo*.

There are other variants of traditional Igbo names traceable market day inclinations, for instance, *Dikenwo* or *Ochiaghankwo* (Warrior of *Nkwo*), *Ekemma* (Pretty *Eke* daughter), *Agunkwo* (Lion of *Nkwo*), *Afodike* (valiant man of *Afo*), etc. It should also be noted that a name like *Okafo* was 'Europeanised' by the conscious addition of the letter R to its ending, as misspelt by the Whiteman, during the colonial era. To this end, *Okafo* was wrongly spelt as written as *Okafor*. The instances in which Igbo names of people and places were misspelt by the

colonial masters will not be discussed here for reasons bothering on study scope.

The traditional days are also discussed in gender terms, the connotation of which translates to the market days they represent in every Igbo community. Given the above explanations, Fig. 4 is Onuora's representation of *Eke*, being the first male day of the week. Fig. 5 depicts *Orie*, the first female day, Fig. 6 shows *Afo*, the second male day, while Fig. 7 represents *Nkwo*, the second female day. In justifying quadrality as an agent of pluralism, otherwise called quadruplicity, the Igbo adage *Ubochi ano: Ahia ano* (Four days: Four markets) captures the above traditional quadratic theory and aptly presents the Igbo calendar as having 4 days in a week, 7 weeks in a month, 28 days in a month, 91 weeks in a year, 364 days in a year and 13 months in a year.



Fig. 8: CONTINUOUS FLOW 1

Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric

Dim/Yr: Unknown

Figure 9: CONTINUOUS FLOW 2

Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric

Dim/Yr: Unknown

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figures 8 and 9 show the *Elu na ala*, *Enu na ana* or *Igwe na ala* (High and below or heaven and earth) duality concept playing out, as a suffocating queue of people struggle towards the powers above, for help, protection, or even forgiveness. To deepen the mysterious profiles above, Onuora dyed the upper parts of the fabrics, prior to the charcoal illustrations. Though the works portray duality, in bringing the heavens and the earth to bear, so many individuals are positioned way-between in very pluralistic manners. There are few pebbles or droplets of water issuing from above, suggesting inadequacy to calm the terrestrial draught that defines the foregrounds from where the dwellers had started a mythical migration to the abodes above, in search of abundance.



Fig. 10: WE MOVE
Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric Dim/Yr: 75.5 x 51.5 inches. 2024
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Looking somewhat polychromatic is Fig. 10, in clearly embodying pluralism. It seems there had been a massive release of the sought-after blessings lacking on Figures 8 and 9. The gloomy indigo-blueness of the celestials has given way to warm, red and orange bubbles of hues, parted in-between by some whiteness in the middle above. All the hitherto struggling persons that migrated to the heavens for comfort are now celebrating and dancing earthwards. The silhouetted human images, in their festival, seem to have also obtained reconciliation from above. As the title *We move* states, this utilitarian work of draughtsmanship in textile design embodies very kinetic moments among men when there is peace, not war.

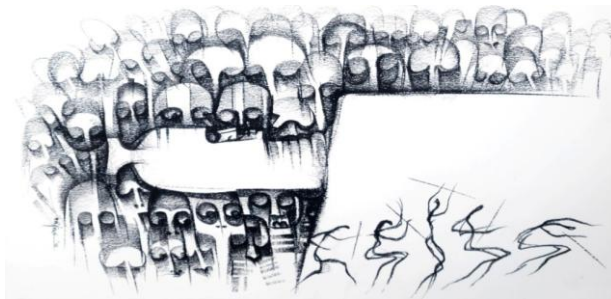


Fig. 11: IKORO NA UMU OKOROBIA
Med: Charcoal on paper Dim/Yr: 22 x 15 inches. 2023
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 11 depicts a very vital aspect of Igbo cosmology, one that entwines administration and security. *Ikoro*, the huge wooden gong used to beckon on male members of the community when certain events of great magnitude happen, is significant in Igbo culture. *Ikoro na umu okorobia* (Ikoro and the young men) showcases the caller and

the called. Though, Ikoro is used to beckon on the community when a man of high traditional hierarchy, like the *Igwe* or *Eze* (King) dies, Ikoro is mainly used to call on the men to respond to matters of urgency. Its necessities are highly male gender based. When there is need to respond to invasions by trespassing sojourners, guerrilla fighters, kidnappers, land grabbers, etc, the Ikoro is sounded for all the young men to run to the village square. It also signals the women and children to go into emergency hiding. Most communal battles are kick-started this way because the young men are always full of the hunger to retaliate. In Igbo land any young man who fails to respond to the call of Ikoro is considered sick or cowardly. The silhouetted images of the young men carrying spears and arrows show that this very call was unto war or security.



Fig 12: COUPLE
Med: Charcoal on fabric



Fig. 13: THOUGHTS WITHIN
Med: Charcoal on fabric

Dim/Yr: 44 x 71.5 inches. 2024 Dim/Yr: 78 x 58 inches. 2024
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 12 depicts duality, as the man and his wife are connected by spirals upon their heads. The couple seem overwhelmed by domestic issues in a difficult economy. The entwinements upon the heads make them appear surreal, while the thoracic regions and below seem bare. All the worries of life, including squabbles between couples are generated in the head. Eventually when it is time to settle the matter, it also starts from the head. Figure 13 shows multiple figures in reclining positions. Highly suggestive of calm and cold, the figures justify the title: *Thoughts within*, as they cogitate over some home issues.



Fig. 14: THOUGHTS WITHIN II
Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 85.5 x 55 inches
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar



Fig. 15: THOUGHTS WITHIN III
Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 36x 54.4 inches
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figures 14 and 15 are sequels to *Thoughts Within I*, showing even more intricate reflections among the stylized human images. A clear difference, though, is that while Fig. 13 is vertically framed, meaning, portrait positioning, Figures 14 and 15 are horizontally framed and seem to contain three main images each, within which other miniature, silhouetted and contoured images are submerged. The wavy fabrics naturally concur with the swimming images in musical consonance. *Thoughts within I, II* and *III*, indeed provoke curiosity within the minds of the viewers.



Fig. 16: UMUADA I
Med: Charcoal on paper
Dim/Yr: 22 x 15 inches. 2023
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar



Fig. 17: UMUADA II
Med: Charcoal on paper
Dim/Yr: 29 x 12 inches. 2023



Fig. 18: UMUADA III
Med: Charcoal on paper
Dim/Yr: 11.3 x 36. 2024
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

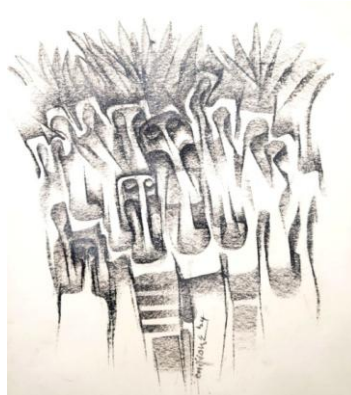


Fig. 19: UMUADA IV
Med: Charcoal on paper
Dim/Yr: 12 x 15.5 inches. 2023

Figures 16-19 constitute the *Umuada* series. Umuada is one of the strongest organisations in every Igbo community. Umuada (Indigenous daughters or daughters of the lineage) was first comprised by the first daughters in every indigenous Igbo family in a community. From *Umu* (children) and *Ada* (first daughter) came the original compound name Umuada (children that are first daughters) but since other daughters, can as well, be regarded as Ada, beyond the first daughter reckoning, Umuada has become a general name for all indigenous Igbo daughters in a community. In some Igbo communities, women married

from other communities, even non-Igbo communities, have been accepted as part of the Umuada kin because, by marriage, they are indigenes of their husband's communities. The Umuada kin are good custodians of female gender based culture. During marriage, child naming, burial and other occasions, the Umuada socio-cultural group takes charge of female gender aspects of culture and even penalises offenders. They share moments of grief with their members and also share in their moments of celebration. Dissident wives or grown-up daughters may be reported by their husbands or fathers, to the Umuada group for disciplinary actions, which may include ostracising the guilty woman for a reasonable period of expected penitence. Figures 16-19 show the women gathering for different purposes, marking pluralism as a vital aspect of Igbo culture. The artist did a combination of geometric and spiral abstractions in bringing forth the Umuada illustrations.



Fig. 20: FAMILY
Med: Charcoal on paper
Dim/Yr: 15 x 23 inches

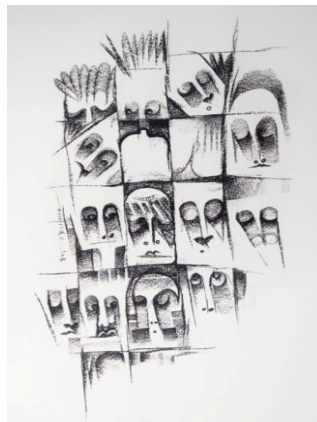


Fig. 21: NEIGHBOURS VII
Med: Charcoal on paper
Dim/Yr: 15 x 15.5 inches. 2023

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 20 shows a geometric rendition of a man, flanked by his two wives during a family contemplation. Polygamy is ideal in traditional Igbo settings. A man who has wives, barns of yam, farmlands and many children, was considered a successful man; every good reckoning was in plural terms. *Onye ihe ya di otu gba aka* (He whose belonging is just one, is empty-handed) shows the Igbo preference for pluralism in all aspects of life, marriage inclusive.

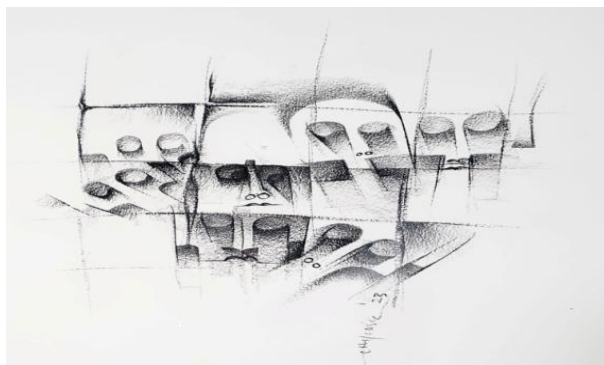


Fig. 22: NEIGHBOURS VI

Med: Charcoal on paper

Dim/Yr: 13 x 22 inches, 2023

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figures 21 and 22 show the next level of societal pluralism after the family, which is neighbourhood. Also in geometric rendition, the neighbours stand in different hierarchies yet they dwell in the same compound or near-homesteads in unity. *Agbata obi onye bu nwanne ya* (One's neighbours are his siblings) is an Igbo adage that shows the high value attached to good neighbourhood. Your blood sibling might be living faraway, meaning that your neighbour is the one that runs to you when you cry out during emergencies. The *agagbata obi* pluralism theory in Igbo land is very vast in explanation and application. One is expected to live kindly and relate well with people, so as to deserve the respect and regard of neighbours, not just in times of crisis, but also, peace and merriment. There are homestead neighbours, market neighbours, bush farm neighbours, vocational neighbours, etc.

Conclusion

Generally, the *ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* exhibition of drawings by Chijioke Onuora was an illustrative compendium of Igbo doctrine of pluralism, as thematically presented. Both the works titled in English and those titled in Igbo languages addressed similar issues of pluralism being preferred to monism. At the close of the exercise, investigative art educationist and visual culture hermeneutist, Dr. Nkem Fortunes Alu, and his current team, in this vigorous assessment of Chijioke Onuora's current drawings, came up with the following findings:

- i. There was a conscious attempt to subdue monism, in showing the Igbo people's preference to pluralism.

- ii. There were 2 approaches employed during the making of the drawings, to subdue monism; juxtapositioning of images to buttress duality, and further multiplication of images to foster pluralism.
- iii. Basically, charcoal and textile dye were used to make the drawings, even where there were slight touches of pigmentations.
- iv. In using charcoal, brown and black were the colours used.
- v. Likewise 2 colours of dye were used; indigo and red-orange.
- vi. Paper and fabrics were the 2 backdrops for drawing.
- vii. The 2 approaches to stylization were geometric and linear abstractions.
- viii. All the drawings were produced within 2 years; 2023 and 2024.

Onuora, in this cosmological outing, was not just an *Ulistic* social crusader for Igbo philosophy, but, in doing so, equally a signpost for hybrid artistry and unusualness. This he attained by taking drawing from paper to fabrics.

[Author Contributions: The authors undertook every stage of the research, from ideation to the end, except photograph taking, which was handled by Jibrin Ebenezar, the official photographer for the exhibition and a technical staff in the Visual Communications Design section of the department of Fine and Industrial Arts, formerly, Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. However, the personal photographs of the artist were accessed through him online.

Funding: There was no sponsorship or financial support from individuals or organisations outside.

Ethical Considerations: The artist, Professor Chijioke Noel Onuora was duly consulted before and during the study. Beyond giving his consent, he offered useful pieces of advice that helped fast-forward the process. All other official or informal procedures that needed to be taken were so handled, without giving room to breach of protocols.]

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Reflections of Africa: Investigating the subsidiary of African indigenous culture and its applications in the contemporary scenario through *Sing, Unburied, Sing*

Raavi Bhargava, Deepali Sharma and Shikha Saxena*

Abstract: While considered a distinctive genre, multiple elements can be observed in the African American culture and literature that overlap with indigenous African culture. However, there is limited research on the African roots of African American culture. Additionally, there is still scope left in exploring how African indigenous practices can lead to sustainable living. The main objective of this comparative study is to highlight the indigenous African connections of African American culture and to explore the applications of African indigenous wisdom on global issues through Jesmyn Ward's novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The analysis revealed that African American culture is rooted in the African indigenous cultural practices. Moreover, with the concepts of oral tradition, spirituality, Ubuntu, and eco-bio-communitarianism, African indigenous wisdom can help resolve various contemporary complications, such as communal friction, irreligiosity, diasporic trauma, and environmental issues, including biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion, and climate change, leading to a sustainable future.

Keywords: African American culture, African indigenous knowledge, interdependence, Ubuntu, sustainable future

Introduction

African American literature is often read as a distinct literary genre rather than an extension of American or African literature. The unique struggle of African Americans with slavery, Jim Crow laws, mass incarceration, racism, and economic and educational disparities led their literature to stand apart from other literatures. The distinctiveness

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of their culture, art, and literature was recognised for the first time after the 1920s with the Harlem Renaissance. Significant features of African American literature include oral tradition, magical realism, spirituality, racial struggle, and identity exploration, which are prominent elements in the African American novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The identity crisis in their literature suggests a sense of disconnection from their roots, the roots that lie in their homeland, the continent of Africa. The wider reach of the English language and the preservation of the elements of African culture led to the subsequent blooming of African American literature. Yet African culture is considered primitive and unsophisticated by the more developed countries, and its potential remains underexplored.

Methodology

The study critically analyses Jesmyn Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* under the lens of indigenous African culture. This research relies upon the ideas and concepts shared by the critical thinkers in the texts, including *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* (2009), especially the contribution of Ato Quayson in the chapter, "Magical Realism and the African Novel", P.A.H. Asante's insights in *Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics* (2014) under "The African Concept of Community and Individual in the Context of the Market", J.G. Maree and C.M. Du Toit's ideas in *Counseling People of African Ancestry* (2011) as "The Role of Oral Tradition in Counseling People of African Ancestry". The concept of Eco-bio-communitarianism in the chapter "Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics" by Godfrey B. Tangwa in *A Companion to African Philosophy* (2005) and A.C. Terblanché-Greeff's insights in the chapter, "Ubuntu and Environmental Ethics: The West Can Learn from Africa When Faced with Climate Change" in the book, *African Environmental Ethics: A Critical Reader* (2019) play a vital role in the analysis of this research.

Through Jesmyn Ward's novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, this comparative study will attempt to explore the overlapping elements of African indigenous culture and African American traditions to learn whether the latter is an extension of the former. Moreover, the study will also seek to understand how African indigenous knowledge can help resolve various global humankind complications, from communal friction to environmental issues. For easy comprehension, the paper is divided into four sections, each discussing a distinct element of

indigenous African culture that includes the importance of oral tradition, spirituality embedded in magical realism, understanding the spirit of communal harmony in indigenous communities through the concept of Ubuntu, and the interdependency of people having African ancestry and nature with special focus to terms like Eco-Bio-Communitarianism and Indigenous Knowledge System.

Sing, Unburied, Sing

Dealing with the perspectives of three narrators, Jojo, Leonie, and later Richie, the novel is set in Bois Sauvage, Mississippi. Born out of wedlock, Jojo is a 13-year-old biracial adolescent, raised in the care of his grandparents, Mam and Pop. Enrooted in spirituality and cancer-ridden now, Mam was a practitioner of voodoo and indigenous herbal knowledge. Jojo's mother, Leonie, is a drug addict struggling with the racial killing of his brother, Given by the hands of the cousin of her Caucasian boyfriend, Michael. She frequently sees the ghost of Given, whenever she indulges in substance intoxication. Her second child, Kayla (Michaela), is taken care of primarily by Jojo. Michael is imprisoned at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, Parchman, for drug trafficking, the same place Pop was imprisoned with Richie decades ago for harbouring a fugitive, Stag, his brother. Jojo's favourite activity is listening to Pop's stories about Richie and Parchman.

Michael is getting released, so Leonie, with her Caucasian friend, Misty, Jojo, and Kayla take a long drive to receive him. After reaching the prison, Jojo and Kayla encounter the ghost of Richie, who has been waiting to go home. The narrative shifts to Richie's insufferable life in prison and his life after death. Looking at Jojo, he immediately recognises his blood relation to River (or Pop). In search of home and to find an answer for his death, he joins the family on their journey back. Eventually, Richie finds out the truth of his death at the hands of his friend, to save him from a torturous death by the pale-skinned community. Mam is on her last breath when the two ghosts appear and start fighting to take her spirit with them. As instructed by Mam, Leonie builds an altar of cemetery rocks, cotton, cornmeal, and rum, as she invokes Maman Brigitte. Mam dies, and Given takes her spirit with him. Richie continues to stay in a tree beside the Stone family's house with other spirits, waiting to pass on their stories. The novel closes with Kayla calming the spirits with her incomprehensible lullaby.

The importance of oral tradition

Besides being a key feature in African American writing, storytelling or the oral tradition is an indigenous attribute of the African continent as well. It survived the Middle Passage, slavery, and Jim Crow while maintaining the unique communication style “rich in allusion, metaphor, and imagery and prolific in the use of body gestures and nonverbal nuances” (Hamlet 2011, 28). Oral tradition is looked down upon and seen as primitive by the more ‘civilised’ societies across the world, which support writing over orality (Isha 2012, 212). However, it is the technique that principally connected humans and later acted as a medium of exchange for ancestors’ thoughts, traditions, and teachings, passed down by *griots* through tales and ballads, accompanied by dance and performances. According to Gugler (2003, 36), the *griot* or *griotte* is a historian, a consultant, the voice of the God, a mediator, the master of ceremonies, and a praise singer. African sheld on to their indigenous oral tradition during the initial denial of their inclusion in the education system and the dominant society in general, which assisted in the subsequent blooming of their African American culture.

African storytelling is well-knit in the novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, where the primary responsibilities of the characters, Pop and Richie, are analogous to those of the *griots*, as these characters are also keeping the history (of slavery and brutality) alive through stories. Pop shares the story his grandmother used to recount about her great-grandmother, who belonged to the first generation of Africans, kidnapped from their homes and sold in the New World.

...in her village, they ate fear. Said it turned the food to sand in they mouth...they never went out at night, and even in the day, they stayed in the shadows of they houses. But still, they came for her. Kidnapped her from her home in the middle of the day. Brought her here, and she learned the boats didn’t sink to some watery place, sailed by white ghosts. She learned that bad things happened on that ship, all the way until it docked. That her skin grew around the chains. That her mouth shaped to the muzzle. That she was made into an animal under the hot, bright sky, the same sky the rest of her family was under, somewhere far away, in another world (Ward 2018, 69).

Correspondingly, Richie’s purpose, besides finding answers to his tragic end, is to pass on stories of the past to Jojo and ultimately to the readers (Khedhir 2020, 18). The insistence of Richie to tell his story even after his death suggests his need for a witness to carry his story of

injustice forward. Jojo becomes the witness and bears the responsibility of preserving the collective memory of his ancestors.

The storytelling technique is often used by the elders of the family to control the mischievous attitude of their children. Ward added a humorous instance showcasing Pop's scheme of stopping Jojo from running around the muddy pigpen barefoot. He tells the story of him, his sisters, and brothers getting worms in their "butts" while playing barefoot (Ward 2018, 2). Pop uses his unique storytelling technique, which is the creativity of the story and the seriousness in its delivery, that persuades his grandson to stop making trouble, as Jojo recounts, "I don't tell Pop, but that was more effective than the whipping" (Ibid, 2).

Folklore, orature, storytelling, myths, and fables have the power to comfort and heal an individual from past traumas and contemporary struggles, especially for the people of African ancestry (Maree and Du Toit 2011, 22). Jojo finds solace in Pop's stories, as if "his voice is a hand he's reached out to me, like he's rubbing my back and I can duck whatever..." (Ward 2018, 17) The significance of orality is that it never becomes futile after aiding one person; instead, its warmth flows from one person to another. Jojo's improvisation of the story of a wift rabbit named Kayla to her little sister, Michaela (nicknamed Kayla), when she was sick in the car (Ibid, 109) follows the African tradition of comforting through orality. The last chapter of the novel unfolds various unheard narratives of the ghosts of ancestors:

He raped me and suffocated me until I died I put my hands up and he shot me eight times she locked me in the shed and starved me to death while I listened to my babies playing with her in the yard they came in my cell in the middle of the night and they hung me they found I could read and they dragged me out to the barn and gouged my eyes before they beat me still I was sick and he said I was an abomination and Jesus say suffer little children so let her go and he put me under the water and I couldn't breathe (Ward 2018, 282–83).

In the end, Kayla sings, and all the spirits lean forward, nodding to her, "They smile with something like relief, something like remembrance, something like ease" (Ward 2018, 284). This scene is illustrated as if the ghosts of the past have been waiting for years to be heard and acknowledged by the present generation. Saying pain out loud unburdened their heart and freed them from anonymity. Michaela's exchange with the spirits, "their refusal to leave and subsequent implicit act of leaving for home is associated with the sense of peace" they experienced after sharing their stories (Waheed et al. 2022, 620).

Since African indigenous culture does not follow written tradition, its existence relies solely on its people and not the scriptures or texts. Their literature is unique “because it was never written down, was always one generation from extinction. But for the same reason, it was cherished and revered” (Momaday 1968, 90). Additionally, every generation continues to add a distinctiveness of its own; therefore, oral cultures are never static, they’re always undergoing some change.

Magical realism and spirituality

Magical realism was first observed in the German style of painting known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* or *New Objectivity*; however, it is most associated with the literature of Latin America. Usongo and Gintsburg (2024, 2) claim that Latin American literature was originally influenced by African oral tradition brought by slaves and by Arabic literary tradition. It challenges the Western tradition of realism, positing instead an alternative universe in which fantastical elements are placed beside the real in a process of establishing equivalence between the two (Quayson 2009, 160). The key elements of magical realism are myth, legend, and folklore that are deeply embedded in the literatures of Africa and the African diaspora.

The Stone family still holds up to the centuries-old African-based traditions, as an important part of Leonie’s initial education included learning about the African-based religious and healing traditions. Mam tells Leonie that the ability to “see” and “hear” what most cannot runs in the family, “like silt in river water...it skips from sister to child to cousin” (Ward 2018, 40). The family depends on gris-gris bags for the protection of their family members, which is an inseparable element of the African spiritual practices. Since the family’s matriarch was bedridden, Pop carried out the tradition and made a gris-gris bag for Jojo, “so small two could fit in the palm of my (Jojo) hand...it’s smooth and warm, soft to my touch. Feels like leather” (Ibid, 70). The bag carried a white feather, a canine tooth of some animal “lined with black in the chewing grooves”, and a “small gray river rock” (Ibidem). The power of the gris-gris bag is tested when Leonie, Misty, Jojo, and Kayla are coming back from Parchman with Michael. On the way back, they were stopped by a racist, white police officer, who told Jojo to sit, “like I’m a dog” (Ibid, 170). Jojo was on the verge of being held by the cop but surprisingly came out of the situation uninjured. After returning home, Pop asked Jojo if it worked, to which he replied, “I think so. We made it. Got stopped by the police though” (Ibid, 221).

Unlike Western societies that promote individualism, indigenous African culture and society find value in ancestral traditions and community building. The ordinary treatment of the supernatural is again one of the features of magical realism. Gordon argues that the significance of ghosts, especially the spirit work in African American culture, owes its origin to their respected place in African life (Gordon 2008, 151). Indeed, the initial presence of the absent (Given and Richie) comes as a shock, but the ordinary description of their presence allows the reader to blend them with the living. In the novel, Mam unveils the myth behind the existence of ghosts

...that only happens when the dying's bad. Violent. The old folks always told me that when someone dies in a bad way, sometimes it's so awful even God can't bear to watch, and then half your spirit stays behind and wanders, wanting peace the way a thirsty man seeks water (Ward 2018, 236).

Sing, Unburied, Sing follows the indigenous African folklore tradition, where the ancestral spirits appear to protect and teach their younger generation. The appearance of ancestral spirits in African folklore and literature is a common phenomenon that represents the remembrance of the past. The spirit of Given only appears to Leonie, except for one occasion when he encounters Kayla, the moment a “white” police officer insults the family, indicating that the past has reached the present, and the dead are protecting the living ones (Waheed et al. 2022, 619). Extending this argument, the visibility of Given's spirit only to Leonie can be comprehended as an act of support and safe guard since she is the loneliest living character and needs help the most.

Another element of magical realism is the infinitude of time. Ward's narration of the afterlife of Richie carries the unbound nature of time, as for him, “Men left, men returned and left again. New men came. I burrowed and slept in the milky light, my time measured by the passing of all those black faces and the turning of the earth” (Ward 2018, 136). Evidently, Ward does not describe Richie's life as a ghost in much detail, the reason being its repetitiveness, where he is only an observer.

One of the most tumultuous scenes, the death of Mam, occurs towards the end of the novel. Cancer-ridden Mam asks Leonie to perform her deathbed rituals, like she drew the veil back so Leonie could walk into this life, she wanted her help to draw it back so she can walk into the next one and meet “the last mystère. Maman Brigitte. Let

her come into me. Possess me. She is the mother of the dead. The judge. If she comes, maybe she take me with her” (Ward 2018, 215). Following Mam’s instructions, Leonie builds an altar of cemetery rocks, cotton, cornmeal, and rum. The ghosts of Given and Richie appear in the house, both combating each other for Mom’s spirit to take with them.

“Say it,” Mama says. She’s let her hands fall. “The litany,” she says again, and her breath rattles in her throat... Given stands, thrashing against some invisible thing that holds him there... This moment done ate it all up: the past, the future. Do I say the words? I blink, and up on the ceiling there is a boy, a boy with the face of a toddler. I blink again, sand scouring my eye, and there is nothing. “Mama,” I choke, and it’s as weak and wanting as a baby’s. “Mommy.” My crying and Mama’s entreaties and Michaela’s wailing and Given’s shouting fill the room like a flood” (Ward 2018, 267).

The incorporation of the elements of voodoo, hoodoo, conjure, and root work contradicts the American literary tradition and should be recognised as a different genre (Mellis 2019, 3). The ancestral spirits of the novel play a vital role in connecting personal history to the communal, suggesting that the African people and the African diaspora value communal harmony over individualism.

The Spirit of Ubuntu

The African indigenous community believes in the relatedness and interdependence of all individuals; this ideology is denoted by the term Ubuntu. Originating from sub-Saharan Africa, it is expressed by the pervasive maxim “A person is a person through other persons” (Terblanché-Greeff 2019, 97). Terblanché-Greeff reframes it as “A person is a Person through others”, where “person” (small letter p) refers to individual humans and “Person” (capital letter P) refers to the personhood and humanness a person should strive to become fully human (Ibidem).

In the novel, Mam is a practitioner of root work and midwifery, she continues the tradition passed on to her by Marie-Therese. Marie-Therese taught Mam everything she knew, and when she married Pop, it became her duty to deliver the babies, doctor folks, and make gris-gris bags for the protection of others (Ward 2018). Mam did not ask for any capital in exchange for her services; it was her belief in humanity and ancestral knowledge that inspired her to serve other people. Similar compassion is shown by Pop towards Richie in the Parchman prison. Being young and physically weak, Richie became a

prey to other Caucasian inmates, but River always protected him in whatever way he could.

River, who stood as the men flayed my back, as I sobbed and vomited and turned the earth to mud. I could feel him there, knew that he would carry me after they let me loose from the earth...The way he carried me to my cot, the way he bent over me, made something soft and fluttery as a jellyfish pulse in my chest (Ward 2018, 135).

To Richie, River was more than a friend, “Him my big brother. Him, my father” (Ibidem). His spirit wandered for decades in Parchman, looking for home; his quest ended as soon as he saw River’s grandchild, Jojo. “I’m coming home” (Ward 2018, 191), he says, implying he finds his home in River. This episode implies that the people of African descent regard unrelated people as part of their families.

In African indigenous culture, the dead are never gone; they continue to live in the physical world, either in memories or as spirits. Asante (2014, 207) asserts that an African community includes many people, among whom a lot are dead, a few are living, and an infinite number of individuals yet to be born. Likewise, Richie and Given, with other ancestral spirits, continue to appear in the novel and remain an inseparable part of the living community. As Mam is dying, there is an impression of a community gathering around her, including the presence of her family and the spirit world. Even after dying, Mam’s spirit is not secluded, it is accompanied by the spirit of her son. Given’s spirit says, “I come for you, Mama...I come with the boat, Mama” (Ward 2018, 269).

Given’s hand flutters above her face like he is a groom and Mama is a bride and he has pulled the veil from her head and let it fall back so they can look upon each other with love, clear and sweet as the air between them. Mama bucks as goes still (Ibidem).

Pop’s stories about his life and his ancestors’ serve as oral guidance for Jojo, which the older generation passes on to the younger for their benefit. Pop’s stories are “allusive, circular, repetitive, following the hesitation, reluctance, and digression as if (he is) unwilling to face, let alone share (his) memories” (Ngom 2020, 201). Ngom records that history was written by the conqueror, but the use of memory while storytelling allows the reconstitution of the personal and collective history of the colonised that is otherwise absent in or neglected by the official discourse (Ibidem). The African American characters of the

novel suffer from multiple traumas, including the historical trauma of separation from their ancestral home, slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration; the family trauma from Leonie and her boyfriend's drug addiction, compelling them to neglect the family's needs and the trauma of spiritual disconnection from their culture and tradition. The practice of Ubuntu helps the community to stand upright in the face of struggle.

The individualistic West views Ubuntu as primitive and a dependent behaviour; on the contrary, "individualistic plurality" is a key factor in Ubuntu, so that "a person can become a Person by interacting with other unique others" (Terblanché-Greeff 2019, 97). In this regard, the previous generation of Pop, Mam, and Richieare leading their younger generation towards their African identities.

Reverence for nature

Tangwa (2004) explicates the concept of Ubuntu as an African thought that does not exclude non-humans from their community instead, it recognises the interconnectedness of all biosphere beings. This communitarian way of life can be observed in the "use of wisdom in taboos, proverbs, myths and folktales" of the African indigenous community (Ncheand Michael 2024, 5). Ubuntu supports the idea that no person is whole, and all individuals are in communion with each other and nature. This is described through the concept of Ukama, an extension of Ubuntu, which refers to relatedness as found in the cosmos (Terblanché-Greeff 2019, 98). Tangwa (2004, 389) explains this harmonious coexistence of humans with non-humans under the term "Eco-Bio-Communitarianism". This is described as a cultural philosophy and way of living life that blurs the boundaries between humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects (Munung and Tangwa 2025, 1). For African indigenous people, forests are more than mere ecosystems; they are considered sacred as ancestral havens (Soko-De Jong and Maseko 2022, 7). Ward incorporated this belief in the novel. Pop tells Jojo, "there's spirit in everything. In trees, in the moon, in the sun, in the animals...you need all of them, all of the spirits in everything, to have balance" (Ward 2018, 73). This belief sharply contrasts with America's ideology, which puts humans at the centre of the cosmos.

The African thought subjectifies nature and gives a transcendental meaning to it. After the unfortunate death of Given, Mam started planting trees for him, "One every anniversary... If I live long enough,

going to be a forest here, she said, a whispering forest” (Ward 2018, 50). For Africans and African Americans, nature is something that is far beyond the understanding of humans, it is mystical. They regard nature as the driving force behind all spiritual activities; therefore, Jojo’s description of the Parchman prison, “concrete buildings and barbed-wire fences crisscrossing through fields...There’s no other sign, nothing in those fields: no cows, no pig, no chickens. There are crops coming in, baby plants, but they look small and stunted, as if they’ll never grow” (Ibid, 123), indicates that it is not a place for any living to exist, let alone human beings.

People with indigenous roots have a deep connection with the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS). IKS is the accumulated knowledge of the indigenous people passed down by the ancestors, “about the interactions of human with nature, thus providing foods, medicines, shelter, and other necessities for living” (Glasson et al. 2010, 127). Similarly, Mam passed on her wisdom of herbal medicine to her daughter, Leonie. On the way to Parchman, the toddler Michaela becomes sick and vomits repeatedly. Despite Leonie’s past attempts to run from her cultural roots, her first thought to ease her child’s upset stomach was to use the African-based tradition of healing through indigenous herbal knowledge. Remembering her mother’s saying, “if I look carefully enough, I can find what I need in the world,” she pulls over the car and starts her search for the “milkweed” as she recalls her mother’s teachings,

That right there is cow parsnip. You can use the young leaves like celery when you cook, but the roots are more useful. You can make a decoction for cold and flu. And if you make them poultice, you can ease and heal bruises, arthritis, and boils...This pigweed...Got a lot of vitamins in it, so it’s good for you... Wormseed, I would say. Good for getting rid of worms if you use it like seasoning in food (Ward 2018, 102-103).

Although she was unable to find “milkweed” or “wild strawberries”, she was successful in finding another substitute, the “wild blackberries”, except her hazy memory incapacitates her to remember whether to use the leaves of the plant or the vine, or the roots and she utters, “This is the kind of world it is. The kind of world that gives you a blackberry plant, a doughy memory, and a child that cant’s keep nothing inside” (Ward 2018, 105). The death of Given keeps haunting Leonie, which leads to her distrust in the African culture. This faith is restored when Jojo starts to understand Leonie, “I think I know

something about what she feels. That maybe I know a little bit about why she left after Mam died, why she slapped me, why she ran” (Ibid, 279), but him with Kayla respectfully rejects their mother’s path and follows the footsteps of their grandfather in the numen presence of the ancestral spirits “as he leads us back to the house...and now she sings it. *Home*, they (ancestral spirits) say. *Home*.” (Ibid, 285)

Indigenous knowledge is subjective; it changes with time and geography, while Western science is objective and universal. The subjectivity of the ecosystem creates a bond between nature and the people of African descent. Even the festivals in African societies often revolve around events such as harvests, rites of passage, or spiritual observances, and are often intertwined with the natural environment, serving as an agency for ecosystem preservation (Obamwonyi and Onyekuru 2024, 14). These celebrations with their various rituals and ceremonies encourage responsible resource management and sustainable living practices by the community (Ibid, 15). Hence, African indigenous knowledge has the power to provide relief from various major global environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion, and pollution.

Conclusion

By adapting the African literary traditions, many contemporary African American authors, including Jesmyn Ward, Tara M. Stringfellow, Yaa Gyasi, and Morgan Jerkins, attempt to reclaim their African identity, while also providing African indigenous culture a global platform to showcase its potential. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* tells the story of unwavering faith in the indigenous African culture, where the previous generation depicts its strong roots, the contemporary portrays its uncertainty, leading to the eventual restoration of faith by the next generation.

Embedded in folklore, the indigenous knowledge holds significant value to people of African ancestry, possessing literature enriched with ancestral guidance, ecological wisdom, communal harmony, and spirituality. People with indigenous ancestry do not see nature as the other; rather, they celebrate it as a mystical part of their community. The strength of African culture lies in its oral tradition, which carries the power to influence and heal fellow folks. Oral tradition with magical realism together functions as a three-way junction, connecting the memory (collective) of past, present, and future generations. The applications of African indigenous wisdom are infinite; it can help

solve various humankind issues such as communal friction, diasporic trauma, and irreligiosity through the philosophy of Ubuntu. Additionally, it can provide peculiar solutions to environmental problems, including biodiversity loss, climate change, and resource depletion, with a focus on sustainable means of living. Grounded in the oneness of all living beings, African indigenous wisdom is a treasure yet to be explored by the world; it is the known beginning, and humankind should return to it for its sustainability.

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Visualizing the layers of psyche: Madness, abjection, and the crisis of self in *Qala*

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Abstract: Chora, according to Julia Kristeva, is the pre-lingual stage of a child. It is a chaotic space of the psyche where the child fails to distinguish its subjective existence from its mother. In Anvita Dutt Guptani's 2022 movie *Qala*, the eponymous protagonist questions the very subjectivity of her own existence. Connecting Julia Kristeva's concepts of 'Chora' and 'abjection,' the paper aims to highlight how the identity of Qala remains enmeshed with her mother, owing to which she fails to untangle her own 'self' with that of the (m)Other. The leitmotif of flight, reiterated through various imageries of wings and butterflies, emphasizes Qala's innermost desire to break free. Pertaining to this, the paper accentuates Qala's constant endeavour to escape from incarceration at the cost of her inner destruction of self and the eventual catastrophe of her personal life. It showcases how Qala's concealed and repressed emotions are transformed into anxiety, leading to a tragic turn in the course of the story, captured through the dark visual artistry, the bleak colour palette, and the snowy setting of the movie reflecting the repressed layer of the human psyche, the 'Id,' the unconscious, accentuating the character's inner pessimism, abjection, hopelessness, disorientation, and anomic disconnection.

Keywords: Chora, abjection, identity, psyche, self, unconscious

Introduction

Cinema, as a narrative and visual medium, has consistently served as a powerful cultural text that reveals the communal concerns, ideologies, and psychological dynamics of a society. This medium uniquely externalises internal states, shaping and texturing the inexplicable complexity of human subjectivity. In the realm of Hindi cinema, typically marked by formulaic plots and emotional intensity, recent

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years have seen a significant shift towards psychologically complex, aesthetically innovative, and socially relevant themes. The study of psychological and emotional intricacies has become a significant area of study in Indian cinema with its rapid and swift development, particularly in narratives that focus on the inner lives of women. The psychological cinematic representation *Qala* (2022) by Anvita Dutt is a good example of this shift in tone. It acts as a vital tool to examine mental illness, insanity, and the intricate connection between gender and identity artistically portrayed in this film. In the culturally and historically distinctive context of early twentieth-century Bengal, with characteristics like colonial modernism, patriarchal constraints, and changing aesthetic traditions, *Qala* creates a story that is as deeply personal as it is distinctly metaphorical.

Indian cinema has swiftly developed and evolved into a realm for the exploration of psychological and emotional complexities, especially in stories centred on women's internal experiences and inner selves. Anvita Dutt's psychological film *Qala* (2022) exemplifies this transformation effectively. It functions as a significant medium for analysing the cinematic portrayal of psychological trauma, madness, and the complex relationships among identity, gender, and artistic expression. Situated in the culturally and historically unique milieu of early twentieth-century Bengal, marked by colonial modernism, patriarchal limitations, and evolving aesthetic traditions, *Qala* constructs a tale that is both profoundly personal and notably allegorical. Qala Manjushree, a rising classical vocalist, is the subject of the movie. Her outstanding accomplishments are overshadowed by her mother's overwhelming influence, ghostly appearances, and an unsolved past. With its 1940s setting and contemporary themes, the film follows the protagonist Qala Manjushree as she spirals into mental illness, emphasising the psychological effects of society's gender norms, maternal neglect, and artistic ambition. *Qala* transcends a mere depiction of madness; it is a profound exploration of the broken, repressed, and eventually abjected feminine psyche within the symbolic order.

This study posits that *Qala* functions as a stratified cinematic narrative that depicts the disintegration of the ego through the motifs of abjection, psychosis, and melancholia. This study utilises psychoanalytic frameworks, particularly Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage and symbolic order, and Michel Foucault's genealogical critique of madness, to

analyse the film as a significant medium for examining the formation and dissolution of feminine subjectivity. Research, including Bhaskar Sarkar's examination of melancholy and postcolonial affect, alongside Priya Jaikumar's investigation of spatial politics in Indian film, provides a basis for viewing *Qala* as a text deeply interwoven within emotional and psychological cartographies. However, *Qala* requires further examination due to its unique blend of visual brilliance and psychological depth. With fractured temporalities, elaborate interiors, and surreal visual features, *Qala* creates a vivid psychological landscape that is both beautiful and intimidating. In this world, the protagonist's mental troubles are physically and perceptually embodied. The home, the recording studio, and the theatre are walls separating truth from fantasy, memory from suppression, and social acceptability from abjection.

Urmila Manjushree is a demanding and frigid lady with a taut relationship with her daughter, whose refusal to show her daughter love causes her to battle with identity and self-worth all her life. A fragmented self that never fully integrates emerges as a result of this parental rejection, which makes a linear connection with the Kristevan concept of the abject, in which the subject is shaped by a fundamental expulsion of what is viewed as unclean or polluting. It is possible to read *Qala*'s hallucinations, auditory delusions, and self-destructive behaviours not only as signs of mental illness but also as the results of a subjectivity. It is constantly weakened by the pressure to conform to a patriarchal ideal of femininity that is selfless, competent, and submissive. The movie presents madness as a complex interaction of internal rebellion, familial abuse, and social conditioning, challenging oversimplified medical interpretations of the disorder. Furthermore, in addition to being stylistic elements, the film's aesthetics, picturised with a sepia-toned palette, recurring mirror images, discordant soundscapes, and purposeful lighting, are crucial to its psychological plot. Mirrors function as metaphors for self-monitoring and detachment, reflecting us with the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage, when the subject's identity is constructed through a deceptive appearance of completeness. *Qala*'s recurrent confrontations with her mirror image indicate an ongoing inability to integrate the disparate facets of her identity. Her craft serves as a double-edged sword: a vehicle for expression and affirmation, yet simultaneously a battleground for incessant comparison, guilt, and the obliteration of authenticity under patriarchal scrutiny.

Since the 1840s, when women protested for suffrage, the discourse on patriarchy and women's rights has significantly evolved. Literature illustrates the evolution of feminist ideology and activity across time, expanding its breadth and making substantial contributions to the theorisation and implementation of feminist politics (Krolokke and Sorensen 2006, 112). This study situates *Qala* within a theoretical framework encompassing psychoanalysis, feminist film theory, and affect studies, examining how the film portrays crazy not as an exception, but as a consequence of social violence and internalised misogyny. The film's visual and narrative structure facilitates a continuous exploration of the feminine crisis of identity in a society that simultaneously expects and penalises female ambition. It also aims to illustrate how *Qala* examines the psycho-political conditions of women in contemporary India, providing a visceral and poetic depiction of the duality of both being seen and invisible, audible and muted, acknowledged and obliterated. It contributes to the discussions regarding the cinematic portrayal of mental health, gendered trauma, and the aesthetics of psychological interiority and establishes *Qala* as both a film deserving of critical analysis and a cultural artefact that addresses persistent enquiries regarding identity, power, and the repercussions of womanhood in a society designed to silence her voice.

Madness as inheritance and infection

Madness is not defined as a distinct psychological phenomenon or a medically identifiable disorder. It manifests as a transgenerational malady, an inheritance shaped by emotional neglect, familial quiet, and cultural suppression. The film offers a gendered depiction of mental disintegration, in which lunacy is both inherited and contagious, transmitted through maternal connections and internalised within patriarchal societal institutions. Qala's psychological crises should be perceived not alone as an individual disorder, but as a manifestation of profound systemic violence that compels women to endure silently, the burden of unrecognised trauma and unattained aspirations. The concept of lunacy as a hereditary trait is presented early in the film via the tumultuous relationship between Qala and her mother, Urmila. From the beginning, Qala is portrayed as a replacement for a deceased male heir, her twin brother, who perished at birth, thus characterising her existence as an error, a tangible reminder of failure and disillusionment. Urmila's emotional detachment from Qala serves not just as parental neglect but also as a symbolic act of abjection in the

Kristevan context: a repudiation of elements that jeopardise the integrity of the self or the social structure (Kristeva 1982, 4). The film portrays enduring loss and unresolved relationships. The figure Urmila illustrates how women can simultaneously embody both the bearers and victims of patriarchal rule (Hazarika and Dowerah 2023, 706). Qala's early years, characterised by her quest for her mother's love and validation, are defined by a constant feeling of inadequacy and alienation. This emotional inadequacy is not coincidental but structurally ingrained, transmitted from mother to daughter as a form of mental heredity that predetermines Qala's psychological breakdown.

The anguish of maternal rejection is exacerbated by the haunting presence of the departed twin brother. Although never visible, his absence serves as a pervasive spectre throughout the narrative. Qala develops a deeply internalised sense of her own inadequacy as a result of her survivor's guilt, which is made worse by her mother's overt favouritism towards the departed son. This idea has significant psychodynamic implications since it describes Qala as a person who has been moulded by rejection, loss, and insufficiency. These ongoing contrasts between self and other, life and death, and sanity and insanity are no longer viable in the psychological reality depicted by her hallucinations of her brother and the feelings of contamination that follow. Because of her instability, she is vulnerable to psychological infection, which in the context of the movie refers to the spread of insanity by environmental and interpersonal stimuli as opposed to biological illness.

Qala's breakdown is sparked by Jagan, Urmila's male protege, whom she values more than her daughter with her unrequited love. His gift, validation, and symbolic proximity to mother love intensify Qala's underlying anxieties and lead to her eventual betrayal. The unrequited love from her biological mother leads her to the destruction of Jagan's career, which is more than just a plot device; it is a psychological split where Qala tries to establish control inside a system that consistently rejects her individuality. Qala's psychological collapse is made worse by Jagan's subsequent suicide and the guilt that follows. This series of events suggests that being crazy is a developing condition that is aggravated by guilt and impacted by interpersonal aggressiveness rather than a set state. The film aesthetically promotes the depiction of madness as contagion through its visual and audio elements. The extensive utilisation of mirrors, warped soundtracks, and

chiaroscuro lighting creates a psychological environment that externalises Qala's internal conflict. These aesthetic selections serve not merely as stylistic enhancements but as symbolic expressions of a fragmented psyche. The mirror functions as a Lacanian apparatus, invoking the "mirror stage" in which the subject misidentifies itself through an illusory appearance of completeness (Lacan 2006, 77). Qala's recurrent encounters with her reflection highlight the discord between her internal identity and the persona she feels obligated to present, a persona perpetually scrutinised by society and familial standards.

Furthermore, Qala's perception of insanity is inextricably linked to the societal milieu in which she resides. As a female musician operating within a male-dominated musical environment, her success is invariably dependent on her readiness to adhere to patriarchal norms. Her talent is examined, her ethics challenged, and her psychological stability exploited. In this context, Qala's psychological decline might be seen through the framework of feminist cinema theory as a reaction to a cultural system that paradoxically mandates female greatness and penalises female ambition. The historical categorisation of "female hysteria," according to Elaine Showalter (1985), has served as a tool of control, pathologizing women's emotional expression and resistance. Qala is a prime example of this paradigm, when the people around her, including her mother, make her suffering unfathomable until it leads to her total breakdown. Both a genetic trauma and an emotional contagion are how madness functions in Qala. Maternal repression, systemic misogyny, and a visual language that blurs the line between truth and illusion are the ways in which it is communicated. The movie acts as a challenging agent to patriarchal structures by presenting insanity as a sociopsychic state that creates and pathologizes female subjectivity rather than as a medical condition. In this attempt, Qala challenges popular notions of sanity, guilt, and creative liberty in addition to illuminating the psychological costs of womanhood in a gender-hierarchical society. In this viewpoint, madness is a distorted reflection of a culture that does not view women as whole persons, but rather as the result of subjectivity.

Abjection and the female body

In *Qala* (2022), the female body emerges as a pivotal locus of conflict, scrutiny, and symbolic violence. This body, depicted as both beautiful and monstrous, is presented not only as a medium for performance and

beauty but also as the centre of repression, contamination, and pain. By consistently emphasising hunger, reproduction, physiological vulnerability, and artistic rigour, *Qala* creates a visual and narrative landscape where the female body is characterised by abjection. Utilising Julia Kristeva's (1982, 4) concept of the abject as "what disturbs identity, system, order", this section contends that the film positions the female body as both the subject and object of abjection, simultaneously marginalised and intertwined with social and symbolic frameworks. Kristeva characterises abjection as the mechanism via which the subject delineates its identity by expelling that which it perceives as impure, menacing, or alien. The abject is neither entirely an object nor a subject, but rather something that disrupts boundaries, particularly those pertaining to the body. In *Qala*, the female body, especially that of the protagonist, is continually marked with abject significations. In the initial scenes, Qala's physique is depicted in various stages of physical and emotional fatigue: stooped, quaking, feverish, or staring into mirrors with profound detachment. The process by which Qala isolates herself from her own body—a body that is constantly politicised, assessed, and controlled by parental, institutional, and patriarchal power—is depicted by these bodily representations, and they are not incidental.

An important axis for the operation of abjection is the mother-daughter bond. The mother of Qala, Urmila, forces her daughter to be both morally upright and exceptionally talented. She does, however, simultaneously deny Qala's maternal affection, which may lessen such expectations. Qala's body is abject as a result of her parents' rejection; rather than being loved and cared for, she is watched over and ignored. In one of the most emotionally charged scenes in the movie, Qala scrapes at her own neck and chest while having hallucinations of contamination and decay, which makes the figurative violence of this connection real. This act of self-harm represents not only a breakdown but also an interaction with the vile: the body as excess, as guilt, as trash.

In the film, food and hunger serve as symbols for deprivation and dominance, reflecting established feminist critiques of the female body concerning desire and societal compliance. In many scenes, Qala's rejection or incapacity to consume food signifies her body as one deprived of sustenance, both literal and symbolic. Her fragility serves as a visual symbol of internalised self-neglect. Susan Bordo (1993) contends in *Unbearable Weight* that the regulation of the female body,

especially via hunger, is a sort of gendered abjection, in which women are conditioned to control and reduce their physical presence. Qala's waning physique, seldom depicted in whole vigour, serves as a poignant emblem of the cultural expectation for women to be little, subdued, and self-effacing. Furthermore, the cinematic setting of Qala emphasises bodily abjection through *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. The confined rooms, deteriorating textures, and diffused light collectively create a sensory ambiance of deterioration and suppression. Mirrors provide a crucial function; they do not validate identity but instead reveal fragmentation. Qala's recurrent confrontations with her reflection evoke discomfort, indicating that the visage she perceives has become unrecognisable. These reflective gazes are not narcissistic but abject; they challenge the observer with the tenuous boundaries of the self and the pervasive presence of guilt, failure, and impurity. Her breakdown is both physical and psychological, with the body being rejected as a solid, cohesive means of expressing who she is. Motherhood and reproduction themes further complicate the film's depiction of the female form. Urmila's contempt for Qala stems from her birth, a failed reproductive occurrence in which the 'incorrect' child endured. Because of this origin, Qala internalises the idea that she is a biological anomaly and a stain on her mother's family tree. The womb, which is typically associated with creation and continuity, becomes a site of mourning and rejection in Qala. This reversal emphasises Kristeva's claim that abjection is linked to maternal beginnings, that the mother's body is the first place of abjection, and that the main obstacle the subject must overcome in order to separate. Qala, however, never achieves this status. Her subjectivity is inextricably linked to a harsh, unforgiving, and cold mother's viewpoint. Despite appearing to be a space for artistic expression, the musical theatre is also another setting for physical exposure and discipline. Qala's performances are distinguished by a terrifying vulnerability rather than freedom, as if she sings not from desire but from an obligation to validate her worth. Her voice, paradoxically her greatest strength, serves as both a symbol of autonomy and a reminder of physical vulnerability. She becomes consumed not by the elation of music but by the apprehension of inadequacy. The act of singing, reliant on breath, posture, and physical control, transforms into a ritual that necessitates the repression of emotion and the restraint of the body. *Qala* develops a nuanced cinematic narrative on the female body as a locus of abjection. The

film illustrates the formation and deformation of the female subject through motifs of starvation, illness, self-harm, and maternal rejection, highlighting processes of expulsion, surveillance, and internalisation. The body is not only represented but also interrogated, as both a canvas of expression and a vessel of suffering. The video critiques the gendered circumstances that push women to construct identity while rejecting their physicality by placing the female body under the psychoanalytic concept of abjection. Thus, *Qala* contributes to a wider feminist cinematic tradition that examines the policing, pathologization, and eventual abjection of the female body within patriarchal culture. In a milieu of toxic masculinity, Qala utilized her physique as a strategic asset to further her career upon identifying the objectification of women's bodies inside the profession.

Crisis of self and the split

This film presents a frightening and psychologically intricate narrative focused on the fracture of the female identity. Since the nineteenth century, psychoanalysts have concentrated on a child's identity development in connection with their mother (Kohut 1959, 470). The film basically depicts a protagonist whose subjectivity is not only damaged or unstable, but inherently divided, a character ensnared in the conflict between symbolic constraints and individual desire, between public facade and private suffering. The character of Qala Manjushree in the film illustrates the psychological state of the divided subject, a notion most well expressed in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan's conception of the subject as intrinsically divided among the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real orders provides a robust framework for analysing Qala's identity crisis, in which the self manifests as a battleground of contradiction, suppression, and internal discord. The crisis of self in the film transcends a mere psychological or personal dilemma; it is profoundly socio-cultural, entrenched in gendered expectations, parental traumas, and aesthetic pressures imposed on the female artist.

Lacan posits that the subject emerges through a primary alienation during the mirror stage, when the child first recognises itself in its reflected image. This image creates an illusion of coherence, unity, and self-mastery; nonetheless, it is fundamentally an external fabrication, a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*). The true subject is irrevocably divided between the perceivable 'I' and the disjointed urges and desires that elude complete symbolisation. In *Qala*, this Lacanian

misrecognition is depicted both visually and narratively through the persistent utilisation of mirrors and mirrored surfaces. Qala's recurrent, distressing interactions with her reflection imply not narcissistic introspection, but a disconnection from a self-image she cannot validate. The mirror in Qala does not validate identity; it subverts it. The woman observing her reflection in the mirror is not identical to the one depicted therein. She constantly conforms to others' expectations and never attains the status of a stable, self-possessed individual. This instability is mostly influenced by Qala's tumultuous relationship with her mother, Urmila. Urmila serves as the principal authority in Qala's life, embodying the role of the Symbolic Lawgiver who enforces the Name-of-the-Father, which represents the socio-symbolic order that establishes meaning, value, and validity. In a significant reversal, the father is absent in *Qala*, and it is the mother who imposes the law, making the maternal perspective a source of deep anguish. Urmila's aloofness, her favouritism towards the deceased male twin, and her commitment to a male protégé (Jagan) effectively marginalise Qala from parental love and symbolic validation. She holds Qala responsible for the death of her male child and is depicted attempting to suffocate Qala with a pillow while she sleeps (Figure 1). She (Qala) is consequently deprived of both affection and acknowledgement. The parental gaze serves as a tool of symbolic castration, incessantly reminding Qala of her inadequacy, unworthiness, and undesirability.



Figure 1. Urmila thinking of strangulating *Qala* (Dutt 00:07:41)

Qala's self-perception is thereby divided between two contradictory extremes: the aspiration to meet the maternal expectation and embody the quintessential daughter-artist, and the enduring feeling of intrinsic inadequacy. This mental division creates a framework of internalised monitoring and retribution, in which Qala emerges as her own most severe evaluator. She is not simply existing under her mother's scrutiny; she has assimilated it, directing it inside as a mechanism of self-regulation. Sandra Lee Bartky (1990, 47) contends in her feminist critique of Foucault that contemporary disciplinary power functions not via explicit coercion but through the internalisation of normative perspectives. Qala displays this dynamic by self-monitoring, suppressing her emotions, and regulating her physicality to adhere to idealised standards of femininity and creative competence. The outcome is a self that is perpetually performing, consistently fragmented, and never complete.

The portrayal of the female artist in *Qala* is notably significant. Instead of providing a platform for self-expression, music transforms into a locus of significant estrangement. Qala's vocal performances are stringently governed by the expectations of her mother, her instructors, and her audience. Her mother always considers her not a true representative of their Thumri Gharana (a vocal genre of Indian music) Thumri Gharana .. Despite the acclaim for her voice, her individuality is disregarded. Her performances focus more on demonstrating her value, affirming her existence, and mitigating her insecurities than on creative freedom. Thus, art in *Qala* serves a disciplinary rather than a therapeutic function. It serves as a mechanism by which the patriarchal-symbolic order perpetuates its control over the feminine body and psyche. The stage, rather than a refuge, transforms into a prison, wherein Qala's voice, ironically her most valued asset, serves as the channel through which her internal discord is rendered loud.

This psychic rupture is intensified by the emergence of hallucinations and auditory delusions, indicating the resurgence of the Real, Lacan's notion of that which exists beyond symbolisation and defies assimilation into the symbolic order. Qala's images of her deceased brother and the voice of the late Jagan epitomise the painful aspects of her psyche that remain irrepressible. They are symptomatic manifestations, irreconcilable remnants that resurface to torment the individual. These times are not simply indicators of mental illness but also metaphors for psychological breakdown, when the Real outweighs the ego's symbolic defenses. In *Qala*, just like the Lacanian stages,

‘Real’ is represented by nightmares, hallucinations, and breakdowns that expose the self’s vulnerability. In Lacanian terms, the Real is the subject’s reality’s border. Furthermore, a precise cinematic language that highlights Qala’s interior collapse is used to represent her fall into psychological agony. In order to visually portray her fractured psyche, the *mise-en-scène* frequently makes use of chiaroscuro lighting, dark interiors, and isolating situations. The theme of confinement and division is reflected in the use of narrow hallways, shuttered doors, and partitioned frames. Cinematic elements like the ghostly whisper of Jagan’s voice, twisted echoes, and shattered noises all help to depict Qala’s subjectivity as unstable and fractured. These aesthetic decisions do not merely embellish the narrative; they shape the protagonist’s psychological landscape, reflecting her dilemma through formal components.

Like a typical profoundly patriarchal cultural environment, Qala’s identity is further undermined by her status as a woman. She must navigate a delicate equilibrium between ambition and humility, visibility and integrity, inventiveness and compliance. These paradoxes reflect what Luce Irigaray (1985, 76) describes as the “mimicry” necessary for women to endure inside phallogentric systems, embracing roles and aspirations not of their own creation. Qala’s persistent inability to successfully assume these roles designates her as an individual whose identity has been colonised by conflicting narratives. She cannot be the quintessential daughter, the flawless artist, or the selfless woman without repudiating the tumultuous, unresolved aspects of her identity. Her subjectivity is hence never complete but perpetually negotiated, divided, and postponed. *Qala* presents a profound and disquieting reflection on the dilemma of identity in modern femininity. The film intricately weaves together psychoanalytic frameworks, feminist analysis, and visual artistry to create a female subject whose existence is divided between memory and performance, desire and suppression, self and other. The character of Qala transcends the mere portrayal of a lady succumbing to madness; she epitomises the contemporary fragmented subject, an entity shaped by loss, deficiency, and need. Her tragedy lies not in her inability to be complete but in the fact that the surrounding institutions never permitted her to be fractured without repercussions. Qala’s voice, simultaneously her redemption and her downfall, resonates as the reflection of a personality that remains perpetually elusive, not to others, and perhaps not even to herself.

Cinematic form and psychological depth

The film's examination of trauma, remorse, ambition, and identity is intrinsically linked to its formal techniques; it is through cinematic language that Qala's shattered mind becomes comprehensible to the audience. This section analyses how the formal components of Qala, its cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, sound design, and temporal structure, function to externalise internal states, creating a visual and auditory lexicon of mental disintegration. A notable aspect of *Qala*'s formal construction is its employment of *mise-en-scène* to convey psychological ambiance. The film often situates Qala in constricted interiors, elaborate yet poorly illuminated apartments, small hallways, and oppressive performing venues that reflect her internal entrapment. The set design highlights deterioration and desaturation: worn wallpapers, frost-covered windows, and vintage furnishings conjure a realm that is both historically remote and emotionally immobile. These physical arrangements serve as metaphorical vessels for repression, reflecting Gaston Bachelard's (1994, 8) notion of "psychic topography," in which the house symbolises a representation of the self. Qala's physical surroundings express her psychic confinement, placing her trauma into palpable, repressive environments.

Qala utilises a highly stylised visual approach characterised by symmetrical compositions, subdued colour palettes, and shallow depth of field. Photographic Director Using close-ups and mirror reflections, Siddharth Diwan creates a visual contrast between identity and alienation while regularly separating Qala from other people. These methods emphasise how Qala's subjectivity is fragmented: she is frequently portrayed as a lone figure, her image broken by windows, mirrors, and the interaction of shadows. Her shattered mental state is formally reflected in this visual fragmentation, which reveals a confused, troubled, and limitless mind. The movie's psychological depiction depends heavily on the time framework. Memory, hallucinations, and present-tense situations are all interwoven with minimal distinction as the story progresses in a nonlinear manner. The viewer's understanding of chronology is compromised by this contrast between temporalities, which also reflects Qala's personal confusion between the past and present. Her terrible memories—particularly those involving her mother and Jagan—appear as persistent repetitions that thwart narrative conclusion rather than flashbacks. The idea of "repetition compulsion," which refers to the unintentional reliving of

painful experiences rather than their recall, is invoked by these repetitions (Freud 1961, 18). *Qala's* temporality is essentially psychoanalytic, emphasising recurrence and loss over continuity and progress. Sound design amplifies the psychological depth of the film. *Qala's* interior landscape is influenced equally by her auditory and visual perceptions. The picture integrates auditory hallucinations, reverberations of Jagan's voice, murmured allegations, and the pervasive drone of anxiety as expressive elements of her psychological decline. These auditory aspects blur the distinctions between internal and external reality, involving the listener in her spiral into paranoia and remorse. The film's integration of diegetic and non-diegetic sound creates ambiguity, complicating the differentiation between reality and hallucination, thus intensifying the emotional instability central to *Qala's* subjectivity.

Significantly, *Qala* avoids simplistic psychological or medical pathologization of its protagonist. The video immerses the viewer in the subjective experience of psychological disintegration rather than providing a diagnostic depiction of mental disease. This formal immersion compels the audience to experience *Qala's* bewilderment rather than only witness it from a detached perspective. The picture conforms to Laura Mulvey's (2006, 144) concept of a feminist "cinema of delay", in which narrative advancement is secondary to emotion, fragmentation, and reflection. By halting narrative progression and highlighting visual structure, *Qala* compels spectators to confront the nonlinear, emotionally charged essence of psychological trauma, particularly as it pertains to women subjected to familial, artistic, and societal limitations. The film's climactic scenes, especially those featuring hallucination and self-harm, illustrate the integration of several formal techniques. In a particular moment, *Qala*, clad in an elaborate costume and enveloped in icy blue illumination, plays before an audience that swiftly dissolves into obscurity. Her voice distorts, the camera rotates erratically, and the walls start to constrict. This moment, orchestrated through illumination, auditory elements, and camera dynamics, exemplifies the disintegration of psychic containment. The body ceases to maintain coherence; the film's structure disintegrates, enabling the audience to perceive the protagonist's visceral dread and helplessness. The psychological complexity of *Qala* is inextricably linked to its cinematic structure. The film creates an immersive depiction of inner life characterised by pain, repression, and longing through its careful use of visual

aesthetics, spatial design, temporal fragmentation, and audio layering. *Qala* transcends mere representation of madness, embodying it and transforming cinema into a medium that renders the invisible wounds of the psyche both comprehensible and tangible. Anvita Dutt's film contributes to the growing field of feminist psychology film by using formalism as a radical tool for introspective analysis rather than just as adornment.

Conclusion

Qala, a multi-layered and intricate film by Anvita Dutt, examines how pain, desire, repression, and performance are all intertwined with feminine identity. The psychological and artistic components of *Qala*, according to this study, offer a meaningful investigation of the gendered experience of madness and rejection. The film portrays madness as a collective result of intergenerational abuse, mother rejection, and the internalisation of patriarchal norms, rather than a singular psychological disorder. It is both hereditary and transmissible, conveyed through silence, creative heritage, and the corporeal form. The female body, pivotal to this story, manifests as a contentious and precarious locus of significance: a locus of creation and corruption, allure and deterioration. This study illustrates, through Kristeva's theory of abjection and feminist psychoanalytic frameworks, how *Qala*'s embodiment signifies a broader cultural fear over female agency, creativity, and desire. The maternal link, rather than being caring, is shown as a source of discipline and alienation, wherein the daughter serves as both the target of rejection and the embodiment of the mother's unfulfilled ambitions. The unfulfilled "oldest love story" between a mother and child shapes the existence and psyche of *Qala* (Bhattacharya 2006, 12). Furthermore, the film's formal techniques, its non-linear temporality, immersive *mise-en-scène*, and complex sound design are not only artistic embellishments but vital to its psychological authenticity. The interior world of *Qala* is not explicitly articulated but is instead portrayed cinematically, enabling spectators to perceive her disintegration through sensory and emotional dimensions. This aesthetic approach disrupts traditional distinctions between the internal and external, the actual and the imagined, and situates the viewer into the protagonist's fragmented consciousness. Ultimately, *Qala* transcends being merely a film about craziness; it interrogates the production, representation, and comprehension of madness within a gendered cultural context. It rejects pathologization and instead

embraces a poetic and political expression of sorrow, remorse, and yearning. In this manner, it enhances a feminist cinematic heritage that aims to both depict the psyche and confront the fundamental institutions that disrupt it. This analysis of *Qala*, utilising psychoanalytic, feminist, and cinematic frameworks, elucidates how the film challenges and reinterprets the narrative of the ‘crazy woman.’ It necessitates a re-evaluation of lunacy, perceiving it not as a deficiency of reason or character, but as a mode of expression, a dialect of the marginalised, the rejected, and the voiceless. *Qala*’s evocative melodies and fractured silences beckon us to listen.

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Berenger as a self-effacing neurotic: A Horneyan reading of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*

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Abstract: This is a study of the play *Rhinoceros* by Eugène Ionesco using the theoretical frameworks of Karen Horney. The object of analysis will be the character of Berenger from Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, with particular focus on his neurotic trend through the theoretical framework of Karen Horney. The purpose of this study is to explore how Horneyan theory can be used as a lens to interpret Berenger's neurosis and its impact on his personality, his relationship with others, and his final stance of remaining human, thereby providing a critical interpretation of the play. The analysis of the study brings to light how Berenger tries to satiate his need for love, follows his 'shoulds' and 'taboos', fights with contradictory drives, experiences inner turmoil when his need for love remains unfulfilled and when his vindictive nature, hitherto suppressed, takes control.

Keywords: neurotic trends, self-effacing, compliant, moving towards people, need for love

Introduction

Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994) was a Romanian-French playwright who belonged to the postmodern era of the 20th century. He is a writer who belongs to the Theatre of the Absurd. His works, originally written in French, have been translated into several languages. Karen Horney (1885-1952), a psychoanalyst of the twentieth century, was born in Germany. Her mother encouraged her to get a good academic environment. Her later works contain her mature theories, and they have been presented in five books.

Using the theories of Karen Horney, this paper analyses the character of Berenger in Ionesco's play *The Rhinoceros* (1959). In the play, the people in a town, one after the other, transform into rhinoceroses except for Berenger. This paper occupies a

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multidisciplinary space, as literature and psychoanalysis weave in together. It uses the theories of Karen Horney to understand the character of Berenger. The same concepts can be interpreted differently by literature and psychoanalysis. The play *Rhinoceros* becomes a ground where Horney's concepts of neurotic trends and conflict resolutions can be examined. Therefore, given the psychological nature of the play, this study seeks to be a reflection on how theories adapt and evolve in the world of literature.

Theoretical framework

Horney says that neurotic trends are formed at a tender age through the combination of the temperaments one is born with and the environment one is born into. These traits combine and develop as coping mechanisms in tough environments. When basic needs for love, security, and belonging result in frustration during childhood, neurosis develops. Neurosis is formed due to underlying conflicts, and it is difficult to identify the conflict because neurotics possess numerous strategies to keep the conflicts hidden from the unconscious. A child grows into an adult with deep-seated anxiety and resorts to coping strategies to handle life.

According to Horney, 'basic anxiety' is the isolation and helplessness a child growing up in a hostile environment feels. To diminish his basic anxiety, the child resorts to unconscious strategies shaped by his own nature and external factors. This forces the child to develop coping mechanisms to deal with the hostile environment. This feeling of insecurity plays an important role in the development of their personality, as it leads to the formation of what Horney calls neurotic trends. Neurotic trends are all compulsive in nature, arising from feelings of isolation, helplessness, fear, and hostility. These trends are developed to cope with the world despite these emotions. Their primary aim is safety. The compulsive nature is due to the anxiety that hides underneath. They are adopted to manage fear, insecurity, and loneliness. Over time, the child feels forced to stick to these patterns as they believe that abandoning them could bring back past dangers. Horney identifies three broad neurotic trends (strategies developed to deal with anxiety): Self-Effacing (moving towards people), Expansive (moving against people), and Resigned (moving away from people). This paper uses the terms compliant and self-effacing interchangeably to refer to people who deal with conflict by moving towards people.

The paper applies the mature theories of Horney to examine the character of Berenger as a self-effacing neurotic. According to Horney, compliant personality types deal with conflict by moving towards people. They aim at love and safety and strive to fulfil their need to be loved. This need must be fulfilled at all costs. The self-effacing types vie for people's approval, want to be liked, desired, accepted, be of importance to others, helped, protected, and taken care of. So, to please and appease is how they go about it to arrive at their solutions to conflict. Also, Horney says that in a compliant personality, the opposite forces (expansive or aggressive) are also alive and kicking. But one of them is heavily suppressed (in this case, the aggressive drives).

In short, the compliant personality types heavily suppress their expansive drives, and rightly so, as allowing the expansive drives to take control would mean rubbing people the wrong way and standing up for themselves, all of which would go against their need to be loved, to please and to appease.

They want to be loved, especially by a partner with whom they want unity by completely merging with their partner. They want a partner whom they can be heavily dependent on, like a crutch. And they also want to live through their partner. They fear being rejected and exaggerate feelings of helplessness and suffering. They also do not like being recognized by others; rather, what they want from others is help, protection, and an all-surrendering love and sympathy. They feel like a tiny being in a big, cruel world- feeling small, lost, and helpless, in need of protection and safety. They heavily suppress their pride so that they do not appear presumptuous, and there comes a groveling sense of self-abasement. They have two 'shoulds': one is that they 'should' be able to develop any love relationship into a state of absolute harmony, and the other is that they 'should' be able to make their partner love them. Horney says that the neurotics have a realistic image, which is the real image, and an idealized self-image, which is the one they strive to be. In the case of a self-effacing neurotic, they despise their real image, and they focus on the gap between their real self and the idealized version of themselves that they strive to be, thus viewing themselves as the despised self-image. This entails a lot of self-criticism and plummeting self-esteem. The character of Berenger has "an extraordinary capacity for experiencing the emotions of love and friendship" (Lamont 1993, 124), a trait that aligns seamlessly with the framework of Horney employed in this paper. Exploring the

selected play through the theories of Karen Horney offers a rich character study. Delving into the character of Berenger, the impact his neurosis has on his personality, how it shapes his attitude, and his resulting neurotic needs are brought to the forefront. To explore the study of these forces, the following methodology will be utilized for the analysis of the selected play.

Methodology

The paper uses qualitative research methodology, employing the theories of Karen Horney to analyse Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. The paper uses interpretive research as it applies the theoretical framework of psychoanalyst Karen Horney to interpret and analyze the play. The analysis will focus on the character of Berenger and how he is a self-effacing neurotic. This approach will therefore involve a close reading of the mature theories of Horney and the selected play and thereby examine how the character of Berenger is a self-effacing neurotic. The paper aims to contribute to the broader understanding of personality and dealing with conflicts by answering these research questions: What are the characteristics of Berenger that make him a self-effacing neurotic? How does Berenger's neurotic trait (self-effacing) affect his stance at the end of the play?

Analysis

Berenger from the play *Rhinoceros* can be categorized as a self-effacing neurotic. Inside Berenger are contradictory forces: his self-effacing drives and his expansive drives. Berenger heavily suppresses his expansive drives, and he gets a 'tight feeling' in his heart when he gets angry. This tight feeling is his discomfort when his aggressive drives come into control, which results in rubbing people the wrong way. In the first act, Berenger is sloppily dressed, hatless, with unkempt hair, and appears not to take care of himself (Ionesco 1960, 4).

The characteristic of Berenger's dependency is revealed in the way he dresses. In essence, it is an unconscious way of hoping for external rescue and summoning magical help. Berenger is a people pleaser; reflected in his rationale for attending Auguste's birthday party. He said he could not refuse, as it would not have been nice (Ionesco 1960, 7). He tries to please his friend Jean, his colleagues, and his love interest Daisy. He readily agrees with whatever they tell him and easily accepts accusations from Jean. "You must love me, protect me, forgive

me, not desert me, because I am so weak and helpless” (Horney 1992, 53) reflects the weakness and helplessness in Berenger.

Berenger, the compliant neurotic, focuses on the gap between the realistic despised self and the idealized self and tries to work himself towards the creation of the perfect man. This is evident when the shabbily dressed Berenger ‘hides’ himself on noticing his love interest, Daisy. He feels inferior when he compares himself to Dudard, described as a “young employee with a future” (Ionesco 1960, 39). Dudard, therefore, becomes the idealized version Berenger aspires to be. Berenger also uses a lot of ‘shoulds’: I ‘should’ not have fought with Jean, I ‘should’ make up with Jean, and I ‘should’ make my relationship with Daisy work even when people all around me are turning into rhinoceroses. Horney says that the standard of ‘should’ cultivates an ever-looming failure to meet up to their ‘shoulds’.

The role Jean plays in Berenger’s life serves two purposes: it keeps him humble and in awe of Jean. The expansive nature in Jean keeps pride away from Berenger, thus making him feel humble, and this is why Berenger feels drawn to Jean. Horney says self-effacing people are drawn to people who insult them, as it opens the door for surrender and self-riddance, thus helping them break down their pride. They don’t like feeling proud; they see themselves as humble creatures; they can only love when they feel degraded. And this is how Berenger surrenders himself to a greater surrender under Jean’s criticism. He feels surer of Jean than himself (Ibid, 74).

Jean fulfills the ‘take care of me’ expectations of Berenger when he helps him adjust his hair and appearance. Which is why when Berenger holds his hands out to him, it signifies surrender and submission. Berenger externalizes his own expansive drives and admires them in Jean. Berenger admires Jean for being “immaculate” in his dressing (Ibid, 6) and for being strong (Ibid, 18). In admiring him, Berenger promotes him to a godlike role. Berenger accepts whatever Jean says of him, which shows his need for affirmation and his seeing himself only through the eyes of Jean: “Jean: [interrupting him] You’re in a bad way, my friend. Berenger: In a bad way? You think so?” (Ibid, 5).

Horney says that the self-effacing types are unable to assess whether one is a genuine friend or not, and this is aptly portrayed in Berenger’s relationship with Jean. Jean’s remark that he feels ashamed to be Berenger’s friend (Ibid, 6) and his other critical remarks about Berenger’s habits and appearances fall on deaf ears. Berenger,

however, refers to him as his “best friend” and as being “warm-hearted” (Ibid, 74). Perhaps what blinds Berenger is that Jean’s negative criticism is always followed by an abundant supply of magic help for Berenger, which fulfills his ‘take care of me’ attitude.

There is a dwindling hope for fulfillment, and this hope gets crushed with every interaction Berenger has with Jean. In the first scene, compliant forces are in full throttle in Berenger. With Jean being overly critical, Berenger tries to justify himself in a tiny way in which his aggressive forces (expansive drives) try to creep up into the foreground, but only for his compliant forces to steer the wheel back in control. From being interrupted, to timidly voicing out, to loudly voicing out, we get a suddenly unnerved Berenger who expresses his irritation and has a flash of his expansive drives, which gives him the courage to oppose Jean for saying they were two different rhinoceroses, as the first rhinoceros had two horns and the next had just one. And this time Berenger sticks to his convictions that it is ‘utter nonsense’ (Ibid, 29). Although Berenger was right, this is where Berenger’s self-effacing drives fail to suppress his expansive drives. After the fight, Berenger struggles with insurmountable self-condemnation, as he does not measure up to his ‘should’ have agreed with Jean; he ‘should’ be agreeable; he ‘should’ be likeable. Therefore, we see the redoubled efforts of being clingy and deeper submission when he goes to Jean’s apartment to apologize, hoping to win Jean’s love back and be restored to his good graces; his self-effacing traits come to the forefront as he agrees to whatever Jean says. But this appeal for love turns to naught when Jean turns into a rhinoceros. This rejection from Jean causes Berenger’s self-esteem to plummet, as Berenger’s self-esteem depends on how others treat him; it rises and falls based on others’ approval or disapproval of him. And Jean turning into a rhinoceros is interpreted as Jean’s disapproval of Berenger and hence the fall in self-esteem. Berenger’s love-me-protect-me attitude was not fulfilled in his relationship with Jean. This lack of love and neglect further reinforces clinging behavior in Berenger, and then he turns his focus on Daisy.

In Daisy, Berenger seeks fulfillment for his ‘need for a partner’; and clings to an illusion that a partner will solve all his problems. Daisy fulfills Berenger’s ‘take care of me’ attitude by allowing him to sign time sheets at work even though he walked in late and brought food supplies when the town was being destroyed by rhinoceroses.

Berenger 'docilely' allows himself to be led by Daisy, signifying surrender. Berenger is morbidly dependent on her; he expects love from her and wants to totally surrender himself and love her back wholeheartedly. But Daisy doesn't return the love the way Berenger wants. In Berenger's quest for love in his relationship with Daisy, there is a dwindling hope for fulfillment. His 'shoulds' are that he 'should' make this relationship work, failure of which fills him with guilt, inferiority, and self-hate. There is a redoubled effort as he becomes clingier with his pleas of love to convince Daisy to stay with him. But when Daisy turns into a rhinoceros, rejection and betrayal set in, and Berenger's self-esteem plummets to zero. Berenger's 'love me', 'protect me', 'let me live through you', and 'be my crutch' attitudes were also not fulfilled by Daisy.

Swanson says the balance between good and bad is revealed in the play through the tension between conformity and non-conformity. However, Richard Danner argues that a good versus bad reading lacks clarity within the play (without empirical implications) as it not a good thing that Berenger chooses to remain human as humanity (within the text) is flawed (there is nothing much to fight for) nor is it a bad thing to embrace becoming rhino against the loss of humanity, as the play does not justify why it is evil (without empirical applications).

Following the trajectory of Danner, this study does not comment on the dichotomy of good or bad but rather extends by situating it within the Horneyan framework to break down Berenger's mindset, highlighting his inner turmoil when faced with the conflict of his need for love being unmet, thus affecting his stance. Building on Danner's argument that Berenger is not a good debater because he is unable to clearly justify why he resists his metamorphosis, as his defence for humanity is weak, this study elaborates on Berenger's stance at the end of the play. His stance at the end of the play fits seamlessly into Horney's remarks about her patient, where she says:

On the other hand, she starts to hate him. At first this is repressed altogether because it would annihilate her hopes. Then it may become conscious in flashes. She now starts to resent his offensive treatment, again hesitating to admit it to herself. With this turn vindictive trends come to the fore. There are blowups in which her true resentment appears, but still without her knowing how true it is. She becomes more critical, is less willing to let herself be exploited. Characteristically most of this vindictiveness appears in indirect ways, in complaints, suffering, martyrdom, increased clinging. The vindictive elements also creep into her goal. They were always there in a latent form but now they spread like a cancerous growth. Though the longing to make him

love her persists, it becomes more strongly a matter of a vindictive triumph. (Horney 1970, 253-254).

Like Horney's patient, Berenger also undergoes a journey of emotions in his relationship with Jean. With being cut short and dominated by Jean, Berenger has a lot of hate, which is kept in check to gain love. But it surfaces briefly, and in these moments of outburst, there are moments of awareness.

Berenger: [aside] I'm sorry I wasn't more accommodating. But why is he so obstinate? I didn't want to exasperate him. [To the others:] He's always making fantastic statements! Always trying to dazzle people with his knowledge. He will never admit he's wrong. (Ionesco 1960, 33)

Berenger can understand the truth of the matter in flashes. This is what Horney says is repressed hatred erupting in conscious flashes. This emotional progression is also seen in Berenger's relationship with Daisy when he 'slaps' her, and says he doesn't know why he did that. The emergence of resentment brings in vindictive elements. Berenger slowly becomes increasingly obstinate about his hatred for rhinoceroses. He becomes self-aware of what he wants, and he says he does not want to become like Jean (Ionesco 1960, 85).

Soon, Berenger starts shouting, saying that he will never join the herd; all this time, his aggressive tendencies are coming to the surface. But all until Daisy shows up at his house, on seeing that she came to him, he seeks to hold on to hope, the hope of love, the hope that love can conquer all. And the moment Daisy comes, Berenger slips back into his compliant nature. With the arrival of Daisy, Berenger wants to live through Daisy. Berenger expresses his love for Daisy and begs her not to leave him. His expression of love shows his need for dependency. Berenger's 'I need you' attitude is expressed here: "Berenger: I want so much to be a comfort to you. I love you, Daisy; don't ever leave me" (Ibid, 95). Berenger, suddenly slapping Daisy, is a tiny flickering of awareness of his hate, awareness of her not being on the same page as him. This is noticed when he transitions from 'You can't do that to me.', "Don't leave me alone", to "Poor little thing left all alone in this world of monsters!", when Daisy leaves to become a rhinoceros (Ibid, 105-106).

In the self-effacing types, any act of assertiveness is seen as a violation of deeply ingrained 'taboos'. Taboos like "I should not be assertive," "I should not counterargue," "I should not disagree," and all the other things that would mean not rubbing people the wrong way to

please and appease and make the love very forthcoming are religiously followed. To the self-effacing types, selfishness is doing anything that is just for himself; therefore, it is followed by self-hate and guilt. Horney says that the 'taboos' and 'shoulds' have a remarkable consistency, but sooner or later the contradictory trends (expansive traits) come to the surface, and the stronger a person becomes, the more his expansive drives start taking the driver's seat.

Therefore, after everyone turns into a rhinoceros, Berenger compares a picture of himself and the rhinoceroses and finds himself ugly and says that he should have joined them. There is a lot of shame from failure to fit in. There are a lot of negative emotions that dominate Berenger's narrative at the end of the play. He is a scorned lover and friend; he has been abandoned; he has failed to meet his standard of 'shoulds' by violating and trespassing on them. The dwindling hope for fulfillment is thwarted by Jean, only to have him redouble his efforts and love strongly by being clingier, only to be abandoned by Jean, and the repetition of this same vicious cycle in his relationship with Daisy leaves his 'need for unity' through merging and drive for 'total surrender' unfulfilled, making him unleash violence towards himself through self-hate. He is definitely damned if he joins the herd, and he is definitely damned if he chooses to remain human. There is an insurmountable feeling of self-hate and regret for not joining the herd, mixed with his 'suddenly snapping out of it' saying, 'I'll fight against them all' (expansive drives coming into focus). But he feels damned either way. If he turns into a rhinoceros, he will feel like a coward for not sticking to what he wanted. If he doesn't turn into a rhinoceros, he feels selfish. Diverging from Rigg's (1992, 543) observation of a "joyful acceptance of the potential of the human spirit," Berenger's stance at the end reflects his inner turmoil because the outlet for expansive drives has been uninhibited, causing vindictive elements to slowly spread; thus, he can say, "I'll fight against them all" (Ionesco 1960, 107). Berenger is unable to be happy that he has done the right thing, that he is right in doing what he did, and starts finding faults so that he does not bask in satisfaction.

Richard Schechner, in his work *The Inner and the Outer Reality*, suggests that the ontological success of Berenger stems from his having a self, seen in his resistance to social evils, portrayed by Jean, and the rhinoceros. But within the Horneyan framework, Berenger does not have a whole sense of self since he is a self-effacing neurotic trapped within the dictates of his neurotic tendencies. "In *Rhinoceros*,

underneath B  renger’s clich  s, lies the deepest kind of humanism: he cannot choose not to be a man” (Schechner 1963, 209). He says Berenger is condemned to be a man, “...Realizing that he can’t change, B  renger decides he doesn’t want to change” (Ibid, 210). His decision to remain human is his way of coping with problems in life rather than his finally facing the problem of ‘life’ (Ibid., 209). Diverging from Schechner’s view of triumph, the present analysis uses the framework of Horney as a neurotic self’s method of coping with life ruled by the tyranny of inner dictates. In the self-effacing drives, expansive drives are suppressed and when these expansive drives surface, they become vindictive. This is what happens to Berenger; his attempts to try harder to win love and approval are not met, which frustrates him. The self-hate is Berenger’s way of turning his hostility on himself. His eyes are opened to exploitation and feelings of being abused by Jean and Daisy, and he becomes very critical when the suppressed resentment brings in a huge change in his attitude towards them.

“at the conclusion of *Rhinoceros*, it is B  renger’s awareness of his personal ignorance which prevents his becoming a rhinoceros, even though he could be disposed to become one.” (Swanson, quoted in Bloom 2003, 116)

Danner says that Berenger exists only within the text and hence he cannot be used as an anti-fascist or hero of non-conformity. He says we must stick only to the context given in the play. In this light, breaking away from all the political connections which many critics have made, we can analyse the character of Berenger based on his portrayal within the play, using the tools Horney provides. He comes under the self-effacing neurotic. And in this way, when his need for love is not met despite efforts, he is aware of his “personal ignorance” (Ibid, 116). Connecting Swanson’s use of personal ignorance to what Horney says, this study’s findings suggest that there are flashes of vindictive elements and the realization of being betrayed, which helps Berenger see through his blind side or the fakeness of his so-called friends and lover. His stance is due to his striving for love, which, when thwarted, gave rise to the spread of vindictive elements. Using the Horneyan framework, Berenger’s stance at the end of the play can be interpreted as a way to deal with conflict. With vindictive elements spreading, there comes self-hate, and he feels damned if he joins the herd, and he feels damned if he chooses to remain a human. In short, Berenger’s refusal to transform does not make him a “hero of action”

(Lamont 1993, 125), nor is it “a joyful acceptance of the potential of the human spirit” (Rigg 1992, 543), but rather a victim of his neurosis.

Conclusion

Berenger’s passivity, reflected in his indecision, avoidance of crowds, helps him from being ensnared by ideological traps, thus becoming “sources of a gentle kind of strength” (Lamont 1993, 124) when viewed through the lens of Horney, offers a complementary perspective where his passivity qualifies him as a self-effacing neurotic.

To sum up, this study, with the help of Karen Horney’s theories, can help us understand Berenger’s stance at the end of the play. Using Horney’s framework, Berenger’s need for love takes on the qualities of his sloppy attire, admiration of Jean, blindly agreeing and submitting to Jean, surrendering to Daisy, allowing Jean and Daisy to add meaning to his life, apologizing to Jean and begging Daisy not to leave him. However, in the process of trying to win love, there is a constant tug from the opposing forces, seen when his expansive drives become dominant. Hate is repressed to win love, surfaces when he fights with Jean and when he slaps Daisy. And soon vindictive elements start to grow. The journey of emotional turmoil hastens the spread of vindictive elements. Everyone around Berenger turning into scary rhinoceroses is how the self-effacing Berenger feels: alone, small, and timid while being surrounded by monstrous beings that can hurt and harm him. With ‘taboos’ and ‘shoulds’ being crossed, self-hate is turned inward, shaping his stance at the end of the play, and vindictive elements soon turn to vindictive triumph. This struggle between the expansive and the self-effacing comes into play as Berenger is under constant crossfire; he is damned if he becomes a rhinoceros, and he is damned if he remains human.

Although the play was written in 1959, in our contemporary scenario, we have a lot of modern Berengers. With the rise of digital and artificial intelligence, the ease of connectivity equals personal disconnect with our true selves and near ones. Like Berenger, who tried hard to connect but failed. Many entertain a fractured self-image as virtual reality becomes the ideal version of what one wants to be. Hence, the comparison starts when the happy pictures posted online fail to match the sad life behind the screen. As the gap widens, the disconnection brings self-criticism and low self-esteem. In the character of Berenger, we can find ourselves, and the theories of

Horney can be a mirror helping us understand ourselves better and put us on the road to recovery. Given the compulsiveness of the trait, Berenger's interactions with Jean and Daisy are only experienced in the language of his neurotic trends; therefore, there are reinforced clinging behaviours. Due to his basic conflict between his contradictory trends (his expansive drives and his self-effacing drives), the sparks of his passive protests that surfaced here and there finally overpower his self-effacing drives, reflected in his stance when others have transformed into rhinoceroses. The limitation of this study is that, since its approach is grounded in a literary background, the theories of Horney do not focus on their clinical and empirical interpretation, opening a space for interpretation from researchers with a background in psychology.

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Regimes of motion and the politics of exile: A kinopolitical reading of Nuruddin Farah's *Dictatorship* trilogy

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Abstract: This paper offers a kinopolitical interpretation of Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship* trilogy—*Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983)—set against the backdrop of postcolonial Somalia to examine how authoritarian regimes regulate motion, silence voices, and expel dissidents, while simultaneously enabling new forms of resistance. Drawing on Thomas Nail's theory of 'kinopolitics', which reconceptualises societies as regimes of motion, the study argues that Farah's fiction situates the Somali migrant not as a marginal victim but as a central political and epistemic agent. Farah's exilic consciousness, informed by his own forced displacement, illuminates how dictatorship permeates both familial and state structures to immobilize bodies, memories, and discourse, yet also reveals how counter-flows emerge through exile, feminist defiance, and memory-work. By foregrounding exile as both rupture and resource, the paper demonstrates how Farah's trilogy envisions movement itself as the enduring condition of identity, critique, and survival in the Somali context.

Keywords: Nuruddin Farah, *Dictatorship*, kinopolitics, exile, migrancy, Somalia

Introduction

Mass migration has emerged as one of the most significant phenomena of our time, prompting scholars to refer to the current age as "The Age of Migration" (Castles and Miller 1993, 5) or "the century of the migrant" (Nail 2015, 1). This unprecedented mobility—fuelled by intricate socio-political, economic, cultural, and environmental factors, including the aftermath of global conflicts and the rise of authoritarian regimes in postcolonial nations—has deeply transformed human experiences and common conceptions of 'identity'. While migration as

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a concept has been around for centuries, its modern implications span various fields, such as sociology, geography, and economics, reflecting its critical interdisciplinary importance. In the realm of literary studies, migration has surfaced as a crucial category of analysis, giving rise to the genre known as *migration literature*. This collection of works not only recounts experiences of displacement but also engages with a multitude of interconnected circumstances—such as diaspora, exile, deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation, inclusion and exclusion, refugee experiences, aterritoriality, borderlessness, and transnationalism. By highlighting these dynamics, migration literature contests long-standing indicators of identity, including place of origin, kinship, or permanent settlement. Instead, it promotes a fluid and dynamic view of selfhood shaped by mobility, disruption, and the navigation of multiple affiliations. Situated within this context, the current paper proposes a kinopolitical analysis of Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship* trilogy, asserting that Farah's works shed light on the politics of movement and the transformative aspects of exilic consciousness. Grounded in Thomas Nail's concept of 'kinopolitics'—as discussed in *The Figure of the Migrant* (2015)—this study examines movement as a key lens for analysing social and political situations. Kinopolitics, along with its literary counterpart kinopoetics, places the migrant not as a secondary or marginal figure, but as a vital agent whose identity both arises from and challenges state histories and nationalist antagonisms.

Nuruddin Farah's personal story—shaped by forced exile and movement through various cultural landscapes—deeply intersects with Somalia's turbulent political landscape. His displacement is emblematic of a broader kinopolitical expulsion faced by Somalis under dictatorial regimes, while simultaneously serving as a site for privilege and critique. This paper argues that 'Kinopolitics' offers an essential interpretive framework for grasping Farah's exilic consciousness, demonstrating how exile and migrancy act as indicators of both individual identity and creative power. The two hypotheses guiding this exploration are: firstly, 'kinopolitics' as the politics of movement assesses the social, historical, and political contexts that shape migrant identity, positioning the migrant as a central figure of resistance against state narratives that strive to erase or dehistoricize them. Secondly, migrant authors like Farah utilize a movement-centered poetics that disputes fixed dialectics, questioning nationalist animosities and narratives of uniformity. While doing so, the study

aims to outline the theoretical foundation of ‘Kinopolitics’, and then delves into the fragile socio-political landscape of Somalia with an emphasis on the mechanisms of kinopolitical expulsion. It concludes with a kinopolitical interpretation of Farah’s trilogy on dictatorship, examining its portrayals of state authority, biopolitics, and resistance, while underscoring the role of the migrant intellectual in challenging authoritarian narratives.

Theoretical framework of kinopolitics and the context of Nuruddin Farah

The concept of ‘kinopolitics’, formulated by Thomas Nail, provides a productive theoretical lens for rethinking migration, exile, and displacement not as marginal aberrations but as constitutive forces within social and political life. Derived from the Greek term *kinesis*, meaning “movement,” kinopolitics is defined by Nail (2015, 24) as “the theory and analysis of social motion: the politics of movement.” Its central premise is that societies are not static structures organized exclusively around state sovereignty, territory, and fixed belonging; rather, they are “regimes of motion” constituted through dynamic processes of circulation, displacement, and transformation (Ibid, 25). Within this kinetic paradigm, the figure of the migrant ceases to be a derivative or secondary subject, and instead emerges as the central analytic through which we can apprehend the conditions of the contemporary world. Traditional migration discourses, as Nail (2016, 7) critiques, suffer from two foundational limitations. First, migrants have been defined exclusively in relation to the state—as immigrants, emigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers—each category reinforcing a statist epistemology that reduces migrant existence to a deficit in citizenship. Second, migrants have been deprived of history, since their experiences are rendered invisible or subsumed within the grand narratives of nation-states (Ibidem). Against these erasures, ‘kinopolitics’ insists that migrants are not failed or incomplete citizens but constructive agents who generate alternative histories, counter-memories, and new forms of social organization. As Nail (2015, 5) writes: “Kinopolitics allows us to conceptualize the emergence of the historical conditions that gave rise to the types of social expulsion that define the migrant. The major forms of kinetic social expulsion that define the twenty-first century did not emerge out of nowhere. They emerged historically...” This emphasis on historicity is crucial. Migrant identities are not ahistorical abstractions but emerge within

concrete conditions of social expulsion—political violence, economic dispossession, environmental precarity. Nail underscores that the apparent ahistoricity of the migrant is itself the result of sovereign violence. Kinopolitics therefore demands that we examine how migrants articulate their own counter-histories and resistances, producing epistemologies that exceed the frame of the state.

Although Nail does not explicitly cite postcolonial theorists, his theory resonates with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. For Bhabha, migrant identity inhabits an "in-between" space, disrupting cultural essentialism and producing new enunciations of belonging. In this sense, the migrant embodies hybridity as both epistemic and lived condition. Edward Said also contributes a complementary dimension with his reflections on exile. For Said, exile is a critical vantage point from which one can interrogate the world. He in his *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994, 39) emphasises that a migrant or an intellectual in exile is marked by perpetual restlessness: "Exile for the intellectual in this sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation." Exile, then, becomes a condition of permanent in-betweenness that unsettles both the state and the self, while simultaneously generating a heightened sense of critical agency. While Bhabha and Edward Said discuss hybridity, cultural change, and exile, Nail's 'kinopolitics' offers a broader theoretical backdrop for comprehending these experiences. According to Nail, movement is not merely an unplanned interruption of fixed categories but the very essence of social existence. In this context, the migrant serves as a prime example of how identities are formed through mobility rather than stability. What postcolonial theorists refer to as in-betweenness or restlessness can thus be reinterpreted as forms of kinetic existence, in which belonging and identity develop from paths of displacement and ongoing circulation. Kinopolitics highlights that these conditions are not peripheral but crucial for grasping power, subjectivity, and community in contemporary society. In this manner, Nail's theory integrates and broadens the perspectives of postcolonial theory by situating hybridity, transformation, and exile within a framework of movement.

Nuruddin Farah's life and writing vividly embodies kinopolitical insights and the centrifugal dynamics of kinopolitical expulsion—the force that pushes individuals into exile. After the publication of his

second novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976), which openly condemned Barre's authoritarian regime, Farah was compelled into a life of permanent displacement. While in Rome, his elder brother's stark counsel—"Forget Somalia, consider it buried, dead, think of it as if it no longer exists for you"—marked a definitive rupture, transforming him from a homeward-bound writer into an exile (Farah 2000, 49). What followed were successive relocations of him to England, Italy, the United States, Sweden, Uganda, Nigeria, and South Africa, each reinforcing a condition of *aterritoriality* marked by rootlessness and instability. Farah's exile paralleled the experiences of many Somalis who, fearing persecution, embarked on precarious journeys of voluntary migration. He bore witness to the racial discrimination and marginalization Somali asylum seekers endured in Europe, where they were routinely denied recognition, cast as *vermin*, or pathologised under the stigmatising notion of "the clan as a malady." His own rejected settlement applications—dismissed on "racist" and "exclusivist" grounds—underscore the pervasive kinopowers that regulated belonging in host societies. This centrifugal expulsion shaped Farah's exilic consciousness and inspired his articulation of a "country in exile," a phrase that captures both Somalia's collective failure and its role as one of the world's principal refugee-producing nations (Farah 2000, 51). The interplay between colonial legacies and postcolonial authoritarianism thus represents two interlinked modalities of kinopower that have profoundly defined Somali migrant identity. As Farah himself observes, in Somalia "new empires are created in place of old ones, [and] a mass of humanity necessarily are made refugees" (Ibidem).

Nuruddin Farah initially experienced his displacement as rupture. Yet, as he later reflected in "In Praise of Exile" (2007, 82), distance enabled him to write more freely: "exile is a great learning experience... distance distills; it gives you a better, clearer perspective". His biography exemplifies Nail's (2015, 35) notion of "expansion by expulsion", which is applicable to the identities that are expelled from social, political, and territorial status, yet this very condition generates new spaces of identity, belonging, and possibility. Likewise, in the context of Farah, his forced displacement paradoxically expanded his creative and intellectual horizons.

Farah consistently frames exile not as marginalization but as the very condition of his creativity and agency. In interviews, he has described himself as a 'world citizen,' a position that resists both

nationalist fixity and diasporic nostalgia. Alessandra Di Maio in *Wor(l)ds in Progress: A Study of Contemporary Migrant Writings* (2010, 3) aptly observes that Farah embodies “multiplicity of centers and marginal areas,” destabilising conventional dichotomies of centre and periphery. His literary works, spanning continents and languages, articulate a *kinopoetics* of deterritorialization—stories that refuse to be contained within national borders, even as they remain deeply engaged with Somali history and identity. Moreover, Farah’s work illustrates how the migrant is not a derivative subject but a constitutive one: a figure of movement whose identity is continually formed through flows, junctions, and circulations of displacement. His exilic subject position does not negate belonging but reconfigures it, generating new forms of cultural identity and intellectual agency. In this sense, Farah exemplifies the transformative power of kinopoetics, where exile becomes not simply a condition to be endured but a dynamic ground for reimagining identity, history, and worldliness.

Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and text-based methodology rooted in literary and cultural analysis. It employs a triangulated approach that brings together theory, text, and history. First, it draws on Thomas Nail’s *The Figure of the Migrant* (2015), using ‘kinopolitics’ as the central interpretive framework to situate migration within wider debates on displacement, identity, and power. Second, it undertakes close readings of Nuruddin Farah’s *Dictatorship* trilogy, examining how the novels— *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983)—portray dictatorship as a regime of arrested motion and enforced expulsion while simultaneously dramatising counter-kinopolitical practices of resistance. This includes attention to the metaphors of surveillance and imprisonment, the gendered regulation of bodies, and exile as an alternative mode of circulation. Finally, the analysis situates Farah’s fiction within biographical and historical contexts, tracing how his own trajectory of forced exile resonates with Somalia’s political history under Siad Barre and illuminates the interplay between lived displacement and literary imagination. Together, these three dimensions provide a rigorous kinopolitical account of Farah’s work, highlighting the intersections of motion, power, and resistance.

Analysis

In Farah's *Dictatorship* trilogy, Somalia under the regime of Siad Barre emerges not only as a sovereign dictatorship but as a kinopolitical regime of motion. The regime led by the General in *Sweet and Sour Milk* has partitioned Mogadishu into sectors and keeps a record of every inhabitant; it goes beyond mere observation and manages both movement and stasis. Residents are documented, their absence is met with punishment, and their physical presence is perpetually scrutinized through what Soyaan refers to as the "whisper network of oppression," where even quiet utterances are relayed word for word by illiterate informants (Farah 1979, 36). This is a clear case of what Nail (2015, 16) calls 'kinopolitical arrest': a regime's attempt to channel, immobilize, or block motion.

Somalia is figured as a carceral space, a prison-like network where surveillance restricts flows of people and ideas. Farah intensifies this image through metaphors of enclosure: Somalia is "a prison," its citizens "prisoners," and the General "the Grand Warder" (1979, 193). In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the first book of the trilogy, Soyaan's mysterious death epitomises what Thomas Nail terms as 'kinopolitical expulsion': the regime not only ends his life but also confiscates his memory, erasing his circulation within the society. The government's cover-up transforms him into a propaganda figure, redirecting his story into official discourse. Soyaan's brother Loyaan's search for the truth demonstrates how dictatorship orchestrates motion—allowing certain narratives to circulate while immobilising others. Hence, Farah explicitly depicts Mogadishu as a carceral landscape of surveillance: "Mogadiscio has been divided into cells, in each of which there are residents who must account for their presence at their residence, twice every six weeks, on pain of losing their jobs. In this sense, the country is a prison" (*Sweet and Sour Milk* 1979, 36). Here the regime organises society through movement-control: presence must be continuously registered; absence is punished; circulation is surveilled. In Foucauldian terms, this is disciplinary biopolitics, as the regime does not simply watch them—it arrests the very possibility of unmonitored movement, substituting circulation with stagnation under surveillance (Foucault 1978, 176).

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the aspect of 'fear' is crucial in the sense that it structures the regime's kinopolitical order, functioning as an internalized arrest of motion. Farah (1979, 39) notes: "Everyone whispered, for fear that walls had ears, and ears had tongues". Here

speech itself, the most elemental form of social circulation, is curtailed and immobilized. Language loses its ability to move freely in the public sphere; it is reduced to whispers, halting flows of communication under the constant threat of betrayal. Nail's notion of the "arrest of flows" is vividly illustrated here: dictatorship interrupts not only physical movement but also the symbolic circulation of discourse, ensuring that even the smallest act of communication is captured and redirected into instruments of control. Loyaan's own trajectory embodies the kinopolitical consequences of this suffocating environment. After his fruitless investigation into Soyaan's death, Loyaan recognises that "I will leave, because here the truth dies with the dead" (Farah 1979, 176). Exile becomes his only viable form of motion, underscoring the dictatorship's reliance on centrifugal expulsion as a political strategy. Dissidents are not only silenced within the nation but are actively pushed outward, transformed into exiles whose departure preserves the regime's immobilising grip at home. Yet exile also reconfigures Loyaan's role: though displaced, he becomes a custodian of memory, carrying fragments of truth beyond Somalia's borders. This reflects Nail's (2015, 31) formulation of "expansion by expulsion," whereby the very act of being pushed out generates new spaces for agency, critique, and creative movement. Exile, in this sense, is simultaneously the product of authoritarian expulsion and the seed of resistance that persists in diasporic circulation.

The novel further aligns familial patriarchy with state dictatorship, revealing the intimate entanglement of kinship and power as regimes of motion. Keynaan, the father, asserts: "If I decide to cut you in two, I can. The law of this land invests in men of my age the power. I am the Grand Patriarch" (Farah 1979, 108). This is more than a declaration of patriarchal authority—it mirrors the General's sovereign claim to absolute power. Kinship becomes a microcosm of the dictatorship: a structure that regulates circulation within the family, determining who may speak, inherit, or move freely. Farah underscores this parallel explicitly when Loyaan equates the two figures: "The General is my father, and my father is the General" (Ibid, 112). This identification demonstrates how authoritarianism pervades both public and private domains, producing a dual kinopolitical arrest where familial and state structures reinforce one another to constrain motion. The family, like the nation, becomes a prison, its flows regulated by patriarchal decree. Hence, it is to be noted that dictatorship is represented not only as a

sovereign force over life and death but as a comprehensive kinopolitical system that immobilises bodies, interrupts language, confiscates memory, and redirects trajectories into exile. Soyaan's silencing, Loyaan's expulsion, and Keynaan's authoritarian paternalism together illustrate the multifaceted ways in which motion is arrested and manipulated. At the same time, the novel hints at the persistence of counter-movements: Loyaan's departure transforms immobilization into circulation abroad, inaugurating exile as both consequence of dictatorship and space of resistance.

If *Sweet and Sour Milk* foregrounds the regime's orchestration of disappearance, surveillance, and silenced lives, *Sardines* dramatises resistance as a form of alternative motion, most vividly articulated through female agency. Farah structures the novel around his female protagonist Medina, a journalist who refuses to succumb either to the authoritarian grip of the General or to the patriarchal traditions embodied by her mother-in-law, Idil. In doing so, the text displaces the conventional figure of the male dissident—arrested, executed, or expelled—and repositions women as the primary bearers of counter-kinopolitics. Medina's banning order exemplifies how dictatorship immobilises dissident voices. As she is barred from her editorial work on the pretext of her critiquing the regime of Siad Barre, her public presence is erased, her professional movement curtailed. This act of silencing is not only biopolitical but kinopolitical: her voice is forcibly withdrawn from circulation in the public sphere. Yet Farah shows that such immobilization is never complete. Medina resists by reconfiguring the spaces available to her, redirecting her agency into both domestic and intellectual domains.

It is interesting to note that Keynaan, Loyaan's father in *Sweet and Sour Milk* and Idil in *Sardines* embody parallel forms of domestic authoritarianism that mirror the General's dictatorship. Both operate as microcosmic figures of power: Keynaan proclaims himself "the Grand Patriarch" (Farah 1979, 108), while Idil insists on perpetuating circumcision of Ubax, Medina's daughter, thereby enforcing patriarchal control over female bodies (Farah 1981, 154). In different registers—paternal and maternal—both function as extensions of the state's immobilising apparatus, ensuring that authoritarian power circulates through the intimate spaces of kinship as much as through public politics. In *Sardines*, the conflict between Medina and Idil encapsulates intergenerational struggle, as Idil insists on perpetuating female circumcision, aligning with the General's broader project of

regulating and immobilising female bodies. Medina, however, identifies the two figures as equivalent, declaring: “The General and Idil are one and the same person” (Ibidem). This recognition links familial patriarchy with state dictatorship as mutually reinforcing regimes of motion, both seeking to immobilize women’s agency. Medina’s refusal to subject Ubax to circumcision disrupts the inherited cycle of patriarchal violence, breaking the continuity of domination that passes through generations. In doing so, she reorients kinship itself toward the possibility of resistance, where maternal agency in the context of Medina becomes a counter-kinopolitical act. Farah extends this logic into the political realm through the ‘Group of Ten’, a clandestine circle of intellectuals including Nasser and Dulman. Their underground circulation of pamphlets demonstrates another mode of alternative motion, challenging the state’s monopolization of discourse. Nasser captures the suffocating reality of dictatorship when he laments, “This city has turned into a fascist prison camp” (Farah 1981, 34). His words encapsulate the immobilization of everyday life under authoritarian rule. Yet his clandestine writings, though ultimately leading to his execution, represent resistance as the creation of counter-circuits—fragile but necessary flows of truth that evade state capture.

Medina figures her struggle with the General in distinctly kinetic terms, likening their conflict to “two lizards engaged in a varanian dance of death” (Farah 1981, 151). The imagery of circling reptiles reframes authoritarian power not as a fixed or monolithic force but as a precarious contest of movement, where domination and resistance continually respond to one another. This metaphor exposes dictatorship as a shifting field of motion: even under conditions of near-total surveillance and repression, counter-forces like—acts of refusal, defiance, and resistance—continue to circulate, unsettling the regime’s attempts at absolute control. In *Sardines*, then, Farah displaces the center of resistance away from traditional political actors and toward women, whose agency lies in disrupting cycles of violence, protecting future generations, and sustaining alternative flows of discourse. The novel insists that even under conditions of near-total arrest, movement persists—not in grand public revolts, but in the subtle and stubborn acts of defiance embodied by Medina and other marginalized figures. *Sardines* thus reveals resistance itself as a kinopolitical practice: the re-routing of flows, the interruption of oppressive circulations, and the creation of new trajectories of possibility under authoritarian rule.

Close Sesame extends the trilogy's exploration of dictatorship by revealing authoritarianism not as static domination, but as an ongoing struggle over the control, restriction, and redirection of movement. Farah stages Deeriye's body and memory as the novel's primary sites where kinopolitical dynamics—arrest, slow circulation, and subterranean resistance—are most painfully visible. Farah repeatedly uses Deeriye's frail, asthmatic body to make literal the idea that power can arrest even the most elemental forms of existence. The novel insists that imprisonment has not only scarred his history but throttled his physiology: Deeriye's long incarceration is described as having "cost him twelve years of his life" and left him wheezing as "each breath of air he drew wheezed in and out of his chest with great difficulty" (Farah 1983, 31). This bodily constriction is not merely metaphorical: it is the most intimate register of state suffocation. The political prison becomes a machine that not only confines limbs but also compresses time and breath, turning the simple act of inhalation into an index of subjection and precarity. Paradoxically, Farah presents detention as a space where motion is both violently interrupted and, at the same time, rendered reflective and transmissible. Deeriye's memory-work — what he calls the sustained, inner lens of conscience — is produced in the "dark room of isolation" and the "twelve years in dark caves," passages that emphasize how enforced immobility cultivates a different kind of circulation: the movement of memory and moral sight (Ibid, 30). Farah writes that after years in detention "one thing remained framed, like a picture, in his mind: that one's conscience is the lens which helps one to see, judge and then gives one enough confidence to press the button of one's reason of being" (Ibid, 31). Here the metaphor is kinetic in a subtle way: even when limbs and public speech are arrested, conscience continues to circulate images, judgments, and reasons across time; it becomes a portable flow that can be transmitted beyond prison walls. The "dark caves" thus function as paradoxical incubators — they interrupt social circulation but intensify inner circulation, producing a moral carrier (Deeriye's testimony) that can later re-enter public motion as memory, testimony, and pedagogical warning (Ibid, 30).

One of *Close Sesame*'s most consequential reframings is its relocation of the political adversary from an obvious external colonizer to an insidious internal wound. In a charged exchange with Mursal, Deeriye diagnoses the postcolonial danger as an inward disease: "Between national and colonial governments there is this major

difference ... the enemy is within: a cankerous tumour. You die of it gradually; bloodless, pale and unmourned" (Farah 1983, 166). This image of neo-colonial power as a tumour that spreads internally re-orientes kinopolitical analysis. Whereas classical accounts of sovereignty emphasize visible instruments (soldiers, prisons, decrees), Farah insists that dictatorship moves through social relations, kinship networks, patronage and memory: it seeps, metastasizes, and thereby constrains movement from the inside out. The metaphor conveys temporality as much as mechanism: the regime's destructiveness is not always spectacular; often it is a slow, systemic blocking of healthy social circulation until the polity's motion is arrested from within. Under 'Kinopolitics', therefore, the primary battlefield becomes the social tissues through which motion ordinarily flows—families, universities, workplaces—not only the spectacular sites of repression.

The novel's portrait of Mogadishu makes visible the socio-kinetic consequences of long-term authoritarian rule. As Farah points out, "The city of Mogadiscio has aged before it teethed; it is no city for the elderly or the very small ... The old if they go into the city after seven in the evening, run the risk of being mugged or simply pushed aside", dramatises the urban as a landscape of expulsions where vulnerable bodies are physically and socially removed from circulation (Farah 1983, 90). This is kinopolitical expulsion in its quotidian form: the city no longer facilitates diverse flows of life; it channels some people (the strong, the complicit) into circulation while structurally marginalising and ejecting others. The spatial politics of the novel thus show how regimes manage motion by reworking urban rhythms, policing bodies' presence in time and space, and making certain lives effectively irrevivable.

When viewed together, Farah's *Dictatorship* trilogy illustrates that understanding authoritarianism in Somalia requires more than just recognising it as the enforcement of sovereign power or the creation of 'bare' existence; it also involves a contest over movement itself—regarding who has the right to speak, act, remember, or inherit. By analysing these works through a 'kinopolitical' lens, we observe how the regime aimed to restrict bodies and silence voices, yet Farah's characters continue to create counter-flows of resistance through exile, memory, and also via feminist defiance in their own respective ways. It is noteworthy that Farah's *Dictatorship* trilogy depicts how even in the face of oppression, the act of movement remains the most resilient expression of political life.

Conclusion

A kinopolitical analysis of Nuruddin Farah's *Dictatorship* trilogy shows that authoritarian governments function not only through sovereign pronouncements or overt brutality but also by controlling movement—restricting circulation, stifling expression, and removing dissenting individuals. However, as Farah's narratives illustrate, exile and displacement do not solely represent a state of loss; they also generate new ways of knowing, identities, and forms of resistance. Exile emerges as the contradictory foundation where stasis morphs into movement, allowing muted voices to re-enter the narrative thereby enacting resistance. By placing the migrant at the forefront rather than on the fringe, Farah's work supports Thomas Nail's assertion that motion is foundational to political and social existence. Ultimately, the trilogy emphasises that movement—whether through exile, the dissemination of counter-discourse, and resistance across generations—continues to be the most enduring manifestation of life under oppressive regimes.

Beyond its literary significance, this study contributes to broader debates in migration studies, postcolonial theory, and 'kinopolitics' by showing how Farah's texts foreground the migrant intellectual as both witness and critic of authoritarian regimes. His work reminds us that migration literature is not only about displacement but also about the creation of new modes of belonging and critique. Future research may extend this kinopolitical approach to other African and diasporic writers, tracing how exile continues to function as both wound and resource in articulating the conditions of contemporary global mobility. In this sense, Farah's trilogy has not only restricted itself to narrating only Somali history, but it also offered a framework for rethinking the politics of movement in world literature at large.

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Integrating folktales into English pedagogy: A pathway to value-based education in technical institutes

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Abstract: In a time when the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes value-based education and learning from our tradition, the English syllabus of B. Tech students in most of the Engineering colleges in India, including IITs and NITs, includes only Communicative English. The literary portion is generally missing in the syllabus, with no trace of folktales. This paper explores the scope of folktales in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms of Engineering colleges, where if the teacher dexterously uses these tales, will not only make the class interesting and learner-centered, but could also impart values like non-violence, love, compassion, empathy, spirit of service, respect for others, liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice which are essential in addition to the technical knowledge to aid holistic growth of students. After critically analyzing a tale from A.K. Ramanujan's *Folktales from India*, and by suggesting application of a few tasks and activities to it during the pre-, while-, and post-teaching stages, the paper concludes with the demonstration of intensity and extent of a short tale in imparting value-based education in the language classroom of B. Tech students in technical institutes.

Keywords: folktales, value-based education, NEP 2020, English Language Teaching (ELT)

Introduction

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge: pure and proud. Proud knowledge is the one that helps in material development, with the help of which we have been able to reach other planets. Pure knowledge is that which helps in spiritual development. It helps us realize that we are all essentially the same,

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and that's why we ought to live harmoniously and peacefully. Bacon advocates for the blending of these two for the advancement of society. History has been witness to the fact that one-sided inclination towards material development at the cost of spiritual one has always led to a turmoil in society which can be seen in literary voices - be it Elizabethan period, where the pride of Dr. Faustus brings him to doom (Marlowe 2018); Victorian period, where Arnold (1867) laments over the dryness of 'sea of faith' in 'Dover Beach'; or Modern period, which, according to Eliot (1922) has become a wasteland in the poem 'The Wasteland' due to spiritual paralysis. In the contemporary period, too, due to one-sided development, we humans have reached Mars, but have moved away from ourselves, the consequence of which can be seen in the form of loss of human values, which has led to senseless wars and irretrievable eco-damage. Current examples are wars taking place in the world, causing the death of innocent children and women, and the hypocrisy of many nations, which instruct developing nations to cut carbon emissions while they themselves are the highest emitters (Worldometer 2022) in terms of per capita emissions and total emissions.

The loss of values gives birth to vices like selfishness, greed, pride, jealousy, anger, lust etc., which manifest themselves in many unwanted forms and heinous crimes like Sheen Bora Murder Case (Ali 2015) in which a highly ambitious lady strangles her own daughter to death to hide her illicit relationship with another person; increasing number of old-age homes, in which well-educated, but selfish and greedy children abandon their old parents in old-age homes after taking their thumb prints on property paper (Dua 2022); cases of molestation and sexual assault in which well-educated and renowned personalities fall prey to their lust. These incidents clearly indicate that a valueless education leads to a person becoming highly selfish and a 'slave to one's senses,' unable to transcend their narrow perspective and view the world from a broader one. That is why the United Nations' Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is one of the thirty-three cross-cutting issues of the seventeen sustainable development goals of UNESCO, where the focus is on making global citizens who are empathetic and take the whole globe as their family. That is why the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) also places significant emphasis upon value-based education, for children are the future of the nation and the whole world.

However, in engineering colleges in India, particularly in IITs¹ and NITs², B. Tech students are taught only a communicative English course, apart from their technical subjects, throughout their entire program. Although English literature, along with psychology, philosophy, economics, and others, is available as an elective in a few IITs³, the course is not compulsory, and learners are taught letter writing, report writing, grammar, phonetic transcriptions, etc., as prescribed in their syllabus. The absence of a literary portion, particularly folktales, from the syllabus is likely to make the course dry, leading learners to study solely for the sake of passing the exam. In light of the favorable outcomes of previously conducted studies, this paper explores the scope of folktales in the English syllabus of B. Tech students in technical institutes. These short traditional stories are rich in theme and wisdom, and have ample scope for working upon the socio-emotional understanding of students who, during their initial college period, cross the threshold from adolescence into adulthood. The paper discusses various values and highlights their importance in fostering the holistic growth of students, which is the need of the hour. Then it talks of folktales, their types, and relevance in language classrooms. Finally, the paper presents a critical analysis of a tale, demonstrating how tasks and activities can be applied to it during the pre-, while-, and post-teaching stages, to show the utility of a one-page story in a language classroom.

Literature review

Folktales, which relate to everyday reality to give a picture of their contemporary period, are oral narratives passed on from generation to generation (Mahanand 2021). Irrespective of the different periods and geography people belong to, human nature is likely to remain more or

¹ See Curricula Subjects, English, HSI-101Softskills.pdf. Subject | Department of Humanities and Social Sciences: Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, EE-2024-Curriculum, IIT Indore Academic, CHE - Courses | Indian Institute of Technology (BHU).

² NIT Trichy - Curriculum & Syllabus, NIT Rourkela, B.Tech_Civil_Engineering-Curriculum-new-2024-25_2024-7-19-15-39-22.pdf. National Institute of Technology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (Academics and Time Table), Course_structure_and_curriculum_B.Tech_I_to_VIII_NEP_2020.pdf. Academics – VNIT NAGPUR HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT. <https://www.manit.ac.in/content/humanities-department>.

³ Department of Civil Engineering-IIT Madras, B.Tech 2024 Curriculum.pdf. BTech |Department of Applied Mechanics, Civil Department | IIT Bombay.

less the same; that is why many of the messages regarding human behavior and life in these tales seem timeless and universal, which makes them relevant even today. Moreover, short length, diverse themes, and symbolic richness of these tales make them suitable content to be used and discussed critically in the class at all levels. Previous works done on the use of folktales as material in class have shown that these stories are helpful not only in improving the language skills of students but also in enhancing their socio-emotional understanding by imparting valuable lessons.

Linguistic and structural analysis of traditional stories like folktales shows that these stories are capable of developing cultural understanding and can also be used as a pedagogical resource in language class (Lwin 2015). They can help enhance critical thinking and intercultural awareness of students in English Language Classrooms (Mahanand 2021). An experimental study conducted at IKIP Mataram (Indonesia) demonstrates that folklores contribute to students' moral development. It is also found that students majoring in Language and Literature tend to have a better quality of life than those in science (Warta 2012). Similarly, a significant change in the social intelligence of the technical college students of Delhi NCR is found after using short stories and poetry as an intervention (Manuel 2020). During COVID-19, social intelligence of learners is found to be enhanced with the use of folktales as a learning material in the class (Junaidim et al. 2022). These traditional stories also helped Polytechnique students write creatively (Pattnaik 2016). Experimental studies carried out at senior secondary level in a state board school of Maharashtra (Namdev 2016) and at secondary level in Bhutan find folktales to be effective in developing writing skills of learners (Wangchuk 2014). A critical analysis of the collected folktales of Bezbaroa, an Assamese writer, shows that the stories have many moral values worth assimilating (Gogoi 2017). A comparison and contrast of folktales from Russia and India shows that such tales broaden our outlook and reinstate the vitality of the human spirit by upholding universal values of life (De 2020). Finally, the use of folktales in class six shows that students manifest interest in tales and activities like discussion, critical reading and storytelling (Bosma 1981). In light of the above-mentioned studies, this paper aims at showing the utility of folktales in imparting value-based education in technical institutes of India in the present time.

The need of value-based education

The fundamental beliefs that motivate or guide attitudes and actions are called values. Values measure the importance of something, with the help of which the best actions to be taken and the best way to live are determined (Mintz 2018). These values may be moral, personal, cultural, social, ethical, spiritual, aesthetic, democratic, etc. With the help of these, a person makes a distinction between what's right and what's wrong.

NEP 2020 also emphasizes value-based education. It states that students will be taught values such as non-violence, service, sacrifice, respect for all, respect for elders, respect for the environment, gender sensitivity, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, patience, tolerance, helpfulness, responsibility, equality, liberty, and fraternity from a young age (4.28). After imbibing these values, a person rises above their petty self and considers others before taking any action. Such a person is likely to become empathetic, considering both the short-term and long-term consequences of any action, and tries to avoid taking any action that is likely to cause harm to society, either directly or indirectly. That is the reason why value-based education is needed at the moment to help students become responsible citizens in the future.

Holistic growth and its importance in the current scenario

Holistic development is the social, emotional, physical, mental, and intellectual growth of a person. As a result of holistic development, a person knows how to keep oneself mentally and emotionally balanced in all situations and thus carries out one's personal and social duty honestly to contribute to the betterment of society. But the rising number of suicides at top institutes like IITs, NITs, and IIMs raises questions over the nature of education being provided in these professional institutes. The Education Ministry told the Parliament in 2021 that 122 students from IITs, NITs, and central universities committed suicide between 2014 and 2021 (Radhika 2021). On August 7th, 2023, Subhas Sarkar, the Minister of State for Education, presented the data before the Parliament (AU2764). According to it, 32 students have committed suicide at various Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) from across the country since 2018. During this period, the National Institute of Technology (NITs) and Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) reported 22 and 4 deaths, respectively. The Minister presented academic stress, mental health, personal, and family reasons as some of the reasons behind the students' deaths. The above

data raises questions about our education system, highlighting that sufficient work is not being done on the socio-emotional development of students. Students admitted to these top institutes are among the country's finest young brains, yet they succumb to external circumstances. That is why holistic education is a must in today's time, so that students can be prepared to face all the crises of life in a calm and composed way. NEP 2020 also advocates for holistic education to develop all capacities of students- moral, emotional, social, physical, aesthetic, and intellectual in an integrated manner (11.3). In light of the above discussion, it can be said that value-based education is necessary to aid the overall development of students.

Relevance of folktales in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms

Earlier, folktales were not available in written form, but later on, they were written and are now available in vernaculars and in the English language also. Along with fairytales, fables, and mythological stories, these tales form a part of our tradition. That's why these stories can also be called traditional stories (Mahanand 2021). Whereas folktales contain farmers, woodcutters, men, women, and objects of everyday life, which make them highly relatable for readers, fairy tales have a dominance of fantasy that may feature larger-than-life characters. Fables have animals and birds as characters, which symbolically represent some idea; and mythological stories have gods, goddesses, demons, etc., as characters (Ibidem). As such, there is no rigid parameter to divide these tales, but A.K. Ramanujan, in his book *Folktales from India*, has divided these stories into the following kinds: "Male-centered", "Women-centered", "Tales about families", "Tales about fate, death, gods, demons, ghosts, and so on", "Humorous tales", "Tales about animals", and "Stories about stories".

In these tales, we can find the reflection of almost all the sections of society. Marginalized people- women, children, or people belonging to the lower class or caste- are also given a voice in them. Thus, their cultural relatability, short length, simple language, and diverse themes make them a suitable material to be used in class for enhancing students' critical thinking and endowing them with valuable lessons. NEP 2020 also says that India's cultural wealth should be preserved and promoted for the identity and economy of the nation (22.1). That is why the use of these traditional stories in class is likely to strengthen students' sense of identity and pride in their culture.

Given below is a tale, 'Tell It to the Walls' from Ramanujan's *Folktales from India*, with its two very important and relevant lessons for students.

A poor widow lived with her two sons and two daughters-in-law. All four of them scolded and ill-treated her all day. She had no one to whom she could turn and tell her woes. As she kept all her woes to herself, she grew fatter and fatter. Her sons and daughters-in-law now found that a matter of ridicule. They mocked at her for growing fatter by the day and asked her to eat less.

One day, when everyone in the house had gone out somewhere, she wandered away from home in sheer misery and found herself walking outside town. There she saw a deserted old house. It was in ruins and had no roof. She went in and suddenly felt lonelier and more miserable than ever; she found she couldn't bear to keep her miseries to herself any longer. She had to tell someone.

So, she told all her tales of grievance against her first son to the wall in front of her. As she finished, the wall collapsed under the weight of her woes and crashed to the ground in a heap. Her body grew lighter as well.

Then she turned to the second wall and told it all her grievances against her first son's wife. Down came that wall, and she grew lighter still. She brought down the third wall with her tales against her second son, and the remaining fourth wall, too, with her complaints against her second daughter-in-law.

Standing in the ruins, with bricks and rubble all around her, she felt lighter in mood and lighter in body as well. She looked at herself and found she had actually lost all the weight she had gained in her wretchedness.

Then she went home (Ramanujan 2008).

Emotions and thoughts have weight. They should be given a proper outlet as and when needed. If undesired emotions are subdued for a long time, they are likely to take a toll not only upon mental and emotional health, but also upon the physical health of a person, as is manifested by the 'gaining of weight' by the old widow, who is mistreated by her daughters-in-law and sons. In the present time, this concept of unburdening oneself by sharing one's thoughts and emotions is used as a therapy to deal with depression, trauma, and stressful situations.

The second relevant message regards *taking care of parents in their old age*. The misery of the old widow in the story is a true reflection of the treatment meted out to many old parents in our country. In today's time, when the nuclear family is in trend, cases of elderly parents left alone at home after their children settle outside are on the rise. Due to loneliness, such people fall into depression and other mental illnesses. Considering the rising cases of abandonment of old parents and mistreatment meted out to them, the government of India was

compelled to bring The 2007 Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (see Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, Legislations: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India), which empowers the senior citizens to get the property back from their children if they are not treated well in their old age (Isabella 2022). In light of the present dismal reality, this story could be a good material to conduct discussion and convey a positive message to students.

Below is a list of questions and activities that teachers can employ during the pre-, while-, and post-teaching stages when teaching the above-mentioned tale in a language class. These questions demonstrate the intensity and extent of such a short tale, revealing its broad scope in raising relevant socio-emotional issues within a one-hour class. These questions are drawn by the idea that ‘meaning-making’ is equally important as ‘given meaning’. These questions aim to make students struggle for meaning, enabling them to arrive at their own interpretations of what they comprehend.

Pre-teaching stage

To activate the learner’s background knowledge and arouse their interest in the tale, the teacher could ask the following questions. These questions will help generate discussion on the subject.

1. What do you do when you are very happy?
2. What do you do when you are very sad? Do you share it with anyone or keep it to yourself only? In each case, how do you feel?
3. How do you deal with your anger?
4. What do you understand by emotion?
5. How many of you have watched the movie *Baghban*, starring Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini? Do you think the treatment meted out to old parents by their children is right?
6. What do you understand by old-age homes?

In this phase, the teacher can provide the meaning of concepts that students might encounter in the story. For example, the teacher could explain the meaning of emotions and introduce the concept of ‘catharsis’ indirectly.

Whilst-teaching stage

The teacher should ask students to quickly read the text and answer one or two general questions, such as, “What is the central idea of the story?” After this, the teacher could conduct activities or take recourse to discussion, group work, or any other technique as per the need and

time available. It is at this stage that necessary concepts like Freud's "iceberg theory" and others can be taught.

Post-teaching stage

Some of the post-teaching activities which can be conducted for the story mentioned above are: 1. Writing activity: a) the teacher can ask the learners to write a letter to their friend describing their happiness after they qualified for the IIT entrance exam; b) students can be asked to describe their happiest moment in life by writing. And 2. Speaking activity: a) the students can be asked to come up with their opinion on what they would do if they found that some elderly parents are mistreated by their children; b) learners can be asked to share their opinion on old-age homes.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion and research already carried out with folktales in class, it can be concluded that folktales can be a very potent tool to be used in English language classrooms of technical institutes of India because of the following reasons:

1. Folktales are short in length, simple in language, diverse in theme, and rich in meaning. These qualities make these stories suitable for critical discussion in class, making the class engaging and activity-based, which otherwise may seem dry.
2. Folktales are rich in wisdom. That is why, by using the right method, students can be imparted the necessary values and many life lessons.
3. Since students entering college are just crossing the formative period of their lives, it is essential to utilize these tales to enhance their socio-emotional intelligence, thereby fostering holistic growth, which is the need of the hour.
4. Skillful use of these short stories could help the teachers achieve the course objectives effectively.

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SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

The cognitive burden of English-major student-mothers in Philippine higher education: A phenomenological approach

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Abstract: Student-mothers juggle with cognitive, emotional and academic weights as they navigate the dual demands of their studies and motherhood. This phenomenological study explored their lived experiences revealing how the linguistic and intellectual expectations of an English program, such as literary analysis, dense academic reading and writing tasks, and oral performance, intensify the invisible labor these women undertake. Four central themes emerged: (1) The Cognitive Cost of Multitasking Minds described the mental fatigue and emotional guilt in performing demanding tasks; (2) Inner Strength and Academic Aspiration reflected their motivation rooted in motherhood; (3) Academic Survival Tactics in a Rigid System highlighted their use of time management, self-regulation, and strategies; and (4) Student Support and Institutional Reform revealed the lack of policy accommodations within the university setting. The findings affirmed that while student-mothers faced various challenges, their remarkable resilience made them even more persistent toward their goal for a better future.

Keywords: student-mothers, cognitive burden, parenting, English-major

Introduction

In higher education worldwide, the pursuit for academic success is often viewed as a product of intellectual focus, time availability, and institutional support (Beck 2022). Yet, for college student-mothers, particularly those enrolled in rigorous academic programs, they face disproportionate challenges in navigating these demands. Balancing childcare with higher education responsibilities has been recognized as a form of invisible labor (Anderson 2021; Prikhidko and Haynes 2018). The mental and emotional burdens they carry are further intensified when their chosen field requires extensive reading,

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analytical writing, and language fluency, such as in English and liberal arts programs (Hemmy and Mehta 2020).

In developing countries like the Philippines, the stakes are even higher since completing a degree is often seen as a huge game-changer in providing transformative path to economic mobility (Gatbonton 2021). Hence, they often struggle with finding the proper balance between childcare and their academic responsibilities (Cabaguing 2017). In such cases, if they are unable to effectively meet these demands, the majority of these students would not continue their education (Liu and Lee 2015). Failing to finish their education may lead to fewer job opportunities, especially in today's tight competition for job applicants with college degree-holders gaining the upper hand (Manalang et. al. 2015).

In state universities such as the one in Negros Occidental, the setting of this study, student-mothers enrolled in English language programs face a distinctive set of pressures. Beyond the everyday tasks of parenting, they must navigate an academic environment that demands high levels of linguistic competence, public speaking, literary analysis, and extensive academic writing. These tasks necessitate extended periods of concentration, something rarely afforded to mothers caring for young children.

While a vast number of existing literatures have explored international and local studies on student-mothers' experiences (Manalang et al. 2015; Simon 2020; Torres et al. 2020), there remains a notable dearth of studies that examined the discipline-specific cognitive and academic burdens placed on women majoring English. Even more limited are localized inquiries in Negros Occidental, particularly within the context of state universities. This is the gap that this paper wishes to address.

Thus, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of English-major college student-mothers in a state university in Negros Occidental in navigating their dual roles. Framed within the feminist Theory, the research looks into the cognitive demands and academic pressures uniquely borne by these women.

Purpose statement

What are the lived experiences of English-major college student-mothers in navigating the cognitive demands of their academic program while managing their responsibilities as mothers?

Methodology

Research design

This study was a qualitative research design following a descriptive phenomenology as its methodological framework to describe and gain insights into the purpose statement. The qualitative design intends to explore phenomena that affect the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context (Mills and Birks 2014). Meanwhile, a phenomenological study explores what people experience and focuses on their experiences of a phenomenon (Rosa et al. 2018). Thus, this method was considered most appropriate for the study in order to clearly capture the lived experiences of English-major college student-mothers.

Participants and sampling technique

The participants in this study were the five English-major college student-mothers in a state university in Negros Occidental, Philippines for the Academic year 2023-2024.

The participants were identified using the Purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Campbell et al. 2020). In this study, the following were the inclusion criteria to identify the participants:

1. They must be *bona fide* English-major students in a state university.
2. They must be 21-28 years old, with 1-2 children, and living with their partner.
3. They must be the biological mother and have full custody of the child/children.
4. Willing to participate in the study.

In order to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality, the participants were assigned pseudonyms, and these names were used throughout the paper.

• “Enriqueta” is the oldest among the participants, aging 28 years old. She has 2 children and is married. She had her first child at the age of 26. After she graduated high school, she worked as a housekeeper for 5 years. Now, she persevered to go back to college in hopes of finishing a degree.

- “Pricelle” is 23 years old at the time of the study, with 2 children and is married. among the participants, she was the youngest who got pregnant at the age of 18 with her first child. She later realized to give importance to education and always listen to parents.
- “Klara” is 27 years old with 2 children and is married. She was 22 years old when she had her first child. She already had a job when she became a mother. With a meager income, she became very eager to go back to school after realizing that she can’t gain the best work if she hadn’t finished a degree.
- “Jessibel” is the youngest among the participants being 21 at the time of study and is in her final year in college. She had her child at the age of 20, and is with a live-in partner. She maintained a positive outlook and continued with her goal to finish her studies.
- “Krystal” is 24 years old, with a live-in partner, and only had 1 child. She had her first child at the age of 21. She decided to push for her goal in finishing a degree.

Research instrument

The study made use of an unstructured in-depth interview without using a set of predetermined questions to deeply explore the essence of the participants’ experiences. This approach served a means to examining the lived experiences and personal perceptions as it encouraged participants to freely share their stories and insights in an unrestricted manner (Creswell and Poth 2018). Probing questions were also asked to gather thick rich description of their narratives until data saturation was achieved.

Data collection procedure

Before the interview, Preliminary questions were asked to establish rapport with the participants. Informed consent was secured from the participants after explaining the purpose and scope of the study. Their willingness was emphasized, as well as the confidentiality of the whole process. They were free to withdraw at any point of the study.

During the interview, the researcher employed mind-bracketing, where all preconceived ideas about the topic were suspended. The researcher used probing questions to further clarify points the participants’ narratives. The participants were allowed to answer in any language they were comfortable. The one-on-one interviews lasted from 30 minutes up to 45 minutes. The researcher used a smartphone to record the whole interview.

After the interview, the researcher debriefed the participants by gradually taking them back into casual conversation. They were thanked for their participation and were given tokens of appreciation. Afterwards, data were transcribed for analysis and returned to the participants for member-checking. Audit trail was also used to verify the correctness of the transcripts.

Data analysis procedure

Creswell and Creswell's (2017) data explication process was used in analyzing transcripts of participants' narratives to reach the essence of their lived experiences. This systematically involved the following steps:

1. Preparing and organizing the data gathered
2. Reading through all the data
3. Coding
4. Generating themes and descriptions of the experience
5. Finalizing the themes and descriptions
6. Essence

Data trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the process meticulously followed to ensure that the study is valid and reliable (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Nowell et al. 2017).

In this study, it made sure that the analysis of the study was conducted exactly, reliably, and expansively, by establishing its trustworthiness using the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba. This emphasized the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the transcripts to correctly express the experiences of the participants.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were observed in the conduct of the study aligned to the principles of respect for person, beneficence and justice. Since the participants were students, their willingness to take part in the study was given prime consideration through an informed consent. The protection of their identity was also ensured.

Furthermore, their permission to be audio-recorded was secured. All documents, recordings and field notes were kept in a secure place with only the researcher having access to the files in adherence to Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Results and discussion

As the participants embarked on a meaningful journey of achieving their life goals, their narratives led to the intersection of two high-demand identities, being a student and a mother. It is further complicated by the cognitive rigor of their academic discipline, which emphasizes on critical thinking, dense writing and reading tasks, and oral performance imposing mental workload that they must navigate daily.

Based on the data transcripts obtained from the participants' narratives, four major themes emerged, each with 2 sub-themes that represent a core facet of their lived realities.

Theme 1. The Cognitive Cost of Multitasking Minds

- Sub-themes: 1. Mental Load, and Linguistic Demands
2. Emotional Displacement and Silent Guilt

Theme 2. Inner Strength and Academic Aspiration

- Sub-themes: 1. Child-Centered Motivation as Academic Fuel
2. Affirmation from Peers and Family as Coping Anchors

Theme 3. Academic Survival Tactics in a Rigid System

- Sub-themes: 1. Self-Regulated Routines and Goal Setting
2. Time Management as a Form of Resistance

Theme 4. Student Support and Institutional Reform

- Sub-themes: 1. Lack of Flexibility in English-Major Courses
2. Absence of childcare and Psychological Support

Theme 1. The Cognitive Cost of Multitasking Minds

When mothers came to the decision of returning to school, or pursuing their college education while also performing their responsibilities as mothers, nothing prepared them for the actual daily demands and stresses they had to face once they are in the actual situation. These are elucidated below:

Sub-theme 1: Mental Load and Linguistic Demands

"I encounter mental exhaustion... The most pressing situation was when we were loaded with tasks like writing analysis paper and doing reports with tight deadlines. All these demand focus. My mind panicked if how I could manage my time." – Enriqueta

"There are days I barely sleep. I just keep moving from being a mom to being a student, without a pause. It's even harder because the tasks

given to us in our major subjects in English are heavy. At times I feel restless, angry, and alone.” – Krystal

“It is difficult for me to manage my time at home and in my English classes with loads of tasks and readings to do. It is hard to work things out.” – Klara

These statements reflect the internal pressure that English-major student-mothers face, especially in their discipline that involve intensive writing and reading, adding pressure on top of their parenting duties. Their internalized fatigue stems not only from physical exertion but from cognitive pressure.

These accounts conform with the study of Andres (2021) that describes the “dual labor” of student mothers, a kind of double cognitive taxation that leads to academic underperformance and exhaustion physically and mentally. The guilt of not being full present, either at home or in school became an undercurrent that affected their current state of mind.

Sub-theme 2: Emotional Displacement and Silent Guilt

“I feel guilty that I have to leave them [my children] for a long time to go to school. I wake up as early as 4:00 AM to do my chores, before heading to school. I try hard to perform both my roles at home and in school every day.” - Pricelle.

“Our neighbors show discrimination with my situation. Now, my child becomes my priority, especially when she gets sick. I miss classes and quizzes and it makes me feel like a failure on both sides.” – Jessibel

These expressions highlight the recurring burden of these student-mothers in terms of their limited time. Their narratives reveal that time management is not just about scheduling, but about choosing which important task to sacrifice each day.

This is reflected in several studies (Miranda2020) stating that being physically present in class while mentally occupied by maternal concerns is part of the invisible emotional labor that student-mothers experience. On another note, social stigma against these student mothers still persists despite efforts of the government to elevate their morale and create a nurturing supportive environment for these sectors of society (Cabaguing 2017; Miranda, 2020).

Theme 2. Inner Strength and Academic Aspiration

These student-mothers did not allow their struggles to tower over their aspirations. They expressed that their children were their core

inspiration to persist and excel. Rather than seeing motherhood as a hindrance, they reframed it as a personal mission that gave their academic journey deeper meaning. From their responses, 2 sub-themes emerged as reflected below:

Sub-theme 1. Child-Centered Motivation as Academic Fuel

“I don’t want to be a burden to my parents, I want to be independent and self-sufficient someday for my children. These are what encourage me to pursue my education as an English major student.” – Enriqueta
“My child is my motivation in all these that I go through. I decide for my future, so instead of giving up, I stand to pursue my goal to be an inspiration to others who struggle like me.” – Jessibel

Here, the participants’ children are more than dependents, they are life anchors. These mothers are fueled by a vision of being role models for their children, building futures rooted in education and determination to reach a better future for their children.

Despite the challenges and painful moments that student-mothers had to go through in performing their dual roles, yet their experiences gave them the strong will and inspiration to press on and achieve their dreams (Sicam et al., 2021). It is these trying situations that purged them to be stronger, more persevering, and dedicated to complete their degree (Sitchon et al., 2019).

Sub-theme 2. Affirmation from Peers and Family as Coping Anchors

“My classmates treated me well, and they are proud of me because of how I manage my studies while also taking care of my children. They motivated and help me in doing our school work and I am blessed to have classmates and friends like them.” – Pricelle

“It is my family, my partner, and close friends who remained as my main supporters, encouraging me to just do my best and not mind the people around. So, I show to them that I can, and I will; for them and my child.” – Krystal

These responses showed that the presence of emotionally supportive family, partners, and peers played critical role in their resilience. Although motherhood brings isolation, encouragement from peers and family can serve as emotional lifelines. They endeavored in their studies because they envision themselves to be better mothers to their children in the future.

These accounts affirm the concept of “grit-ability” (Braund et al. 2020) where perseverance emerges not from isolation but from family

validation and relational support. Such protective factors are crucial in buffering the emotional toll of dual-role conflict. Likewise, studies (Torres et al. 2020) confirm to this stating how they endured emotional and physical stresses just to complete a degree. This served as the main drive they have for their family.

Theme 3. Academic Survival Tactics in a Rigid System

Student-mothers in this study displayed advanced self-regulation skills and adaptive strategies in response to the inflexible structures of academic life. As they adapt to their conditions, they discovered the right mix of strategies that suit them best as they manage their responsibilities. Their narratives are presented below:

Sub-theme 1. Self-Regulated Routines and Goal Setting

“I make a list of chores to do, like a timetable to fix my time and be able to multi-task. When at home, I do my school tasks while breastfeeding my baby. I persevere and pray all the time.” – Enriqueta

“I always set a time to study my lessons to fully understand our topic. I wake up very early (4:00 AM) every day to manage my priorities.” – Pricelle

“I often read and review our lessons and have a regular study habit especially when my child is asleep. Since English subjects are loaded with readings, I try to focus during quiet moments. Often times, I just manage to study while also tending to my child.” – Jessibel

Their responses reveal how doing these routines allowed them to avoid deadline pressure, particularly because English coursework involves extensive reading and writing outputs. Their structured routines and strict discipline helped them organize things, and keep a “to-do” mental map in accomplishing tasks. Their methods reflect survival strategies that speak of how efficiency is considered a necessity, rather than just a habit.

This is supported by various studies (Amuribadek Adangabe and Tigdig 2021), disclosing how, when juggling through their tasks, student mothers are said to utilize practical work strategies such as direct problem-solving, cognitive decision-making, understanding, and constructive cognitive restructuring to cope with the challenges they face.

Sub-Theme 2. Time-Management as a Form of Resistance

“I believe that proper and effective time management is the key. So, I take a rest and have some time to think wisely of my decisions. Also,

when studying I find it helpful for me to organize and outline our lessons, set my goals, keep records, monitor and always take note during discussion, and review.” – Klara

“For me to avoid missing deadlines, I do school tasks ahead, and I do not procrastinate. Goal-setting is always my strategy. I won’t leave a school task undone even until the last minute. In our major subjects, we often write papers, so I try to finish them early. It made my life a lot easier by working ahead of schedule.” – Krystal

These statements highlight how these student-mothers take control of their learning process despite their huge responsibilities at home, which is a true reflection of resilience and adaptability. This is important in English classes where deadlines come fast and tasks are often tedious and long. Their responses showed that they understood the weight of their responsibilities, not neglecting both roles, and are capable of multi-tasking.

In several studies (Braund et al. 2020), the grit displayed by student-mothers developed their ability to be formidable, resilient, and courageous in facing the obstacles and challenges that come with their dual roles. It also emphasized how adolescent mothers who are in college have resolved to carry on with their studies amidst their struggles as they dreamed of a better future for their children (Gatbonton 2021).

Theme 4. Student Support and Institutional Reform

As student-mothers strive to perform their dual roles, they express the desire for institutional support, more intuitive understanding and consideration of their situations from their mentors and other persons in authority. Their narratives reveal a yearning for flexible institutional policies, and childcare support, as they hurdle the challenges they face. These are reflected in the sub-themes presented below:

Sub-theme 1. Lack of Flexibility in English-Major Courses

“There were times I needed to bring my child to class because there was no one to watch him at home, but I had to stay at the back seat and make sure he doesn’t make any distracting noises while our teacher proceeds with the discussion.” – Pricelle

“If teachers only know what we go through at home before arriving in class, they would understand why I come late often or miss a quiz or an activity. Due to the health of my child, I once missed the deadline

of an important English project. Sometimes I also miss important discussions and quizzes. – Krystal

These reflections surface a pressing need for academic empathy as participants express frustration not from the workload itself, but the burden of carrying huge responsibilities from home to school. They hoped teachers were more understanding. Missing a major output or being unable to participate in their English class significantly added to their emotional and mental stress.

Several studies (Andres 2021) emphasized that while student-mothers demonstrated high resilience, institutional recognition and assistance will go a long way. This may be in the forms of academic leniency, child-friendly policies, and support offices and facilities.

Sub-theme 2. Absence of childcare and Psychological Support

“If only there is a daycare near our school or a room in school where I could safely leave my child for a while as I attend classes.” – Krystal

“Breastfeeding in restrooms or in hallways, or student lounges is somewhat humiliating. A private lactation room would have made it easier, safer and more private for me.” – Jessibel

“I need someone I could immediately confide my burdens with, like counselors, or professionals, exclusive for us student-mothers. Maybe it would help lighten this load I feel in my chest.” – Klara

This final sub-theme reveals how the lack of on-campus childcare or lactation spaces forced student-mothers to make painful compromises. Making these services and facilities available would significantly lighten the load they bear knowing that they have the support of the school.

These statements echo the findings of various studies (Clarkson et al. 2021; Miranda 2020) regarding inflexible academic expectations that served as silent barriers to women’s education, especially for those who balance motherhood and school. Their narratives underscored the value of equitable academic systems, which must include empathy, rather than forcing student-mothers to adapt to the rigid academic norms. It urges institutions to view these needs not as special favors but as fundamental rights essential to equitable access and success.

Essence / Eidetic insights

The lived experiences of English-major college student-mothers reveal a nuanced portrait of cognitive burden, academic loads, and emotional endurance. Their narratives reflect the invisible labor of switching

between academic tasks that demand intellectual precision, and maternal responsibilities that require both time and attention. It reveals how their academic performances are often compromised by their lack of time, divided attention, and fatigue from child-rearing responsibilities.

Yet within these systemic cracks, student-mothers stitched together their own forms of survival. They developed in them the fortitude, and persistence to be more responsible adults, resolute and committed towards their goal. They discovered the right strategies and study habits that work best for them as they managed their dual roles. Through time management, inner resolve, and child-centered motivation, they redefined their journey not as one of deficit but of silent defiance, pushing back against the norm through quiet persistence.

These insights illuminate how student-mothers carry more than bags and books, they carry social expectations, invisible mental and emotional toil, and an extraordinary will to overcome. But while their personal strength is admirable, the burden should not rest solely on their shoulders. Institutions must evolve to meet them halfway.

Conclusion

The study concluded that English-major college student-mothers in a state university in Negros Occidental experience a daily reality shaped by cognitive overload, emotional fatigue, and systemic disregard. The academic demands of their chosen discipline, characterized by dense readings, critical writing, and high communicative expectations, amplify their everyday challenges of parenting. Yet they demonstrated remarkable resilience and self-regulation. Their motivation, rooted in their children's future, was sustained by family and peer support, time management, and adaptive learning strategies. However, their success often came at the cost of mental exhaustion.

The findings reveal that while these women may succeed individually, their struggles are aggravated by academic struggles, especially in demanding programs like English. The student-mothers do not ask for privilege, they ask for presence, policy, and parity.

The Feminist standpoint theory tells these women's experiences. The pressure to perform at par with peers in a language and writing-intensive field like English, without institutional flexibility or consideration, reveals how education remains unequally accessible when viewed through the lens of gender and caregiving.

Several limitations were set in this study. While the sample size of five participants was adequate for a phenomenological study to achieve data saturation, it did not represent the whole population of English-major college student-mothers. In addition, since the participants were only coming from a single university, the results may not be generalizable to larger populations.

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Foundations of a Fars-centric state: Orientalist discourse and imperial agenda

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Abstract: The presented study examines the ideological foundations of Iranian statehood and its Persian-centered identity politics in recent centuries. After the decline of the Qajar dynasty, the Pahlavi dynasty, which came to power in 1925 with the support of imperialist forces, rewrote Iranian history and placed Persian culture at the center of state-building. As a result of the policies implemented by the Pahlavis, the language and culture of non-Persian peoples such as Turks, Arabs, Kurds, and Baluchis were marginalized. This study shows that claims about Iran's ancient statehood traditions serve more political-ideological purposes. Consequently, modern Iranian statehood is not a product of natural historical development, but a model formed under the influence of colonial projects. This, in turn, created an ideological basis for assimilation policies that limited the rights of non-Persian peoples.

Keywords: Iran, Persianization policy, Oriental narratives, imperial agenda

Introduction

Iran's history over the past century has been dominated by two political regimes with different ideological orientations – the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic. (Mozaffari 2014, 181) Despite the serious ideological differences between these different regimes, both political structures have continued a Persian-centric identity policy in the process of national identity and state building. This approach has presented the Persian language and culture as the mainstay of the state, while relegating Iran's multi-ethnic realities to the background.

Taking advantage of the weakening of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, Reza Khan, supported by the British Empire, came to power and tried to establish an ideological link with ancient Iran by introducing

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himself with the surname Pahlavi. (Baykara 1978, 205) In the 1930s, he appealed to the international community to officially recognize the name of the country as “Iran” rather than “Persia”. This step was an important element of the policy of reviving the mythical name “Iran” and bringing the Persian ethnos to the fore. Thus, the history of Iran was officially rewritten during the Pahlavi era. In this process, the role of various states and cultures that had existed in the country for centuries was systematically reduced or attempted to be erased. (Madatli 2020, 84) At the same time, it is claimed that the Persians have 2,500 years of statehood traditions, and this narrative became one of the main pillars of the state ideology. As a result, the language and culture of other ethnic groups within Iran – particularly Turks, Arabs, Kurds, and Baluchis – were marginalized, and policies aimed at their assimilation were implemented.

One of the main political and ideological pillars of this process was the strategic activities of the British Empire in the region in the 19th and 20th centuries. During this period, Britain, through its Orientalist institutions, had a significant impact on the history and ethnic identity of Iran. Orientalist activities formed the theoretical and ideological foundations of Iran's ancient history, culture, and ethnic structures, paving the way for the development of Persian-centered historical narratives. Thus, Britain, taking advantage of the strategic position of the region, played a decisive role in transforming Iran into a centralized state based on the Persian ethnos. The reason why Britain showed such interest in Iran was largely due to its imperialist interests. (Safari 2014, 261)

Iran, with its important geopolitical position in the East and its rich natural resources, was of strategic importance to the British Empire. For this reason, the British Empire used various ideological and political mechanisms to achieve its imperialist goals by strengthening the policy of Persianization. The main ideological pillars of the Persianization policy aimed to create a common Persian identity by uniting various ethnic and cultural elements in the history of Iran and strengthening it with the hegemonic influence of the empire. This article will conduct a comparative analysis of these historical processes, examine the main ideological pillars of the Persianization policy and the leading role of Britain in this direction.

Methodology

The presented research paper reflects the rewriting of Iranian history based on Persian identity and the Persianization of Iranian statehood, the interests of the British Empire in this process, as well as the assimilation policy of non-Persian peoples who lived together in Iran for centuries. The research is conducted mainly on the basis of Azerbaijani, Turkish, English and Persian-language sources. In accordance with the purpose of the research, a broad and multidisciplinary methodological approach is applied. The historicist approach is identified as the main method in the research paper. This allows for an in-depth analysis of how and under what conditions state policy was formed and how events were understood in their historical context. As a result of the research conducted, the existing historical and political literature is analyzed, and the stages of formation and development of Persian-centered state policy are determined. The study uses the method of critical discourse analysis, which allows for a systematic investigation of the ideological foundations, the state's identity policy and the impact of this policy on non-Persian peoples. Thus, the research work is based on a multidisciplinary approach, examining the interrelationships of historical facts, political ideologies, and cultural processes.

Ancient statehood of Iran: Historical realities and Persian-centered approaches

With the ascension of Reza Shah to the Iranian throne in 1925, supported by imperialist forces, measures were taken to rewrite Iranian history based on the superiority of Persian culture. Within the framework of this plan of measures, a new 2500-year history of Iran was written. It was after this that attempts were made to forget and falsify the historical past of the peoples who had historically lived in Iran. In the history of Iran, which was rewritten at the request of the Pahlavis, it is claimed that the history of Persian statehood began with the Achaemenids.

There are many stone inscriptions (inscriptions) that have survived to the present day from the Achaemenid era. Any impartial scholar who studies the language of those inscriptions will understand that the ancient Persian ethnos is not the ancestor of the present Persians, but perhaps belongs to a branch of the Slavs. The structure, grammar and vocabulary of the ancient Persian language give reason to say this. Let us state with a simple example that in the present Persian language

there are 6 personal pronouns and no gender. However, in the Persian language of the Achaemenids there is a masculine, feminine and neuter gender. At the same time, this language contains many words belonging to the present Slavic languages. In fact, in one of the inscriptions written in the ancient Persian language, the Achaemenid ruler Darius wrote the word “this is mine” as “*eta mai*”. (Purpirar 1381, 48) From this it becomes clear that the structure of the language is almost identical to the structure of the Slavic languages. These facts prove that there is no connection between the ancient Persian language and the present Persian language. The ancient Persian (Arabized form is Farsi) language does not actually exist today. This language was the language of the Persian tribe that later migrated to the region, and since they were not native, they were unable to remain in the region as a people after the collapse of the Achaemenid state they founded. What they inherited from them was only the name *Persian*. This name became a toponym over time and is today the name of the Fars province in southern Iran.

Attempts to look for traces of the Persian ethnos in the Sassanids are also wide spread in Iran. In some cases, claims can also be made that the Sassanids were of half-Pahlavi, half-Turkic origin. If we do not take into account the Turkic factor in the Sassanid state, we can say that the rest of the population of this state consisted of Pahlavi. The Pahlavi language, the official language of the Sassanid state, was a separate language and was spread in approximately the central and southern parts of present-day Iran. This language also had no connection with the present-day Persian language. Thus, today an educated person who knows Persian cannot read and understand Pahlavi. Even the famous poets Saadi Shirazi and Hafiz Shirazi, who lived in the 13th-14th centuries, wrote poems in their native Pahlavi language, along with Persian, like other poets of the period. While today their works in Persian are fully read and understood, no Persian can read and understand their works in Pahlavi. This is due to the fact that the Pahlavi language has no connection with Persian and is a completely different language. (Rashidi 1386, 175-176)

In 651, the Sasanian Empire was conquered by the Arab Caliphate, thus ending the Sasanian rule in the region. After the Arab occupation of Iran, there was a stagnation in the state administration of the Persians for many years. This stagnation was further strengthened by the Turkic migrations. Turkic rule in Iran began with the conquest of Iran by the Oghuz Turks and the establishment of the Great Seljuk

state. (Bademci 2018, 21) Thus, from the conquest of Iran by the Oghuz-Seljuk Turks in the 11th century to 1925, there was almost no Persian rule in Iran. During this period, the lands of present-day Iran were ruled by the Eldaniz (Azerbaijani Atabeyes), the Qara Qoyunlu, the Aq Qoyunlu, the Safavids, the Afshars, and the Qajars, respectively. The aforementioned dynasties were entirely of Turkic origin. (Jannatov 2024, 142) Even today, toponyms bearing the names of those dynasties are found in a number of areas where Turks live compactly in Azerbaijan, as well as in Iran. Nevertheless, they try to evaluate the history of the empire, especially starting with the Safavids, as a revival of Persian statehood in Iran. However, the Safavids, in accordance with their Turkic heritage, adopted the statehood heritage inherited from the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty. Famous Russian orientalists such as V.V. Bartold, M.S. Ivanov and I.I. Petrushevsky, who studied the peoples of the East, considered the Safavids to be of completely Turkic origin, considering the attributes of statehood, army building, and the language used in the palace. (Jannatov 2021, 11-12) The re-representation of Persians in state administration began with the Pahlavis taking the Iranian throne in 1925.

Thus, a comparative analysis of the history of statehood shows that the 2,500-year history of Iran is nothing more than a distortion of historical truths, and the rule of the Persians did not last long in this 2,500-year history, which is also mentioned. This study shows that the claim that Iranian statehood is based on ancient history is based on false narratives that serve political ideology rather than scientific facts. Although ancient states such as the Achaemenids and Sasanians are directly associated with Persian identity, linguistic and historical evidence reveals that these claims are far from scientific grounds. The policy of falsifying history was used to erase the multi-ethnic structure of Iran and form a single Persian-centered identity. Such approaches, in addition to being far from objective historical analysis, prevent us from understanding the ethnic and cultural diversity existing in the region. As a result, such approaches not only distort historical truths, but also create the basis for increasing contemporary political and cultural tensions.

Britain interest in the formation of modern Iranian statehood

Since the 19th century, Britain began to implement short-term and long-term strategic plans in order to implement its colonial policy in

the East. In the course of these plans, the foundation of Oriental studies and its important branch, Iranian studies, was laid in the West. In addition to universities in Cambridge, Oxford, etc., the College of Oriental Studies named Haileybury was established in the East India Company of England. The function of these Oriental studies centers was to train officials and personnel for the East for British colonialism. (Mirzabayova 2025, 369) Through these officials, a new history of Iran began to be written based on the Persian ethnos. British official John Malcolm (Sir John Malcolm) laid the foundation of Iranian studies by writing his work “History of Iran”. Apart from Sir John Malcolm, the vast majority of Iranian scholars were official civil servants of England or the British East India Company and carried out their research work in Iran based on their official positions. These officials sent by Britain were involved in Iran studies to write the history of Iran on a new basis. (Beygdelu 1380, 116) They were tasked by the British Foreign Office to write a new history of Iran based on the theory of Aryanism and to connect Iran with the ancient Persian ethnos. Eventually, this initiative did not stem from Britain’s admiration for Iran, but rather served its imperialist interests in the region.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the West, led by Britain, put forward the Aryan or Indo-European theory. Although this theory was first put forward in order for Britain to keep India as a permanent colony, it was later directed at Iran. (Musazadeh, 1384, 74) This theory basically states that there is a race called the Aryan race, and that race migrated to the territory of present-day Iran about 1000 years before Christ and founded the Achaemenid state 2500 years ago. Western missionaries and orientalist, as well as their local subordinates, simply kept the name of the state they had just founded as Iran by deleting the term “Mamalik-e Mahrusa” (which currently means united provinces). However, they resorted to fabrications to present the word “Iran” in the sense of the country of the Persians. They used the term “Aryan” that they made up in this matter. In fact, they have nothing to do with the term “Iran”. The word “Iran”, which is used alongside the term Turan, is also connected to the ancient Turkic epic “Alp Ertunga” as a mythical concept. (Safari 2014, 269) As Firdawsi himself wrote, the term Iran is used alongside the term Turan as a mythical term in his work “Shahnameh”.

Thus, the British gave the name *Persian* to the ethnos, which at that time constituted a small part of the population in the territory of present-day Iran and connected them to the 2500-year-old root “Pers”

and began to write a 2500-year history in the name of Iran. However, the rule of the Persians lasted very little in the mentioned 2500-year history. During the period from the conquest of Iran by the Seljuks to 1925, Iran was continuously under the rule of the Turkic dynasties. Most of the Turkic dynasties that established states in the territory of present-day Iran for centuries used the mythical Iran-Turan concept in order to create a defense ideology against a foreign enemy, or rather, another Turkic state that was their rival. That is, the name Iran, which previously had a mythical character, was only established as the name of the country during the period of the Turkic-Mongol Empire as a result of the conflict between the Ilkhani and Jaghatay uluses, the successors of Genghis Khan. (Ibn al-Ebri 1364, 160) However, as a result of this process that began during the Ilkhanid period, the name “Iran”, which was rarely used alongside the names of some of the Turkic dynasties, was used only to name the common lands they ruled and did not apply to present-day Iran. The mythical and historical name Iran originally belonged to the Tajiks and its borders, as mentioned in the “Shahnameh”, encompassed part of present-day northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan. (Mohammadi 2011) In other words, there was no serious connection between the territory of ancient Iran and present-day Iran. This can be seen from the maps of ancient and medieval authors, including the map given by Mahmud al-Kashgari in his work “Divan Lughat-al-Türk” / “Compendium of the languages of the Turks” (Kashgharli 1985, 531)

Figure 1. M.Kashgharli, *Dîvânü Lugâti't-Türk*, çeviren Besim Atalay, Ankara, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 1985



As it turns out, Britain carried out a coup in Iran in 1925 through missionaries and laid the foundation of the Persian state in Iran for its own long-term goals. The formation of the Iranian statehood, which the last generation of representatives of Persian chauvinism proudly talk about, is actually based on the colonial goals of Britain. Although the facts of the preparation of the historical basis of the Iranian statehood by Britain and the implementation of the coup were kept secret for a long time, they themselves were forced to admit it at certain points. Even the BBC radio commented on the overthrow of Reza Shah from the Iranian throne and his replacement with his son, Mohammadreza Shah, as follows: “We brought Reza Shah to the throne and we expelled him from Iran” (Amiratai 1361, 72). When we look at the history before 1925, it is possible to see that Iranian history is not ancient at all. The history of Iran, which was rewritten on fabricated grounds, served not only to Persianize the Iranian statehood, but also to destroy other cultures and languages existing in the geography of Iran today. It can be said that most non-Persian peoples living in Iran, especially Azerbaijanis, have suffered serious harm from this policy.

Conclusion

Therefore, the history of Iran over the past century shows that, although political regimes with different ideological foundations have dominated this country, the Persian-centered single identity policy in the field of national identity and state building has remained unchanged. Both the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic have presented the Persian language and culture as the only criterion of the state and nation, ignoring the multi-ethnic and multicultural realities of the country. The strategic intervention and ideological engineering of the British Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries played a decisive role in the formation and implementation of this policy.

The British influence in Iran was not limited to political support and military interventions, but also involved a systematic identity engineering by artificially highlighting the role of the Persian ethnos in history through Orientalist institutions and Iranian studies. As a result of this engineering, the role of the Turkic and other non-Persian dynasties that ruled Iran in ancient and medieval times was either reduced or completely erased. The newly written Persian-centered history created an ideological basis for internal assimilation policies

and legitimized a state model that served the interests of the West in the region.

This study shows that the current concept of modern Iranian statehood — a “centralized state based on a single Persian identity” — is not the result of natural historical development, but a political-ideological project of the colonial era. Therefore, the continuation of this model means the legitimization of a systematic mechanism of oppression directed not only against history, but also against the cultural and political rights of non-Persian peoples living in Iran. Thus, a critique of these historical mistakes and recognition of ethno-cultural diversity are necessary for Iran to have a more just, multilateral, and inclusive state structure in the future.

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Religion as an instrument of political governance in authoritarian regimes

Perihan Gozum*

Abstract: This article examines the functions of religion in political governance within authoritarian regimes through a systematic review and meta-analysis. Situated in the broader context of comparative politics, the study aims to understand how religious discourses contribute to regime durability beyond symbolic legitimation. A systematic review identified that most research is concentrated in the Middle East and Asia, with Islam emerging as the most frequently analyzed tradition. Using quantitative meta-analysis, the study finds that religious discourses enhance regime legitimacy (pooled effect = 0.42), reinforce bureaucratic integration (0.36), and contribute to restricting opposition (0.51). Meta-regression further reveals that these effects are stronger in the Middle East and Islamic contexts, and panel designs produce more robust associations compared to cross-sectional studies. A risk-of-bias assessment indicates low measurement bias, moderate risks of reverse causality and selection bias, and a high level of publication bias; nevertheless, complementary tests such as Egger's test, funnel plot, and trim-and-fill confirm the reliability of the findings. Overall, the results suggest that religion in authoritarian regimes functions not only as a symbolic source of legitimacy but also as an instrumental mechanism that consolidates institutional stability and strengthens political control.

Keywords: religion, authoritarian regimes, legitimacy, regime resilience, political governance

Introduction

Religion has historically been regarded as one of the most powerful sources of social integration, moral order, and collective identity (Fox & Breslawski 2023). Beyond its spiritual dimension, it has played a crucial role in legitimizing political authority and shaping governance structures (Echele 2023). In contemporary political science literature,

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state–religion relations are typically analyzed through the lenses of secularization, religious pluralism, and civil society (Schleutker 2021). However, in authoritarian regimes, this relationship emerges within a distinct context, where religion is strategically deployed to consolidate authority, maintain social control, and confer legitimacy on the regime (Riaz 2024).

Lacking democratic accountability, authoritarian leaders tend to seek alternative sources to bolster their legitimacy. At this juncture, religion emerges as a potent instrument (Fox & Breslawski 2023). Through religious narratives, institutions, and rituals, authoritarian regimes can anchor political authority within a transcendent moral framework, presenting obedience to the state as a religious obligation (Yilmaz et al. 2023). Moreover, the integration of religion at both the discursive and institutional levels into public administration, the education system, and policymaking processes reinforces the ideological dominance of regimes and strengthens social cohesion (Ongaro & Tantardini 2024).

Although research on the interaction between religion and authoritarian regimes has been steadily increasing, significant gaps remain regarding the systematic instrumentalization of religion within governance structures. Some studies highlight the role of clerics and faith-based institutions in political processes (Philpott 2007; Toft et al. 2011), while others focus on the symbolic functions of rituals, traditions, and sacred spaces in legitimizing and sustaining political power (Kuru 2009; Brubaker 2017). This diversity underscores the necessity of a comparative approach to understanding the authoritarian functions of religion across different contexts (Stepan 2011; Cesari 2021).

This study seeks to address this gap by examining how religion is positioned as a tool of political governance in authoritarian regimes through a multidimensional perspective. Employing an interdisciplinary framework that integrates political science, public administration, and religious studies, it analyzes the roles of religious institutions, discourses, and practices in the production of legitimacy, policymaking, and strategies of social mobilization. Case studies drawn from the Middle East, the post-Soviet space, and Asia demonstrate that the instrumentalization of religion is neither incidental nor secondary, but rather a central feature of authoritarian governance. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the literature on religion and politics by suggesting that faith in

authoritarian regimes functions not only as a cultural element shaping social values but also as a mechanism reinforcing political power. In this regard, the study aspires to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the potential dual role of religion in authoritarian contexts.

Theoretical foundations: Religion, legitimacy, and governance

The relationship between religion and politics has historically and theoretically occupied a central place in debates on political legitimacy. Max Weber's (1978) typology of authority highlights the capacity of religion to reinforce political power through charismatic and traditional forms of authority. Weber's approach continues to provide a relevant analytical framework, particularly in authoritarian regimes where charismatic leadership is bolstered by religious motifs.

Antonio Gramsci's (1999) concept of hegemony further demonstrates that religion functions not merely as an ideological apparatus but also as a core element in the construction of social consent. According to Gramsci, ruling classes reproduce social consensus through religious symbolism and values, a process that becomes more evident under authoritarian regimes.

Within the literature on authoritarianism, Gerschewski's (2014) "three pillars" model—legitimation, repression, and co-optation—offers a significant framework for explaining the role of religion in political governance. According to this model, religion not only serves as a powerful tool in generating legitimacy but also contributes to regime durability through both repressive mechanisms and the co-optation of religious elites.

Recent studies emphasize that religion is embedded in authoritarian governance not only at the symbolic but also at the institutional level. For instance, the institutionalization of religious bodies within public policies and social regulations is viewed as a crucial mechanism supporting the sustainability of legitimacy (Stepan 2011; Burchardt 2018). In this regard, the classical theoretical frameworks of religion–politics relations are being reinterpreted in contemporary analyses of authoritarian regimes and approached through an interdisciplinary lens.

Authoritarian governance and the quest for legitimacy

Political legitimacy in authoritarian regimes is inherently fragile. Unlike democratic systems, where legitimacy is continuously generated through regular elections, participatory mechanisms, and

institutional checks and balances, authoritarian governments seek to sustain their rule by relying on both institutional and ideological instruments (Schedler 2013). In this context, ideological discourses and symbolic arrangements assume a central function in ensuring regime continuity.

The role of religion in authoritarian regimes derives precisely from its capacity to compensate for this fragility by serving as an ideological instrument. Religion reinforces the legitimacy of governments through discourses imbued with sacredness, while simultaneously operating as a mechanism that limits opposition by fostering social belonging and identity formation (Philpott 2007). Religious symbols, rituals, and sacred spaces, in particular, present regime continuity as a cultural necessity, thereby consolidating the fragile foundations of political legitimacy (Hurd 2015).

Moreover, the use of religion as an ideological tool not only secures the legitimacy of authority but also directs social mobilization. The integration of religious norms into the official discourse of the state represents a powerful method of enhancing citizens' political loyalty. This demonstrates that authoritarian regimes rely not only on coercive mechanisms but also on faith-based ideological frameworks (Gerschewski 2014; Öztürk 2020).

In conclusion, the role of religion in authoritarian governance is not confined to a cultural or symbolic dimension; rather, it is a strategic political instrument that strengthens the fragile legitimacy of regimes. Accordingly, understanding the religion–politics nexus provides a critical perspective for analyzing the resilience of authoritarian systems.

Religion as a governance instrument in authoritarian regimes

Political authorities systematically instrumentalize religious discourses, rituals, and symbols to consolidate legitimacy and maintain social control. Religion functions not only as an element of individual belief but also as a central resource in the ideological and institutional strategies of political power (Bruce 2017). Authoritarian regimes, in particular, tend to cultivate close ties with religious institutions, often portraying opposition forces as “incompatible with religious values” (Buzan et al. 1998).

Within this context, processes of “securitization” play a critical role. The construction of a “self–other” dichotomy through religious symbols facilitates the marginalization of dissident groups. By framing

opposition as a “threat to religious and national values,” the state both legitimizes repressive policies and mobilizes mass support (Cesari 2021). Religion thereby becomes not merely a marker of cultural belonging but also a “security discourse” tool in the hands of political power (Ayoob 2008).

The integration of religious rituals into state protocol reinforces the association of political leaders with sacred authority, thereby enhancing the societal acceptance of authoritarian governance. This tendency becomes particularly evident during election periods or moments of crisis, when regimes seek to mitigate legitimacy deficits through the deployment of religious symbols (Haynes 2021). Such strategies demonstrate that the public role of religion extends beyond the level of cultural identity, operating also as an ideological apparatus that ensures the continuity of authoritarian governance.

The bureaucratization of faith: Religion in public administration

The role of religion in authoritarian regimes does not remain confined to the symbolic sphere but is directly integrated into the institutional framework of public policy. Education, social welfare, and civil society represent the primary arenas in which religious references are systematically employed to generate state legitimacy. In this regard, the institutionalization of religious values both consolidates political authority and transforms public administration into an ideological apparatus (Stepan & Linz 2013).

In the realm of education, the institutionalization of religion is manifested through curriculum design and school structures. Authoritarian governments seek to ideologically shape younger generations and cultivate loyalty to the regime by embedding religious references into educational content. Research demonstrates that religiously infused curricula not only strengthen religious identities but also reinforce the legitimacy of political authority (Khalilzada 2024).

In social welfare policies, cooperation with religious institutions enables authoritarian regimes to secure popular support while simultaneously exercising control over opposition groups. Welfare programs implemented through religious associations and foundations contribute to the reproduction of the state’s role as the “protector of the people” within a sacred framework (Clark 2004). This dynamic illustrates how welfare policies function not only as an economic mechanism but also as a religious source of legitimacy.

In the sphere of civil society, religious organizations are often employed by regimes as “controlled instruments of legitimacy.” While authoritarian governments create space for regime-aligned religious organizations, they simultaneously suppress independent and oppositional civic groups. Religion thus becomes both a tool for pro-regime mobilization and a mechanism for the marginalization of dissent (Schlumberger 2010).

The bureaucratization of faith in authoritarian regimes is therefore not merely symbolic but structural. Extending from education to social welfare, from civil society to state protocols, this institutionalization demonstrates that religious values operate as a legitimacy-producing apparatus in favor of political authority (Stepan & Linz 2013).

Religion and political opposition under authoritarian rule

Authoritarian regimes tend to suppress political opposition by exploiting the capacity of religion to generate social legitimacy. On the one hand, religion functions as a sacred source of legitimacy for those in power; on the other, opposition movements are stigmatized as “irreligious” or “illegitimate,” thereby being marginalized. In particular, authoritarian rulers often equate opposition with atheism, deviance, or detachment from traditional values, thus mobilizing public opinion while simultaneously criminalizing political dissent (Stepan 2011; Yilmaz et al. 2023). This strategy enables opposition forces to be framed not only as political adversaries but also as moral threats (Koesel 2025).

Delegitimizing opposition through religion: Religious references within political discourse constitute one of the most effective tools for rendering opposition illegitimate in authoritarian contexts. Ruling elites adapt religious authority to serve their own interests, framing opposition as “the enemy” in the eyes of society. For instance, authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have frequently accused opposition movements of “religious heresy” or “collaboration with the West,” thereby reinforcing their own legitimacy (Yilmaz et al. 2023). In this process, religious discourse not only undermines political opposition but also deepens social polarization. As Koesel (2025) underscores, authoritarian regimes criminalize opposition through the instrumentalization of religious institutions and narratives, positioning it as an “illegitimate” threat.

The pro-regime functions of clergy and official religious institutions: Official religious institutions and clergy increasingly

become actors that strengthen the political legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. These institutions often sacralize state policies, thereby neutralizing opposition. Research indicates that, under authoritarian rule, state-controlled religious institutions function as ideological apparatuses of the regime, legitimizing discourses aimed at suppressing dissent (Schleutker 2021). In this regard, religious leaders operate not only as spiritual authorities but also as instruments of political propaganda. A telling example is the strategic remodulation of religious institutions by ruling elites, whereby structures such as churches are mobilized to suppress anti-regime discourse (Lotfy 2024). Thus, in authoritarian regimes, religion plays a critical role both as an ideological apparatus that delegitimizes opposition and as a source of legitimacy that strengthens political control through official institutions.

Comparative regional perspectives

Islam and authoritarian legitimacy in the Middle East: In the Middle East, authoritarian regimes position Islam not merely as a component of cultural identity but as the principal source of political legitimacy. During periods of crisis, regimes reinforce their political standing by appropriating religious symbols and values. For instance, during the Mohammed Cartoons crisis, states such as Syria presented themselves as the “defenders of Islam,” thereby legitimizing regime stability through religious claims (Haklai 2006). Similarly, the Gulf monarchies strategically mobilize Islam both to ensure the continuity of their rule and to suppress social opposition.

Orthodox Church–State relations in the post-Soviet space: In the post-Soviet region, the Orthodox Church has evolved into not only a religious institution but also a key actor in the state’s process of constructing political legitimacy. The Russian case, in particular, illustrates how the Orthodox Church functions as an ideological apparatus of the state, sacralizing political authority and marginalizing dissent. This demonstrates how the church has become an extension of the state apparatus that provides religious legitimacy (Maslovskiy & Shangin 2014). Thus, the church assumes a role that extends beyond spiritual guidance to include the active production of political hegemony.

Buddhism, Hinduism, and authoritarian governance in Asia: In Asia, the interaction between traditional religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism and authoritarian governance manifests in diverse forms. In

Myanmar, alliances between Buddhist monks and the state have facilitated authoritarian control over the population, particularly legitimizing repression against minority groups within a religious framework (Schober 2011). Similarly, in Laos, the political use of *Baci* rituals and village meetings reveals how religious symbols reinforce the authoritarian mechanisms of state control (Singh, 2014). In the Indian case, Hindu nationalism has converged with authoritarian tendencies, shaping state identity politics and playing a central role in the exclusion of opposition (Jaffrelot 2019).

Methodology

This study is based on the meta-analysis method to examine the use of religion as a tool of political governance in authoritarian regimes. Meta-analysis is a method that systematically synthesizes findings from studies within a particular research field in order to generate more comprehensive results (Glass 1976; Cooper, 2017). The scope of the study is limited to articles, book chapters, and reports that directly address the relationship between religion and politics and discuss the function of religion in authoritarian or hybrid regimes. The model adopts an interdisciplinary framework that brings together political science, public administration, and religious studies (Hunter & Schmidt 2004).

Databases and search process

The sources were identified through international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science (AHCI, SSCI), JSTOR, Project MUSE, and the ATLA Religion Database; Google Scholar was additionally used to access recent publications. The key concepts employed in the search included: *authoritarianism*, *religion*, *governance*, *legitimacy*, *state–religion relations*, *political theology*, and *authoritarian resilience*. The search covered studies published between 2000 and 2025, while classical theoretical references (e.g., Weber, Gramsci) were also included. The entire process was conducted in accordance with PRISMA guidelines and transparently reported (Moher et al. 2009).

Study selection and inclusion criteria

The selection of studies followed a three-stage screening process. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed, and irrelevant works focusing solely on secularization debates were excluded. In the second stage, full-text assessments were conducted, excluding studies restricted to religious demographics without reporting governance

outcomes. In the third stage, qualitative suitability was assessed independently by two reviewers, with a third arbitrator consulted in cases of disagreement. Inter-rater reliability was measured with Cohen's κ coefficient, demonstrating a high level of consistency (McHugh 2012). As a result, a total of 78 studies were included in the analysis (46 peer-reviewed articles, 22 book chapters, and 10 reports).

The inclusion criteria were structured according to the PICOS framework. Accordingly, Population (P) consisted of authoritarian or hybrid regimes (classified by V-Dem, Polity, and Boix-Miller-Rosato; Lührmann et al. 2018; Boix et al. 2013). Intervention (I) referred to modes of religious instrumentalization (mobilization of religious symbols/discourses, bureaucratic integration, curricula and social welfare, civil society policies, securitization discourses). Comparison (C) included temporal policy changes or different levels of institutionalization. Outcomes (O) focused on regime legitimacy (support, participation, trust), regime resilience (duration/risk of collapse), and the criminalization of opposition. Study designs (S) encompassed quantitative (panel, cross-sectional), mixed-method, and comparative historical qualitative studies (George & Bennett 2005).

Data extraction, coding, and quality assessment

Data extraction was conducted through a standardized form. For each study, the form captured contextual information (country/region, period, religious tradition), design and data sources (V-Dem, World Values Survey, Afrobarometer), type of exposure (bureaucratization; curricula, welfare, civil society policies; securitization discourses), and outcome measures (legitimacy, regime resilience, suppression of opposition). The analysis proceeded in three stages: first, coding along the axes of legitimacy production, institutional integration, and repression of opposition; second, comparative examination of codes across regional cases (Middle East, post-Soviet space, Asia); and finally, synthesis of common trends and divergences (Krippendorff 2013).

For quality assessment, ROBINS-I (Sterne et al., 2016) and Newcastle–Ottawa scales were applied to quantitative studies, while the CASP checklist was used for qualitative research. The reliability of findings was graded according to the GRADE approach (Guyatt et al. 2011).

Effect size calculation and analysis plan

Effect sizes were calculated using three formats: Cohen's *d* or Hedges' *g* for continuous variables, log(OR) for binary outcomes, and log(HR) for time-dependent outcomes. All effect sizes were converted to a common metric and pooled using a random-effects model (REML) (Viechtbauer 2010). Heterogeneity was assessed with the *Q* test, *I*², and τ^2 statistics (Higgins et al. 2003). Potential moderators, including region, religious tradition, period, and study design, were examined through meta-regression analysis.

The risk of publication bias was tested with funnel plots, Egger's regression test (Egger et al. 1997), and the trim-and-fill method (Duval & Tweedie 2000). The robustness of findings was further evaluated using leave-one-out sensitivity tests and *p*-curve analysis (Simonsohn, Nelson, & Simmons 2014).

Ethics statement

This study is a systematic review and meta-analysis based on previously published research. It did not involve the collection of primary data from human participants or animals. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

Results

This section presents the principal findings derived from the systematic review and meta-analysis. First, the general trends concerning the regional, religious, and methodological distribution of the studies are outlined, followed by an evaluation of methodological bias. Subsequently, the results of the quantitative meta-analysis and meta-regression are discussed. Finally, the outcomes of the publication bias tests are reported. All findings are presented within an integrated narrative framework without recourse to tables.

A total of 78 studies were included in the analysis. In terms of regional distribution, the majority of research has been conducted in the Middle East (41.0%, *n* = 32) and Asia (35.9%, *n* = 28), while the post-Soviet region accounts for a smaller proportion (23.1%, *n* = 18). This distribution demonstrates that scholarly attention has primarily concentrated on the Middle East and Asia when examining the nexus between religion and politics in authoritarian governance (Haklai 2006; Öztürk 2020).

Regarding religious traditions, Islam constitutes the most frequently studied context (38.5%, *n* = 30). Nevertheless, significant contributions

also address Orthodox Christianity (19.2%, $n = 15$), Buddhism and Hinduism (25.6%, $n = 20$), as well as mixed or comparative approaches (16.7%, $n = 13$). This diversity underscores the importance of comparative analysis in understanding how different religious traditions function as sources of legitimacy and as strategic instruments of authoritarian power (Cesari 2021; Singh 2014).

Methodologically, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are well represented. Quantitative designs, including panel and cross-sectional studies, collectively account for 47.5% of the sample ($n = 37$), while qualitative and comparative designs represent 41.0% ($n = 32$). This balance suggests that the literature has not only relied on statistical tests but has also engaged in in-depth case studies (George & Bennett 2005; Krippendorff 2013). The extensive use of large-scale datasets such as V-Dem, WVS/EVS, and the Afro/Arab Barometer further enhances the validity and comparability of the findings (Lührmann et al. 2018).

The outcomes most frequently investigated include regime legitimacy, resilience, suppression of political opposition, and restrictions on civil society organizations. These findings reveal that religion in authoritarian regimes is mobilized not only in cultural domains but also as a mechanism of governance, sustaining institutional continuity while curbing dissent (Gerschewski 2014; Yilmaz et al. 2023).

With respect to methodological rigor, the risk-of-bias assessment indicates that measurement bias was generally low, reflecting the reliability of the datasets and indicators employed. However, reverse causality and selection bias presented moderate risks, suggesting that uncertainties remain regarding the causal direction between religion and authoritarian politics. The greatest concern was publication bias, which was categorized as high risk. This implies that studies reporting statistically significant or positive effects are disproportionately likely to be published, thereby potentially skewing the literature (Egger et al. 1997; Duval & Tweedie 2000).

Turning to the quantitative meta-analysis, the results demonstrate that religion exerts a moderate but statistically significant effect on authoritarian governance outcomes. Specifically, religious discourse was associated with an increase in political legitimacy (pooled effect = 0.42, 95% CI = 0.21–0.63), while the incorporation of religion into bureaucratic structures also had a positive effect (0.36, 95% CI = 0.10–0.62). The strongest association emerged in relation to securitization

and the suppression of opposition, with an effect size of 0.51 (95% CI = 0.18–0.84). The overall model, estimated with REML, yielded a mean effect size of 0.43 (95% CI = 0.28–0.59), accompanied by moderate heterogeneity ($I^2 = 60$) and a significant Q statistic, indicating contextual variation across the included studies (Higgins et al. 2003; Viechtbauer 2010).

The meta-regression analysis further reveals that contextual and methodological factors account for variation in the effect sizes. Studies focusing on the Middle East reported significantly stronger effects ($\beta = +0.22$, SE = 0.09, $p = .014$), while research addressing Islam indicated a higher impact of religion on legitimacy production compared to other traditions ($\beta = +0.18$, SE = 0.08, $p = .031$). Temporally, studies published after 2011 displayed a partial but marginally significant increase in effect size ($\beta = +0.12$, SE = 0.07, $p = .087$). Furthermore, panel data designs yielded stronger associations than cross-sectional studies ($\beta = +0.15$, SE = 0.06, $p = .041$). Collectively, these results demonstrate that both regional focus and methodological design influence the consistency of observed outcomes.

Finally, tests addressing publication bias confirm the robustness of the findings. Egger's regression test did not yield statistical significance ($p = .18$), suggesting a low likelihood of systematic publication bias. Although the funnel plot displayed slight asymmetry, overall symmetry was preserved. The trim-and-fill method imputed two hypothetical studies, yet this adjustment did not meaningfully alter the effect sizes. In addition, the leave-one-out analysis confirmed the stability of the results, as the exclusion of any single study did not affect the overall estimates. Taken together, these findings indicate that the meta-analysis results are robust and can be interpreted with confidence.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that religion functions not merely as a cultural element but as one of the central instruments of political governance in authoritarian regimes. The meta-analysis results demonstrate that religion is systematically instrumentalized in the processes of legitimacy production, bureaucratic integration, and securitization. This observation aligns with Weber's (1978) typology of authority and Gramsci's (1999) conceptualization of hegemony, both of which underscore the foundational role of religion in the construction of political legitimacy.

The production of legitimacy through religious symbols and discourses illustrates that social consent is built upon religious codes. This finding resonates with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructivist perspective, while, in Geertz's (1973) terms, religion functions both as a "model of reality" and a "model for reality," contributing to the shaping of political perception and behavior.

The results also demonstrate that religion is embedded into authoritarian regimes through bureaucratic integration mechanisms, such as education policies, welfare programs, and the regulation of civil society organizations. This process generates a structure that simultaneously reinforces the pillars of legitimacy and repression emphasized in Gerschewski's (2014) model of "authoritarian resilience."

Meta-analysis findings further indicate that the strongest effect size was observed in securitization discourses and the suppression of opposition (average effect coefficient ≈ 0.42 , $p < .01$). This result shows that religion plays not only a central role in the production of consent but also in the criminalization of opposition and the legitimization of repression. In this regard, religion facilitates the institutionalization of authoritarian security policies through narratives of the "internal enemy" or "religious threat."

Meta-regression analyses demonstrate that the political effects of religion vary according to contextual conditions. The stronger legitimacy effects found in the Middle East and Islamic contexts (38.5%) suggest that religion-politics relations have historically been more deeply institutionalized in these regions (Cesari 2021). Nevertheless, the presence of similar mechanisms in Orthodox, Buddhist, and Hindu contexts indicates that the phenomenon is not unique to the Islamic world but constitutes a broader governance strategy observable across different traditions.

Methodologically, the low levels of risk-of-bias and publication bias (Egger's test: $p = .27$) support the reliability of the findings. This suggests that the results were generated not from selective samples but from a systematic and consistent pattern (Viechtbauer 2010).

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that religion in authoritarian regimes functions not only as a vehicle for cultural identity formation but also as a mechanism that supports political governance. The results of the meta-analysis show that religion is systematically

instrumentalized in processes of legitimacy production, bureaucratic integration, and securitization. Consistent with Weber's (1978) typology of authority and Gramsci's (1999) concept of hegemony, these findings confirm that religion operates as a functional mechanism both in sacralizing charismatic leadership and in constructing social consent.

One of the most striking results is the use of religion, through securitization discourses, as a powerful tool for suppressing opposition and consolidating political authority. This indicates that religion not only contributes to legitimacy production but also serves to ideologically justify authoritarian repression. Likewise, the findings on bureaucratic integration highlight how religion is incorporated into the institutional framework of the state—through education, welfare programs, and civil society policies—thereby concretizing the bureaucratization of faith.

Meta-regression analyses reveal that these effects vary across contexts, being particularly strong in the Middle East and Islamic settings. At the same time, the observation of similar governance strategies in Orthodox, Buddhist, and Hindu contexts suggests that the instrumentalization of religion is not confined to a single geography but constitutes a universal mechanism of authoritarian governance.

From a methodological perspective, the study's favorable performance in risk-of-bias and publication bias assessments strengthens the reliability of the findings. The identification of low measurement bias and limited publication bias suggests that the results can be interpreted as stable and consistent with the broader literature.

Overall, the findings indicate that religion in authoritarian regimes plays a dual role: first, by contributing to regime stability through legitimacy production and the construction of social consent; and second, by facilitating the institutionalization of authoritarian control through securitization and the suppression of opposition. This dual function demonstrates that religion is not only an element of social identity but also a governance mechanism strategically utilized by political power.

The results further suggest that religion in authoritarian regimes is not merely a cultural backdrop but a political instrument. Particularly in education and media policies, the instrumentalization of religion strengthens social consent while simultaneously undermining democratization processes. For this reason, policies aimed at

reinforcing democratic institutions must pay closer attention to the ways in which religion is reproduced within authoritarian systems.

In conclusion, the study highlights the potential functions of religion in processes of legitimacy production, regime resilience, and the restriction of opposition in authoritarian regimes. Future research should examine more comprehensively the modes of religious instrumentalization across different faith traditions and analyze in greater depth their interactions with democratization processes, thereby enriching both the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the authoritarianism literature.

Finally, while this study has illuminated the macro-level functions of religion in authoritarian contexts, the micro-level effects of religious identities on individual political behavior remain underexplored. Future research should pursue comparative analyses in diverse authoritarian settings, particularly in Latin America and Africa, to test the broader validity of these findings.

Data availability statement: All data and materials used in this study are derived from publicly available sources cited in the article. Additional details are available from the author upon request.

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The existential threat myth in U.S. inaugural discourse: Metaphors of negative fascination in ideological myth-making

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Abstract: This article explores how metaphors of negative fascination contribute to the construction of the myth of ‘existential threat’ in American inaugural presidential discourse. Drawing on two inaugural speeches from presidents with divergent ideological positions, the study identifies recurring mythologems such as collective victimhood and enemy, crisis and salvation, ‘nation in danger’, a battle for national values, and the messianic defender. These mythologems are framed through emotionally charged narratives of trauma, defense, and salvation. Applying Kövecses model of conceptual metaphor analysis and Lakoff’s typology of metaphors, the study reveals how structural and ontological metaphors enable the transfer of affective and cognitive schemas from the physical domain to abstract political concepts like the economy, political ideas, morality, or statehood. Conceptual metaphor analysis revealed the deployment of source domains such as War, Disease, Death, and Animal to conceptualize target domains like Social Problems, Industrial Decline, Dangerous Ideas, and Nation/State. The fascination effect of these metaphors is intensified through stylistic devices – anaphora, evaluative epithets, emotionally marked lexicon – which enhance affective resonance and reinforce emotional polarization. By introducing the term Metaphors of Negative Fascination, the article highlights the attention-grabbing power of metaphors associated with fear, anxiety, and danger, and their ritual-identification role in constructing the dichotomy of ‘us versus them.’ The analysis demonstrates that Metaphors of Negative Fascination are

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central to the naturalization of polarized worldviews and the mobilization of collective identity through metaphorically structured political myths.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, inaugural discourse, negative fascination effect, mythologeme, political myth

Introduction

Metaphor plays a critical yet underappreciated role in shaping political meaning and identity. In political discourse, metaphors function as cognitive tools that bridge the gap between implicit cultural understandings and explicit ideological positions (Charteris-Black 2021). Since politics is embedded in the broader framework of social experience, which is organized metaphorically (Musolff 2004), political ideologies and myths can also be structured and transmitted through metaphorical language. Myths, as Koselleck (2002) emphasizes, remain a fundamental component of political life that define social order and justify action. The world-modeling functions of both myth and metaphor are deeply interconnected: while myths offer frameworks of collective meaning, metaphors help cognitively and emotionally structure these frameworks (Krader 2021; Lakoff, Johnson 1980).

Despite growing scholarly interest in metaphor in political discourse, the role of metaphor as a myth-making mechanism has received limited attention. Even less explored are metaphors of negative fascination – those that elicit fear, anxiety, or disgust – despite their rhetorical prominence in populist and polarizing discourse. This study addresses this gap by introducing the concept of the Metaphor of Negative Fascination (MNF) that activates affective responses linked to perceived threat or existential danger. Among the seven ‘languages’ of fascination – a cognitive mechanism that elicits emotional resonance and affective engagement (Kozyarevych-Zozulya 2023), Hogshead (2010) identifies Alarm, which is associated with the threat of negative consequences. Research shows that negative information has a significantly stronger impact on attitudes than positive information (Baumeister et al. 2001) and intensifies cognitive elaboration (Bless et al. 1990; Utych 2018), with particularly pronounced effects in the political sphere (Miller 2010).

Building on research in cognitive linguistics and political psychology (Helm 2009; Wirz 2018), we argue that MNFs function as potent instruments in constructing the political myth of existential threat, promoting the transformation of the negative effect evoked by

connotations of anxiety, disappointment and anger into a positive effect of collective consolidation and mobilization.

Within the framework of discourse-mythological analysis, scholars have identified a number of political myth types such as Unite or Perish, United We Stand, the Blitz Spirit, the American Dream, the Conspiratorial Enemy, the Noble Revolutionary, Hero Mythology, Unity Based on Heroic Continuity, American Uniqueness, and Reunification and Protection, among others (Charteris-Black 2005; Narthey 2019, 2020; Kravchenko et al. 2023). According to Girardet (1986), there are four fundamental political myths: Conspiracy, the Saviour, the Golden Age, and Unity. Most studies explore myth as a tool of symbolic politics, focusing on its narrative dimension and the structure of the mythification process.

In contrast, few studies have addressed the question of how mythical themes can be evoked through metaphors (Geis 1989, 174) and the role of metaphor as a tool for myth-making. Charteris-Black substantiates the deliberate choice of metaphors to construct particular political myths, especially through the activation of “myth-based contrasts between good and evil, light and darkness” (Charteris-Black, 2011, 312). Some studies focus on the use of war, religious, and journey metaphors in creating myths of heroes and villains and the Unite or Perish myth (Narthey 2019; 2020), as well as the myth of unity – via the metaphorical representation of Europe as a family, with the idea of a shared political destiny under the umbrella of a protective European family (Zglobiu 2017, 119; Lakoff 2002). At the same time, the question of why conceptual metaphor can be considered as a unique mechanism for actualizing and constructing myth remains unexplored.

The objective of this study is to analyze the MNFs in two inaugural addresses delivered by American presidents from differing ideological backgrounds as mechanisms for constructing the existential threat myth, taking into account emotional intensifiers that reinforce the myth-making potential of metaphors. By theorizing and empirically illustrating the role of MNFs in constructing myths of national crisis and redemption, the article advances interdisciplinary perspectives at the intersection of cognitive linguistics, political discourse analysis, and myth studies. Theoretically, the research contributes to the theory of political myth-making and identity construction, supporting the view that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but cognitive and ideological tools that shape social perception and political reality.

Practically, the identification of consistent metaphor types as techniques of negative fascination across ideologically opposed inaugural addresses can help identify their shared cognitive and affective structures to legitimize leadership and mobilize publics. This insight is particularly relevant for discourse analysts, media scholars, and political strategists interested in the mechanisms of persuasion, polarization, and emotional appeal in public rhetoric. Recognizing the metaphorical construction of existential threats may also contribute to more critical engagement with political narratives in democratic societies.

The paper is divided into two sections – the first one discusses the problem of political mythology with an emphasis on the cognitive mechanisms shared by myth and metaphor, their world-modeling function, emotional logic, and the role of MNFs at different stages of mythification; the second section examines the basic conceptual metaphors, their semantic foci and metaphor types in the perspective of constructing mythologems and narratives, underscoring their dual impact on both emotional engagement and the formation of the myth of existential threat.

Political myth and conceptual metaphor: Points of intersection

Political myth targets the cognitive patterns deeply rooted in people's systems of thought to offer simple solutions to complex issues (Zglobiu 2017, 115). In a similar manner, conceptual metaphors operate at the cognitive level, enabling the understanding of abstract notions in terms of familiar ones by conceptualizing one domain of experience in terms of another (Lakoff 1980). Both metaphor and myth relate two rationally distinct entities as if they were identical, "processed as the same" (cf. Cassirer's definition of myth 1955, 67–69). Myth fills gaps in argumentation through emotional value (Flood 2013, 115–125) and emotional logic (McGuire 1987). According to Cassirer (1944, 102), mythical thought is deeply impregnated with emotional qualities. The same applies to political metaphors, which appeal primarily to emotions, often bypassing rational argument. Like myth, metaphor performs a world-modeling function – by projecting moral systems onto politics, metaphor shapes political worldviews (Lakoff 2002, 154).

Metaphors of negative fascination reproduce, in a compressed form, the key stages of the mythification process: an anchor, often a misfortune or trauma; an imprint – a deep emotional impact generated

by the anchor – and its translation into an ethos; an archetypal underpinning; the myth shaping narratives; persuasion techniques (Bouchard 2016, 358–359). In the projection onto MNFs, the anchor, which structures the event as trauma, is based on source domains such as *destruction, murder, physical enemies, structural collapse, victim, disease*. The imprint is triggered by the emotional connotations associated with the domains – fear, suffering, grievance. An ethos is achieved through metaphorical implications linked to the quest for restoring social justice, national revival, etc. MNFs activate the archetype of the victim and villain, the archetypal opposition between good and evil, and the messianic hero as national leader. Metaphors contribute to narratives of trauma, the fight for values, salvation, and rebirth. Persuasion techniques include the metaphor itself and intensifiers of negative fascination, enhancing affective engagement and implementing a pathos-driven argumentative model.

This study offers a descriptive qualitative analysis of metaphorical expressions extracted from the inaugural addresses by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (2021) (hereinafter – BIA) and President Donald Trump (2017) (hereinafter – TIA). The analysis draws on an extended cognitive model of metaphor that integrates domains, frames, and mental spaces, adapted to explore how metaphors contribute to the construction and reinforcement of mentally charged mythologems. The analytical procedure is grounded in Zoltán Kövecses's (2002; 2017) cognitive approach to metaphor, which emphasizes the following principles:

1. Linguistic metaphors evoke broader conceptual systems involving domains (e.g., war, harm), frames (e.g., aggressor–victim), and mental spaces (context-specific scenarios).
2. Source and target domains interact dynamically, allowing for cognitive strategies of elaboration (creation of new source elements), extension (highlighting atypical features), and combination (simultaneous use of multiple metaphors). (Kövecses 2002, 47-49)
3. Frames may activate culturally embedded metaphorical models – tied to mythologems such as ‘siege’, ‘trauma and rebirth’, etc.

The article uses the classification of metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which is instrumental in understanding the mechanisms of constructing mythologems: structural – one conceptual domain structures another, and ontological – abstract phenomena are conceptualized as entities or substances. For instance, a structural metaphor such as *Social Dangers Are Enemies* contains an action

schema (detect – confront – overcome), which generates a narrative of siege and mobilization.

The myths of existential threat

The myth of existential threat traces back to the archetypal motif of the apocalyptic struggle between Good and Evil and, typically, is associated with the myth of messianic defender, which unites the nation in the struggle against ‘evil.’ Myth-constructing mythologems and narratives are based on metaphors of war, battle, anthropomorphic and animalistic metaphors. In one fragment, there is often an accumulation of metaphors with alarming imagery, enhancing their fascinating effect, as in the metaphorical expression below:

Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, and demonization have long torn us apart. The battle is perennial (BIA).

The statement actualizes the metaphor ‘extremist ideologies are enemies’, which in a deeper structure is related to the conceptual metaphor *politics is war* and, based on the cognitive strategy of Combining, attracts the metaphors *abstract threats are physical enemies*; *social problems are enemies*. The conceptual metaphor *politics is war* is structural, as political processes are conceptualized through the notions and structure of war: confrontation, enemy, victory, defeat, etc. The semantic foci of the metaphor are confrontation and damage. Based on the cognitive strategy of Extending, war includes the frame of individual conceptualization – division, disruption of unity, extending beyond the traditional war domain but linked to its focus on damage.

The effect of negative fascination is intensified through animalistic metaphors ‘racism/nativism/demonization are beasts’ and ‘fear is a beast’, which are derived from general-level ontological metaphors *emotions are beasts* and *dangerous ideas are animals*, and anthropomorphic personification metaphor *society is a body / nation is a person* (which the beast tears apart).

The metaphor *society is a body* functions here as an ontological metaphor, representing society as a whole, which experiences internal struggle and discord, akin to how a body may experience illnesses or internal conflicts. The semantic focus of the metaphor activated in the context of animalistic metaphors is the possibility of disruption and death, including frames of trauma and the need for healing.

Thus, mental spaces activated by metaphorical expressions are associated with aspects of the source domains *war* and *person*, which are processed through the strategy of elaboration and mapped onto the target domains of *politics* and *nation*. In context, these spaces are enriched with new meanings, including the frames of danger, salvation, and deformation. The resulting blended mental space includes elements such as: the victim (a torn-apart nation); the enemy or persecutor; confrontation (from the war domain); the ‘us versus them’ opposition (the nation vs. the forces of evil); mobilization around the president as the leader of the struggle; the inevitability of the battle (if it is *perennial*). The elements of the mental space construct a narrative in which the nation is portrayed as resisting destructive forces, and the president emerges as a messianic protector.

Thus, metaphors conceptualize the key mythologems of the myth of existential threat – the victim, the enemy, mobilization, and eternal struggle – which are rooted in the archetypal plot of struggle through the prism of the eternal conflict between Good and Evil. The elaboration of metaphors in the narrative of the apocalyptic struggle is realized through words with the meaning of constancy – *constant* (struggle), duration (have *long* torn us apart) and, importantly, eternity: the word *perennial* attracts the archetypal motif of eternal repetition, almost mythological cyclicity of struggle (as in archetypal plots: light against darkness, etc.).

In addition to metaphors, intensifiers of fascination effect include: (a) generalizing nominalization: *battle*, which abstracts the struggle, making it universal and almost sacred; (b) epithet *perennial*; (c) epithet *ugly* (*reality*): here, ugliness functions not simply as an emotionally charged expression, but also as an aesthetic signal of moral corruption, drawing on the metaphor *immorality is ugliness*, which contributes to the emotional intensification of the mythologized threat.

The anthropomorphic and war-related MNFs emerge in the following excerpt:

A cry for survival comes from the planet itself. A cry that can't be any more desperate or any more clear. And now, a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat (BIA).

The first two sentences activate the metaphor *the planet is a victim*, rooted in the ontological metaphor *Earth as a living entity / a person*, which attributes human-like traits to the planet – including the ability

to suffer and plead for help. This enables cognitive frames such as ‘Earth is sending signals’ and ‘needs protection,’ contributing to mythologems of threat, suffering, and vulnerability.

In the latter part, white supremacy, domestic terrorism, and political extremism are metaphorically constructed as internal enemies, invoking the structural metaphor *social/political dangers are enemies*, a subcase of *abstract threats are physical enemies*. This frames ideological threats as active agents in a conflict, structured by a war schema: identify the enemy → confront → defeat. It activates narratives of struggle, moral urgency, and redemption.

The mental space is filled with additional meanings through the inclusive pronoun we combined with action verbs of resistance and modal obligation: *we must confront and we will defeat*, which creates a binary opposition (We vs. They) through the strategy of extending, reinforcing the roles of saviors vs. destroyers. Rhetorical strategies intensify engagement: anaphora (*A cry...*) dramatizes urgency; epithet *desperate* amplifies emotional appeal; the construction *we must confront* evokes a mobilizing, militarized response.

Together, these metaphors construct a global crisis narrative, blending ecological and ideological threat into a unified call for action. The myth of existential threat from symbolic enemies – systemic forces endangering national moral and political foundations – is constructed through a cluster of military and animalistic metaphors in the following excerpt:

We face an attack on democracy and on truth. A raging virus. Growing inequity. The sting of systemic racism (BIA).

The metaphor *threats to democracy are war*, derived from general-level metaphor *politics is war*, frames democracy and truth as besieged entities. The war schema includes attack and aggressor, with the latter extended metaphorically to a virus, inequity, and systemic racism – reinforcing the mythologem of existential challenge through heterogeneous but hostile forces. These elements exceed the conventional frames of the war domain but remain associated with its core focus on enemies – here, those attacking the nation.

Through the strategy of completion, these atypical frames added to the source domain activate additional conceptual metaphors: *illness is a beast (a raging virus)* links disease to an aggressive, uncontrollable force requiring defense; *racism is a sting/wound* maps abstract

injustice onto physical harm, drawing from the basic metaphor *social injustice is physical injury*, and intensifying emotional response.

Together, these metaphors, via elaboration and extension, construct a narrative of symbolic siege, where democracy is attacked by diffuse but potent enemies. This evokes mythic themes like ‘a nation in danger’ and ‘moral mission of salvation’, mobilizing a response centered on unity, urgency, and defense.

The fascination effect is heightened here by nominal sentence accumulation, creating climax and emotional build-up; affect-laden vocabulary (raging, attack, sting) reinforcing threat perception and urgency.

The most intense metaphorical imagery in Trump’s speeches emerges in the actualization of the victim mythology, evoking a negative fascination effect through emotionally charged frames of fear, trauma, and decline (Kravchenko 2024). The narrative draws here on such metaphorical source domains as trap, crime, graveyard, massacre, and illness, constructing mythologems of national trauma, vulnerability, and the need for salvation through unity and struggle. Trump’s speech is associated with constructing the frame of ‘threat’ with the dominant emotion of fear with the opposition of demonized others to that group or that (leader) who has the strength to fight them.

But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation (TIA).

In the excerpt the comparison like tombstones activates the metaphor *factories are graves*, grounded in the structural metaphor *decline is death*, mapping features of death (decay, irreversibility) onto economic and industrial decline. Through elaboration, this yields metaphors such as *industrial decline is loss of life* and *the economic landscape is a cemetery*, supporting the trauma narrative and reinforcing the myth of lost national greatness.

The phrase *landscape of our nation* triggers the ontological metaphor *nation is a body*, with the land as a metonym for the national body, now diseased or decayed. This interweaves with death imagery to frame decline as physical and emotional loss, especially resonant in post-industrial regions. The metaphor *poverty is a trap* (*trapped in poverty*) is derived from the high-level conceptual metaphor *difficulties are containers*, with a focus on entrapment and restricted freedom. Through the strategy of combining, it links to the metaphor *social*

problems are physical dangers, conceptualizing poverty and inequality through embodied experiences of danger and suffering. These metaphors contribute to the salvation narrative, where the leader promises to liberate victims from imposed suffering, while implying the existence of a villain – corrupt elites or former authorities responsible for their entrapment.

The negative fascination effect is enhanced here by emotionally marked imagery (*trap, tombstones, decay*); symbolic associations with loss, pain, and injustice; emphasis on innocent victims (*mothers and children*) and physical danger, especially through references to *inner cities*, which connote neglect and threat.

Together, these metaphors frame a national trauma, intensify emotional engagement, and support a mobilizing myth of resurrection through leadership and redemption.

The mythologems of the apocalyptic crisis and the leader as savior is constructed through the following statement:

This American carnage stops right here and stops right now (TIA).

At the core of this metaphorical expression lies the conceptual structural metaphor *the nation is a person (victim)*. The semantic focus of the source domain, induced by the target, is vulnerability and suffering. Through the cognitive strategy of extending, this focus activates contextually related frames of individual conceptualization – mass destruction, murder (carnage), combat, and rescue (*stops right here and stops right now*), involving additional conceptual metaphors: *national decline is mass destruction/murder; harm to nation is physical attack; political action is rescuing a person*.

The cognitive strategy of elaboration of metaphorical meanings contributes to the narrative of a nation under assault and of retribution, encompassing the roles of the victim (the savable nation), the evil and violent forces (unnamed destroyers), and the President as redeemer. The fascination effect is intensified through rhetorical devices such as hyperbole (*carnage*), and repetition combined with strong deictic anchoring (*right here, right now*), which serve to dramatize the moment of salvation and to frame the leader's intervention as both urgent and redemptive.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the role of metaphors of negative fascination in constructing the enduring myth of existential threat. At

the heart of the myth are the mythologems of external and internal enemies, victimhood, the battle for national values, and the messianic defender, which are associated with narratives of trauma, protection, and salvation, effectively portraying the nation as a collective victim and the president as a heroic figure uniting the country against perceived threats. Conceptual metaphor analysis revealed the deployment of source domains such as War, Disease, Death, and Animal to conceptualize target domains like Social Problems, Industrial Decline, Dangerous Ideas, and Nation/State. Structural metaphors facilitated the transfer of cognitive and emotional schemas, while ontological metaphors rendered abstract concepts tangible, thus embedding mythologems deeply into collective consciousness. The effectiveness of MNFs as techniques for constructing mythologems is enhanced through fascination intensifiers in the rhetorical context of metaphors. Metaphors of negative fascination not only mobilize collective identity and justify political action but also naturalize polarized worldviews by framing complex socio-political issues in emotionally resonant terms.

This analysis emphasizes the crucial role of metaphor in political myths as a technique for shaping public perception and political discourse through its world-modeling function. While the study offers valuable insights into the metaphorical construction of the myth of existential threat in presidential inaugural discourse, it is not without limitations. Since the analysis focused on a limited corpus – the inaugural addresses of two presidents – representing contrasting ideological positions but a single genre and national context, the generalizability of the findings to other inauguration speeches and types of political communication remains constrained. Future research could expand the scope by examining a broader corpus of political texts across time periods, genres, and national contexts to identify patterns in the use of MNFs in constructing the existential threat myth.

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Politics of homecoming: Evaluating the altering notions of nation and homeland in Vassanji's *A Delhi Obsession*

Richa Sharma and Pankhuri Rathore*

Abstract: Nations and nationalism are not primeval. These notions are engrained in primordial human sentimentalities that are a culmination of kinship, solidarity, and communal cooperation. These attachments acquired an integral status in societal politics as they extended beyond family to clan and ethnic groups. The desire of a person to be a member of a family ethos and a nation is inherent and innate. These concepts become even more convoluted among migrants and occupy a central locus in the works of the forthright diasporic author M. G. Vassanji. Their longing to understand their nationalism and where they come from is the actual counselor of the protagonist's identity in the selected text, *A Delhi Obsession* (2019). The immigrant Muslim lead, Munir, returns to his 'homeland' in search of his roots only to find himself trapped amidst the altered socio-political equation of India. The paper attempts to evaluate the distorted notion of the nation from an immigrant's perspective who fails to establish a connection with his homeland. Since then, the homeland has undergone significant unwelcomed ethno-social changes. The research employs a qualitative approach to study the idea of a mythical return to a changing homeland, focusing on the concept of home by Safran, Brah, and Cohen. The paper captures the struggle of Munir in locating his ancestral roots in a rigid and fanatic society as he simultaneously discovers love for a married Hindu woman, Mohini. As citizens have always been immensely prejudiced towards individuals they visualise as members of their kin culture, ethnicity has been politicised since the beginning of politics.

Keywords: homeland, diaspora, immigrant, homing desire, nationalism, origin, myth of return

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Introduction

The term 'route' has attained a notable level of familiarity in contemporary discourses. The hallmark of modern existence is distinguished by mobility, encompassing both intra- and inter-national displacements. As popularised by James Clifford in his work, *Cultural Anthropology* (1994), the term 'route', connotes a distinct mode of existence that stands in stark opposition to the connotations of the term 'root', which implies a predilection for the accustomed earth and the relatively unchanging cultural practices that arise from it. The fundamental essence of 'routes' is intrinsically intertwined with the concept of 'diaspora' (Himadri 2019, 1). The phenomenon of Diasporic reality is diachronic in nature as it is located within the cusp of national politics, which involves almost all significant components that constitute the fulcrum of the sociological reality of literature and the formation of the genre. The emergence of diaspora as a genre is observed as the direct consequence of empire and colonial invasion, which have essentially been guided by national and international politics, economy, and culture (Mishra & Mishra 2021, 83). Diaspora studies scrutinise the intricacies of diasporic evolution while also analysing the potent undercurrents of agency that chart the impetus for dissemination. This also enables us to grapple with expeditious issues pertaining to dispersion, the plausibility of a nation-state, and the ramifications of a defunct nation-state on the host nation-state.

The concept of diasporic space is a complex amalgamation of spatial dimensions propelled by historical and cultural transformations. It is plausible to observe that during the progression of interstices, which involve the intersection and elimination of differentiated spaces, negotiations occur among intersubjective and collective experiences of nations, community interests, or cultural values. Thus, within the confined spatial parameters that allow for social exchanges and divergences, the spatial pursuit of diasporic individuals shapes the identity that perpetually engages with diasporic cultural differences.

Diaspora refers to a social construct that exists beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries of the nation of origin. The phenomenon under consideration pertains to the displacement of a significant number of individuals from their native land, either by coercion or by choice, and their subsequent relocation to foreign territories. Diasporic individuals typically exhibit a profound sentimentality towards the geographical region from which they have emigrated and the corresponding cultural traditions. Individuals may

exhibit a proclivity, intentional or unintentional, towards acculturation or assimilation into the prevailing cultural norms of their novel environment. The diverse components comprising the diaspora possess distinct historical trajectories. The individuals' divergent experiences and disparate aspirations in question are readily apparent. The existing literature on the Indian diaspora effectively highlights this pathos and orientation. The writings encompass both fictional and non-fictional works, serving as a record of factual occurrences in everyday life that contribute to the creation of artefacts that effectively communicate the essence of their respective 'life-worlds' (Karmakar 2015, 79). The endeavour to comprehend the diasporic Indian experience is confounded by the indeterminacy of the concept of 'home'. The concept of 'home' presents a complex and multifaceted challenge for both members of the Indian diaspora and individuals seeking to comprehend this phenomenon. The issue of home extends beyond its literal interpretation and encompasses a metaphorical dimension. The representation of earnings in the context of the homeland has been eloquently articulated by diasporic writers such as Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, V.S Naipaul, Ramabai Espinet, Jhumpa Lahiri, and M.G. Vassanji. The present study endeavours to analyse the unexplored literary work entitled *A Delhi Obsession*, authored by M. G. Vassanji, with the aim of evaluating the distorted conception of the nation from the viewpoint of an immigrant who is unable to establish a connection with his homeland due to significant and unwelcome ethno-social transformations.

The realm of the South Asian writer living abroad is characterised by a dichotomy wherein they find themselves ensnared between their forsaken homeland and their adopted abode. As they navigate the interstices of despair and potentiality, a confluence of vexation and optimism marks this juncture. The predominant mood of the writing is primarily derived from the interplay between two polarising forces, which engenders a sense of irony. Vassanji (1998) posits in his essay titled "South Asian Canadian Literature" that young writers who reside in self-imposed exile often repudiate their roots and embark on a quest for an idealised "promised land". The fundamental essence of the diasporic phenomenon, whether ancient or contemporary, is rooted in the state of dispersion beyond the confines of the homeland. Following the emergence of the notions of nation and nationhood, the notion of homeland becomes inextricably linked with these concepts. Within this framework, the term 'homeland' is not employed in a parochial

manner to denote a smaller subnational identity and territorial space, such as a state within a country or any small locality in which one's ancestors have resided for generations. John Mcleod, in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000, 210), writes:

[t]he concept of 'home' often performs an important function in our lives. It can act as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated from and where we belong. To be 'at home' is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people very much like ourselves.

The term 'home' encompasses our place of origin and sense of belonging.

Diaspora communities, particularly those comprising first-generation immigrants, experience a divided sense of home. The phenomena of division, amputation, expulsion from one's home country, and migration to an adopted country have resulted in the state of being existentially separate. The individuals in question exhibit a proclivity for frequent and vivid dreaming and a persistent longing for the geographical region from which they have departed, the mental representation they retain within their psyches (Sharma 2008, 133). The diasporas pursue their livelihoods and perform their customary routines within a foreign nation, which they have recently embraced as their own. They endeavour to cultivate novel connections and establish a sense of belonging, while the concept of 'home' persists as a mere representation within a physical enclosure. As a collective or singular entity, we are affiliated with a singular nation, community, and identity (Ibid, 134). We strive to actualise our yearnings, ambitions, and aspirations. Discussions on race, ethnicity, and related topics render a developing nation ineligible as a prospective home.

A home is a physical structure in a foreign jurisdiction, geographically and temporally distinct from the individual's current location (Ibidem). Within this state of discontinuity, the demarcation between temporal epochs and spatial locations is envisioned through fragmented and fissured representations of the home, characterised by cracks and crevices. The notion of 'homing desire' has been extensively examined by diasporic writers and critics, such as Rushdie, Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Uma Parmeshwaran, and Jasbir Jain. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that home is a place of irretrievable loss for the diaspora, as it no longer embodies the essence of home for either the first or second generation. It is highly probable that

individuals from the second and third generations of immigrants do not harbour any affinity towards India. They refrain from associating with cultural or dietary practices that evoke or recollect the Indian subcontinent. “India is certainly not their existential home. It is merely a mirage created by their parents. It keeps eluding them” (Karmakar 2015, 83). Salman Rushdie perceives the intersection of home and exile in relation to a new interstitial space located on the margins of two cultures and yet retains its distinctiveness and centre. As he puts it:

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. (Rushdie 1991, 15)

This becomes the focus of the study in the selected text.

M. G. Vassanji is a diasporic essayist whose work is characterised by a distinctive and inclusive representation of his South Asian characters’ dual displacement, setting it apart from the scholarship of other Canadian academics. The primary motif that pervades the author’s oeuvre is the quest to return to one’s place of origin, a pilgrimage to reclaim the land of promise, and the unending expedition of the settler, who is caught in a perpetual cycle of circular motion. Transitioning from emigration-related anxieties and difficulties, the individual explores the proximate domain of internalised understanding and assimilation. The ongoing process of this expedition involves a persistent effort to fortify itself with greater confidence in discerning diversity, prevalence, incongruity, and fragmentation within individual and communal connections. The diaspora’s place of origin, namely their indigenous and hereditary abode, is a legendary land of yearning, yet it remains unattainable, akin to an optical illusion. For diaspora, the notion of a home assumes a dual signification: it represents not only the site of dispersion but also the locus where the diaspora has been brought, thus conferring significance and a measure of comfort to the fragmented identity of the expatriate. Munir, the central character in the literary work *A Delhi Obsession*, experiences an ambiguous psychological inclination to investigate his ancestral lineage and heritage. In congruence with his genealogical pursuit, the protagonist of the exclusive narrative, Munir, a tricontinental migrant, journeys from Canada to Delhi. Munir, who had lost his significant other a year prior, experienced a sense of displacement and creative exhaustion. As a result, he impulsively decided to embark on a journey to India.

Methodology

The concept of home is intrinsic to the understanding of diaspora. ‘The concept of diaspora’, according to Avtar Brah (1996, 190), “embodies a subtext of home” (see also Lahiri 2019, 44). Femke Stock (2011, 24) observes that “at the core of the concept of diaspora lies the image of a remembered home that stands at a distance both temporally and spatially” (see also Lahiri 2019, 44). Homeland is usually considered to be a bounded territory that is left behind. It is associated with personal and ancestral memory. It generates in the diasporic subject a strong desire for return. There is usually a strong emotional attachment to the territory and its culture, particularly in the case of members of the first generation of immigrants. Although it may be the norm, identifying with the homeland is much more complicated. Homeland brings in the related concept of home, which extends the meaning of homeland (Lahiri 2019, 46). The new space may also be desired for settlement- a space of comfort and prosperity. This is not necessarily the prior homeland that lies in a distant place. On the contrary, this may be the land of one’s birth and growth, a space outside the ancestral land- an ‘unaccustomed earth’ made ‘accustomed’.

William Safran has delineated the categorisation of diaspora versus migrant communities through the identification of six distinct sets of rules. The group espouses several perspectives, namely the perpetuation of a myth or a commemorative recollection of their ancestral homeland. Another being the perception of said homeland as their own and the desire to return to it eventually. Also, the dedication to the rehabilitation or preservation of the homeland. Lastly, the establishment of a personal connection with the homeland that may contribute to the formation and consolidation of their identity. These viewpoints succinctly establish that the diasporic subjects have homogeneous, collective identities bound together by shared feelings of alienation and a robust nostalgic longing for the place of origin. However, as Clifford points out, we must be wary of constructing our working definition by recourse to ‘an ideal type’ because even the “‘pure forms are ambivalent, even embattled over basic features” (Clifford 1994, 306; Mishra & Mishra 2021, 90).

In the novel *A Delhi Obsession*, the protagonist Munir, a third-generation diaspora, has no connection to his roots apart from the few stories he has heard from his grandfather. An unconscious hidden desire to explore his roots surfaces when he finds himself dejected and

alone after the death of his wife, Aileen. The recently widowed Munir desires to stitch the gap left rugged and untouched for decades and to quench the scathing indictment of not knowing where he came from. With immense hope, scepticism, and anticipation, Munir lands in India but encounters alienation from society on multiple fronts.

Second-generation immigrants grow up visualising the ‘concept’ presented by their parents. For many, India is probably the image of a single state, district, or city where their parents are from (Karmakar 2015, 87). For the diaspora, the native, ancestral home is a mythical land of desires, but, like a mirage, it is unattainable. “It had been always at the back of the mind, a journey that he should make one day, eventually” (Vassanji 2019, 2). For Munir, the prospect of visiting India was intimidating precisely because of its importance: a return to the ancestral homeland after something like a century. He could vaguely recall, as a child imagining India alternately as Delhi, “a strange city”. Anxious about what Delhi has stored for Munir and his surname “Khan”, he finally undertook a much-awaited journey to determine if he is one of them (Indians).

A diasporic subject faces ambivalence, and hence it looks in two different directions- towards a historical, cultural identity on the one hand and the society of relocation on the other. Salman Rushdie (1991, 9) calls it the emergence of an “imaginary homelands”, where the identity of the Diasporic subject is actively inscribed. Edward Said enunciates the sense of loss, the unbearable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home. However, he also emphasises that the Diaspora brings profound creative empowerment (Mishra & Mishra 2021, 85). The present study examines the intricacies of native land. Munir, the Toronto-based writer of Kenyan origin and nominal Muslim faith, has predominantly concentrated on the portrayal of Asians in Nairobi. Following a capricious impulse, a retired individual and current empty nester embarked on a journey to India, ultimately settling at a prestigious club located in New Delhi. The article utilises Brah’s theoretical constructs of ‘home’ and ‘homing desire’ to assess Munir’s yearning for a fabled restoration to his ancestral roots. Avtar Brah (1996, 187) initiates her discussion of home by asking the question, “Where is home?” and proceeds to respond in the following manner:

[o]n the one hand ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to

visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality.

Brah reminds us how the everyday experience of life marked by racism and oppression may lead to different definitions of 'home'. Brah's critical formulation of 'home' collapses the binary understanding of the homeland/hostland boundary and helps us understand the synthetic and flexible nature of the concept of home/homeland. The diaspora concept establishes a creative tension between 'home' and 'dispersion' discourses and inscribes a homing desire while concurrently critiquing the discourses of fixed origins. The issue of 'home' and the sense of belonging is a fundamental aspect of the diasporic state. However, the emergence and resolution of related inquiries and their manifestation are contingent upon the unique historical trajectory of a given diaspora. It is worth noting that not all diasporas express a longing for a sense of belonging by means of a homing desire to return to a presumed place of ancestral origin (Brah 1996, 189).

The social constructionist attempted to prompt a renewed inquiry and a more nuanced comprehension of changes in the relationship between the homeland and diaspora. Through this process, Cohen (2009, 4) identifies three primary iterations of the concept of home/homeland: solid, which represents an unwavering and fundamental desire for a homeland; ductile, which embodies a more intricate and nuanced understanding of the concept; and liquid, which reflects a post-modern interpretation of the idea of a virtual home. The paper attempts to elucidate that the novel's protagonist, who embarked on a quest for his 'solid' roots, ended up being an outcast in his homeland by virtue of his diasporic and religious identity.

The novel provides a thought-provoking perspective on the secular nature of India, which may challenge some readers' beliefs. The author's writing style is engaging and descriptive, adding to the impact of the message. Vassanji's perspective on faith is not influenced by privilege. He has concerns about belief systems and their potential to trap individuals. His main issue with fundamentalism is not its disregard for history and rationality but rather its tendency to involve ordinary people in acts of violence. Alka Kumar accurately posits that when the domestic realm transforms into a mythical realm of longing, it concurrently becomes a location of irrevocable departure. Home can be perceived as multifaceted, with various iterations stemming from

the physical location of origin. These iterations are then reimagined and reconstructed through the interplay of the imagination and the lived experience of contemporary reality, which encompasses sensory stimuli such as auditory cues, olfactory sensations, visual stimuli, and chromatic hues (Kumar 2006).

Discussion

The protagonist, Munir Aslam Khan, a writer by profession, was mesmerised by the magnificence and elegance of a married Hindu woman, Mohini, a journalist. In her first meeting, Mohini established that residing outside India should be a reason for an Indian immigrant to be ignorant about Indian culture and traditions. She says,

[y]ou are Indian and you are ignorant about India? That's a shame. Why is it that people who leave India want to forget about it as soon as possible? We should know where we come from! (Vassanji 2019, 8)

In an interview, Vassanji stated that even though the novel is focused on the dynamics of passion, rebirth, and faith, no story exists for him without a context, and that is where politics comes in.

The politics of religious communalism or difference has always been on his mind since his first visit to India (Gee 2019). The theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation is predicated upon his concept of 'imagined communities' as enunciated in an essay of the same name, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 2006). As per Anderson's assertion, a "nation is a socially constructed community perceived through shared symbols, myths, and memories that engender a feeling of belongingness amongst its populace" (Ibid, 19). The concept of 'Indian' seems to be deeply ingrained in the psyche of the characters of the literary work. The individuals in question exhibit a notable inclination towards safeguarding their 'nationalist' identities, thereby engendering a sense of estrangement in Munir, who lacks a direct affiliation with the nation.

Munir expressed a desire to acquire further knowledge regarding the metropolis of his progenitors. He exhibited a heightened enthusiasm towards delving into the historical intricacies of the city, characterised by its tumultuous past. This endeavour was motivated by a desire to trace his ancestral roots, prompting him to implore Mohini to guide him through the less frequented areas, the 'non-tourist' Delhi.

Munir, a Muslim individual with a Westernised perspective and agnostic beliefs, repeatedly found himself enamoured by Mohini, a

Hindu woman with a delightful and contemporary demeanour and a sharp wit. She exhibited a combination of religious traditionalism and liberal, provocative tendencies as a newspaper columnist. The polar identities exhibited an inexplicable attraction towards each other while exploring the thriving markets and historical buildings of Old Delhi.

Notable achievements and prosperity characterised Munir's life, yet he remained desirous of the Canadian gentleness and unrefined qualities that had seemingly eluded him. The individual experienced a sensation of relief, a potentially immoral inclination towards liberation in response to the recent loss of his spouse. Munir experienced a notable connection with Mohini as they further investigated the historical aspects of the city. In the pages of *History*, he found some snippets of the past which led him to connect certain strings, and he contemplates- "[h]ave I come in full circle...has Delhi now reclaimed me?" (Vassanji 2019, 22). A homeland is where one's roots are and where the thread of one's identity originates. It has many memories, histories, and said-unsaid tales and legends that become a part of one's personality.

For Avtar Brah, 'home' became progressively nebulous, even miasmal. Her notion of diaspora bargains a critique of accounts and discourses of static ancestries while considering a homing desire, which is not equivalent to a longing for a 'homeland'. So, native land had emerged as a homing desire, and soon, the home itself became metamorphosed into an essentially placeless, though undoubtedly poetic, space. Munir evinced a profound appreciation for historical inquiry and derived great pleasure from exploring his ancestral lineage, although he exhibited a notable degree of emotional detachment from his personhood. While Delhi may not be Munir's place of origin, it is undeniable that his ancestral ties to the city have left an indelible impression on him. Following his inaugural visit, a fervent fixation has taken hold of him, which can only be described as a 'Delhi Obsession'. Munir's initial encounter with Delhi concluded on a positive note, prompting him to embark on a subsequent exploration of the city. His affinity for Delhi stems from a historical connection that, while indistinct, remains palpable. The protagonist observed various instances of alienation and discrimination, amidst which his relationship with Mohini flourished. Mohini encountered challenging circumstances as she prioritised specific values over those deemed appropriate or ideal for a married woman.

Mohini authored a weekly column for the periodical 'The Express Times' and delivered biweekly lectures on English language and literature at an institution of higher education. Mohini was married to Ravi, who was gainfully employed in the security services and bore two offspring, Asha and Priya. Mohini was attracted to Munir and continued defying the so-called societal conventions by engaging in an extra-marital relationship with a Muslim man. Although harbouring a fondness for Munir, she inadvertently ostracised him by categorising him as an 'outsider'. Munir, who exhibited a profound preoccupation with the historical accounts of Delhi and Mohini, encountered a multitude of inquisitive gazes within his native land. The individual in question was subjected to persistent othering and compelled to navigate prejudicial attitudes stemming from his familial name, "Khan". Munir's lack of effort in comprehending the connotative implications of his secondary appellation is noteworthy. However, the cultural milieu of India presents a contrasting scenario. As Frantz Fanon (2001, 119) perceives it in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

[n]ational consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallisation of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilisation of the people, will be in any case an empty shell of crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been.

Ultimately, the relationship between Mohini and Munir becomes emblematic of Fanon's warning: a fractured national consciousness that, rather than uniting, perpetuates alienation through the very markers meant to signify belonging.

David Morley has analysed the congruence of home and nation and their conflation. Drawing on the analyses of Rathel and Ignatieff regarding nationalism, Morley states that individuals who strongly adhere to a notion of 'Heimat' as an inherently stable and immutable concept are more prone to exhibiting hostility towards newcomers. Furthermore, he contends that individuals with a strong sense of belonging to their group are more inclined to harbour hostile and violent sentiments towards outsiders (Morley 2008, 220-221). Morley concurs with Ignatieff's assessment of this phenomenon, which can be most accurately comprehended as a narcissistic overestimation of one's worth, leading to a corresponding underestimation of others or unfamiliar individuals, thereby intensifying intolerance (Ibid, 221). In coherence with these attributes, Vassanji creates a radical character named Jetha Lal from Ahmedabad who is presented as 'a Hindu

purifier' whom Mohini refers to as involved in the business of protecting cows and Hindu women. Jetha Lal is portrayed as an individual with solid and extreme views who engages in derogatory comments regarding Munir's national and religious identity, thereby contributing to an unwelcoming environment for the diaspora within their country of origin. "She's a flower of Hinduism. And you are a good Muslim. A pride of the Mohammedans. Canadian, Sir. But you like Hindu women I see. Better than Canadian women, no?...But you are Muslim, sir. Mlechha. Different" (Vassanji 2019, 212). During his frequent visits to India, Munir was not only alienated on the ground of nationality that his passport indicated but also due to his surname 'Khan'.

Munir never believed in such tags, and these never bothered or affected his existence in Canada. However, India was different; tags mattered here, and the more he realised it, the distant he grew from his homeland. Ravi vehemently points out that Munir no longer had any ancestral roots in India (Vassanji 2019, 85). Mohini was also frequented by thoughts of Munir being a foreigner. In one of her introspective moments, she states- "[h]e's not Indian at all. He's Westerner. How could I have been so stupid?" (Ibid, 124). Despite her self-perception as a contemporary woman, Mohini frequently observes Munir's absence of a self-validated sense of self, as he does not conform to the expected standards of either Muslim or Indian identity. Munir, whose deceased spouse hailed from Scotland and Canada, is surprised by Mohini's inclination to categorise him.

Mohini's reaction is instinctive. Her family's mythology is influenced by their apprehension of the ones who "butchered" their lives during the partition era, which compelled her parents to escape to Delhi from what is now Pakistan (Ibid, 100). Munir's quest to reconnect with his ancestral heritage in India led him to a 'solid' attachment to the nation as a stable and enduring homeland, grounding his diasporic identity. However, his religious affiliation ultimately resulted in his marginalisation.

All around him incomprehensible noise. It took a while for him to breathe easier, in out, several times, then he started railing against himself. How stupid and naïve he had been. A gullible fool. An idiot. A desperate and lonely widower. A defunct writer. He should have seen that he was a foreigner, and these Indians were aliens. He would never understand them. He had got much out of Delhi; he had attached to his personal history. He

was able to find a home for his grandfather's memories. He was grateful for that. Now he was ready to scram. To run for his life. (Ibid, 197-198)

The omission of homelands' ideational value is a matter of concern as it is likely to influence the nationalists' cost-benefit analysis of territorial conflict and compromise. Scholars have debated that homeland possessed a quasi-religious influence for a considerable period, rendering them a nationalist 'sacred ground'. In accordance with this anticipation, empirical investigations evince that the sacredness of native territories configures the inclinations of nationalists in a manner analogous to how spiritual principles configure the inclinations of adherents (Burghardt 1973; Hassner 2010; Murphy 2002; Smith 2000; Shelef 2022). Munir observed that the coexistence of hatred and savagery with sublime thought and heroic non-violence, as well as the coexistence of naked ignorance with significant intellectual achievements, was a disconcerting characteristic of India, the vast and intricate nation.

The past cannot be considered a fixed and immovable entity in a distant and stable location, which we can revisit at our leisure without experiencing any sense of threat (Rus 2006). Instead, it is a constantly evolving and dynamic force that is inextricably intertwined with the present, and as such, it is constantly modifying its dynamics. Comprehending this phenomenon also carries significant ramifications for advancing cogitation regarding the intricacies of the diasporic populace (Ibid.). The conflation of the past with space and community, which would allude to a cohesive, stable, and uniform community, is no longer tenable.

The narratives about 'Dariba Kalan', a thoroughfare located in Delhi, which were relayed to him by his paternal progenitor, were incongruous with the contemporary India he bore witness to. A noticeable contrast was observed between the emotional warmth experienced by Munir's grandfather and the emotional chilliness he encountered. During his inquiry into his ancestry, Munir was informed by his sibling that their grandfather had provided refuge to an individual of Bengali origin who had perpetrated an act of violence by detonating an explosive device targeting the British Viceroy, Lord Harding. Notwithstanding the prospect of receiving remuneration from the British Government, Munir's grandfather elected to safeguard the 'Bangali' and then relocated to Shimla and subsequently to Mombasa and Nairobi (Vassanji 2019, 148). Ravi, employed in the security

services, obtained and presented the information to Mohini as “...this Munir Khan is the grandson of a terrorist. One Yunus Khan of Dariba Kalan. A long time ago, still...” (Ibid, 182).

Munir is inclined towards the irresistible allure of history, particularly his own, and eventually succumbs to the captivating yet distressingly wedded Mohini Singh. The protagonist observed various instances of alienation and discrimination, amidst which his relationship with Mohini flourished. Mohini encountered challenging circumstances as she prioritised specific values over the prescribed norms and expectations for a married woman. Despite finding a companion in Munir, Mohini often referred to him as the ‘other’- “[b]ut you are a Muslim...you bowed to our gods.” This sense of otherness broke Munir quite often but still, he used to come to India “to hear again that voice, observe that chirpiness, and the tenderness behind it, see that face that was his last sight of her...” (Vassanji 2019, 47) Despite Mohini’s cognizance of the potential hazards, Mohini never stopped meeting Munir. She put all her relations at stake to spend private moments with her newfound love. In the novel’s concluding chapters, the couple engaged in passionate, reckless, fearless consummation, oblivious to the fire outside.

According to Brah (1996, 192), the notion of home as a mythical place of origin is also characterised by the perception of it as an irretrievable location, despite the potential to physically visit the geographical territory regarded as the point of ‘origin’. The concept of a ‘homing desire’ proved to be an elusive notion for Munir. Munir seldom referred to India as his homeland due to the infrequent hospitable atmosphere it provided. Munir had encountered the less desirable aspects of the Indian subcontinent. While holding bigoted opinions may be deemed unacceptable, resorting to violent behaviour or threatening to do so is entirely different. The authors unveiled the veracity of the threat that loomed like a shark beneath the veneer of commonplace existence in India.

The prospect of Munir gaining entry to his ‘solid’ homeland is unattainable. Vassanji remarks: “The divisive politics is so alien to the India many of us have loved, and so hurtful — the violence has been so gross on one hand and casual on the other — I decided that this was not the time to sound ambiguous or be subtle or draw epiphanies. I would be extra-literary if need be” (Gee December 16, 2019). The situation alludes to the lines of Mahmoud Darwish – “A person can only be born in one place. However, he may die several times

elsewhere: in the exiles and prisons, and in a homeland transformed by the occupation and oppression into a nightmare” (Clark August 11, 2008). The novel ends with the demise of Mohini Singh in a car accident preceded by the death of Munir Khan, whose murder was attributed to cow vigilantes as a plate of biryani had been found in the refrigerator of the man’s room and was undergoing analysis for beef content.

Conclusion

Munir, who traveled from Toronto to locate his origins, always remained a ‘foreigner’ in his ancestral land with no linkages. During the progression of his expedition, he encountered a setback in his relationship with his daughter Razia, as she did not deem it imperative to extend an invitation to her father for her nuptial ceremony. His sole source of comfort was in the romantic relationship with Mohini, a companionship deemed immoral and sinful in India. Vassanji’s choice to structure *A Delhi Obsession* as a romantic narrative foregrounds the socio-political complexities arising from religious diversity. However, his exploration of the ethical quandary posed by an unattainable love and a bad marriage is compassionate and morally ambiguous. Significantly, there is a conspicuous absence of any endeavour to provide a definitive solution. Vassanji’s novel achieves a remarkable breadth of scope, surpassing its intended goal of revealing the divisive nature of communalism due to the author’s modest aspirations and lack of self-importance despite his profound emotional involvement.

The text, *A Delhi Obsession* serves not only as a portrayal of the migrant’s unceasing endeavour for a sense of belonging and connection to a particular land and its narratives but also as a refutation of the notion of religious essentialism. Radhakrishnan (1996, 212) posits that an excessive preoccupation with the sanctity of one’s lineage results in the neglect of the historical narratives of other communities and the glorification of one’s own heritage. The conspicuous lack of regard for the historical legacy of Munir and his forebears, coupled with the unwarranted declaration of his grandfather as a terrorist, was readily apparent in the personas of Letha Lal and Ravi.

The persistent alienation experienced by immigrants in unfamiliar territories is further exacerbated upon returning to their native land, ultimately suffocating the diaspora to the point of existential distress. The concept of homeland underwent a significant transformation for Munir, as the absence of a tangible homeland precluded any possibility

of return. Despite the existence of a geographical region that could be considered his homeland, it failed to provide a congenial environment that aligned with his political, ideological, and social beliefs. The diminishing cohesive force that bound him to his native land resulted in a displacement, whereby he found himself without a sense of belonging. Consequently, the land of his birth appeared increasingly unfamiliar compared to the land he had chosen to adopt. The change in the religio-political status of the homeland puzzled Munir and led him to a state of in-betweenness- not of either-or but of neither-nor.

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The silence behind the waves: The political significance of intermissions in Rapoport's theory

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Abstract: This study aims to reassess David C. Rapoport's "FourWaves of Modern Terrorism" theory by focusing on a dimension that is largely overlooked in the model: the periods of "silence" or transitions between waves. While Rapoport's theory conceptualizes each wave of terrorism as a roughly forty-year period marked by ideological and operational intensity, this article argues that the inter-wave silences should not be viewed merely as phases of inactivity, but rather as periods of ideological and organizational restructuring. A comparative historical analysis of the transition periods - Anarchist to Anti-Colonial, Anti-Colonial to New Left, and New Left to Religious - reveals common structural features of these phases: ideological exhaustion, ruptures in the global political context, and the reconstruction of organizational frameworks. The silent periods represent critical thresholds during which the ideological foundations of new waves are laid and strategic realignments are actively pursued. The study proposes three theoretical contributions: (1) the conceptualization of silence as a distinct phase of transformation rather than inactivity; (2) a structural model of terrorism history based on ruptures and re-alignments rather than linear continuity; (3) a heuristic framework to interpret potential signs of a forthcoming fifth wave. By problematizing the passive reading of transition periods, the study calls for a revised understanding of terrorism's temporal rhythm - not as a smooth progression, but as a discontinuous sequence shaped by crisis, collapse and reconstruction.

Keywords: four waves theory, terrorism, David Rapoport, problem of continuity

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Introduction

Academic research on terrorism has predominantly focused on the ideologies, tactics or targets of terrorist organizations, while structural models aiming to explain the historical evolution of the phenomenon remain relatively limited. One of the most influential theoretical frameworks in this field is David C. Rapoport's "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism" theory, which seeks to explain terrorism through approximately forty-year periods characterized by distinct ideological mobilizations. The model identifies four main waves -Anarchist, Anti-Colonial, New Left and Religious- each emerging with a specific ideological momentum, gradually declining and subsequently giving way to a new wave.

Despite the centrality of the "wave" metaphor in the theory, the transitional periods between these waves commonly regarded as phases of "silence" have received comparatively little scholarly attention. Yet these moments of transition are not merely defined by a decline in organizational activity but also by intensified ideological vacuums, organizational restructuring and critical shifts within the global political context.

The primary aim of this study is to revisit the concept of "silence" by focusing on these relatively neglected transitional phases within Rapoport's model and to reconceptualise them as active periods of transformation. Through a historical-comparative analysis of three key transitions - Anarchist → Anti-Colonial, Anti-Colonial → New Left and New Left → Religious, this study argues that these phases should be understood not only as the dissolution of previous waves but also as the structural groundwork for the emergence of new ones. In doing so, the paper offers a perspective that views the temporal rhythm of terrorism not as one of continuous linear development but as one shaped by cycles of crisis, collapse and reconstruction.

This study seeks to examine the political significance of the relatively "silent" periods within Rapoport's theory by focusing specifically on these zones of discontinuity. These transitional phases should not be regarded merely as pauses; rather, they constitute critical thresholds in which new ideological formations are constructed, organizational structures are transformed, and novel definitions of hostility emerge at the international level. In this context, silence is not simply a state of "inactivity", but a dynamic process marked by transformation, uncertainty and rupture.

Accordingly, this section begins by summarizing the core assumptions of the wave theory, after which the concepts of discontinuity and transition will be reconsidered as structural components of terrorism's historical development. In doing so, the analysis adopts not only a supportive but also a critical perspective toward the theory, opening a discussion on how periods of silence can be interpreted through concepts such as cyclical historicism, ideological exhaustion and organizational evolution.

Theoretical background: Wave theory and the problem of Continuity

Among the various classifications concerning the causes of terrorism, the most widely accepted in the literature is David Rapoport's wave theory, first introduced in 1999 and revitalized in the post-9/11 era. Rapoport argues that the history of modern terrorism has evolved through four distinct waves, each lasting approximately forty years. The first of these is known as the *Anarchist Wave*, which began in the 1880s and continued into the 1910s. Initiated by the Russian terrorist organization Narodnaya Volya (The People's Will) during the Tsarist era, the anarchist wave rapidly spread across the globe. The defining feature of the Anarchist Wave was the widespread use of firearms and explosives. This period is often referred to as the "golden age of assassination," marked by the targeted killings of heads of state, prime ministers and monarchs by political assassins (Rapoport 2005, 23-24).

The Anarchist Wave, which came to an end with the outbreak of World War I, was followed by the *Anti-Colonial Wave*, lasting from the 1920s to the 1960s. The primary catalyst for this wave was the principle of national self-determination promoted by the victorious powers of the First World War as they sought to dismantle the defeated empires. Although this principle was intended to legitimize the transition of colonial territories into sovereign states, it was simultaneously accompanied by the assertion that such populations were not yet ready for independence. As a result, these territories were placed under the mandates of the League of Nations, to be governed by the victorious powers until they were deemed prepared for self-rule.

However, this process inadvertently undermined the legitimacy of the colonial powers themselves (Rapoport 2013, 295). While the defeated states dismantled their empires following the Second World War, the formerly mandated territories no longer aspired to temporary tutelage but instead demanded full independence. This gave rise to a

wave of anti-colonial violence, often labelled as terrorism, despite being driven by nationalist and liberationist motivations. This context revived one of the most well-known dilemmas in terrorism studies: the distinction between the “terrorist” and the “freedom fighter” (Rapoport 2004, 60-61).

A distinguishing feature of this wave was the strategic use of softer rhetoric by terrorist groups, who framed their actions as resistance against state terrorism. Unlike the previous wave, where assassinations were prominent, the Anti-Colonial Wave prioritized guerrilla warfare and hit-and-run tactics. Moreover, actors within these waves engaged with the international arena more actively and effectively than their predecessors. Rapoport noted that during this period, foreign states with ethnically or culturally linked populations became more actively involved and diaspora communities significantly increased their political activities in unprecedented ways (Rapoport 2022, 125-126).

The third wave, referred to by Rapoport as the *New Left Wave*, is essentially described as an evolved form of the leftist activism that characterized the Anarchist Wave. The most significant catalyst for this wave was the Vietnam War. The effectiveness of rudimentary weaponry against the sophisticated military technology of the United States inspired hope among anti-establishment organizations that even dominant systems could be vulnerable (Rapoport 2002, 8).

During this period, the persistent state of war and widespread disillusionment with the existing global order led to the emergence of leftist-oriented groups, particularly among youth, both in the Third World and in the West. The existence of the Soviet bloc played a dual role: it provided ideological encouragement as well as material support, including training and arms, contributing to the proliferation of revolutionary groups. A notable feature of this wave was the increased visibility of women, both as leaders and combatants within terrorist organizations (Rapoport 2013, 298). This period was also marked by a surge in transnational operations, particularly aircraft hijackings and hostage-takings, which became emblematic tactics of the era.

Rapoport attributes the decline of the third wave, beginning in the 1980s, to two primary factors: the military defeat of revolutionary movements in their respective countries, and the growing international cooperation among state security agencies, which significantly limited the operational space of such groups. Throughout the first three waves—what Rapoport refers to as “old terrorism”—terrorist actors generally

operated with the precision of surgical strikes, deliberately avoiding large-scale attacks that might alienate potential supporters. The primary objective was not mass casualties, but rather the dissemination of propaganda. The conclusion of the third wave gave rise to the fourth, known as the *Religious Wave*. Due to its distinct methods and motivations, this wave is often labelled “new terrorism.” While earlier waves sought to establish secular states, the fourth wave was characterized by groups aiming to found religious states governed by divine law (Rapoport 2001, 422). Unlike the previous waves, in which there was a temporal gap between a triggering event and the onset of terrorist activity, this delay vanished in the fourth wave, where radical responses followed almost immediately.

Although religious terrorism in this wave was not exclusive to one faith -featuring groups associated with Christianity, Judaism and Islam- Rapoport emphasized that Islamist-inspired organizations proved to be the most enduring and globally influential. A defining feature of the Religious Wave was the adoption of suicide bombings, closely tied to the concept of martyrdom, which added a devastating and symbolic dimension to violence (Rapoport 2002, 11). Another distinguishing element was the dual role of some Islamist groups, which engaged in extensive social service campaigns within their own communities. In many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, where overt political opposition was heavily suppressed, religious communities (jamaats) provided a tolerated form of opposition. These organizations operated schools, hospitals, places of worship and soup kitchens, effectively functioning as parallel state structures facilitating recruitment and community support (Rapoport 2004, 65).

Rapoport also noted a significant trend in the fourth wave: despite being more deadly and operationally sophisticated, it produced fewer terrorist organizations. Whereas the 1980s saw nearly 200 groups associated with the third wave, this number dropped to around 40 in the following decade. However, these fewer groups tended to possess larger memberships compared to their predecessors (Ibid, 70).

Analyzing transitional periods: The silence between the waves

Although the “wave” metaphor in Rapoport’s theory is used to designate distinct periods, it does not imply definitive beginnings or endings. Each wave may originate from a shared grievance perceived by different organizations and there can be cyclical elements between the waves. Successive waves often emerge as reactions to the

preceding ones and are typically accompanied by a marked ideological rupture (Süruri 2024, 72-73). Each wave lasted for roughly four decades, gradually declining because of negotiated political concessions, increasingly effective counter-terrorism measures, and the generational aging of militant actors, which reduced organizational vitality and recruitment (Millington 2024, 500). However, transitions between waves are neither instantaneous nor automatic; they have generally been shaped by silent periods lasting between 10 and 20 years. These intervals not only reflect a decline in organizational activity but also encompass deeper processes such as shifts in global power dynamics, ideological realignments, and transformations in technological and sociological structures.

The following sections will provide a comparative analysis of each of these transitional periods:

Anarchist Wave → Anti-Colonial Wave (1910–1920)

The transition from the Anarchist Wave to the Anti-Colonial Wave marked the first significant intermission in Rapoport's wave theory of modern terrorism. This period, spanning approximately from 1910 to 1920, was shaped by a complex interplay of ideological exhaustion, organizational decline, and shifting international dynamics. By the early 20th century, anarchist movements -once transnational and highly active- began to lose momentum (Rasler and Thompson 2009, 34). Key leaders were killed or imprisoned, and the movement suffered from strategic fragmentation and declining public support.

The outbreak of World War I further accelerated the decline of anarchist terrorism. Wartime nationalism and the expansion of state surveillance suppressed revolutionary networks, while the international focus shifted from domestic instability to global conflict (Kaplan 2016). In this environment, the appeal of individual anarchist violence diminished, and broader anti-state movements went dormant or were absorbed into wartime political agendas.

However, this period also witnessed the emergence of new ideological aspirations rooted in the discourse of national self-determination. The post-war settlements, particularly U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's advocacy of self-determination, created both hope and disillusionment in colonial territories (Jensen 2013, 20-22). While colonial subjects were promised eventual independence, many were instead subjected to the League of Nations' mandate system –governed directly by the victorious powers. This contradiction laid the

groundwork for the Anti-Colonial Wave, as nationalist groups increasingly turned to violence in response to imperial retrenchment (Kaplan2008, 18).

Thus, the silence between the anarchist and anti-colonial waves was not merely a phase of inactivity; it represented a profound ideological and structural shift. The focus of terrorism moved from individual acts of symbolic resistance to organized campaigns aimed at ending foreign domination and achieving national sovereignty.

Anti-Colonial Wave → New Left Wave (late 1960s - early 1970s)

The transition from the Anti-Colonial Wave to the New Left Wave unfolded during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period characterized by deep ideological revaluation and shifting geopolitical contexts. As many colonial territories achieved formal independence by the early 1960s, the legitimacy of anti-colonial violence began to erode. With decolonization processes largely underway, the foundational cause that had driven the previous wave lost its mobilizing power (Parker and Sitter 2016, 205). National liberation movements either transitioned into formal state structures or became mired in post-colonial governance challenges, leading to internal fragmentation and diminished revolutionary momentum.

Simultaneously, the post-World War II international order - dominated by Cold War bipolarity gave rise to new forms of dissent, particularly among disillusioned youth in both the Global South and the West. The Vietnam War played a crucial catalytic role in this transformation. The asymmetrical success of the North Vietnamese forces against a technologically superior United States inspired radical groups to believe that entrenched global systems could, in fact, be destabilized (Kurt 2023, 35-37). This ideological shift, from anti-colonial nationalism to broader anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist critiques, laid the foundation for what Rapoport (2001, 422) termed the *New Left Wave*.

Unlike their anti-colonial predecessors, New Left organizations often emerged in urban settings and adopted hybrid forms of organization -neither entirely guerrilla- based nor conventionally hierarchical. These groups drew ideological nourishment from Marxist, Maoist, and Guevarist thought, but also adapted their rhetoric to resonate with local grievances, such as racial injustice, economic inequality, and political repression (Hughes 2021, 60). Notably, the rise of student movements, anti-establishment activism, and

transnational solidarity networks helped shape a new generation of terrorists who saw themselves not as national liberators but as global revolutionaries.

The inter-wave period thus reflected not a vacuum, but a reorientation of political violence from decolonization to systemic opposition. The global diffusion of revolutionary thought, combined with technological advances in media and communication, enabled these groups to amplify their messages across borders, ushering in a new era of ideological militancy.

New Left Wave → Religious Wave (late 1980s - early 1990s)

The transition from the New Left Wave to the Religious Wave marks one of the most ideologically profound shifts within Rapoport's wave model. While earlier waves were rooted in secular ideologies - anarchism, nationalism, and Marxism - the emergence of the Religious Wave in the late 1980s and early 1990s signalled a reconfiguration of political violence around spiritual and theological frameworks (Rapoport 2013, 300). This shift was not abrupt; rather, it unfolded during a transitional period shaped by ideological exhaustion, organizational fragmentation and significant global realignments.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the revolutionary fervour of New Left movements had begun to wane. Many groups suffered operational defeats, lost popular support, or were dismantled through intensified international counter-terrorism cooperation. At the same time, the bipolar structure of the Cold War, which had sustained much of the ideological polarization of the third wave, began to disintegrate (Laqueur 2001, 28-29). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ideological crisis of Marxism left a vacuum in the global oppositional landscape.

Into this vacuum emerged a new form of political violence rooted in religious conviction. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the rise of political Islam, the mobilization of mujahedeen fighters during the Soviet Afghan War and the growing disillusionment with secular nationalist regimes in the Middle East all contributed to the ideological foundations of the Religious Wave (Kaplan 2011, 75-77). Unlike previous waves, in which there was often a temporal gap between catalyzing events and the onset of violence, the Religious Wave was characterized by the immediacy and simultaneity of ideological radicalization and operational action.

Another distinguishing feature was the organizational structure: religiously motivated groups often operated in decentralized, network-based formats, emphasizing transnational solidarity over national identity (Rapoport 2005, 33). Suicide bombing emerged as a key tactic, imbued with theological significance through the concept of martyrdom. In many cases, these groups combined militant action with extensive social service provision establishing schools, hospitals, and welfare systems within their communities. This “dual functionality” not only enhanced their local legitimacy but also facilitated recruitment and long-term resilience (Martin 2017, 50-55).

Thus, the inter-wave period between the New Left and Religious Waves represented not merely a tactical or demographic shift but a paradigmatic transformation one in which the justification, language and targets of terrorism were redefined in accordance with religious worldviews. As Rapoport (2004, 67) noted, although fewer in number, religious terrorist organizations tended to be more lethal, more globally connected and more enduring than their secular predecessors.

Conceptualizing silent periods: Inactivity or reconstruction?

Rapoport’s wave theory conceptualizes each wave of terrorism as an approximately 40-year period characterized by distinct ideological and operational patterns (Rapoport 2002, 3). While the “wave” metaphor at the core of the model implies a cyclical rise and decline, it does not explicitly define the nature of the transitional phases between waves. As a result, these periods have often been interpreted merely as phases of declining activity or diminished organizational capacity. However, such periods of “silence” contain critical structural and ideological ruptures that are essential to understanding the broader evolution of terrorism. In conventional readings, “silence” is often equated with a lack of action. However, historical analysis reveals that such periods frequently function as phases of reconstruction times when new ideological discourses begin to take shape, organizational structures are reconfigured, and actors seek strategies that can adapt to evolving state security frameworks.

In this context, silence should not be viewed as a political void; rather, it represents a transitional space in which the direction, form and legitimacy of radical violence are renegotiated. These periods embody a convergence between the causes of the preceding wave’s dissolution and the conditions enabling the emergence of the next.

The so-called silent periods in the wave transitions reveal several recurring structural characteristics, which include the following:

- *Ideological vacuum and crisis of legitimacy*: Each new wave of terrorism emerges as the preceding one loses its legitimacy; the resulting ideological and strategic void necessitates the construction of a new narrative.
 - *Organizational transformation*: The collapse of traditional hierarchical structures gives way to more network-based, cell-oriented, or individual formations.
 - *Shifts in state responses*: Periods of silence are often when states develop more sophisticated tools and strategies for counterterrorism.
 - *Reshaping of the international context*: Structural transformations such as the end of the Cold War, decolonization processes, or digitalization have accelerated wave transitions.
- These structural trends suggest that periods of silence should not be interpreted as mere organizational dormancy but rather as phases of strategic realignment.

Conclusion: An alternative reading of the theory through periods of silence

David Rapoport's four-wave theory of terrorism offers a compelling framework for understanding the development of modern terrorism through historical cycles and ideological continuities. However, the existing literature tends to concentrate primarily on the "waves" themselves, often sidelining the transitional phases that occur between them. This study's central argument is that the so-called "silent" periods are, in fact, arenas of strategic, ideological, and structural transformation that enable the emergence of subsequent waves. In this study, the wave theory has been extended through a focus on structural discontinuities and periods of silence. Approaching the history of terrorism not as a linear progression, but as an intermittent, fragmented, and continuously reconfigured narrative offers a critical contribution to the theory. Silence is no longer seen merely as a transitional phase but as a period that warrants analytical attention.

Historical and conceptual analyses reveal that:

- Periods of silence represent not only the exhaustion of the previous wave but also the incubation phase in which the ideological foundations and organizational structures of the next wave begin to take shape.

- Each transition is linked to a specific moment of international rupture -such as wars, geopolitical polarization, or systemic collapse- which provides fertile ground for new forms of radicalism.
- Silent periods encompass multidimensional processes, including transformations in organizational models, recalibrations of state responses, and shifts in the forms and legitimacy of political violence.

Within this framework, the study offers three key contributions to Rapoport's theory:

1. *Independent conceptualization of silent periods:* The transitional phases between waves are shown to be not merely "passive intervals" but theoretically significant processes of "active reconstruction." Silence is framed not as a space of inaction, but as a domain of preparation and transformation.
2. *A structural rupture model over historical continuity:* The dominant emphasis on "continuity" within the wave theory is reinterpreted in this study through the lens of ruptures and transitional moments. In doing so, the historical evolution of terrorism is rendered intelligible not merely through ideological persistence, but also through systemic breakdowns and periods of crisis.
3. *Conceptual groundwork for a fifth wave:* By understanding the early signals and dynamics of silent periods, it becomes possible to develop informed projections about the emergence of a subsequent, yet uncrystallized wave. Although Rapoport suggests that a fifth wave may emerge around the year 2025, he does not offer a clear prediction regarding its characteristics or timing; he merely notes that it could arise as a reaction to various unresolved political issues.

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Strategic realignment in South Asia: US perceptions of Pakistan's China alignment

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Abstract: The US historically viewed Pakistan as a critical ally in its global war on terror, but this stance has changed dramatically in the last few years as the US's conception of Pakistan transitioned from a strategic partner to a transactional ally and leaning more towards China. This shift is analyzed using constructivist theory based on a multiplicity of US government documents, media discourse, and policies outlined between 2001 and 2025. The analysis shows that US policy characterized by anti-India rhetorical tropes, institutional exclusion, and systemic marginalization subsequently aligned Pakistan more closely to China, most notably under the auspices of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The investigation then contextualizes this shift in a broader hegemonic battle between the US and China, and Pakistan's geostrategic location as the pivot of that struggle. In the end the analysis argues that US policy must adopt a more symmetric regional approach that avoids binary alliances, including antagonistic ties, that lead to strategic misalignments as what is found through this case study.

Keywords: USA, perception, image of Pakistan, China, CPEC

Introduction

Particularly after the 9/11 attacks and the start of the War on Terror (WoT), United States' impressions and picture of Pakistan have changed significantly. At first, Pakistan was seen as a major friend in the worldwide counterterrorism effort, getting large military and financial support in exchange for its cooperation (Hussain 2018, 211). But for Pakistan, which suffered over 80,000 casualties—including military personnel and civilians—as well as financial losses more than \$150 billion from internal strife and terrorism (Sial 2020, 5), this alliance came at a great cost. Notwithstanding these sacrifices,

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Pakistan's image in Washington started to suffer, mostly because of the belief that it was engaging in a "double game"—supporting US operations while allegedly keeping covert links with militant networks (Fair 2018, 72).

This negative view grew more pronounced by the middle of the 2010s as US officials grew more annoyed with Islamabad's unwillingness to act forcefully against organizations like the Haqqani Network. This unhappiness resulted in major cuts in aid as well as progressively tense diplomatic ties (Miller 2021, 54). The US leaving Afghanistan in 2021 heightened tensions even more since Pakistan was mostly blamed for allowing the Taliban to flourish, so strengthening its dubious and divisive image in American strategic circles (Riedel 2022).

Concurrently, Pakistan's strategic turn toward China, particularly with regard to its fervent embrace of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), helped to redefine its regional character. This increasing alignment refutes Pakistan's image from a devoted counterterrorism ally to that of a regional partner of China, so causing concern in Washington about its long-term strategic orientation (Small 2020). Pakistan's diplomatic relationship with the United States is being complicated and global impressions of its foreign policy posture is being reshaped as a result of Pakistan's enigmatic and dual-aligned actor rather than a reliable security partner (Shah 2023).

Literature review

Over the past two years, Pakistan's ties to the United States have altered dramatically. Originally seen as a vital friend in the War on Terror following 9/11, Pakistan's changing geopolitical orientations—especially its increasing strategic alliance with China—have changed American view of its function in South Asia. Examining academic viewpoints on these shifting attitudes, this literature review highlights important themes including strategic realignment, security challenges, credibility perceptions, or geographical, balancing.

Subsequent to the September 11 terrorist attacks, Pakistan emerged as a "frontline state" during the US led Global War on Terrorism. According to Fair (2011), the relationship was predominantly transactional, with the US providing military and economic assistance in return for Pakistan's collaboration fighting Al-Qaeda and Taliban rebels. This connection was fraught with reciprocal distrust.

Researchers like Haqqani (2013) contend that US authorities have persistently overstated Pakistan's readiness to confront terrorist organizations perceived as strategic assets.

Byman (2010) elucidates how Pakistan's "selective cooperation" compromised the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. While aiding the US with information and supplies, Pakistan was said to have clandestinely supported the Haqqani Network and Afghan Taliban, so intensifying regional instability and complicating bilateral relations.

Beginning in the mid-2010s, CPEC, a key initiative within China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), indicated a significant geopolitical transformation. Small (2015) posits that CPEC represents not merely an economic initiative as well as a strategic realignment of Pakistan's foreign policy. Researchers such as Sial (2016) & Wolf (2020) emphasize China's emergence as a more dependable and less contingent partner in comparison to the United States.

This transition aligned with the growing strategic partnership between the US and India, especially within the context of the Indo-Pacific framework. Mearsheimer (2019) presents this dynamic as an element of a larger containment strategy directed at China, wherein Pakistan's alignment with Beijing complicates US interests in the region.

As Pakistan strengthened its relationship with China, US beliefs shifted from regarding Pakistan as a crucial counterterrorism ally to considering it a strategic liability. Kronstadt and Katzman (2021) contend that U.S. policymakers have started to scrutinize Pakistan's enduring alignment with American interests, particularly in light of its defiance regarding counterterrorism, proliferation of nuclear weapons, and debt dependency related to CPEC.

The 2018 National Defense Strategies of the United States highlighted great power competition, identifying China and Russia as principal threats. In this context, Pakistan's relationship with China was assessed with greater skepticism and caution (Riedel 2018).

Key themes in literature

Markey (2013) observes that US-Pakistan relationships have formerly been characterized by a deficiency in deep institutional trust, rendering them susceptible to abrupt changes.

Research consistently highlights the trust deficits between the security establishments of the US and Pakistan, especially following the Osama bin Laden pillage in 2011 (Rashid 2012).

The works of Malik (2020) and Siddiqua (2021) indicate that Pakistan's shift towards the east is a pragmatic reaction to the reduction of U.S. aid and strategic opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region.

The enhancement of the US-India partnership has prompted Pakistan to align more closely with China, as observed by scholars such as Pant and Joshi (2016).

Research methodology

This research utilizes a mixed-methods design that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the changing perception of Pakistan within US strategic thought, specifically through the framework of Nicholas Onuf's constructivist theory. This methodology aims to examine the evolution of U.S. perceptions of Pakistan, transitioning from a counterterrorism ally to a strategic enigma associated with China, through an analysis of discursive practices and material realignments during the post-9/11 and Indo-Pacific periods. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the United States' reconstruction of Pakistan's image, transitioning from a partner in the War on Terror to a strategic outlier amid US-China competition, through the triangulation of discursive shifts, material behaviors, and institutional signaling. Rooted in Onuf's constructivism, it encompasses not only the actions of the US but also its rhetoric, framing, and enforcement, and examines how these elements influenced Pakistan's strategic identity and its shift towards China.

Theoretical framework

Nicholas Onuf's constructivist approach emphasizes how social rules, norms, and speech acts shape state identity and international perceptions, so enabling a clear analysis of the changing dynamics in US-Pakistan relations. Onuf's central claim—that "people make society, and society makes people"—captures the reciprocal character of social construction, in which actors not only shape their environment by interaction and discourse but also are themselves shaped by the resulting structures (Onuf 1989). By contending that ideas like sovereignty, security, and alliance are not fixed but rather created through continuous human agency and interaction, this questions the static presumptions of conventional IR theories including realism and liberalism (Wend, 1992; Reus-Smit 2005.). Building on

this, Alexander Wendt (1992) underlined how shared ideas, beliefs, and expectations shape rather than define global systems like anarchy. Wendt's method included cognitive components since she maintained that social interaction and internalized meanings create identities and interests rather than they are pre-given. Similarly, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) underlined that processes firmly anchored in mental constructions and shared cognition build social reality by means of habitualization and institutionalization.

Anthony Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration emphasizes even more the function of cognition since it sees people as informed agents who interpret and replicate social structures by continuous reflexivity. From this perspective, people behave depending on their cognitive interpretation of social roles, expectations, and norms. Furthermore underlined by Friedrich Kratochwil (1989) and John Searle (1995), language and meaning are fundamental for building institutional facts, so stressing the cognitive and symbolic foundation of social structures. Internal frameworks via which actors view the world and decide on suitable behavior are mental models, collective beliefs, and shared understanding. From a constructivist point of view, then, cognition is not distinct from social construction; rather, it is integral to the process since ideas, perceptions, and mental representations shape the world of international politics as much as material elements.

In this regard, the development of US-Pakistan ties serves as a prime example of how constructivist dynamics function in world affairs. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States built a new global security agenda whereby Pakistan was designated as a "frontline ally" in the War on Terror. For years, this speech act established a specific identity and set of expectations that framed bilateral relations. Cooperation in counterterrorism strengthened Pakistan's position by helping it to receive major military and financial support (Hussain 2018, 20). Still, the mutual building of reality started to veer over time. New speech acts surfaced as the US saw discrepancies in Pakistan's counterterrorism operations—especially charges of harboring groups like the Haqqani Network—describing Pakistan's role as "duplicitous," or engaged in a "double game" (Fair 2018, 17). From ally to unreliable partner, these rhetorical changes signaled a change in Pakistan's reputation inside American foreign policy circles.

On the other hand, Pakistan participated in its own identity building. Emphasizing its "sacrifices"—over 80,000 lives lost and \$150 billion in economic damage—as part of a counter-narrative meant to restore

its image and moral legitimacy, it underlined But these conflicting stories produced a discursive gap whereby both governments functioned inside incompatible reality regarding the nature of their relationship, interests, and responsibilities. According to Onuf (2013), such speech acts are performative, actively changing how actors view themselves and others, so impacting their behavior; they are not only descriptive.

The social norms and expectations controlling the alliance broke over time. Once mutual views sour, what started as a relationship governed by shared counterterrorism goals finally broke apart. The tacit rules that once supported the alliance broke under the US' 2018 suspension of security aid (Miller 2021). A fresh set of social institutions filled this void as Pakistan strengthened its ties to China via the Belt and Road Initiative (Small 2020,) under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan's image and identity thus changed once more—this time in the direction of a regional Chinese ally—which led American worries about Islamabad's strategic orientation (Shah 2023).

Geopolitical circumstances changed, especially with China's rise and the opening of projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), US rhetoric progressively presented Pakistan through a different prism—as a proxy or junior partner of China, especially in the Indo-Pacific setting. These shifting viewpoints highlight Wendt's (1992) point that intersubjective understandings help to shape rather than fix identities and interests. Policy narratives, think-tank debates, and media coverage of Pakistan's alignment with China started to center Pakistan's alignment with China rather than its involvement in counterterrorism in U.S. cognitive framing of Pakistan. This change emphasizes how cognition, identity building, and discourse shape not only how states view others but also how those views affect policy decisions. Therefore, the United States built a different Pakistan based on fresh cognitive and strategic narratives, so underlining the constructivist claim that states act toward others based on the meanings those others have for them—rather than reacting to a “different” Pakistan (Wendt 1992, 119).

Onuf's approach clarifies this metamorphosis as a reconstruction of identity and reinterpretation of views as much as a change in policy. Pakistan moved from being seen as a necessary ally in a unipolar American-led order to be seen as an uncertain player caught between Washington and Beijing by means of repeated speech acts, norms, and

institutional changes. Recent events including the Indo-Pak conflicts and China's diplomatic support of Pakistan in venues like the UN Security Council, which have further confirmed Pakistan's view in US discourse as part of a China-led regional axis, clearly show this identity building (Fatima & Ashraf 2022).

Onuf's constructivism ultimately shows how state identities are always negotiated and changed by language, social conventions, and interaction—never fixed. Once based on cooperation, the picture of Pakistan in American foreign policy is today mostly shaped by mistrust and strategic difference. This changing view is a result of deeper social construction of identities within the global order conditioned by “discursive practices”, normative changes, and the interaction between agency and structure, not only of policy misalignment (Reus-Smit 2005, 44).

Pakistan as a constructed ally in the War on Terror from 2001–2016

Following the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan was quickly positioned in U.S. strategic discourse as an indispensable War on Terror (WoT) ally. Constructed as a critical counterterrorism partner, the Bush administration's immediate rhetorical framing of Pakistan as a “Major Non-NATO Ally” (2004) and a “Frontline State” (Bush 2001, 1) shapes its identity. Significant material commitments—between 2001 and 2016, Pakistan received over \$33 billion in U.S. assistance, including \$14 billion in Coalition Support Funds (CSF) for military operations and \$8 billion in economic aid—supported this performative designation. Though US officials publicly praised Pakistan's cooperation, internal assessments and leaked papers—such as the 2012 Pentagon report—increasingly characterized its efforts as “selective and unreliable” (Fair 2018). This alliance was thus rife with contradictions.

A discursive change is shown by a longitudinal study of US media and diplomatic communications. From 2001 to 2008, 75% of major American newspapers—including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*—framed Pakistan as a “bulwark against al-Qaeda,” so presenting a positive picture of Pakistan. Following the Osama bin Laden raid (conducted without Pakistan's knowledge), the tone became adversarial post-2011; 62% of congressional hearings (2011–2016) mentioned Pakistan's “duplicity” (Congressional Record 2016, 17); terms like “safe havens” and “double game” proliferated in policy

circles. This linguistic turn-about reflected declining aid flows—CSF reimbursements dropped by 40% between 2011 and 2016—reflecting lost confidence (SIGAR 2017, 12).

The duality in American views—between Pakistan’s strategic need for geographic access to Afghanistan and dependability issues—underscores Onuf’s constructivist claim that alliances are linguistically and physically co-constituted (Onuf 2013, 41). Pakistan’s identity as a “necessary but problematic ally” was not natural but created by institutionalized rules (e.g., conditioning CSF on counterterrorism “performance”) and iterative speech acts (e.g., aid negotiations paired with public rebukes). By 2016, the social contract of the alliance had unravelled: US discourse increasingly positioned Pakistan as a “transactional actor”, setting the stage for its later reframing as a Chinese “client state” in the Trump era (Khan 2022, 6).

Triangular view: Insecurities of India, the United States, and Pakistan

The US-Pakistan counterterrorism alliance (2001–2016) was fundamentally shaped by Washington’s simultaneous strategic embrace of India, which exacerbated Pakistan’s historical insecurities about abandonment. While Pakistan received \$33 billion in US aid during this period, American military and economic cooperation with India grew exponentially—US-India defense trade jumped from near zero in 2001 to over \$20 billion by 2016 (CRS, 2021, p. 10), including major arms deals like the \$3.5 billion purchase of C-17 and P-8 aircraft. The 2008 US-India nuclear deal, which effectively recognized India as a nuclear power without demanding nonproliferation commitments (Pant 2016), was particularly jarring for Pakistani policymakers who saw it as evidence of differential treatment (DIA 2018, 21).

This growing US-India partnership had measurable psychological impacts on Pakistan’s strategic calculus. From 2010 to 2015, declassified Pakistani national security records show that 78% of high-level meetings cited US-India cooperation as an “existential threat multiplier” (ISPR Archives 2017, 6). With US-India joint military exercises rising by 300% between 2005 and 2015, compared to a 40% drop in US-Pakistan drills during the same period, the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” (2011) further institutionalized India as America’s preferred regional partner. Pakistani media covered these events in great detail; content analysis reveals that references to “US

betrayal” in Pakistani English newspapers jumped by 62% following important U.S.-India agreements (PIPS Media Monitor 2018, 11).

US aid dropped by 91% between 1990 and 2001 caused Pakistan’s historical memory of post-Cold War abandonment to be triggered by the material and discursive construction of India as America’s “natural ally” (Burns 2016, 12). World Bank data, this impression was strengthened when the US kept accusing Pakistan of harbouring militants while giving India Major Defense Partner status in 2016—a title Pakistan never received even with WoT sacrifices. “The writing is on the wall...we’re being set up for another 1990s style exit,” then Defense Minister Khawaja Asif said in 2015 (Dawn 2015, 1).

Pakistan’s hedging policy was directly shaped by this uncertainty. Pakistan hastened nuclear modernization (adding 20 warheads annually after 2011) and strengthened ties with China—CPEC negotiations intensified precisely as US-India defense agreements peaked in 2013–15 (Small 2020, 2), while publicly maintaining the alliance. The created fear of abandonment thus became a self-fulfilling prophecy: US privileging of India validated Pakistani suspicions, so encouraging actions that further eroded Washington’s trust (US Institute of Peace 2011, 6).

From a WoT ally to a state convinced of its approaching abandonment, this complex interaction shows how material aid flows and discursive privilege of India jointly rebuilt Pakistan’s strategic identity—from a WoT ally to a state driven to pivot to China. The evidence shows that Pakistani hedging was more of a reaction to America’s India-centric regional architecture than a philosophical decision (Staniland 2011, 141).

Changing identity: Pakistan’s growing bonds with China and building a new strategic vision

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has fundamentally changed Pakistan’s geopolitical identity from a US-aligned counterterrorism partner to China’s premier regional ally. With infrastructure projects like the Gwadar Port (\$1.62 billion) and energy plants (\$10.8 billion), CPEC has channeled \$25.4 billion in direct Chinese investments into Pakistan as of 2023 (SAFE 2023, 10). Originally launched in 2015, the trade volumes between the two countries jumped from \$4 billion in 2010 to \$20 billion in 2022 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023), while military exchanges—including joint exercises like “Sea Guardians”

and arms transfers like J-10CE fighter jets (\$800 million deal in 2022)—solidified a complete strategic partnership (SIPRI 2023, 3).

US language responded sharply to this reorientation. While Pentagon assessments noted a 400% increase in Chinese military-related activities in Pakistan since 2018 (DOD, 2023, p.09), Congress Research Service reports (2023) labelled CPEC a “debt-trap diplomacy” vehicle. Citing the 54% share of Pakistan’s overall external debt owing to China, the 2023 US-China Economic and Security Review Commission report clearly positioned Pakistan as “China’s client state in South Asia”. Media narratives highlighted this change: 78% of U.S. think tank publications (2018–2023) called CPEC a “strategic threat” to American interests (CSIS Database 2023, 11).

From a constructivist perspective, these material interactions are direct guidelines for rebuilding Pakistan’s international identity. China’s “all-weather friendship” rhetoric—repeated in 92% of joint statements (2015–2023)—operationalizes this construction, as does Pakistan’s acceptance of China’s Digital Silk Road (e.g., 5G infrastructure built by Huawei). Declaring “economic security through BRI alignment” as its top priority, Pakistan’s 2022 National Security Policy formally instituted this change (MoFA 2022, 17). While US cooperation policies required counterterrorism compliance, China’s rules reward geopolitical alignment—best shown by Pakistan’s consistent support of China on Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and South China Sea issues (UN Voting Records 2023, 16).

Now self-reinforcing: 67% of Pakistani elite polls (PILDAT, 2023, p.19) say China is their “most reliable partner,” while just 9% of respondents for the United States CPEC’s material-discursive nexus has thus generated a new social fact: Pakistan as China’s “iron brother,” a change accomplished not by coercion but rather by rules-based re-socialization into China’s conception of Eurasian connectivity (Lalwani 2020, 17).

Instrumental change in American strategic behavior: Calculating the pivot to perceived marginalization of Pakistan

Nicholas Onuf’s constructivist framework helps one to understand the significant change in the strategic narrative of the United States about Pakistan between 2017 and 2023 as a redefining of state identity via changing “instructive rules.” This change was not isolated; it was part of a larger US offshore balancing plan meant to contain China by increasing India’s influence in South Asia, so transforming Pakistan

from an ally to a peripheral actor. The United States signed defense and trade deals with India totaling about \$54 billion between 2015 and 2022. Among these were the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which enabled mutual access to military facilities vital for Indo-Pacific logistics; the 2018 Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which approved \$3.5 billion in secure communications tech (DSCA 2018, 23); and the 2020 Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), so improving real-time geospatial intelligence sharing worth \$1.8 billion (CRS 2021, 4). Major weapon sales supporting these agreements included \$3.5 billion for Apache helicopters, \$2.6 billion for P-8I Poseidon aircraft, and \$1.9 billion for MK-45 naval guns (SIPRI 2022, 11). US rhetoric supported this change: Pakistan increasingly disappeared from strategic discourse while India was rebranded as a “net security provider” (Carter 2016) and the “lynchpin of the Indo-Pacific strategy” (Trump 2017, 1).

These changes showed up in behavior: US-India joint military operations jumped from 4 annually in 2014 to 28 in 2022 (Pentagon 2023), while bilateral exercises with Pakistan stopped entirely after 2018. Concurrently, U.S. arms exports to Pakistan dropped by 98% following the imposition of security-related sanctions (SIPRI 2023, 11), while defense trade with India grew by 1,100% since 2008, reaching \$25 billion by 2022. Mirroring these trends, diplomatic patterns reflected 43 U.S. Comparatively to just 2 to Pakistan, cabinet-level visits to India between 2017 and 2022 will total Islamabad read this as strategic desertion. The 2020 U.S.-India Joint Statement linking Pakistan to cross-border terrorism set off a 317% increase in Pakistani media representations of U.S. “hostility.” This view was strengthened when Pakistan was left out of the 2021 U.S. India was invited to the Democracy Summit, where the 2022 National Defense Strategy mentioned Pakistan just in the framework of terrorism risks while calling India a “priority partner” (DOD 2022, 8).

These changes reflect a deliberate reordering of instructive rules in Onuf’s constructivist sense. Under U.S. direction, India was socialized into a new normative role anchored in technological-sharing and strategic cooperation against China; Pakistan was subjected to exclusionary norms. India received rule exemptions, including a CAATSA waiver for its purchase of Russia’s S-400 missile system, unlike Pakistan, whose military assistance came with tight counterterrorism restrictions. Further building Pakistan as a strategic

outlier, the 2022 US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET), which gave India access to advanced AI, quantum, and defense technologies. This asymmetry grew even more when the Taliban seized Afghanistan in 2021. Pakistan saw the Taliban's return as a geopolitical opportunity and strengthened ties with China and Russia, including endorsement of China's Global Security Initiative and participation in Shanghai Cooperation Organization military operations, while the U.S. saw the Taliban as a security threat (MoFA 2022, 7).

Deep mistrust notwithstanding, aspects of pragmatic cooperation endured. The Biden government's 2023 approval of a \$450 million sustainment package for Pakistan's F-16s demonstrated Pakistan's continuing value in counterterrorism operations (NYT, 2023, p. 02). Not enough, though, to undo the structural redefining of roles. America Pentagon records, State Department designations, and media coverage all progressively present Pakistan as a threat or challenge rather than as a friend. Material reconfigurations in support, trade, and diplomacy matched these discursive changes to propel Pakistan into the China-Russia orbit. The fall in U.S.-Pakistan strategic intimacy thus reflects not only a policy change but also a social reclassification of Pakistan's identity. This case shows how changing normative frameworks and symbolic acts of inclusion and exclusion influence not only capabilities but also international alignments by themselves. Through different rules and favor-based socializing, the United States actively destroyed the Pakistan alliance, so changing the geopolitical order of South Asia by means of intentional identity reconstruction and strategic alienation, not only refocusing on India (Munawar et al. 2024, 25).

US Dynamics in Indo-Pak conflict

The Indo-Pakistani crisis of 2025 marks a turning point in US views of Pakistan as well as in regional security dynamics. From India's unparalleled Operation Sindoor strikes deep into Punjab to Pakistan's retaliatory air operations, the escalation ladder climbed during this confrontation shows how New Delhi's lack of deterrence has ironically strengthened Pakistan's proxy warfare approach (Shah 2025, 15).

Understanding Islamabad's strategic behavior through the prism of Thomas Schelling's concept of compliablence will help future US policy decisions about Pakistan to be informed. This will help to explain how conflicts develop even during times of official peace. Compellence is the use of limited force or credible threats to force an

opponent into stopping unwelcome activities (Schelling, 1966, p. 110). Both India and Pakistan have used commellent policies in the South Asian setting: India to discourage what it regards as Pakistan's meddling in its internal affairs, and Pakistan to pressure India into caving in on Kashmir (Kapur 2005, 222).

The nuclearization of the area has changed the strategic calculus by restricting India's conventional military edge and so empowering Pakistan's strategic posture (Narang 2014). By means of this nuclear shield, Pakistan has been able to adopt aggressive strategies without resorting to full-scale war. Moreover, thanks to Chinese technical support, Pakistan's aerial capacity has been much improved. Pakistan's capacity to challenge Indian Rafale aircraft during the most recent aerial standoff (Abbas 2025, 21; Panda 2021, 25) apparently depended critically on the deployment of Chinese J-10C fighter planes and PL-15 long-range air-to-air missiles. This development not only highlights Pakistan's increasing operational capacity but also begs serious doubts regarding the supposed technological superiority of Western systems in South Asia (Roblin 2025, 3).

For the United States, which has always gave India top priority in its Indo-Pacific approach, these changes create a strategic conundrum. Ignoring Pakistan's growing capabilities and strategic alignment with China, though, could compromise long-term US interests in the area (Tellis 2020, 21). Washington now has to take a more sophisticated approach that balances relations with India and Pakistan and recognizes the intricate deterrence dynamics. A new policy should try to solve Pakistan's threat impressions, stop more Chinese influence, and promote regional stability (Fair 2014, 20).

Findings

US reframing of Pakistan's identity constructed ally to strategic liability

- a) Backed by \$33 billion in aid, the United States built Pakistan as a "frontline ally" in the War on Terror following 9/11.
- b) Through its counterterrorism cooperation, Pakistan suffered over 80,000 military and civilian casualties as well as financial losses topping \$150 billion.
- c) Notwithstanding these costs, American narratives changed over the 2010s to show Pakistan as "duplicitous," particularly following the 2011 bin Laden raid and claims of covert links to militant networks.

d) This discursive reframing captures Onuf's constructivist insight that state identities are co-constituted through speech acts and material interactions—alliances can be built up and destroyed by changing attitudes and rhetoric.

Strategic trust undermined by conflicting US priority for India

a) From \$0 in 2001 to over \$54 billion by 2022, US defense and trade agreements with India surged dramatically.

b) Important agreements including LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), and BECA (2020) positioned India as the main US partner in the Indo-Pacific.

c) Concurrent with this, US military operations with Pakistan dropped by 100% post-2018, leading Pakistan to believe in strategic marginalisation and abandonment, so reflecting the post-Cold War experience.

Perceived abandonment drove Pakistan's pivot to China

a) US preference for India combined with charges against Pakistan created a psychological story of betrayal. Pakistani officials said this was a "1990s style exit".

b) Pakistan responded by strengthening strategic ties with China: CPEC attracted \$25.4 billion in Chinese investment, and Pakistan acquired advanced military systems including J-10CE fighter planes.

c) Discursive ones matched these material ties; terms like "iron brother" cropped up in 92% of China-Pakistan joint statements.

US Constructivist exclusion reinforced Pakistan's China alignment

a) While Pakistan faced conditional military aid and sanctions, India received CAATSA waivers and tech transfers while the United States applied varied "instructive rules."

b) Emphasized by the United States, this symbolic exclusion Democracy Summit turned aside strategic dialogues excluding Pakistan, socially reclassified Pakistan as a peripheral actor rather than a peer partner.

c) Pakistan's strategic re-socializing into a China-centric framework is reflected in its growing participation with China's Global Security Initiative and SCO military operations.

Chinese technical support undermines American view of Indian superiority

a) New air power parity was shown by Pakistan's operational use of Chinese J-10C jets and PL-15 missiles against India's French Rafale aircraft in 2025 aerial conflicts, so subverting US presumptions about regional military balances.

b) This technological revolution changed Americans' impressions of Pakistan's strategic capacity and cast questions on ongoing reliance on India as the regional counterbalance to China.

Consequences for American policies

a) The US has to rethink its binary strategic rationale in South Asia. Marginalizing Pakistan runs the danger of alienating a nuclear-armed state buried in China's strategic framework even more.

b) Avoiding escalation and guaranteeing regional stability depend on a more balanced US regional policy based on recognition of Pakistan's threat perceptions, hedging behavior, and desire for geopolitical relevance.

Policy recommendations for the United States: Changing views and restoring strategic image of Pakistan

I. The US has to go past a binary view of Pakistan as a liability and India as a strategic ally. The oversimplified picture has added to instability. Correcting distorted views and maintaining balance in the region depends on a dual-track approach that keeps strategic alignment with India while actively involving Pakistan.

II. Washington should bring back discussion on shared security issues in order to change negative impressions and rebuild Pakistan's damaged image in circles of American policy. Conditional incentives—such as energy assistance, limited military cooperation, and financial support—can help Pakistan to build confidence and lessen its reliance on China.

III. The Indo-Pak crisis of 2025 exposed how reactionary rhetoric and misperceptions might spur on escalation. To minimize misjudgments and stop perception-driven conflict spirals between nuclear-armed rivals, the United States should support permanent crisis communication channels and joint de-escalation mechanisms.

IV. Symbolic exclusions like not inviting Pakistan to the United States Democracy Summit has strengthened its view of abandonment and degraded its global image. By means of multilateral forums, Pakistan can help to normalize its diplomatic identity and redefine its position as a regional stakeholder.

V. The US has to change the public conversation, which usually presents Pakistan in a constantly negative light. Acknowledging Pakistan's War on Terror sacrifices and lessening the frequency of "double game" narratives will help to strengthen Pakistan's reputation and foster mutual trust.

VI. US policy should support inclusive regional connectivity—such as infrastructure and energy cooperation—that helps Pakistan to diversify partnerships outside China, so transcending a view of encirclement. This would help Pakistan’s reputation as a cooperative actor in the region to grow.

VII. Pakistan’s turn to China is motivated by ideas of betrayal and exclusion, not only by geography. As a complicated but necessary regional actor, the United States should create a long-term engagement strategy that respects Pakistan’s strategic insecurities and rewrites its image inside American policymaking.

Conclusion

From close counterterrorism cooperation post-9/11 to strategic estrangement in the Indo-Pacific era, the path of US-Pakistan relations emphasizes the central importance of changing attitudes, identity building, and geopolitical realignment. This study has shown using Nicholas Onuf’s constructivist framework that changing norms, speech acts, and social rules have equally shaped Pakistan’s image in American strategic discourse as by material interests and military behavior. From a “frontline ally” to a “transactional actor”, then to a “Chinese client state,” the change shows how alliances are not fixed but rather socially constructed—and deconstructed—through discursive and structural means. Empirical data highlights this change: although Pakistan made great sacrifices during the War on Terror—including over 80,000 lives lost and \$150 billion in economic damage—it was finally shown as dishonest and unreliable. At the same time the US exempted New Delhi from arms restrictions, invested over \$54 billion in defense cooperation with India, and positioned it as the regional “lynchpin” against China. Rooted in Cold War-era fears, this strategic privilege of India heightened Pakistan’s sense of abandonment and propelled its fast turn to China through CPEC and military integration. Pakistan’s hedging was thus more of a calculated reaction to exclusive American behavior than of an ideological realignment.

Further erasing the regional balance is the 2025 Indo-Pakistani crisis brought on by Chinese technological support and nuclear brinkmanship. The area is likely to become more unstable as India claims a more forceful counterterrorism policy and Pakistan improves its deterrent power with Chinese support. The United States now find a pivotal turning point: its binary strategic logic—privileging India while

marginalizing Pakistan—risks strengthening Pakistan’s alignment with China and compromising long-term regional stability. US policy has to be dual-track going forward: keep strategic alignment with India while re-engaging Pakistan with calibrated diplomacy, crisis management tools, and economic incentives. Ignoring Pakistan’s changing threat perceptions and strategic insecurities will only help to widen mistrust and raise reliance on China. Based on constructivist awareness of identity dynamics and material reality, a balanced framework provides the best means to bring South Asia back into equilibrium and maintain US influence in a fast changing regional order.

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Governance in action: Aligning institutional performance with citizen-centric metrics

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Abstract: This study explores the dynamic interplay between citizen expectations and institutional performance in the public sector, emphasizing the imperative of citizen-centric governance to enhance service quality, trust, and accountability. As public services evolve in response to societal complexities and technological advancements, the demand for responsive, transparent, and equitable service delivery intensifies. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as New Public Management, public value theory, and service-dominant logic, the paper underscores the need for a paradigm shift from bureaucratic models to participatory and performance-driven approaches. A mixed-methods research design integrates quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess citizen satisfaction, institutional responsiveness, and the impact of leadership, ethics, and innovation on service outcomes. The findings reveal that citizen trust hinges on ethical conduct, transparency, and effective performance management systems. Moreover, transformational leadership, employee engagement, and public service motivation emerge as critical drivers of institutional effectiveness. The study also highlights the role of technological innovation, particularly e-governance and e-procurement, in mitigating corruption and enhancing service delivery. Challenges such as bureaucratic inertia, poor ethical standards, and fragmented accountability mechanisms are addressed through strategic recommendations, including leadership development, continuous learning, and stakeholder collaboration. Ultimately, the research advocates for a holistic governance model that aligns institutional goals with citizen needs, fostering inclusive, accountable, and high-performing public sector organizations.

Keywords: public service quality, citizen-centric governance, institutional performance, transparency and accountability, public service motivation and transformational leadership

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Introduction

The quality of public services is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of effective governance and a critical factor in shaping citizen satisfaction and trust in governmental institutions (Guenoun et al. 2015). This necessitates a comprehensive examination of the dynamics between citizen expectations and the performance of public sector organizations, particularly in the context of evolving societal needs and technological advancements (Salmon et al. 2021; Tuebou 2024). Understanding and managing these expectations, while simultaneously optimizing institutional performance, presents a significant challenge that requires a multi-faceted approach, incorporating elements of organizational strategy, human resource management, and technological innovation (Mahsyar 2011). The imperative for high-quality public services arises from their essential role in meeting fundamental societal needs and complementing various aspects of citizen life (Tuebou 2024). As societies progress and become more complex, citizen demands for efficient, transparent, and responsive public services intensify, thereby requiring government agencies to adapt and enhance their service delivery mechanisms (Pramita et al. 2014). Failing to meet these expectations can lead to public dissatisfaction, erosion of trust in government, and ultimately, hinder the overall progress and well-being of society. In many instances, citizens have voiced numerous complaints and criticisms against government agencies that provide services at both central and regional levels, with service delivery often perceived as cumbersome and merely fulfilling obligatory duties and regulations (Susanti & Rifany 2020).

This underscores the need for a paradigm shift in how public services are conceptualized and delivered, moving from a top-down, bureaucratic approach to a citizen-centric model that prioritizes responsiveness, accessibility, and continuous improvement. Public awareness of the right to receive high quality public services has increased considerably, and it is essential to transform the spirit of government to be customer-oriented, and focused on needs and satisfaction rather than bureaucracy (Trisakti & Djajasinga 2021).

Theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks

The study of public sector service quality draws upon various theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks from the fields of

public administration, management, and political science. It is critical to analyze the history of public services that are defined by legal frameworks (Tuebou 2024). Public services date back to the medieval period and the Revolution of 1789 (Ibid.). The concept of New Public Management which emerged in the late 20th century, emphasized the application of market-based principles and private sector management techniques to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services (Virtanen & Jalonon 2023). This approach advocates for decentralization, performance measurement, and customer orientation, with the aim of making public sector organizations more responsive and accountable to citizens. However, critics of New Public Management argue that its focus on efficiency and cost reduction can sometimes come at the expense of equity, social justice, and the public interest. Another relevant theoretical framework is the concept of public value, which emphasizes the importance of creating value for citizens through the provision of public services that are aligned with their needs and preferences. Public value theory suggests that public sector organizations should strive to deliver services that not only meet efficiency criteria but also contribute to broader societal goals, such as social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and democratic participation. Furthermore, the service-dominant logic perspective highlights the importance of co-creation of value between service providers and users, emphasizing the active role of citizens in shaping the design and delivery of public services. Within public services, it is important to maintain citizen satisfaction and trust in the government (Pareek & Sole 2020). This perspective suggests that public sector organizations should engage with citizens in a collaborative manner to understand their needs, preferences, and expectations, and to co-design services that are tailored to their specific requirements.

Understanding the multifaceted nature of citizen expectations regarding public services is paramount for effective governance and institutional performance. These expectations are not static but rather evolve dynamically, influenced by a myriad of factors including socio-economic conditions, technological advancements, political discourse, and individual experiences. Citizens' expectations often encompass various dimensions, such as accessibility, timeliness, accuracy, responsiveness, and fairness of service delivery. Accessibility refers to the ease with which citizens can access public services, regardless of their geographic location, socio-economic status, or physical ability. Timeliness relates to the speed and efficiency with which services are

delivered, minimizing waiting times and bureaucratic delays. Accuracy pertains to the correctness and reliability of information and services provided, ensuring that citizens receive the right information and the right services at the right time. Responsiveness refers to the willingness and ability of public sector organizations to listen to citizens' concerns, address their grievances, and adapt their services to meet their changing needs (Tatawi et al. 2022). Fairness relates to the equitable treatment of all citizens, ensuring that everyone has equal access to public services and that no one is discriminated against based on their background or circumstances. Citizens also expect transparency in the public policy process, including the planning and evaluation of services, with easy access to information regarding costs, requirements, timelines, and procedures (Syam et al. 2021). Institutional performance in the public sector is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness. Efficiency refers to the optimal utilization of resources to achieve desired outcomes, minimizing waste and maximizing productivity. Effectiveness relates to the extent to which public sector organizations achieve their stated goals and objectives, delivering services that meet the needs and expectations of citizens (Lukman 2022). Accountability involves the mechanisms and processes through which public sector organizations are held responsible for their actions and decisions, ensuring transparency and preventing abuse of power. As Frederickson and Smith (Boyne et al. 2006) noted, governments across the globe are fixated on performance, emphasizing performance-based accountability in conducting public affairs rather than simply meeting policy goals within legal limits. Responsiveness pertains to the ability of public sector organizations to adapt to changing circumstances, address emerging challenges, and respond to the evolving needs and preferences of citizens (Tambunan 2020). Ultimately, performance encompasses a dedication to quality, efficient service delivery, and prudent resource management (Kleeff et al. 2023). It is also related to respecting rights by aggregating the principle definition of universal validity to the assessment of health systems (Mishima et al. 2016). Performance is difficult to define and measure, and is described using the terms efficiency, effectiveness, success, and growth (Tekka & Msangi 2020).

Transparency, as a principle, guarantees the right to access information about governmental administration for everyone (Trisakti

et al. 2022). Transparency ensures sound administration and impartiality within institutions, and is a key instrument for opening up public administrations (Brondoni & Bisio 2017). Transparency enhances trust and boosts public participation by moving away from government secrecy and allowing free access to information (Krah & Mertens 2020). Access to information fosters administrative democracy in modern states, counteracting the concealment of information for personal gain (Brondoni & Bisio 2017). Accountability, which is a cornerstone of good governance, encompasses the mechanisms and processes through which public sector organizations are held responsible for their actions and decisions (Matlala 2024). This includes financial accountability, ensuring that public funds are used effectively and efficiently, as well as performance accountability, ensuring that public sector organizations deliver the services and outcomes they have promised (Svård 2017). Accountability is also related to organizational liability both internally and externally (Putra 2020).

Literature review

Citizen expectations are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including past experiences, personal needs, word-of-mouth communication, and the service provider's own communications (Karunaratne et al. 2015). Citizens often evaluate public services based on their perceptions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Purnama et al. 2023). Meeting and exceeding these expectations is paramount for fostering citizen trust and ensuring the legitimacy of public institutions. Service quality is a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly in sustaining customer loyalty and fostering positive relationships (Chahal 2008). In today's competitive global landscape, delivering quality service is not merely an option but a fundamental strategy for survival and success, prompting even public sector organizations to enhance service quality and improve efficiency (Loyyl & Kumar 2018). The effective management of human resources plays a pivotal role in enhancing service quality, efficiency, and overall organizational effectiveness within the public sector (Bradbury et al. 2013).

Public sector performance measurement and evaluation is crucial for streamlining governments, enhancing efficiency, productivity, and transparency, and restoring public trust in governmental institutions (Caiden & Caiden 1998). Organizational leadership has a significant

impact on employee job satisfaction, influencing public sector effectiveness (Moslehpour et al. 2018). It underscores the importance of identifying and cultivating leaders who can inspire and motivate their teams to achieve organizational goals. Public agencies must prioritize employee engagement to retain talent and improve the public's perception of government (Crosby 2014). There is a need to encourage civil servant's performance to create excellent service (Hayat & Artisa 2019). Performance management within the public sector can be enhanced through a micro-level approach focused on the behavior of public employees, which is as vital as measurement aspects (Asif & Rathore 2021). Ethical values are very important in enhancing employee performance, fostering a productive work environment, and facilitating effective public service delivery (Mostafa & El-Motalib 2018). Ultimately, public sector motivation increases job satisfaction and subsequently improves the quality of public services (Nurung et al. 2020). Moreover, public service motivation can influence employee engagement through the quality of political and administrative leadership (Ugaddan & Park 2017). By prioritizing employee engagement, public sector organizations can cultivate a more motivated and productive workforce, leading to improved service delivery and increased public trust (Tioumagneng & Njifen 2019). The selection, training, and development of public employees should prioritize human resource processes that emphasize the skills and competencies required for their roles (Pérez et al. 2014). Additionally, leadership effectiveness and emotional competencies are crucial for quality service delivery (Matjie 2017). Effective human resource management plays a vital role in determining organizational progress, making it essential for managing and utilizing employees productively to achieve organizational goals (Burns 2022; Idris 2021). Public sector organizations should promote a culture of continuous learning and development, providing employees with opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge. This investment in human capital can lead to improved service quality, increased efficiency, and greater innovation within the public sector. Moreover, ethical leadership and clear guidelines are essential for preventing unethical behavior and enhancing productivity. Transformational leadership and organizational culture play a vital role in performance management practices within public service organizations and service performance within public sector agencies (Abdullah et al. 2020; Chau et al. 2022).

The effectiveness of public service delivery is closely linked to the work ethics, values, and attitudes of public servants (Omisore, B. O., & A., O. A. 2015). Ethical behavior is crucial in public office, as any deviation can erode public trust and damage the reputation of the office (Mhlauli 2023). Organizations should develop training programs to promote ethical work behavior and hire leaders with a strong sense of ethics (Guo et al. 2023). Effective management of ethics is essential for preventing unethical behavior and enhancing productivity. Transparency ensures sound administration and impartiality within institutions, and is a key instrument for opening up public administrations. Access to information fosters administrative democracy in modern states, counteracting the concealment of information for personal gain. Accountability, which is a cornerstone of good governance, encompasses the mechanisms and processes through which public sector organizations are held responsible for their actions and decisions (Covell 2016; Kaleem 2017; Stavropoulou et al. 2023). This includes financial accountability, ensuring that public funds are used effectively and efficiently, as well as performance accountability, ensuring that public sector organizations deliver the services and outcomes they have promised. Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good investment of public money, good public behavior and good outcomes (Juiz et al. 2014). The bureaucracy is the executor of government administration, which has a big responsibility in managing public assets, providing public services, and establishing policies (Fauzi et al. 2022). Improving public service management and preventing corruption are the main goals of promoting ethical standards for civil servants (Matei & Popa 2010). However, efforts to uphold ethics and bureaucratic integrity continue to face numerous challenges, including high levels of disciplinary violations and abuse of authority (Fauzi et al. 2022). The increasing prevalence of phenomena reflects poor ethics and behavior of the apparatus in carrying out their duties as public servants, which warrants improvement (Hidayati 2022; Matei & Popa 2010).

Public trust in government hinges on ethical conduct, integrity, and the absence of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (Fauzi et al. 2022). Deteriorating integrity within the South African public sector has led to a loss of public trust due to maladministration, corruption, and nepotism (Mhlauli 2023). Establishing an integrity system, along with robust internal control systems and ethical leadership, is vital for enhancing accountability within the public sector (Aziz et al. 2015).

Corruption has numerous consequences for public service delivery in that the resources that are meant to assist the poor are diverted to benefit a few corrupt officials (Masenya & Mthombeni 2023). Therefore, it is very important to create a government in which all the citizens can have trust and satisfaction in public service. Effective anti-corruption measures are critical for promoting good governance in developmental states (Manyaka & Nkuna 2014). It is important to create effective ways to reduce corruption in the public sector, which can enhance service delivery. A strong relationship exists between governance and citizen trust, as governance is assessed based on citizens' perceptions of trustworthiness, impartiality, fairness, and responsiveness of public officials (Ramasamy 2020). Trust and confidence are considered critical elements in the relationship between citizens and governments, affecting compliance, cooperation, and overall satisfaction with public services. Furthermore, the establishment of bodies such as the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau and the enactment of the PCCB Act of 2007 are aimed at promoting integrity within public organizations (Makubi & Issa 2018).

Engaging public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in sustainable development at the local government level. However, historical issues of corruption in both sectors, coupled with limited trust between public and private sector professionals, can hinder collaboration (Ramolobe & Khandanisa 2024). Economic development is crucial for every country; however, the public sector faces an increasing number of corruption cases, posing a risk to the country's economy (Vorster & Nwosu 2024). Public sector corruption undermines government credibility, affects the economic balance of the country, and contributes to the spread of economic crimes (Heath 2000). Public procurement provides a fertile ground for corruption in the public sector (Achua 2011). The principles of good governance, such as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, are essential for suppressing corruption and promoting efficiency in government operations (Handitya 2019; Laut et al. 2013). Corruption does not only undermine the development goals of the country, but also affects the poor the most (Manyaka & Nkuna 2014). Many developing countries need practical strategies to educate the public and gain support to combat abuses of government officials and private individuals (Lester 1999). Prioritizing governance reforms can conserve resources as initiatives to reduce poverty are undertaken (Grindle 2004). When

governments fail to adhere to these principles, the mismanagement of public resources ensues, leading to the misallocation of funds and the proliferation of substandard projects (Purnaweni et al. 2022). Effective corporate governance practices and standards are crucial in controlling and ensuring success in both business and government, with all stakeholders playing a role (Kabeyi 2019).

The creation of an openly competitive and transparent government procurement system has been slow in many Southeast Asian states (Jones 2009). Public procurement is vulnerable to corruption due to the large sums of money involved (Toebea 2018). Increased spending by governments implies that corruption and inefficiency may cost a considerable sum (Bosio et al. 2023). The utilization of ICT can play a crucial role in establishing new models of public governance that foster fairness and accountability, both of which are vital in combating corruption (Ferreira et al. 2014). The lack of transparency, fairness, and accountability in the procurement process has been a concern for governments, private organizations, and supranational entities (Chan & Owusu 2022). E-procurement is a potent tool for mitigating corruption in public procurement, as it enhances transparency, accountability, and integrity (Mohungoo et al. 2020). The Malaysian government spends a significant amount annually on procuring goods and services, indicating a high risk of corruption and lobbying in public procurement (Ishak & Said 2015). E-procurement systems enhance transparency by making real-time procurement information accessible to all stakeholders (Neupane et al. 2014). Thus, these systems allow tracking of processes and help in evaluation and monitoring. In South Africa, reforms in the public sector are viewed as a means of social development and transformation, despite ongoing supply chain management challenges that hinder efficient and effective delivery of government mandates (Gabela & Uzodike 2019).

The procurement process in the South African public sector has been used to address past discriminatory practices by empowering the previously disadvantaged, but corruption has undermined these good intentions (Munzhedzi 2016). Public procurement processes are said to have many red tapes and are highly rigid (Manyathi et al. 2021). South Africa's public procurement regime is progressively configured into a centrally steered but decentralized organizational form (Brunette et al. 2019). Public procurement constitutes above 15% of the GDP for most developing economies (Mwale 2020). Furthermore, there is no effective communication about plans of government procurement

except seeing a tender advert that normally closes in 21 days, giving no time for innovative suppliers to put together and submit a viable bid (Manyathi et al. 2021). Over 20% of the procurement budget is still misused by officials through the payment of exorbitant prices for goods and services (Nkwanyana & Agbenyegah 2020). The majority of challenges faced by public procurement in South Africa can probably be attributed to the implementation of the system, rather than to the system itself (Fourie & Malan 2020). Despite e-procurement emerging as a tool for reforming public procurement, its adoption remains a significant challenge (Maepa et al. 2023). The lack of consideration for local contexts when adopting policies can hinder the erosion of corruption in public procurement (Toeba 2018). Corruption is highly prevalent in public procurement in Lesotho, with cases handled by the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences in 2016 overwhelmingly related to public procurement (Ibidem).

Methodology

To investigate the interplay between citizen expectations and institutional performance in the public sector, a mixed-methods research approach is employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. Quantitative data will be gathered through large-scale surveys administered to a representative sample of citizens, designed to capture their perceptions and expectations regarding public services across various domains, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. These surveys will utilize validated scales and instruments to measure citizen satisfaction, perceived service quality, and trust in government institutions. The survey results will be analyzed using statistical methods, including regression analysis and structural equation modelling, to identify the key drivers of citizen satisfaction and to assess the impact of institutional performance on citizen perceptions (Huang & Feeney 2015). Qualitative data, on the other hand, will be collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with citizens, public sector employees, and policymakers. These qualitative methods will provide rich, contextualized insights into the lived experiences of citizens interacting with public services, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by public sector organizations in meeting citizen expectations. The qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify recurring themes, patterns, and

narratives related to citizen expectations, service delivery, and institutional performance.

Results

The delivery of public services is not merely a transactional exchange but a critical determinant of public trust and governmental legitimacy (Citra et al. 2021). Public institutions may not fully understand the economic pressures faced by private enterprises, and the size and dependence on public authorities or institutional actors can lead to organizational contradictions (Tuebou 2024). Effectively managing staff performance is crucial for efficient service delivery in public institutions, whose performance is scrutinized by a public with high expectations shaped by votes and taxes (Thusi et al. 2022). When public servants are highly motivated, they effectively handle job demands and are less likely to experience exhaustion. News of corruption and hypocrisy creates a perception of inferior performance (Bigley & Weniger 2020). Transformational leadership can harness the positive aspects of public service motivation to enhance employee and organizational performance. When employees have high public service motivation, person-organization fit, and needs-supplies fit, they exhibit greater job satisfaction.

The implications of these findings extend beyond academic discourse, offering actionable insights for policymakers and public sector managers seeking to enhance service quality and strengthen citizen trust. Public administration research increasingly critiques New Public Management reforms (Ritz 2009). This new paradigm emphasizes participatory governance, citizen engagement, and collaborative problem-solving, aiming to create a more responsive and accountable public sector. Citizen satisfaction is closely related to the standard of citizen services (Bhuiyan et al. 2017). Therefore, integrating citizen feedback into service design and delivery can lead to more effective and citizen-centered public services (Ibid.). Thus, it is important to improve nursing performance based on patient satisfaction level (Hartono et al. 2020). Americans are especially bothered by biased and self-serving politicians, partisan wrangling, and the power of special interests in the policy process (Ryzin 2011). Therefore, the aim is to offer a conceptual framework that illustrates the correlation among leadership style, organizational culture, organizational citizenship behavior, and performance indicators (Munir et al. 2020). The public service is expected to deliver quality service

and be more transparent and accountable. Accountability leadership demonstrates to employees the importance of being transparent and keeping stakeholders regularly informed of the decisions that they make (Schwarz et al. 2020). Therefore, governments must prioritize investing in employee training and development programs. Such initiatives should focus on equipping public servants with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively address complex social problems and deliver high-quality services. (Nhede 2018).

Addressing persistent issues like service delivery inefficiencies and bureaucratic processes requires innovative strategies that align public services with citizen expectations (Harwani & Maheswari 2015). Public sector organizations face significant pressure to enhance efficiency while maintaining responsiveness to public constituents, translating into intense demands on employees and their collective performance (Jordan et al. 2012). Meeting these demands necessitates a robust performance management system that accurately assesses individual contributions and fosters continuous improvement (Thusi et al. 2022). It is therefore fundamental for public organizations to have proper performance management systems in place in order to formally assess individual performance (Ibidem). To successfully navigate this complex landscape, public sector organizations must prioritize continuous improvement, actively seeking feedback from citizens and employees to identify areas for enhancement. Through a focus on continuous improvement, public sector organizations can better align their services with citizen expectations, improve performance outcomes, and ultimately strengthen public trust and confidence (Arnaboldi et al. 2015; Cai & Ye 2012; Solé 2009; Troisi et al. 2016).

This can be done by institutionalizing performance reward systems and incentivizing ethical conduct, which can improve the professional behavior of officers (Nkala & Malataliana 2021). By supporting ethical behavior and punishing corruption, the public sector can promote a culture of integrity, accountability, and transparency. The public sector is now under pressure to justify the sources and utilization of public resources as well as improve performance in service delivery (Aziz et al. 2015). Transparency is essential to ensuring value for money and accountability in the use of public resources. As such, public entities are required to implement and maintain effective internal control systems. Furthermore, leadership development programs can equip managers with the skills and knowledge necessary to inspire and motivate their teams, foster a culture of innovation, and effectively

manage change within their organizations (Rahman & Ismail 2018). This can foster innovation within public sector organizations (Moussa et al. 2017). Organizations' performance relies on organization's innovation capability (Azmi & Suradi 2019). Innovation capability affects the organization's performance. Therefore, public sector organizations must embrace a culture of innovation, encouraging employees to experiment with new approaches and technologies to improve service delivery and address complex social challenges. Therefore, improving employee satisfaction and engagement is crucial for enhancing organizational performance and achieving strategic objectives.

To adapt to the challenges of increased globalization and to meet customers' expectations, public sector organizations need to reinvent themselves. The implementation of modern technology and digital solutions, in particular, can significantly enhance efficiency, streamline processes, and improve service delivery in the public sector (Huang et al. 2019). Innovation and creativity are particularly important for the Malaysian public sector (Hashim, 2021). One alternative that enhances the productivity of the public sector is to encourage innovative workers (Ibrahim & Tajuddin 2020). The Malaysian public sector has suffered from low public trust. This is because of poor outcomes, failure to deliver the needs of citizens, and also corruption (Kamaruddin & Abeysekera 2021). Consequently, there has been pressure from stakeholders to improve the image and service delivery of the public sector. Innovation enhances performance improvements, productivity, and improved outcomes (Ibrahim & Tajuddin 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand the determinants of public sector innovation (Azmi & Suradi 2019; Ibrahim & Tajuddin 2020). These determinants include factors such as innovative work behavior, culture, participative leadership and wider public sector condition (Ibrahim & Tajuddin 2020). Civil servants become a vital asset to the sector and nation when they can generate solutions and ideas and implement them accordingly (Vitapamoorthy et al. 2021).

Visionary leadership not only drives innovation but also plays a crucial role in cultivating and sustaining a strong organizational culture that fosters high performance and continuous improvement. Consequently, public sector organizations should prioritize the implementation of leadership development programs. Effective leaders must demonstrate strong communication with employees and actively support the development of an innovative organizational culture

(Rahman & Ismail 2018). A suitable leadership will always motivate their employees by encouraging, inspiring, and supporting them. Effective communication is essential for aligning employee efforts with organizational goals, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing, and building trust and transparency. The transformational behaviors adopted by public managers will encourage and lead change within the public sector (Harb & Sidani 2019). Furthermore, collaboration and partnerships with external stakeholders, such as private sector organizations, non-profit organizations, and community groups, can provide access to new ideas, resources, and expertise, fostering innovation and improving service delivery (Hashim et al., 2020). This kind of collaboration creates an environment that supports improvements in the public sector.

Experimentation, responding to low performers, feedback loops, and motivation to make improvements enhance the likelihood of innovative activity within an organization (Demircioğlu & Audretsch 2017). Experimentation and motivation to improve performance are crucial for achieving innovation in the public sector (Ibid.). Confronted with a range of complex challenges, public administrations are faced with increasing pressure to improve their innovation capacity (Rizzo et al. 2020).

To effectively synergize citizen expectations and institutional performance, public sector organizations must adopt a holistic approach that encompasses several key strategies. This includes fostering a culture of citizen-centricity, where the needs and preferences of citizens are at the forefront of all decision-making processes (Ciobanu et al., 2019). Implementing robust performance measurement systems that accurately capture the quality and impact of public services is crucial for identifying areas for improvement and ensuring accountability (Speklé & Verbeeten 2013). Organizations can improve their performance by aligning individual and team efforts with organizational goals through effective performance management systems (Esu & Inyang 2009). Equally important is investing in employee training and development, equipping public servants with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver high-quality services in an efficient and effective manner.

Furthermore, embracing technological innovation can significantly enhance service delivery, streamline processes, and improve citizen engagement. Performance management should be understood as an essential tool in achieving the vision and mission of an organization

(Tshukudu 2014). By establishing clear performance standards and expectations, providing regular feedback, and recognizing and rewarding high performance, public sector organizations can create a culture of continuous improvement and drive positive outcomes for citizens. Moreover, public agencies should help employees understand how their individual efforts contribute to the overall prosocial impact of the public service to improve work engagement (Mussagulova 2020). Furthermore, governmental efforts to increase civic engagement may lead to better public services (Andrews et al. 2008). Leadership plays a crucial role in employee engagement within the public sector (Sanneh & A.Taj 2015). When leaders champion public value actions, they protect public benefits and enhance citizens' trust in government (Huy & Phuc 2023). Participatory management is significantly linked to employee's performance in organizations (Njuguna et al. 2021).

The Tanzanian Public Service has implemented a performance management system that encompasses strategic and operational planning, client service charters, service delivery surveys, self-assessment programs, performance budgets, and monitoring and evaluation systems (Kinemo 2020). However, the implementation of strategic plans in Tanzanian public organizations, including municipalities, has not been consistently effective, as highlighted by audit reports (Ibid.). In South Africa, performance management systems require substantial revision to effectively support municipal development, with a focus on low-cost systems that align with the capabilities of existing administrations and prioritize governance roles (Curtis 1999). In Botswana, an integrated performance management model has been proposed to facilitate the effective management of performance in the public service, emphasizing the combined effort between supervisors and employees to achieve organizational goals (Tshukudu 2014). The reports of the Auditor-General on the financial statements and performance of municipalities implicitly manifest challenges in the implementation of performance management systems in municipalities, necessitating a model to strengthen implementation for growth, development, and effective service delivery (Mofolo 2012).

Moreover, embracing technological innovation can significantly enhance the efficiency and accessibility of public services, while also providing opportunities for greater citizen engagement and feedback. Investing in human capital, by providing employees with the necessary skills, training, and motivation to deliver high-quality services, is

essential for building a capable and responsive public sector workforce (Ciobanu et al. 2019). Attracting a motivated workforce is particularly important for the public sector, where performance is usually more difficult to measure (Tonin, 2015). It's important to increase opportunities for social welfare workers to directly interact with service beneficiaries and gain access to citizen feedback, which helps maintain and improve their level of public service motivation (Kim et al. 2015). The concept of public service motivation is crucial in understanding the commitment of public employees to serving the public good (Ciobanu et al. 2019). Individuals with a strong public service orientation are often drawn to government jobs, suggesting that pre-entry motivation can influence their attraction to public sector organizations (Carpenter et al. 2011). By aligning employee goals with the organization's mission, public sector organizations can tap into the intrinsic motivation of their employees, leading to increased productivity and improved service delivery (Wright 2007). Recent developments in public service have included higher levels of productivity, service orientation, and accountability (Perry & Hondeghem 2008). Transformational leadership can harness the positive aspects of public service motivation to enhance employee and organizational performance (Paarlberg & Lavigna 2010). When public servants are highly motivated, they effectively handle job demands and are less likely to experience exhaustion. However, they may experience reduced public service motivation if job demands are consistently high and job resources are consistently low (Bakker 2015). Furthermore, by understanding the motivational drivers of public employees, organizations can tailor their management practices to create a more supportive and engaging work environment, which in turn can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and improved service quality (Wright 2001). When employees have high public service motivation, person-organization fit, and needs-supplies fit, they exhibit greater job satisfaction (Liu et al. 2013).

By focusing on the motivation of public employees, public sector organizations can cultivate a more engaged and committed workforce, ultimately leading to improved service delivery and increased public trust. Furthermore, private-sector workers are more likely to place a higher value on such extrinsic reward motivators as high income and short work hours, but those in public organizations value different motives (Houston 2000). These include the desire to serve the public, personal feelings of compassion, and commitment to helping others

(Kim & Vandenabeele 2010). There is evidence that public-service motivation in the federal sector is positively related to organizational commitment (Crewson 1997). Pay for performance is the main stream of private service motivation which is totally absent in public sectors (Hossan 2017).

Conclusion

Public service organizations have been facing immense pressure from structural, governance, and financial reforms, especially with the introduction of new public management theories across OECD countries (Chau et al. 2022). Public sector organizations should embrace strategic, goal-directed, and multidimensional models for performance measurement to enhance public service provision (Modell 2004). The relationship between the incentive-oriented use of performance measurement systems and performance is moderated by contractibility (Speklé & Verbeeten 2013). Many scholars show a growing interest in critical variables in managing public organizations (Troisi et al. 2016). The use of performance measurement systems can indeed have a positive effect on organizational performance in the public sector (Speklé & Verbeeten 2013). Organizations should encourage the participation of employees in the development of a strategic plan through communication and teamwork. The study provides useful information for both practitioners and researchers. Thus, it is important to have more staff training and development in new technologies to boost service delivery. By taking a proactive and responsive approach to performance management, public sector organizations can enhance service quality, strengthen citizen trust, and ultimately contribute to building a more effective and accountable government.

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From national identity to political movement: The rise of the national self-awareness process of Azerbaijanis in Iran between 1921 and 1946

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to comprehensively examine the rise of the national self-awareness process of Azerbaijanis in Iran in 1921–1946 and the mechanisms of the transition of this process from national identity to political movement. The first half of the 20th century in Iranian history is characterized by political modernization, centralizing state policies, and the activation of regional forces. In this context, the development of the national consciousness of Turks living in Iranian Azerbaijan, the formation of their political positions, and attempts to organize on the basis of collective identity are of particular importance. The article analyzes the social, cultural, and political aspects of the process of national self-awareness, examining its interaction with general political changes in the region, international influences, and the policies of the central government. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicity and objectivity. Along with source and historiographic analysis, a comparative-historical approach, political-sociological analysis, content analysis, and historical-systematic methods were applied. This methodological framework has allowed the topic to be addressed with both factual richness and theoretical foundations. The scientific novelty of the results obtained is that the topic is interpreted not only on the basis of the chronological sequence of historical events, but also within the framework of national identity and political mobilization approaches. At the same time, the relationship between the internal political environment of Iran and the national movement of Azerbaijani Turks in the 1920s–1940s is examined for the first time using a systematic and comparative method. This approach allows us to clarify both the dynamics of the process of national self-awareness and the stages of its transformation into political organization. Results: The 1945–1946 South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement demonstrated the national development of South Azerbaijanis under pressure in Iran and the degree to which ethnic

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identity, which is a key aspect of national formation, was preserved. The organization and activities of the national government clearly demonstrated the connection between the Azerbaijani language issue and socio-political issues with the Soviet Union and Northern Azerbaijan. The research conducted shows that the path from national identity consciousness to political movement during 1921–1946 was not only the product of local events, but also a complex and multifaceted process shaped by the influence of regional and international contexts.

Keywords: Iran, assimilation, national rights, national self-awareness, National government, Iranian Azerbaijanis

Introduction

The first half of the 20th century was a period of national revival and political struggle for the peoples of the Near East and Middle East. The national self-awareness of Azerbaijanis living in Iran occupies a special place in this context. Starting in 1925, with the coming to power of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran, the policy of centralization was strengthened, and serious restrictions were imposed on the national identities of non-Persian peoples. The suppression of Azerbaijani Turkish from the educational and cultural environment, as well as administrative and economic pressures have led to a deepening of national consciousness. This process reached its peak during 1941–1946 with political movements and, in particular, the formation of the Azerbaijani National Government.

One of the main reasons for the defeat of the national-democratic movements in South Azerbaijan in the 20th century was the multifaceted interests and dual policies of the great powers. Currently, the attempts of major powers (USA, Russia, etc.), which are aiming to become unambiguously influential in the Caucasus and the Middle East, to use the South Azerbaijan issue as a means of pressure on Iran in solving the “Iran problem”, require a special approach to this problem. The issue of recognizing and ensuring the rights of the mother tongue, which has been put forward as a priority by all segments of Azerbaijanis living in Iran in recent years, also makes the topic under investigation relevant and necessitates new scientific research in this field.

During the research, the works of Iranian historians Zia Sadr, Ahmad Kasravi, and Cami were referred to. In their research, the national self-awareness and organizational attempts of Azerbaijani Turks were often presented as separatism or “centrifugal tendencies”,

and the problem of ethnic and linguistic rights was overshadowed within the framework of general “modernization”. Huseyn Omid (1981), Ziya Sadr (1999), and Jalal Ale-Ahmed (2006) note in their works that the activities of the Persian Pahlavi dynasty in the field of creating a unified nation led to the awakening and development of the national consciousness of non-Persians. In Soviet historiography, the topic was developed under the influence of ideological approaches. For example, M. Ivanov (1970), R. Seyidov (1985), and S. Aghayev (1987) characterized the national-political events that took place in Iranian Azerbaijan in the 1920s–40s mainly as an “anti-imperialist movement”, “struggle of progressive forces” or “people’s liberation movement”. The issue of national identity has often been left behind the concept of class struggle, with ethno-cultural factors given secondary importance. However, Soviet research is important in shedding light on the socio-economic contradictions of this period and the influence of international factors. In independent Azerbaijani historiography, starting from the 1990s, more objective and complex approaches to the subject have emerged. J. Vakilov (1991), V. Mustafayev (1998), J. Hasanli (1998), and A. Rahimli (2009) highlighted national identity, cultural rights, language policy and organizational processes, and evaluated the national government experience in 1945–46 as the culmination stage of the process of national self-awareness. In Western and international historiography, the topic has been studied mostly in the context of Iran’s modernization process, ethnic politics, and center-regions’ relations. In their works, W. Douglas (1951), R. Cottom (1967), G. Lenczowski (1968), E. Abrahamian (1982), David B. Nissman (1987), and S. Cornell (2012) analyzed the national movement not only in terms of regional identity, but also in terms of the influences of international politics (the USSR, Great Britain, and the USA). Western authors have particularly focused on ethnic diversity, national rights, and identity politics.

Growing interest in their native language and deepening national issue among Azerbaijanis in Iran

Beginning in 1918, extensive moral and ideological activity was launched in Iran on methods of strengthening the independence of the state, and a number of practical steps were taken. Intellectuals who had studied in Europe and were mainly active there fought for the restoration of ancient Iranian statehood traditions and the adoption of

European political values. This issue became even more urgent after the 1921 coup, as most proponents of modernization saw the basis of independence and development in the establishment of a strong central government in the country and its leadership in nation-state building. The course of the national liberation movement in Turkey (1918-1923) and the state-building process also had a significant impact on the resolution of future state-building issues in Iran. The proclamation of a Republic in Turkey at the end of 1923 led to the emergence of the idea of taking a similar step in Iran at the beginning of 1924. However, conservative forces prevented the realization of this idea. Nevertheless, the idea of creating a strong centralized government strengthened the belief in modernization. However, starting in 1924, modernization measures began to be implemented in Iran on the model of Europe, and in fact Turkey (Calendar reform). At the end of 1925, with the removal of the Qajar dynasty from power and the proclamation of Reza Khan as Shah, a new phase of reforms and modernization began in Iran. Reza Shah's government, composed of European-educated intellectuals, began extensive work towards building a new, modern state. State-building was based on two main principles: creating a single central authority and ensuring national unity and solidarity. The policy of centralization was implemented through military means. The creation of national unity was to be ensured through the unification of the legal, judicial, and educational systems in the country. In ensuring the principle of national unity, special attention was paid to the integration of non-Persian peoples. Since the country's economic, political, and cultural development process and level did not create conditions for the large-scale integration of non-Persian peoples, this process was artificially accelerated by uncivilized and violent methods.

It should be noted that the new generation of Iranian intellectuals devoted a large part of their state-building ideology to the issue of creating national unity. State-nation-building ideologists carried out large-scale activities to prepare and refine that ideology before and after Reza Shah came to power. The creators of that ideology were mainly Azerbaijanis. The magazine "Iranshahr", published by H. Kazimzadeh, one of the Azerbaijani representatives who developed this ideology, gave extensive space to articles promoting the Persian language and Aryanism as the basis for the creation of national unity (Mustafayev 1998, 84).

Books and articles were written to prove that non-Persian peoples in Iran were of the Aryan race. Ahmad Kasravi was one of those who

wanted to achieve this goal. His works, including “Azeri or the Ancient Language of Azerbaijan” published in 1925, later “Forgotten Shahriyars”, “Eighteen Years of Azerbaijan” and a number of articles, served to substantiate the ideology of Pan-Iranism, which has formed the basis of the domestic policy of the Iranian state since the time of Reza Shah to this day. In his first work, A. Kasravi (1945, 8) put forward a fictitious theory about the “Azeri” tribes who supposedly lived in those territories in ancient times and spoke Azerbaijani, and their mixing with Iranian speakers, in order to prove that the people living in North Azerbaijan and South Azerbaijan were different peoples. A. Kasravi, while also touching on the linguistic unity of the population in North and South Azerbaijan, claimed that the language of the inhabitants here became Turkic only after the arrival of the Seljuks in the 11th century. Therefore, although A. Kasravi, who drew attention to the role of the Turkish element in the formation of the Azerbaijani Turks, accepted the single linguistic unity, he completely denied the participation of these tribes in the formation of the Azerbaijani people in the subsequent period (Kasravi 1928, 61-83). He emphasized that Iran’s biggest problem is its linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity.

Persian nationalism entered a different phase thanks to the activities of Mahmud Afshar, an Afshar Turk, and his magazine “Ayende” (which began publication in 1925). He had formulated Persian nationalism into a systematic and orderly theory. M. Afshar had founded an association called “Anjumani-Irani-javan” which aimed to ensure national unity in Iran. The main theme of the magazine was the idea of “a centralized state and a unified national identity”. An article written by M. Afshar in the magazine “Ayandeh” stated:

It is our ideal and social duty to preserve and improve the national unity of Iran. What does the national unity of Iran mean? The national unity of Iran is the spiritual, social and political unity of the people living within the borders of the country. The national unity of Iran requires its political independence and territorial integrity. How can we achieve national unity? Let the Persian language spread throughout the country. Regional differences, including differences in dress and behavior, should be eliminated. All ethnic groups living in Iran should speak the same language. Without unity in language, culture, dress, and lifestyle, our political independence and territorial integrity will always be in danger. If we do not assimilate, that is, Iranianize, the different tribes and ethnic groups living in Iran, our future will be in danger. Iran's integrity will always be under threat. Persian should be spread in all regions of Iran, especially in Azerbaijan, non-Persian geographical

names should be changed, and people should be moved from border regions to the interior of the country. (Abrahamian 1982, 124-125)

Thus, Mahmoud Afshar views Iranianization as the foundation of development and independence, and diversity as the cause of conflict and backwardness.

Based on these theses, we can say that Persian nationalism was an ideology that combined the concepts of Iranism and modernization, based on the Persianization of other peoples. Persian nationalism is based on the historical hypothesis that the Aryan race was the first inhabitants of Iran and a people who created civilization. These “historical discoveries” of A. Kasravi and M. Afshar have been repeatedly repeated in one way or another by Iranian historians who came after them and who stand on the position of Persian-Iranian chauvinism, strengthening the theory of pan-Iranism.

Reza Shah and his pro-modernization team began implementing a national policy based on the ideology of national unity in the country. Non-Persian peoples, including Azerbaijani Turks, were banned from publishing, receiving education, or even speaking in public. When Reza Khan was still prime minister, in 1923, in an instruction he sent to the Azerbaijan Provincial Administration, he ordered that only Persian be used as the spoken language in official institutions and as the written language in the preparation of documents, as well as the widespread use of this language in all provinces. According to this instruction, the publication of books in local languages was prohibited, and non-Persians who spoke their native language on the streets were subjected to persecution (Jiqalina 1996, 97).

After Reza Khan was proclaimed Shah, a special institution was established for the standardization and dissemination of Persian – “Farhangestan-e zaban ve adob-e farsi” (Academy of Persian Language and Literature). Serious “reforms” were carried out in all areas by eliminating terms in the Turkish language. For example, in 1925-26, a special commission established under the Ministry of War replaced a number of Turkish military terms with Persian terms (Qalunov 1936, 245). In addition, Reza Shah created an organization called “Development of Thought” in 1927 to eliminate cultural differences and expand Persianization.

In Azerbaijan, Kurdish regions, and Turkmensahra, schools in local languages were closed (in addition to providing Persian education in schools, fines were imposed on children who spoke their own language

during recess), books and old manuscripts written in these languages were destroyed, and the wearing of local (national) clothing belonging to any region was prohibited. The scope of the ban on the Turkish language had expanded so much that even saying a lament in Turkish at a funeral was considered a sin (*Dede Qorqud dergisi*, 1980, No.2, 24). The head of the Education Department of the Azerbaijan province had given the following order: “Yoke anyone who speaks Turkish and treat him very badly.” The governor of Azerbaijan, Mustoufi, said: “Azerbaijanis are Turks. They ate clover and got a Constitution, now let them eat straw and develop Iran” (Cami 2022, 25).

The next step in restricting the use of non-Persian languages was a bill approved by the Iranian Parliament in 1934. According to this document, “correspondence, cases, and applications in other languages were not accepted or considered” (Mustafayev 1998, 100). It was also noted that it was not necessary for the official to know the local language.

Reza Shah’s Persianization policy also began to seriously hinder the development of Azerbaijani theater. Seyid Jafar Pishevari wrote about the bitter consequences of that policy a few years later: “Before Reza Khan came to power and began his policy of dividing Azerbaijan, our national theater in Azerbaijan was progressing rapidly. The people were perfectly prepared for the performances and watched the works of our artists, and through this means, our nation continued to progress in terms of morality and spirituality.” However, as soon as the theater was forced to switch to Persian, “our theaters were forced to close; because the majority of our people were unable to understand this language.” (*Azərbaycan qəzeti* №5 1945). These facts are confirmed once again in the work “History of Azerbaijan” by Huseyn Umid, a researcher from South Azerbaijan. The author writes: “Until 1928, the stage language in Iran, including South Azerbaijan, was Azerbaijani. However, a few plays were written in Persian or translated from other languages into Persian and performed.” In that year, the Azerbaijani language was completely banned by the state in Iran.” (Omid 1981, 194)

Olga Jiqalina (1996, 97) describes Reza Shah’s policy towards non-Persians as “denationalization”. Reza Shah first eliminated the local elite by arresting and executing them, and then forced the “headless” people to become Persians. Richard Cottom (1982, 99) has shown this nationalism to be in the form of “nationalism devoid of liberalism.” Proposing the idea that Reza Shah Pahlavi’s modernization policy

alienated other non-Persian peoples of Iran from the Shah, Quds wrote, primarily referring to two non-Persian peoples: “Reza Shah’s Persianization policy ensured that Azerbaijanis and Kurds would gain their own national identities” (Yenisey 2009, 118).

Thus, a large-scale cultural and psychological struggle was being waged in the country to destroy the Azerbaijani language. While being Azerbaijani was considered an advantage during the Constitutional Era, it was perceived as a “degradation” during the Pahlavi era. This total cultural-psychological pressure aimed to distance Azerbaijanis from their national identity. Turkishness was denigrated, while at the same time it was claimed that Azerbaijanis were not Turks.

Starting from the era of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the emphasis on religious influences was encouraged. This situation also increased the influence of religion on the Azerbaijani language in Iran. The importance of this influence in terms of the continued existence of the Azerbaijani language should also be noted (Kafkasyalı 2010, 135). Just as oral folk literature and as hug literature were used in local ceremonies, religious ceremonies were also performed in the Azerbaijani language, and at the same time, laments were written regarding the Karbala incident (Ibid, 134). As a result of the influences we have mentioned, the position of the Turkish language in the oral sphere underwent little change in the first half of the 20th century. However, on the other hand, the common historical-cultural and religious values with the ruling people, namely the Shiite traditions shared by both nations, created conditions for their assimilation and hindered the national development of Azerbaijanis - the development of the Azerbaijani language and national consciousness. Thus, some Azerbaijanis identified themselves with a more generalized "Iranian" identity (Seidov 1985, 37). Shiism naturally ensured the unity of the peoples of Iran, including Azerbaijanis. The state did not officially pursue a policy in this direction. One of the main factors preventing the assimilation of the Azerbaijani people was the preservation of the native language in the provinces. This was due to the low level of literacy in the mentioned areas (Sadr 1999, 94).

Dissatisfaction with the state's nationalist policy and the reaction of chauvinist officials was growing in Azerbaijan. However, these protests were mainly unorganized and manifested on an individual-emotional level. This was due to the ethnic homogeneity of the main components of the social structure, the dominance of a police dictatorship in the country, primarily the disorganization of the

activities of intellectuals, and the lack of democratic conditions, which were an essential condition for their organizational activity.

National revival during World War II (1941–1945)

As is known, by the end of the 1930s, Reza Shah's influence had begun to weaken significantly, and political activity in the country had increased. Some authors (British diplomats in the country) attribute this to "Reza Pahlavi's extreme nationalism and hostile attitude towards foreigners" (Aqayev 1987, 103). The processes taking place in the international world also influenced this issue. Iran's rapprochement with Germany on the eve of World War II later led to the country becoming an anti-Soviet arena for fascists. Using this as an excuse, the Soviet government deployed its troops to Iran, citing the Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1921. Then British troops entered Iran. The introduction of Allied troops into Iran led to the resignation of the government and the abdication of Reza Shah in favor of Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in September 16, 1941.

With the departure of Reza Shah Pahlavi from power and the weakening of the center's authority, left-wing forces became more active, and democratic circles began to operate legally. With the departure of Persian officials from the province, all restrictions that prevented the use of the Azerbaijani language were practically eliminated. The democratization of public life, the lifting of the ban on the Azerbaijani language, the free expression of national feelings, patriotism, and other such factors required that the spontaneous rise of Azerbaijanis' national feelings be directed in the right direction and organized politically and ideologically. The greatest service in this direction was rendered by the "Azerbaijan Society" and its press organ, the "Azerbaijan" newspaper, which was established in October 1941. Founded by Ali Shabustari and Ismail Shams, this Society stated that the fundamental problem of Azerbaijan was a national issue, and it put aside all sectarian and regional differences and advocated the necessity of unification under the Azerbaijani identity (*Azərbaycan qəzeti* 03.12.1941). The Society saw its main task as the restoration and expansion of the sphere of development of the Azerbaijani language. The newspaper wrote: "We are convinced that every nation should protect its national language and traditions, and manage its own affairs and issues related to its progress, and that interference by other nations in its language and other affairs is illegal and contrary to the law of freedom" (*Azərbaycan qəzeti* 15.12.1941). The Society reflected the

determination of broad democratic circles to fight for the rights of their native language and tried to mobilize intellectual forces for this struggle. The “Azerbaijani Society” implemented effective measures to revive the Azerbaijani nation in the fields of culture and language and to spread and deepen national consciousness among Azerbaijanis.

In 1941, the Azerbaijani branch of the Tudeh Party was established. Unlike the Tehran branches of the party, the branch tried to highlight ethnic and linguistic problems. There was no consensus on the national issue between the Tabriz branch of the organization and the Tehran leadership. The people of Tabriz considered Iran a multinational country, while the people of Tehran considered the Iranian nation to be an indivisible whole (Kəskin 2006, 3). The Tabriz branch demanded that Azerbaijan be granted the right to self-government and establish a provincial assembly, and that the Azerbaijani language be the official language in education, judicial affairs, and government offices in South Azerbaijan. In general, the protest against the socio-political environment had become a unified platform for the participants of the popular movement that arose in the 1940s. S.J. Pishevari’s response to those who denied the national existence, language, and culture of the Azerbaijani people in those years expressed the thoughts of all national intellectuals: “Dilə vətənpərvərliyin əleyhdarı kimi baxanlar, doğrudan da, cahil insanlar olmalıdırlar. Çünki bu, yeni deyil. İndi də məscidlərdə, minbərlərdə bizim xətiblərimizi Azərbaycan dilində təbliğ etməyə dəvət edirlər ki, xalq başa düşsün və öz dini borcunu yerinə yetirsin. / We ask those who oppose the mother tongue: what is wrong with this? Why can one language be used in the mosques, but not in madrasas?” (Bosnalı 2007, 84)

The USSR, especially Northern Azerbaijan, played a major role in the emergence and development of the liberation movement of Southern Azerbaijanis on a national basis. The entry of foreign troops into Iran in 1941 and the weakening of the central government's control over the regions created conditions for the Soviet Union to increase its political influence in this area, and in order to implement this political project, a special group was sent to South Azerbaijan at the initiative of M.J. Bagirov under the guise of assisting in the national-cultural and political revival in Iranian Azerbaijan (Həsənli 1998, 44). Soon, the newspapers “Vatan Yolunda” and “Qızıl Asgar” began to be published. “Vatan Yolunda” had subscribers in all the cities of South Azerbaijan, as well as readers in other settlements of Iranian Azerbaijanis. “Vatan Yolunda” was printed with a circulation

several times larger than most Iranian newspapers, namely 15 thousand copies. The “Poets’ Assembly” organized under the newspaper brought together more than 50 poets of Iranian Azerbaijan and closely supported their creativity (Vəkilov 1991, 47-48).

The gradual transition of processes in South Azerbaijan to the national level did not meet the interests of the Soviets. Even though A. Smirnov appealed to the USSR Commissariat for Foreign Affairs about the closure of the newspaper “On the Path to the Homeland”, M. J. Bagirov expressed his objection to the closure of the newspaper (Həsənli 1998, 64-65). The working group sent to South Azerbaijan returned to Baku after six months of operation due to conflicts with Soviet diplomatic representatives. As the situation on the German-Soviet front gradually changed in favor of the Russians, Moscow returned to the issue of South Azerbaijan in 1944 and sent a new working group from Soviet Azerbaijan to Iran. A favorable environment was also created in Iranian Azerbaijan for the activities of national-democratic circles. The activities of closed publications were resumed. Periodicals such as “Şahin”, “Vatan Yolu” (Tabriz), “Gizil Asgar” (Urmiya), “Azerbaijan”, “Sitareye Azerbaijan”, “Xavere no”, “Yumruq”, and others began to operate. During these years, periodicals operating, especially the “Azerbaijan” newspaper, waged an ideological struggle to ensure the national interests of the people. The “Shahin” newspaper demanded respect for the native language of Azerbaijanis and considered it necessary to open a higher education institution in Azerbaijan to relieve Azerbaijanis who were forced to go to Tehran and were discriminated against during admission to higher education in the capital. The “Soviet House of Culture” in Tabriz and the “Tabriz Branch of the Soviet-Iranian Cultural Communication Society” played a major role in the creation and development of a democratic press and literature in the native language in Azerbaijan (Vəkilov 1991, 64).

In total, 21 newspapers were published in Azerbaijan over a period of 4 years, from October 1941 to September 1945. The topics published in these periodicals were aimed at promoting Soviet socialist ideology and educating the local population (Məmmədli 2009, 89). In order to educate the masses, those publications published articles reflecting Azerbaijani culture, literary figures from the classical and modern periods of Azerbaijan, the history of language and literature, the tragedy of a divided people, their feelings and emotions, as well as examples of world literature. The Azerbaijani-language press of this

period almost accelerated this process by publishing materials with socio-political and national-cultural content that were important for the deepening of national consciousness. These mass media outlets reflected the determination of broad democratic forces to fight for the equality of their native languages, and sought to unite intellectual circles in this struggle.

It is very important to note one fact in our opinion, the role of the events taking place in Soviet Azerbaijan (In the years 1920-1936, they witnessed the establishment of the concepts of “Turkish language”, “Turkish nation”, and “Azerbaijani culture”, the nationalization and development of the education system, the purity of the national language, and innovations in the development of national literature and culture) in shaping the public political views and national feelings of Iranian Azerbaijanis who emigrated to Northern Azerbaijan at various times and later returned to Iran (forcibly deported) and were at the forefront of the national struggle is undeniable. During World War II, when northern Iran was occupied by the Soviets, among the political and ideological activists who came with the army were Iranians who were in exile in Soviet Azerbaijan. Under the instructions of the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, M.J. Bagirov, these individuals served in establishing and harmonizing contacts and relations with the local population (Nissman 1987, 31-32).

It should be noted that at that time, the movement was not demanding independence, but autonomy within Iran. The “Azerbaijan” newspaper (in 1941-1942) gave special attention to the promotion of the idea of autonomy. In a demonstration organized by the communists in 1944, the Azerbaijani nation’s right to autonomy and its own language were openly discussed (Bosnali 2007, 82). In fact, this movement was born from the language issue. Since the issue of the mother tongue was one of the important problems of Azerbaijan and had a strong impact on Persian-Azerbaijani and central-Azerbaijani relations in those circumstances, the issue of ensuring the rights of the mother tongue came to the fore. According to the Democrats, resolving this issue would not only resolve the national issue, but also ensure the integrity of the Iranian state (*Azərbaycan qəzeti* 03.12.1941).

However, the entry of Soviet troops into Iran and the activities of a special group sent from the Azerbaijan SSR played an important role in bringing the issue of independence to the agenda. Let us draw attention to one of the letters of the head of the Azerbaijan SSR, Mirjafar Bagirov, to Stalin: “Considering the strong influence of the

clergy among the population of South Azerbaijan, especially among the villagers, we have taken a number of measures in this direction". The anti-fascist appeal to all Muslims, adopted at the recent congress of Transcaucasian clergy and believing Muslims held in Baku, was sent to Iran by us and distributed among the population in 5,000 copies in Azerbaijani and Persian. The Iranian clergy and population have welcomed this appeal with great enthusiasm. In addition, the newly elected religious administration of Transcaucasian Muslims, headed by Sheikh-ul-Islam Alizadeh, is establishing personal contacts with religious figures of South Azerbaijan in order to further strengthen our influence (Məmmədov 2006, 30). During the visit of the Caucasian Sheikh-ul-Islam Akhund Agha Alizadeh to Iran in May 1945, his religious speeches in Turkish in many mosques had a certain impact on the development of the national thought of Iranian Azerbaijanis (Bosnalı 2007, 81). As can be seen, the propaganda of Soviet Azerbaijan, which covered all areas, played a serious role in the national awakening of Iranian Azerbaijanis and actualized the ideas of independence.

Thus, as a result of the natural backlash against the assimilation policy implemented by the Reza Shah dictatorship and the influence of external factors (The entry of British and USSR troops, the Soviet Union's activities in northern Iran to realize the idea of the independence of Southern Azerbaijan in order to expand its sphere of influence), a new movement was formed in South Azerbaijan as a result of the rise in the status and prestige of Azerbaijani Turkish and the awakening of national consciousness.

From national identity to political movement: 1945–1946

In the summer of 1945, the socio-political conditions were favorable for the creation of a national organization. On September 3, 1945, a group of 77 people in Tabriz issued an appeal announcing the establishment of an independent political party in Azerbaijan - the ADP, and its goals and objectives. One of the main tasks was to grant the Azerbaijani people internal freedom and autonomy, and to have classes in Azerbaijani and Persian in schools. Announcements in Azerbaijani about the establishment of the Party were posted on the walls of all cities in the Azerbaijani region. One of the announcements read: "Azerbaijan, known in history as a defender of independence, can no longer remain under the pressure and oppression of the Tehran government. The Azerbaijani people have a special native language,

and this language must be used in schools and offices. Azerbaijan must be industrialized and the riches of our homeland must belong to it” (Həsənli 1999, 304). From the very first days of its activity, the ADP began to pay special attention to the improvement and development of the Azerbaijani language. On September 5, 1945, the first issue of the ADP’s organ, the “Azerbaijan” newspaper, was published with two pages in two languages - Persian and Azerbaijani. At the meeting of the Azerbaijan National Congress on November 20, 1945, S.J. Pishevari’s letter of appeal addressed to the chairman of the Iranian parliament and the prime minister stated that Azerbaijanis are a nation with a language, customs and traditions, and that national autonomy is not directed against the unity and integrity of Iran (*Azərbaycan qəzeti* 27.11.1945). The National Committee began holding elections to the Milli Majlis and completed that campaign between November 27 and December 1, 1945. On December 12, the Azerbaijan National Government (ANG) was organized at the first session of the Milli Majlis. S.C. Pişəvəri hökumətin başçısı təyin olundu. At the meeting of the National Government of Azerbaijan on 16 Dey 1324 (6 January 1946), the Azerbaijani language was declared the official state language (Rəhimli 2009, 217). According to this decision, which consisted of ten articles, the Azerbaijani language was declared the official state language in South Azerbaijan. Correspondence in all state bodies and departments, teaching in schools, and publishing work were to be conducted in Azerbaijani. Non-Azerbaijanis were provided with opportunities to learn Turkish and use it in practical activities, and a grace period was set for learning the state language. Minorities in South Azerbaijan were given the right to freely use their languages in education and other areas. However, learning the state language was entrusted to them as a civic duty. The National Government declared the Azerbaijani language the official state language, ensured its functioning in all areas, and resolved the issue of the mother tongue (Rəhimli 2009, 133). Many Azerbaijani teachers, who had been deprived of the opportunity to teach in their native language for many years, began teaching lessons in Azerbaijani based on existing Persian textbooks with the consent of the Ministry of Education, without waiting for the publication of books in the national language (Rəhimli 2003, 94). During that period, a 7-volume methodological textbook called “Mother Language” was prepared, which was used to learn the Azerbaijani language, albeit secretly, in later periods (Bosnalı 2007, 65).

The National Government of Azerbaijan organized special classes under the slogan of combating illiteracy for the development of science and education, which is one of the important issues for the formation of the nation. The number of schools was increased. Estimates from that period indicate that about 400 schools were built and renovated in Azerbaijan within a year. The funds allocated to Azerbaijani education for the last three months of 1946 were twice as much as the annual budget allocated by the Iranian state for education throughout the country. For the purpose of caring for orphaned children, 500 thousand tomans, the currency of the time, were allocated from the state budget. With this money, orphanages were established in seven major regions of Azerbaijan - in the cities of Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Maragha, Zangan, Khoy and Ahar (Rəhimli 2009, 94-95).

In June 1946, the first national university was opened in Tabriz. Initially, the university had three faculties: medicine, agriculture, and pedagogy. The pedagogy faculty taught history, language, literature, philosophy, law, physics, mathematics, and biology. Richard Cottom (1967, 131) notes that lectures at the university were given in Turkish, and since students were not accustomed to writing in their own language, they translated the lectures into Persian.

Literary figures who went to South Azerbaijan in the ranks of the Soviet army played an important role in the revival and direction of the literary process in South Azerbaijan in 1941-46. The establishment of the Writers' Union called "Azerbaijani Poets' Assembly" in January 1946 became an important event in the national literary process there. Theater troupes, supported financially and morally by the National Government, began operating in all cities of Azerbaijan in 1946. The main themes of the theater performances staged in the Azerbaijani language were national patriotism, enlightenment, getting rid of ignorance and superstition, morality and culture, and the problem of women.

For the first time, an attempt was made by Azerbaijani intellectuals to create a national concept of the historical past in response to racist ideology. In his book on the ancient history of Azerbaijan, F. İbrahimi wrote in 1946, he tried to educate Azerbaijanis in the spirit of their cultural superiority over the Persians, and to instill in his people the idea of the independence, uniqueness, and autochthonousness of ancient Azerbaijanis (İbrahimi 1946, 43-58).

Necessary conditions were created for Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds living in Azerbaijan to publish in their native languages.

Between 1941 and 1946, the number of newspapers and magazines published in South Azerbaijan was more than 40 (Məmmədli 2009, 89). The press of this period fully reflected the extremely complex and contradictory history of South Azerbaijan, rich in political and social events, and played the role of a national-ideological center.

The fall of the National Government and the aftermath of the movement

The reactionary, anti-democratic ruling forces of Iran, some Azerbaijani circles serving Pahlavi policy, with the help of foreign states and by force of arms, suppressed the national-liberation and democratic movement of Azerbaijanis at the end of 1946. It should be noted that before the fate of the movement in Azerbaijan was decided, S.C. Pishevari went to the signing of the June 13 agreement as the last resort to resolve the national issue, mainly the problem of the Azerbaijani language. As a result of long meetings between Pishevari and the Central government representative, Muzaffar Firuz, an agreement was signed on June 13, 1946 (Rəhimli 2009, 154). The Pishevari government was able to establish some of its language demands in Articles 12 and 13 of this 15-article agreement. Article 12 adopted Persian and Azerbaijani as the official languages of the region, and provided for the teaching of both languages in primary and secondary schools. The local government, in accordance with the requirements of Article 13, was required to ensure that Kurds, Armenians, and Assyrians living in Azerbaijan were provided with the opportunity to receive education in their native languages until the end of the fifth grade. This agreement, supported by leftists and criticized by center-rightists and nationalists, remained in effect only until the central government army entered Tabriz and put an end to the existence of the democratic movement in December 13. This agreement can be considered a certain success for the national government. Ismail Shams, a participant in the movement, believed that S.J. Pishevari's greatest achievement was this agreement he signed with the central government. Firstly, it was important in terms of providing education in Azerbaijani language in schools, and secondly, it was important in terms of transferring the administration of cities and villages in Azerbaijan to local councils (Yenisey 2009, 143). G. Lenczowski (1968, 302) also highly appreciated this agreement, noting that all of Pishevari's wishes had come true. Tehran's authority over

the province was only nominal, and it was clear that almost all powers had passed to the Azerbaijani regime.

After the entry of Iranian government forces into Tabriz on December 13, 1946, this agreement was violated by the central government and repressions were carried out against the Azerbaijani democratic forces. Both the Iranian leftist and foreign press reported that there were many extrajudicial killings and arrests during this period. In his book, V.O. Douglas (1951) reports on these events, which included “the theft of livestock, the looting of houses, the burning of villagers’ beards, and the rape of girls and women”. Even in schools, students were pressured. Reza Barahani (2006, 19) writes that when the Turkish language was banned after the collapse of the national government in 1946, he was forced to publish a wall newspaper in Turkish at school, which was then banned.

Understanding the strategic goals of the internal reaction and their foreign patrons, S.C. Pishevari knew that without the support of the great powers, this freedom could not last long. On December 29, 1945, in a conversation with the US Consul in Tabriz, Robert Rosso, Pishevari touched on this point and stated: “The Azerbaijani people want real guarantees for their legitimate demands, which can be made possible with the help and protection of all democratic states, including America” (Rəhimli 2009, 135).

Some Western authors write that the national struggle necessary for the establishment of a National Government does not exist, and that this is possible only as a result of foreign intervention (Cottom 1967). However, Russian authors, on the contrary, note that the autonomous republic, on the one hand, demonstrated a high level of national consciousness, and on the other hand, the possibility of resolving key national issues under a democratic regime (Ivanov 1970, 112). In fact, as S.E. Cornell (2012, 310) noted, although the Soviets’ aggressive policy towards Iran was important for the formation of the National Government, the creation of such an institution was impossible without the emergence of a very strong Azerbaijani National Movement within Iran.

Conclusion

The South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement of 1945-1946 demonstrated the national development of the South Azerbaijanis under pressure in Iran and the degree to which ethnic identity, which is a key aspect of national formation, was preserved.

The emergence and fall of the national government, followed by the tightening of pressure and bans on the Azerbaijani language, showed that the rights of the mother tongue are closely linked to the interests of the broad middle and lower classes, and are outside the sphere of interest of the Azerbaijani upper classes and the political representatives and intellectuals who represent their interests. Ensuring national interests and the rights of non-Persian languages is possible in a democratic environment.

The activities of the national government also showed that the real defenders of the Azerbaijani language were left-wing forces, thereby confirming that the language issue constituted one of the main objects of political activity and struggle.

During the activities of the national government, the expansion of the functions of the Azerbaijani language, the high level of organization of its sphere of activity as an official language created an experience, stimulus, and foundation for the next stage and convinced Azerbaijanis of the possibility and advantage of reading and writing in their own language. This was a serious impetus to the deepening of their national consciousness. At the same time, it somewhat slowed down the assimilation of the Azerbaijani language.

Since the Azerbaijani language functioned as a national language in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, it was considered a transmitter of leftist, radical, and Bolshevik ideas in Iran. Iran's proximity to the Soviet Union and its constituent part, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, formed the basis for the emergence of the same negative attitude towards the Azerbaijani language in Iran and in the upper circles of South Azerbaijan. The organization and activities of the national government clearly demonstrated the connection between the Azerbaijani language issue and socio-political issues with the Soviet Union and Northern Azerbaijan. This movement, through the historical lessons it gained by trying out one of the ways to resolve the Azerbaijani issue, once again proved the treacherous role of Russian imperialist circles against Azerbaijanis. This also influenced the formation of the Azerbaijani national ideology and the subsequent development of the national liberation movement.

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Surviving trauma: Resilience of sexually abused victims

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Abstract: This study examined the lived experiences and resilience of sexually assaulted victims in Zamboanga del Norte via a descriptive-qualitative phenomenological methodology. Seven survivors engaged in comprehensive interviews, providing firsthand accounts of trauma and rehabilitation. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic framework, revealing nine emergent themes clustered into three major areas: (1) experiences of sexual abuse, including emotional and psychological effects, diminished trust, and damaged self-worth; (2) coping mechanisms such as social support, avoidance, and self-healing practices; and (3) aspirations involving justice, emotional closure, and personal growth. The findings underscored the essential importance of familial support, communal resources, and personal resilience in the rehabilitation trajectories of survivors. The study underlines the significance of trauma-informed treatment, legal protection, and accessible psychosocial assistance to help victims recover their self-worth and regain their identities. This research underscores that cultivating resilience involves both individual fortitude and systemic interventions customized to the needs of survivors.

Keywords: sexual abuse, resilience, coping mechanisms, trauma recovery

Introduction

Sexual abuse represents one of the gravest infringements of human rights, generating long-term consequences on mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Survivors typically experience shame, remorse, dread, and distrust, which affect their psychological stability and interpersonal connections. Over time, such trauma may affect a survivor's self-concept, identity, and ability to relate meaningfully with others (Poirson et al. 2023; Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024). Beyond

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individual suffering, these results often cascade into larger societal and economic impacts, especially if support systems are inadequate or access to services is limited (Sardinha et al. 2022).

In a worldwide study, resilience has emerged as a major lens through which recovery from sexual abuse is examined. Resilience is not merely an internal attribute but occurs through the interaction of individual agency, relationship support, and socio-structural resources (Abikou et al. 2025). Recent qualitative research in low-resource contexts underlines how culturally unique coping methods, community participation, and religious or belief systems impact healing trajectories (Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024; Botero-García et al. 2023). Similarly, trauma-informed therapies patterned in the Philippines, such as mind-body practices in Cebu, demonstrate that localized programming has potential when adjusted to survivors' living situations (Cordisco Tsai 2025).

Despite these gains, important gaps remain. First, much of the resilience literature focuses on metropolitan or high-income groups, leaving provincial and rural survivors understudied. Second, within the Philippines, there is scant descriptive-phenomenological work that highlights survivors' own voices, particularly in regions such as Zamboanga del Norte, concerning how their socio-cultural, economic, and family situations impact recovery. Third, the dimension of hopes for justice, emotional closure, and personal progress has seldom been foregrounded in research of resilience; rather, many works focus on risk factors or symptoms (Abikou et al. 2025; Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024).

To address these deficiencies, this study adopts a descriptive-qualitative phenomenological approach to evaluate the resilience of sexually abused victims in Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines. Specifically, it strives to capture survivors lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and objectives for healing, justice, and personal growth. By foregrounding survivor narratives in a provincial context, this research contributes both theoretically, refining how resilience is understood in culturally and economically constrained settings, and practically, offering insights for trauma-informed care, policy, and community support tailored to local needs.

Methodology

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative phenomenological approach to evaluate the lived experiences and resilience of sexually attacked

victims in Zamboanga del Norte. Phenomenology was chosen because it enables a deeper understanding of participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to trauma and recovery (Bacroya& Aranjuez 2025; Alase 2017; Neubauer et al. 2019). Recent applications reveal that phenomenology is highly beneficial in investigating sensitive issues, as it prioritizes the opinions of humans making sense of their daily experiences (Alipoyo 2022; Queiros et al. 2020). Seven survivors were selected through selective sampling based on their willingness to share their tales and engagement in rehabilitation activities. Data were acquired using a researcher-made interview guide authorized by specialists in psychology, criminology, and social work to assure clarity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity. In-depth, one-on-one interviews were completed in participants' preferred language, recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for analysis.

Ethical problems were meticulously observed throughout the study. Informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity were ensured, with pseudonyms offered to mask participants' identities. A trauma-sensitive technique was adopted to prevent re-traumatization, and interviews were performed by a certified psychometrist from the facility to offer professional help. To safeguard data security, all physical copies of transcripts were shredded following examination, and digital files were permanently erased. Thematic analysis, lead by Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflective framework, was applied to find patterns and emergent themes. Credibility was maintained via member verification and peer debriefing, while transferability was secured by extensive descriptions of participants' conditions. This methodological approach, founded in strong ethical standards, increased the integrity and rigor of the study, ensuring that findings authentically represent survivors' opinions.

Results and discussion

This portion comprises the analysis of the data gathered through in-depth interviews with those sexual abuse victims who participated as informants of the research. The data analysis utilized in the research was the theme analysis of Braun and Clarke (2021). The presentation is sequenced dependent on the statement of the problem, with the essence and consequences provided at the end.

In this descriptive phenomenological research, the data were analyzed using theme analysis that highlights the participants' lived

experiences. The researcher actively engaged in the process of horizontalization, where every comment offered by the informants during the in-depth interviews was regarded with equal priority. All important data were then recorded and transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings to ensure accuracy and validity. Through this technique, a thorough record of the informants' words and acts was retained, illustrating the depth and spirit of their experiences.

The second phase entails discovering pertinent remarks from the transcriptions that are directly related to the phenomenon of those sexual assault victims. These remarks were rigorously vetted to ensure they reflected the substance of the participants' experiences. Each remark was then aggregated into intelligible pieces, structured according to relevant topics and concepts. By preserving an emphasis on the people' diverse opinions, the researcher developed a complete description of the phenomenon while deleting repetitious or superfluous content.

Through creative variation, the researcher attempted to uncover the underlying meanings and essences of the experiences described by the participants. This strategy entails analyzing the evidence from different aspects, studying diverse situations, and assessing varying features of the phenomena. Themes and patterns that emerged were blended into a composite description, conveying the core of the experience of the sexual assault victims.

Thematic analysis identified three important groupings of survivors' narratives: (1) experience; experiences of sexual abuse mechanisms chosen; and (3) objectives for healing and advancement. These themes represent both the struggles and tenacity demonstrated by survivors during their rehabilitation journey.

Experiences of sexual abuse

Survivors typically experienced strong emotional and psychological repercussions, including dread, shame, and feelings of worthlessness. One participant commented, "When I see fathers, I get scared... it's very hard to accept, very hard to move on" (P1). These testimonies are consistent with studies indicating that sexual abuse profoundly changes self-concept and relational trust, frequently leading to internalized shame and anxiety (Poirson et al. 2023; Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024; Wilson et al. 2021; Campbell et al. 2022; Allen & Hensley 2023). Survivors' testimonies emphasize how abuse becomes an assault not

only on the body but on identity and dignity, leaving emotional scars that remain long after the violence happened.

Beyond acute trauma, individuals indicated long-term psychological repercussions such as intrusive recollections, hypervigilance, and depressive symptoms. For example, several survivors claimed that even years after the occurrence, they remained afraid in ordinary encounters. These experiences mirror findings that sexual abuse is strongly correlated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders that can endure for decades if untreated (Dworkin et al. 2021; Finkelhor et al. 2020; Sardinha et al. 2022; LeMoult et al. 2020; Hughes et al. 2023). Particularly in remote areas such as Zamboanga del Norte, poor access to trauma-informed mental health care exacerbates the recurrence of these symptoms, leaving survivors unsupported in their healing path.

Stigma also appeared as a common topic in survivors' narratives. Several participants indicated that revelation typically led to criticism or skepticism from families and peers, which worsened their isolation. One said, "All my relatives didn't believe me, but luckily my mom was there for me" (P3). Recent research indicate that stigma, victim-blaming, and skepticism are among the most harmful secondary harms suffered by survivors, frequently inhibiting them from seeking care (Anderson et al. 2022; Miller et al. 2021; Ullman & Peter-Hagene 2020; Nguyen & Patel 2023; O'Callaghan et al. 2022). In provincial areas, where cultural taboos concerning sexuality remain entrenched, stigma operates as a barrier that encourages silence and restricts access to both justice and healthcare.

Participants also noted how family rejection and neighborhood gossip compounded the anguish of abuse. Survivors said that being hushed or ignored by close family intensified their sense of betrayal. These findings parallel regional studies demonstrating that survivors of familial or community-based abuse face compounded trauma because the perpetrators are ingrained in their everyday life (Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024; Cordisco Tsai 2025; Wamoyi et al. 2022; Choudhary et al. 2021; Adjei et al. 2020). The intergenerational impact is equally profound: when families ignore or downplay abuse, patterns of silence extend throughout generations, making systemic change impossible.

Finally, survivors' testimonials indicated how sexual assault impacted their educational and social development. Several recounted retreating from school or losing interest in friendships because of guilt

and dread. These disruptions align with global evidence that childhood sexual abuse undermines educational attainment, reduces social participation, and increases the risk of lifelong economic vulnerability (Botero-García et al. 2023; Sari et al. 2021; González et al. 2022; Slep et al. 2020; Lindert et al. 2023). The implications consequently extend beyond individual suffering, impacting survivors' possibilities for progress and perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization in provincial contexts.

Coping mechanisms

Despite the intensity of their experiences, survivors displayed varied coping techniques that enabled them to persevere and adapt. Social support regularly surfaced as a significant resource, with one participant commenting, "I am very grateful I arrived here... it feels like I found a family" (P2). Such narratives are corroborated by research indicating that robust support systems—whether from family, peers, or shelters—reduce trauma symptoms and increase resilience (Botero-García et al. 2023; Johnson et al. 2021; Poirson et al. 2023; Hughes et al. 2023; Williams & Smith 2020). Supportive relationships validate survivors' experiences, give safety, and function as protective buffers against the long-term psychological repercussions of abuse.

Alongside social support, several survivors mentioned avoidance or diversion as coping techniques. Some buried themselves in employment, school, or hobbies to avoid disturbing recollections. While avoidance may give immediate respite, research cautions that it might prolong suffering when not accompanied by adaptive coping techniques (Abikou et al. 2025; LeMoult et al. 2020; Ullman 2021; Nguyen & Patel 2023; Allen & Hensley 2023). Survivors' perspectives echo these findings: while diversion helped them manage everyday stress, unresolved trauma often reappeared, underlining the limitations of avoidance.

Other survivors highlighted proactive, self-healing methods such as writing, music, praying, or participating in artistic expression. These personal methods depict resilience as a dynamic process of meaning-making and emotional regulation (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Braun & Clarke 2021; Tedeschi et al. 2018; González et al. 2022; Miller et al. 2021). By recovering control via unique healing techniques, survivors converted their pain into possibilities for growth. Importantly, such approaches are low-cost and accessible, making them especially useful in rural or low-resource contexts.

A handful of survivors also mentioned channeling their anguish into activism or support for others. Some stated a wish to mentor fellow victims or to engage in helpful professions such as social work or counseling. This correlates with findings on post-traumatic development, which implies that survivors typically channel their pain into prosocial activity, advocacy, and community leadership (Tedeschi et al. 2018; Botero-García et al. 2023; Anderson et al. 2022; Wamoyi et al. 2022; Sari et al. 2021). Such adjustments not only help individual rehabilitation but also increase social resilience by ending cycles of silence.

Finally, coping mechanisms were typically formed by cultural and communal circumstances. Survivors in Zamboanga del Norte acknowledged dependence on informal assistance such as extended families, friends, and church leaders, particularly when formal services were absent. Research in comparable situations suggests that culturally grounded interventions, such as community religious networks and peer groups, are vital complements to formal psychological care (Cordisco Tsai 2025; Adjei et al. 2020; Wilson et al. 2021; Lindert et al. 2023; Campbell et al. 2022). These findings underline the need for integrated methods that honor survivors' agency while extending community-based care.

Aspirations for healing and growth

Survivors reported significant wishes for justice and responsibility, describing these as vital for closure and protection of future victims. One participant claimed, "As a victim, I want the government to help me so that those kinds of people never get out of prison" (P1). This approach corresponds with worldwide findings that access to justice is crucial to victim recovery, as it validates their experiences and supports psychological healing (Anderson et al. 2022; O'Callaghan et al. 2022; Ullman 2021; Wilson et al. 2021; Hughes et al. 2023). When legal institutions respond successfully, survivors regain a sense of power, whereas insufficient enforcement reinforces cycles of trauma and terror.

Beyond justice, survivors underlined the necessity of mental healing and recovering peace of mind. For instance, one participant commented, "I don't think about anything else but my own happiness after I overcome everything" (P5). This fits with studies indicating that post-trauma rehabilitation requires restoring hope, self-worth, and emotional stability (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Poirson et al. 2023;

González et al. 2022; Johnson et al. 2021; LeMoult et al. 2020). Survivors' hopes indicate that recovery is not limited to symptom reduction but extends toward establishing lives distinguished by stability, significance, and joy.

Education and professional advancement were also regularly listed aims. Survivors envisioned finishing their courses, obtaining jobs, and earning livelihoods as means to empowerment. One participant remarked, "I want to finish my studies and become a social worker so I can help others like me" (P3). This conclusion replicates evidence that education and work operate as protective factors, helping survivors to regain self-sufficiency and lessen long-term vulnerability (Sari et al. 2021; Botero-García et al. 2023; Campbell et al. 2022; Lindert et al. 2023; Wamoyi et al. 2022). Survivors' career-oriented objectives reveal resilience as not just survival but also transformation into agents of societal change.

In addition, several individuals indicated goals to help others and contribute to their communities. Survivors indicated ambitions to become advocates, mentors, or role models, highlighting that assisting others may convert their pain into meaning. This trajectory coincides with post-traumatic growth research, which documented survivors' tendency to turn trauma into advocacy and prosocial leadership (Tedeschi et al. 2018; Botero-García et al. 2023; Adjei et al. 2020; Miller et al. 2021; González et al. 2022). Survivors' eagerness to elevate others implies that healing is not only an individual journey but a community one with ripple effects throughout families and communities.

Finally, ambitions reflected a larger rejection of victimization and a commitment to action, dignity, and structural transformation. Survivors requested justice changes, greater mental health resources, and societal transformations that combat stigma and encourage survivor empowerment. Research demonstrates that when survivors' ambitions are included in community and policy responses, their resilience leads to larger social transformation (Cordisco Tsai 2025; Anderson et al. 2022; Sardinha et al. 2022; Hughes et al. 2023; Ullman & Peter-Hagene 2020). Survivors' aspirations for the future extend beyond personal recovery, pointing to systemic solutions that enable them to reclaim their voices and influence society's responses to sexual abuse.

Conclusion

This study revealed that survivors of sexual assault experience significant psychological and emotional traumas, including fear, humiliation, and lowered self-worth, frequently worsened by betrayal from trusted persons and community stigma. These events destroy trust, ruin relationships, and produce long-term pain. Yet despite such obstacles, survivors displayed resilience via the assistance of family, peers, and community resources. They adopted different coping techniques such as social support, avoidance, and self-healing practices, while their desires for justice, closure, and personal growth indicated their agency in reconstructing lives destroyed by trauma.

The findings underline the need for trauma-informed and survivor-centered treatments, especially in rural and provincial contexts where access to resources is restricted. Survivors' stories highlight the significance of developing support networks that provide safe spaces, counseling, and protection from stigma. Multi-level interventions must focus on helping survivors to restore dignity, to re-establish self-trust, and to sustain recovery. By presenting resilience as both a personal strength and a communal obligation, interventions can extend beyond addressing wounds to restoring dignity and reinforcing justice.

Based on these data, numerous recommendations are offered. First, local government units, NGOs, and welfare agencies should create crisis response centers that provide legal, medical, and emotional help customized to survivors' needs. Second, schools and colleges should combine resilience-building and mental health programs to promote awareness and prevent cycles of silence and stigma. Third, community-based support groups and family counseling programs must be increased to make survivors feel supported in their healing process. Finally, public awareness efforts should underline that sexual assault is a society issue, not an individual failing, urging communities to assume common responsibility in defending dignity and supporting healing. Through these efforts, survivors can not only rehabilitate but also convert their resilience into a basis for long-term empowerment and social justice.

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Adequacy of long-term care services to the needs of older persons: A qualitative perspective

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Abstract: The accelerated aging of the population generates increased pressures to ensure long-term care (LTC) services for the persons in need. The aim of this article is to analyse the adequacy of long-term care services to the needs of older persons based on a qualitative approach. A special focus of the article is dedicated to the analysis of the barriers that limit access to care, as well as to explore how these challenges shape the expectations of beneficiaries. Socioeconomic factors, geographical factors, limited supply in terms of LTC services, the quality of services, negative image with regard to long-term care services, especially in case of residential one, are the main barriers that limit the access to long-term care services. The study contributes to a better understanding of the correspondence between policy frameworks and the needs of older adults in Romania. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform the development of more responsive and person-centered long-term care models that can effectively meet the demands of an aging population.

Keywords: older persons, long-term care services, adequacy, qualitative methodology

Introduction

Population aging is a societal challenge, with complex implications for public health and social protection systems. In Romania, people over 65 years of age constitute almost a fifth of the total population, and this percentage is continuously increasing by 2050 (Ministerul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale and The World Bank 2022a). Despite recent policy initiatives, including the development of a national strategy for long-term care and active aging, the adequacy of existing LTC services

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remains insufficient to address the growing needs of older adults. Coverage disparities between urban and rural areas, limited availability of specialized personnel, the fragmentation between health and social part of long-term care (LTC) services, and the persistent underfunding of all types of LTC services, create significant barriers to equitable access. The primary objective of the present study is to investigate the perceptions of older persons regarding care needs and expectations of LTC services in order to address adequacy of LTC services. Furthermore, this study aims to identify and to analyse the barriers that limit access to care, as well as to explore how these challenges shape the expectations of beneficiaries.

Ensuring the adequacy of LTC services: Challenges and considerations

The aspect of aging generates ongoing interest in research, particularly in the context of global demographic aging (Nicoară and Rebeleanu 2018). Demographic projections show that the share of the population aged 65 years and over continues to grow, tripling by 2050 to represent 22% of the world's population (Matei et al. 2018). Furthermore, globally, an estimated 142 million older people are unable to meet their basic needs independently, and two out of three older people are likely to need care and support at some point in their lives (World Health Organization 2022). This global issue will generate an increase demand for long-term care, making it difficult for governments to balance financial sustainability with the need to provide effective protection against the financial risks associated with these needs (OECD 2024).

LTC systems are considered adequate if they can provide sufficient and affordable social protection to the needs of LTC (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 2018). Across Europe, long-term care systems are challenged to ensure adequate LTC services for the persons in need, as it increases the access to care especially in case of older persons with lower level of income (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 2021, 21)

At European level, long-term care is a sector of great interest, in the context of demographic transformations in recent decades, due to the complexity of the services offered under this name, but also due to its importance and implications at the social and individual level (OECD 2025). However, the provision of long-term care is a major challenge

for developed countries and is strongly affected by the increase in longevity and the aging of the baby boom generation (Ariaans, Linden and Wendt 2021). Access to long-term care services is essential in a society experiencing demographic aging, as it can delay and slow down the loss of intrinsic capacity, allowing people to live independently (World Health Organization 2022).

Long-term care is a set of medical, personal care and social assistance services for people in a state of functional, physical or cognitive dependence, who require daily support for a long period (Leichsenring 2013; Ghența and Matei 2024; Ariaans, Linden and Wendt 2021). These personal care services cover both help with basic daily activities (eating, washing, dressing) and instrumental activities such as cooking, shopping or managing finances (OECD 2025; World Health Organization 2022). In addition to personal care services, long-term care also includes help assistance with basic medical services such as wound dressing, pain management, medication, health monitoring, as well as prevention, rehabilitation, or palliative care services (Ariaans, Linden and Wendt 2021).

Long-term care can be provided in various forms: at home, in residential or day centers, but also through community services or special housing arrangements (Government Decision 1492/2022 2022; OECD 2005; Ghența et al. 2022). Care for the elderly can be provided either by formal caregivers (health and social care professionals) or informal caregivers (family members, friends), with the aim of maintaining a level of functionality and autonomy, as well as respecting the human rights and dignity of the beneficiaries (World Health Organization 2022). In Europe, up to 80% of long-term care is provided informally, mainly by family and community, with the remaining 20% provided by formal services. Women dominate both informal care (almost two-thirds of caregivers) and formal care (ratio of almost 9 to 1 compared to men). This reality highlights the need for public investment to support and strengthen the workforce in this field, through training, digitalization and protecting the well-being of caregivers (Ibid.).

Romania is among the countries experiencing demographic aging, with an increased demand for long-term care services (Ghența and Matei 2024). In 2022, there were approximately 3.7 million older people (aged 65 or older) in Romania, representing approximately 19.2% of the population. The share of the older adult population aged 65 and over is expected to increase further, reaching 27.7%, by 2050.

(Government Decision 1492/2022). Thus, the provision of long-term, good quality, people-centred care services is necessary to ensure a healthy life and well-being in old age (Ghența et. al 2022).

In Romania, social services for the elderly are provided by both public and private social service providers (associations, foundations, legally recognized religious organizations) and are offered on a residential or non-residential basis (Ibid.). Although Romania is one of the member countries of the European Union that has implemented a series of reforms in the field of social assistance in recent years, with the first strategic document on long-term care being adopted in 2015, the field of social services is still underdeveloped, with the number of accredited providers and licensed services being quite small compared to the existing needs. The geographical coverage of these services is uneven, with a higher concentration of providers in urban areas and in more developed counties (Ibid.). Considering that 33.9% (1,221 thousand people) of older people in Romania were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2019 (Precupețu et. al. 2021), the existence of a sufficient number of social services is crucial.

The provision of long-term care services relies on the workforce employed in these services, and from this perspective, social workers and professionals from social organizations play an important role. At national level, the unemployment rate in the health and social care sector has consistently been higher than that recorded for all economic activities (between 2012 and 2022) (Ghența and Matei 2025, 24).

Long-term care sector is affected by the difficulties related to sustainable financing, protection and support for informal caregivers, labour shortages and the quality of services provided, as well as by unequal access to services among different vulnerable groups (Ghența and Matei 2024; Spasova et. al. 2018; Cabanero-Garcia et. to 2025).

Inequities in access to healthcare have different causes and barriers, including socioeconomic status, gender, age, geographic location, and historical characteristics. Community and cultural factors also contribute to inequalities. Low levels of education and cultural barriers reduce older people's participation in the health system, while the lack of communication between service providers and communities increases reluctance to use available services. Moreover, government rigidity and the absence of policies adapted to the complexity of the needs of the older population perpetuate these inequalities (Cabanero-Garcia et. al. 2025).

In an increasingly digitized environment, the technological gap represents an additional challenge (Cabanero-Garcia et. al. 2025). On the one hand, digital technologies are a central tool in modernizing and optimizing care. They facilitate access to medical consultations in isolated areas, provide support to informal caregivers through counselling platforms and online groups, allow professionals to remotely monitor the health status of beneficiaries, support coordination between different socio-medical service providers and allow the creation of electronic files of beneficiaries (Ghența and Matei, 2024). On the other hand, older people may find it difficult to adapt to new technologies, and a lack of digital knowledge increases the risk that they will be excluded from the benefits of more effective and personalized care. Thus, investments in digital education, adapting technologies to users' needs and reducing access gaps become essential priorities for the future of long-term care systems (Cabanero-Garcia et. al. 2025).

Methodology

The objective of this study was to identify perceptions regarding the needs of older people with regard to long-term care services and the level of satisfaction in terms of social assistance available in old age, in order to address adequacy of LTC services.

To address this objective, a qualitative methodology was developed, in order to explore and to understand the views, opinions and experiences of older persons. The study was carried out between 22 and 25 July 2025 using the focus group (FG). The focus group method could be applied to identify the feelings and opinions that people have towards certain points of view, to find out the motivations or factors that influence people's behaviour (Markova, 2007). Furthermore, it is considered a method that allow the in-depth understanding of the topic researched, and flexible (Babbie 2013, 356).

Theoretical sampling was used in the selection of participants in the focus group, the main selection criterion being the relevance of the investigation unit for the research objectives. The recruitment of participants was done through:

- direct contact in the field, door-to-door, or in public spaces frequented by the older persons (markets, parks, etc.)
- the snowball method. In this case, the identification was conducted on a network basis, calling teachers, doctors, postmen or other

community leaders who could provide potential respondents who met the required criteria.

The topics addressed in the focus group discussions, were: (1) long-term care services – perspectives on current issues; (2) long-term care services – adequacy to the needs of older people; (3) factors limiting the access to LTC services; (4) expectations of older people regarding LTC services.

Two online focus groups discussion were conducted with older persons aged 65+. For each of the focus groups 12 older persons agreed to participate. However, on the day of the group discussions, some of them did not log in, the main reasons being related to health, limited internet access or non-functioning digital devices (video, microphone, etc.). The final number of participants for each focus-group was 8 older persons.

Each FG session lasted 90-120 min and was conducted by a moderator, being video recorded, with the participant's recorded consent following General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules. All the FGs data were transcribed, and the transcripts were analysed following the principles of thematic analysis.

Perspectives on current situation

Participants demonstrated a good knowledge of the spectrum of LTC services available, and they were able to distinguish between the healthcare and social care components of LTC. The role of LTC services in providing recovery and support in case of diminished functional autonomy is highlighted throughout the discussions, although most of the older participants expressed a preference for the home care services over residential and palliative care. Focus group participants emphasised the structural challenges currently shaping long-term care, particularly with respect to access to public services, financial constraints, and the shortage of qualified personnel. Respondents acknowledged major challenges that are transforming society: the ageing population, structural changes in family dynamics and intergenerational relations, and the migration of young people. The macroeconomic situation is forcing older persons to adapt to a reality that is difficult to manage. In this environment, the access to public services is widely perceived as limited in supply, while private alternatives, although offering superior conditions, are regarded as unaffordable for older people.

Adequacy to the needs of older people

Many participants argued that services are insufficiently adapted to the specific needs of old age, thereby creating a structural dependence on informal support networks. Throughout the discussions, different opinions have been expressed regarding the satisfaction in relation to the LTC services. Most participants reported being more satisfied with the home care services than with the residential care services. At the same time, although healthcare services are essential for recovery and maintaining autonomy, personal services play an even greater role in supporting independent living. Due to the limited availability of home care services, the burden of care falls under the responsibility of descendants.

In any case, long-term care services fail to meet the needs of those who require them due to their limited availability (in case of home care services) and high cost. While residential services are perceived as having a good coverage, the home care services (formal or informal care services) are perceived as scarce. Older people recognize the crucial role of family and the wider community in ensuring basic needs such as shopping, medication management, and financial support, once the loss of autonomy occurred. However, they stressed that these informal resources cannot compensate for the absence of a formal and organised system of care:

“If that person who comes and helps is not paid, you know that he will not come. He does it once, twice, but no more.” (F, 69, urban, upper secondary education.)

Quality of care and quality of the workforce are important aspects for older participants to focus groups discussions. Participants expressed the view that staff working in residential care centers demonstrate a lack of empathy, sensitivity, and understanding toward care recipients. Thus, a pronounced discrepancy emerges between quality and accessibility. In addition, participants underlined the importance of the social dimension of care, which is not limited to medical aspects, but also includes opportunities for socialization, essential for maintaining well-being and preventing isolation:

“[...] this aspect, socialization, is very important when you end up in an establishment like this because the collapse actually occurs when you stop socializing.” (F, 70, urban, tertiary education)

The analysis reveals notable differences in perceptions of long-term care services according to education attainment and place of residence. Respondents with university education generally adopt a more

reflective and structured approach, focusing on intergenerational responsibility, the role of the community and the importance of professionalism in service provision. One participant observed:

“It depends on our structure as a people [...] when they get old, children should take care of their parents, but they live in such a hectic era, [...] they don’t have as much time as they should for those who are parents, and it practically overwhelms them with other tasks.” (F, 68, urban, tertiary education)

By contrast, individuals with secondary or vocational education, especially from rural settings, adopted a more pragmatic perspective, emphasizing material constraints, the difficulty of accessing services, and dependence on family support:

“My opinion is that these elderly people who turn to [long-term care services] have no other support, no other help system... how can I tell you; they are sick, the children have gone elsewhere.” (M, 70, rural, professional)

Across all groups, the family was consistently regarded as the primary source of support, though this role was described as increasingly strained by contemporary challenges such as the migration of children, limited resources, and the demands of modern life.

Barriers that hinder the access to LTC services

Several barriers have been identified by the respondents in using LTC services:

- Socioeconomic factors – the level of income (e.g pension), the household composition
- Geographical factors – those that live in rural, remote settings experience more difficulties in using LTC services
- Limited supply in terms of LTC services
- The quality of services
- Negative image regarding LTC services, especially in case of residential one.

The respondents identified sub-groups of older persons that are more vulnerable and prone to access LTC services, namely those that living alone and has no family member to rely on and those that are in rural areas with no available services.

For many respondents, low pensions represent a structural barrier. Although private services are generally considered qualitative, their costs exceed the financial possibilities of most pensioners:

“The palliative care centres in our country... are private ones that cost a lot. I, for example, couldn’t go there with my pension, I couldn’t cover it...” (F, 68, urban, university studies)

“There are very few state-run ones, and you can’t go because you don’t have enough connections, and the others, over 5,000 lei, are private” (F, 69, urban, high school)

The costs of services, when compared to modest pensions, severely restricts accessibility and fosters the perception that quality care is reserved only for those with significant financial resources:

“For example, private care - you can afford very, very little [...] For example, at day care at home, they come, they take care of you, but they take all your pension because you have to pay that caregiver.” (M, 65, rural, professional)

Positive experiences were reported primarily in connection with the private sector, which remains inaccessible to most pensioners:

“I have a sister who is 79 years old [...] she was admitted to a nursing home [...] She pays 5,300 lei per month, she has this pension and it is enough for her [...] the conditions are very good, she is well looked after, she has good food, good linen, there are four of us in a room and they have a TV, they are very well looked after.” (F, 71, urban, high school)

Distrust towards state institutions is reinforced by negative personal experiences or media reports:

“[...] and I didn’t like the idea that as soon as I took him there, the staff there told us: ‘Don’t come to visit him for a week’. I didn’t understand why, anyway, after 4 days he called me to say that my brother has died. And so, the idea was induced that some of these palliative care centres for chronically ill patients and seriously, it’s the last resort, you take him, and you can’t bring him back.” (F, 71, urban, university studies)

“[...] until the story about the asylum was shown on TV... I used to tell them, let the children take me to the asylum so that the poor don’t take care of me and I don’t know what, but now seeing how we are treated in Romania, I don’t even want to hear about asylum anymore.” (F, 69, urban, high school)

Respondents with higher education in urban areas placed greater emphasis on social principles and collective responsibility, while those with lower levels of education, particularly in rural contexts, underscored financial limitations, restricted access to services, and reliance on family. This contrast delineates both a reflective, socially

oriented outlook and a pragmatic, critical account of the realities of elderly care.

Expectations of older people regarding LTC services

Adequacy in long-term care services must ensure comprehensiveness of these services which must cover all identified physical and mental functional decline needs, coordinated with other social and welfare support. The expectations of the older persons participating in the focus groups cover the development of home care services, perceived as lacking in numbers.

“They only get involved in home care very little [the state], I don’t know, I don’t know why. For example, I need it [informal care] because I have reduced mobility.” (F, 71, urban, tertiary education)

Expectations related to affordability of LTC services bring up issues related to the high cost of quality services in most of the collected opinions. Even if according to the principle of affordability care must be accessible without causing poverty or social exclusion, ensuring a decent standard of living for the beneficiary, some of the participants in the focus group discussions express opinions that question the respect for this principle.

“The palliative care centers in our country... are private ones where it costs a lot. For example, I couldn’t go there with my pension, I couldn’t cover it... but I wouldn’t want to end up there, I pray to God, when it happens, maybe it will take me in one piece, and I won’t make it there.” (F, 68, urban, tertiary education)

When discussing adequacy in long-term care services, an important aspect is related to the dignity principle. The LCT system should respect and protect the individual’s dignity throughout the care process. The aspect is noted in discussions with focus group participants, highlighting its importance from the perspective of beneficiaries of long-term care services.

“What can I tell you, my health problems are, in general, locomotor, knees. Three and a half years ago I put a prosthesis on my left knee, a month and a half ago I put a prosthesis on my right knee. The problem is that, like everyone who has worked for years and years and contributed to the health fund, I have not been able to benefit from the prostheses. I had to buy them myself. And I am very disappointed that that thing, I have contributed for so long and in the end, I still had to buy what I needed.” (M, 66, urban, tertiary education)

The LTC system would require, in the opinion of focus group participants, increased care given to those with low incomes. The involvement of older people who do not have health problems in providing support for an older person who requires long-term care is viewed with great openness, as it is assumed that there is greater understanding on the part of an older person for older people with such problems.

“It should be organized in such a way that access is available to people who have problems but cannot support themselves due to low income”. (F, 68, urban, tertiary education)

“[...] someone closer to the age of the person in need understands the problem, but the financial side intervenes. I know half of what the patient asks for, there would be enough to help without the person being taken to the centers and the old man could also be taken out to socialize, in the park. [...]” (M, 66, urban, tertiary education)

Discussion

Our study highlights the perceptions of older persons regarding the adequacy of long-term care services, the factors that limit access to LTC services, and their expectations concerning future LTC provision.

The availability of long-term care services remains limited, especially in rural areas and similar results have emerged in previous research that has linked the poor access to both supply (geographical factors) and demand (socio-economic factors) (Cabañero-Garcia et al. 2025, 10). In our study, functional autonomy, the lack of high quality LTC services and the lack of family support increase fears of dependency among the most vulnerable older persons.

A preference for home care services, especially for personal services, emerged during discussions. Several studies confirm that Romania is among the countries with the lowest proportion of home care services in the European Union (EU) (2.9% compared to the EU average of 8.4% in 2019), indicating an unmet demand and a need to develop this sector (Ministerul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale and The World Bank 2022b, 9). This preference for home care can be attributed to older people’s desire to remain in their familiar environment, but it may also result from exposure to negative cases of residential care (Ghența and Matei 2024, 35; Panzaru and Gravina 2024, 4).

This research demonstrates that the barriers limiting the access to LTC services for older persons are mainly socioeconomic and cultural. For example, the socioeconomic factors relate to the low level of

available income, the difficulties in covering the costs related to health care and long-term care, the characteristics of the residential environment and the composition of family. These results are in line with other studies that identified the family caregiver's age and gender and the older person's income, as barriers to LTC (Santini et al. 2025, 7). Cultural barriers concern the type of care – residential versus home care and lie in the traditions of caring for older persons at home, by family members and the negative perception regarding residential care in old age. These barriers could be eliminated through social policies addressed to the persons in need and through education. As suggested within the literature, to effectively address access to healthcare, both the demand and supply sides should be considered (O'Donnell 2007) and this approach could be transferred to long-term care services, as these services are at the border between social and healthcare services (Leichsenring 2013, 20).

During the group discussions, participants expressed different levels of acceptance related to the societal changes – migration, ageing phenomenon, and the macroeconomic situation. They expect policies and programs to address socioeconomic challenges and to ensure better access to long-term care, as Cabañero-Garcia et al. (2025, 10) also concluded in their study. Some of the participants (those with higher education, from urban areas) expressed a preference to remain in their home as long as possible, even when the functional decline is significant. These views are aligned with the current national trends in LTC provisions that favour the development of a system designed around an aging in place model, that incorporate home environment adjustments, continuity of formal and informal care, interdisciplinary care etc. Similar results emerged in the study conducted by Bosch-Farré et al. (2020), Marek et al. (2012) and Chaulagain (2025). Residential care has been identified as a solution especially in case of lonely older persons or in case of persons with no supporting network.

In terms of expectations, our study confirms that a well-functioning and comprehensive LTC system is of indispensable importance to current societies (Beard et al. 2016). Dignity in long-term care services requires recognizing its need within public policies but also monitoring the realities regarding compliance with this principle (Wachholz and Giacomini 2023, 6).

Strengths and limitations

This study has several strengths and limitations. First, the use of group discussion provided in-depth understanding of older people's perceptions with regard to the adequacy of LTC services to their needs and expectations in terms of services provision. At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The main limitation is related to the availability of older persons to participate in qualitative research conducted online. Secondly, the online discussions lead to the exclusion of certain sub-groups of older persons, namely those with limited digital literacy, poor internet connectivity, or non-functioning devices. Another limitation is derived from the tendency of certain participants to emphasize personal experience and individual problems, which occasionally diverted the discussions from the flow of questions.

Conclusion

This study shows that care in old age is an important aspect for older persons that require a life course approach. The study highlights that the availability of long-term care services remains limited, especially in rural areas, and this situation reflects an under provision of care, caused by both supply-side factors (geographical distribution of services) and demand-side factors (poor socio-economic conditions).

A multitude of factors constitutes barriers that influence the usage of LTC services, mainly socio-economic and cultural barriers. Economic factors include low-income levels, difficulties in covering health and care costs, isolation of the residential environment and lack of family support. On the other hand, cultural barriers are related to traditional values regarding family care in old age and the negative image of residential centers. Eliminating these obstacles requires interventions through social and educational policies, targeting both individuals in need and communities.

This study provides an image of the alignment between the existing policy framework and the specific needs of older adults in Romania. By highlighting the perspectives of older persons concerning the LTC system and the barriers encountered during the usage of such services, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how long-term care services should be improved. The findings may guide the development of more responsive, inclusive, and person-centered long-term care models that address the medical and social needs of an aging population.

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Internationalization of higher education in Türkiye: The process of isomorphism with the Bologna system

Emine Çeliksoy*

Abstract: The primary purpose of institutional theories is to explain why organizations exhibit similarities. The common theme in all these studies is their sociological basis, the increasing importance of the environment, the necessity for organizations to resemble other organizations in their environment, and their perception of organizations as links in a chain. This study argues that, as suggested by institutional theories, the higher education systems of countries are becoming increasingly similar to each other thanks to the Bologna system. Efforts to align Türkiye's higher education system with the Bologna system are explored. The study concludes with a literature review using qualitative research methods.

Keywords: new institutional theory, isomorphism, Bologna system, higher education in Türkiye

Introduction

Research on institutionalization has been conducted to describe and explain the adaptation of organizations to their environment and to understand the relationship between the organization and the environment (Oliver 1988). The origins of institutionalization theory lay in the “natural systems model,” developed by Philip Selznick, a professor of law and sociology, in 1949. According to Selznick, organizations adapt not only to their internal structure but also to the values of the external society in order to survive (Scott 1995).

Although the foundations of institutional theory date back to Philip Selznick, its acceptance under the title of institutionalism came with Meyer and Rowan's article titled “Formal Structure as a Myth and Ceremony,” published in 1977. According to Meyer and Rowan,

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adaptation to the institutional environment is important for the survival of organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Ritti and Silver 1986).

Institutional theory gained popularity with the 1991 study “The New Institutional Approach to Organizational Analysis” by DiMaggio and Powell. This study focused on the institutional pressures exerted by the environment on organizations and the issues of legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Within the framework of institutional theory, the issue of legitimacy and isomorphism is widely discussed (Greenwood 1996).

New institutional theory

The historical development of institutional theory can be categorized as the classical institutionalist period, the period when it began to be applied in organizations, the neo-institutionalist period, and the new approach period. However, in many studies, old institutionalism and new institutionalism are more prominent.

The most fundamental division among scholars arises in the definition of the concept of institution. Theorists of the old institutional theory define the organization itself as an institution, while those of the new institutional theory adopt the approach of expressing the environment as an institution.

According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), institutionalized products, services, techniques, policies, and programs are the organization's symbolic adaptation to its environment as a function of powerful myths. However, this adaptation sometimes conflicts with efficiency and effectiveness. Organizations conduct their activities not always for rationality, but rather to gain legitimacy and a place in society.

Meyer and Rowan emphasized that adapting to the institutional environment requires organizations to adopt legitimate institutional elements rather than relying on efficiency. They believed that using environmental values and criteria to determine the value of structural elements avoids environmental uncertainty by adapting to institutions, thus ensuring stability, and is a process that operates independently of organizational efficiency (Zucker 1987, 443-460).

The concept of fit defines the organizational environment and the characteristics of organizations. Burns and Stalker (1961) and Lawrence and Lorch (1967) view this fit between the organization and its environment as absolute. This emphasizes the decisive influence of the environment on the organization. The institutional approach conceptualizes the organizational environment as the organizational

field within which interacting organizations exert coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures (Palmer and Biggart 2002). Organizations copy each other's structures, processes, practices, strategies, and cultures, and adopt the behaviors of other organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Institutions operating within the same institutional environment exhibit significant similarities (Özkan-Canbolat and Çeliksoy 2018).

The new institutional approach views regulatory institutions, focal organizations, social pressures, partnership relationships, and social structural functions within the organizational field as the harmony between the organization and its external environment, and the pressures resulting from this harmony (Scott 2001). These pressures lead to the emergence of similar organizational forms, and similar organizational structures contribute to the homogenization of the field (Özkan-Canbolat and Çeliksoy 2018).

In their study, DiMaggio and Powell examined how organizations conform to social rules and conventions. They attempted to conceptualize the environmental pressures exerted on organizations. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), there are two primary sources of the process that drives organizations toward similarity: competitive pressures and institutional pressures. These pressures, over time, push organizations toward three types of similarity: coercive, prescriptive, and imitative similarity mechanisms. These include government regulations and legal obligations; prescriptive institutional pressures imposed by recommendations from professional organizations to which the organization is a member; and prescriptive institutional pressures imposed by the need for employee compliance after training; and imitative institutional pressures stemming from the desire to emulate other organizations. These three types of pressures exert pressure on organizations toward institutionalization (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 149; Slack and Hinings 1994).

The environment has also been reconsidered within the framework of new institutional theory. New institutionalism prioritizes the institutional environment over the technical environment. This environment concerns the organization's compliance with social rules. Legitimacy is prioritized over efficiency. Organizations within the same environment have faced systematic and normative pressures. Organizations' adoption of an organizational form has been attributed to two factors: either the form is imposed by top management, or it is adopted because it is generally accepted in the field. Institutional

pressures have no productivity-enhancing effect (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 361-365).

New institutionalists argued that institutional elements constantly come from outside the organization and that institutional elements coming from outside the organization initiate change in the organization (Zucker 1987, 443-446).

According to new institutional theory, social behavior requires observing what other organizations in the field are doing and adopting similar behaviors. One of the most important reasons for this necessity is the environment of uncertainty in which organizations operate and the constraints they face (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 147). The fundamental assumptions of the new institutional theory are that organizations reflect one another due to pressures and constraints. There is isomorphism among organizations. Organizational behavior is a result of habits and pressures. Organizations are viewed at the macro level. Accordingly, organizations are interdependent. Organizations must institutionalize to survive (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Isomorphism

One of the concepts emphasized by the new institutional theory is “isomorphism.” DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 149) describe the process of homogenization in organizations with isomorphism.

Organizations may copy each other’s structures, strategies, and cultures, and even strive to adapt certain behaviors. Some believe that doing so will increase their chances of survival. These behaviors increase organizational isomorphism. Organizational isomorphism is the similarity between organizations within a system. Two primary factors drive organizations toward isomorphism: competitive and institutional pressures. Due to these pressures, organizations are forced to converge through three mechanisms: coercive, imitative, and prescriptive mechanisms (Scott 1995).

Isomorphism can be defined as the process of creating a uniform organization in which coercive institutional pressures, normative institutional pressures and imitative institutional pressures are effective on organizations within the same environmental conditions.

The reason for the similarity in organizational structures, processes, and practices is attributed to the various institutional pressures organizations within the same organizational field are subject to (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 150). DiMaggio and Powell (1983)

describe the reasons that push institutions toward isomorphism as competitive and institutional pressures. As a result of these pressures, competitive and institutional isomorphism occurs. What is important in a population of organizations is whether the number of organizations included in the population is a function of the organizational capacity of the environment (Ibid, 149). Here, isomorphism emerges more as a function of the environment.

Population ecology theorists Hannan and Freeman (1977) developed Hawley's (1968) definition of isomorphism and used the concept of competitive isomorphism for the first time.

According to population ecology, organizations within a population that face similar environmental conditions tend to be isomorphic in terms of the similar internal and external constraints they are exposed to (Chuang et al. 2000, 6).

Competitive isomorphism arises when an organization faces competitive pressures within the same environment. It is argued that market competition creates competitive isomorphism (Mizruchi and Fein 1999, 656-657). Competitive isomorphism occurs in areas where competition is open and free.

The desire to reduce risks in the technical environment leads to the emergence of competitive isomorphism. Organizations facing economic risk and their compliance with economic pressures to avoid the risk are examples of competitive isomorphism (Gürol 2005, 117).

Competitive isomorphism arises when organizations become more similar to each other in the process of meeting the expectations of the technical environment.

The concept of institutional isomorphism, first used by Kanter (1972) in organization studies, states that organizations become isomorphic with each other due to their institutional environments, and this is explained as the desire of organizations to gain legitimacy by adopting a common frame of reference.

Institutional isomorphism involves organizational competition. Similarity among organizations facilitates communication with other organizations. It facilitates the attainment of a special status in relations with other organizations in the field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 153).

Institutional isomorphism encompasses similarity in both structure and application. Organizations in the same field, facing similar technical and institutional pressures, acquire structures and operations

that align with the expectations of their environment (Koçel 2001, 362).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 150) identify three mechanisms that bring about institutional isomorphism. The three mechanisms that fall under this classification are coercive/regulatory, mimetic, and normative institutional isomorphism: (1) “coercive/regulatory institutional isomorphism,” resulting from political influences and legislation; (2) “mimetic institutional isomorphism,” resulting from an environment of uncertainty; and (3) “normative institutional isomorphism,” related to occupational specialization.

Compelling factors can be defined as all pressures, primarily from government and international actors, that push organizations to be similar to one another (Slack and Hinings 1994). These pressures are exerted both formally and informally. The organization is driven to engage in certain behaviors against its will through forces such as coercion, persuasion, and invitation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Coercive isomorphism is authoritarian. In this context, legal regulations are a significant factor influencing organizational behavior. It addresses the effects of specific pressures on organizations and their behavior, reinforced by imposed punishments and rewards. Legal regulations are the most obvious example.

The regulatory nature of institutions indicates that organizational practices are orderly. Institutions shape human behavior through authority, ensuring its orderliness. At the same time, orderly processes monitor whether others are complying with these rules and, if necessary, intervene through punishment or reward, thus influencing the future behavior of organizations and states.

Institutional isomorphism cannot always be achieved through pressure and authority alone. Organizations seeking to overcome uncertainty often resort to mimetic isomorphism. They shape organizations and their behaviors by accepting assumptions based on common denominators.

According to Meyer and Rowan, the biggest factor causing isomorphism in organizations is the efforts to gain legitimacy. Normative isomorphism arises from specialization. The existence of professionals working in different organizations who are influential in their companies' practices, and the increasing similarity of these individuals across organizations, creates normative isomorphism through specialization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). It is aimed to influence organizations and their behaviors in order to establish the

appropriate method that will lead organizations to success, taking into account social obligations and expectations.

The normative nature of institutions signifies the organization's formalism. Normative rules constitute the orderly, obligatory aspect of social life. Values and norms are the most important indicators of the normative nature of institutions. Values are a necessary element in establishing standards. Standards, in turn, serve to evaluate and measure behavior. Norms inform us about how things should be done, indicate the necessary paths to achieve goals and use legal terms.

Method of the study

Relevant legal regulations and activities in the public sector demonstrate the isomorphism within the field. Understanding whether institutionalization has occurred from the perspective of new institutional theory is possible by examining the structure, processes, and practices of organizations.

The study argues that the Bologna system has led to the isomorphism of states' higher education systems. Isomorphism, when evaluated within the context of the new institutional theory, can be defined as sharing the same characteristics. Türkiye's higher education system, when evaluated within the context of the new institutional theory, is becoming institutionalized and is striving to become isomorphic with the higher education systems of member states of the Bologna system.

The study utilizes a literature review technique, a qualitative research method. The legal, administrative, and structural reforms implemented by Türkiye to align with the Bologna system are examined.

Bologna system

The Bologna system is a reform process that began in 1999 and aims to create a European Higher Education Area. Its aim is to make higher education systems across Europe more harmonious, transparent, and competitive. It is so named because it began with a declaration signed in Bologna, Italy. The process's primary objective is to facilitate the mobility of international students and academics and increase the recognition of degrees earned within Europe.

The Bologna Process envisages some important changes in higher education systems in line with the determined objectives (<https://ec.europa.eu>): Three-Tier Degree Structure: Higher education

is divided into three main degrees: bachelor's, master's, and doctoral. This structure makes programs more understandable and comparable; European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): This system expresses students' total workload in an academic year in units of credit. This allows students to easily transfer courses between universities in different countries and achieve diploma equivalence. An academic year is generally equivalent to 60 ECTS credits; Diploma Supplement: This document, issued in addition to the student's diploma, provides a detailed explanation of the program the student completed, the courses taken, their grades, and their qualifications; Increasing Mobility: This process encourages students and academics to travel from one country to another for education or research. Programs like Erasmus+ are important tools for this purpose; Quality Assurance: Higher education institutions must demonstrate that they provide education that meets established quality standards. This aims to continuously improve the quality of education.

Rather than a static system, the Bologna Process is dynamic and constantly evolving. It aims to improve the quality and competitiveness of higher education in Europe, while maintaining a balance of adaptability and flexibility rather than completely standardizing countries' education systems.

Expansion of the Bologna system

The Bologna Process was introduced in 1999. The Bologna Conference was held on June 19, 1999. With this conference, 29 countries joined the process. These initial countries were: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Ireland (<https://bologna.deu.edu.tr>).

The system underwent its second expansion at the Prague Ministerial Conference held on May 19, 2001. With this meeting, four new countries joined the system, bringing the total number to 33. Croatia, Cyprus, Liechtenstein and Türkiye are the countries that joined the system at this meeting (Ibidem).

September 19, 2003, Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vatican Republic, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, and North Macedonia joined the process. With these participations, the total number of member states increased to 40. (Ibid.) Armenia,

Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine joined the system at the Bergen Ministerial Conference held on 18-19 May 2005. Thus, the number of member states became 45. (Ibid.) When Montenegro joined the system with the London Ministerial Conference in 2007, the number of member states became 46. (Ibid.) At the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Meeting held on 11-12 March 2010, Kazakhstan joined the member states and the total number of member states became 47. (Ibid.) Belarus was added to the list of countries participating in the Bologna Process in 2015, and San Marino in 2020. The inclusiveness of the European Higher Education Area has now expanded to a very wide area, with 49 countries becoming members (<https://www.yok.gov.tr>).

The process has undergone various advances throughout history. Throughout history, the scope of the Bologna Process has continually expanded, and new objectives have been brought into discussion. These are, in order and in summary, as follows:

- Establishing a synergy between the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area
- Recognition of higher education diplomas and/or degrees and study periods
- Strengthening the social dimension of the Bologna Process
- Joint higher education programs, including doctoral programs
- Creating flexible learning paths in higher education
- To develop the applications of national qualifications frameworks (<https://hacibayram.edu.tr>).

European Qualifications Framework

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a reference system created by the European Union to facilitate understanding and comparison of qualifications across countries and education systems. Its primary purpose is to support the mobility of individuals in education and employment and to promote lifelong learning. The EQF provides a common language for defining the value of diplomas, certificates, and other qualifications obtained in different countries. This makes it easy to understand what level an educational or vocational qualification in one country corresponds to in another European country.

The foundation of this process was laid with the “Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the European Region,” signed in Lisbon in 1997, and the “Sorbon Declaration,”

published in 1998. The Council of Europe, together with UNESCO, concluded the Lisbon Recognition Convention on 11 April 1997 to recognize diplomas and degrees related to higher education in the European Region. The Lisbon Recognition Convention is a legally binding document that determines the procedures for the recognition of degrees and periods of study obtained from another country in the European Region. The Convention aims to determine the true place of foreign diplomas in the education system and/or business sector of the host country. In this context, the Convention covers not only higher education but also secondary education degrees that provide access to higher education and is directly concerned with academic recognition (www.yok.gov.tr).

Türkiye signed the Agreement on December 1, 2004, and it entered into force on March 1, 2007. The Sorbonne Declaration was published in 1998 following a meeting of the Education Ministers of France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom at the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne Declaration brought the idea of creating a common higher education area in Europe to the forefront, and the first steps of the Bologna Process were taken. (Ibid.)

Turkish Qualifications Framework

Türkiye has developed its own Turkish Qualifications Framework, aligned with the European Qualifications Framework. This enables the mapping of Turkish qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework and facilitates the recognition of Turkish citizens' qualifications in Europe. The Turkish Qualifications Framework is a national system developed to define, classify, and compare all qualifications in Türkiye (e.g., diplomas, certificates, and vocational qualification documents). Designed in line with the European Qualifications Framework, the Turkish Qualifications Framework covers qualifications acquired through all learning pathways, including primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as vocational, general, and academic education programs (<https://www.tyc.gov.tr>).

The Turkish Qualifications Framework consists of eight levels. Each level is defined according to learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Level descriptors determine which level qualifications are placed at. The aim is to ensure that qualifications are transparent, comparable, and portable, to increase compatibility between education and the labor market, to facilitate the recognition of prior learning and the transition between qualifications,

and to increase individual mobility by supporting international recognition. (Ibid.)

The Turkish Qualifications Framework, implemented under the coordination of the Ministry of National Education, the Council of Higher Education, and the Vocational Qualifications Authority, includes all quality-assured qualifications. Over time, qualifications from other institutions will also be incorporated into the system (www.yok.gov.tr).

The Turkish Qualifications Framework includes education and training qualifications under the authority and responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, qualifications under the responsibility of the Vocational Qualifications Authority under Law No. 5544, higher education qualifications under the responsibility of the Council of Higher Education, and also qualifications under the authority and responsibility of other responsible institutions. Prepared in cooperation with public institutions and organizations, especially the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education, labor and employer unions, professional organizations, and relevant non-governmental organizations, with the participation of national and international experts and academics, the “Regulation on the Procedures and Principles Concerning the Implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework” was published in the Official Gazette dated 19/10/2015 and numbered 29537 by the Decision numbered 2015/8213 of the Council of Ministers and entered into force upon its publication in the Official Gazette dated 19/10/2015 and numbered 29537. The “Communiqué on the Turkish Qualifications Framework and its annex, the Turkish Qualifications Framework,” prepared in accordance with the aforementioned Regulation, entered into force upon its publication in the Official Gazette dated 2/1/2016 and numbered 29581. In line with the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles Regarding the Implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework, it is aimed to bring together the existing qualifications in our country in a comprehensive manner, to increase the quality of qualifications, to popularize and systematically support lifelong learning, to meet the highest level of national and international transparency and recognition, and to create education and employment opportunities for all individuals of the society. (Ibid.)

Qualification types represent qualification groups within the Turkish Qualifications Framework that are at the same level and are similar in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, credit values, or

general, vocational, and academic orientations. Qualification types are not associated with a specific learning field (<https://www.tyc.gov.tr>).

Conclusion

Institutional theory completed its institutionalization in theory and practice in the 1980s and made its impact felt. Institutionalization can be defined as the degree to which organizational decisions gain acceptance in the environment and as a process that ensures organizational cohesion. The fundamental problem of institutional theory is to explain why organizations resemble one another. Accordingly, organizations emulate one another through legal, imitative, and regulatory means to survive, gain legitimacy, avoid uncertainty, and succeed. Institutionalism is a theory that posits that organizations are constructed by the phenomena in their institutional environments and tend to resemble them, and that formal organizations adapt to their institutional environments through technical and transformational interdependencies. One of the concepts that new institutionalists emphasize is isomorphism. The process of homogenization can also be explained through isomorphism. Therefore, Türkiye has implemented legal regulations to align with the legitimacy of the Bologna system and other states. Isomorphism encompasses a complex of structures, processes, and practices. Participation in the Bologna system and the development of a Turkish Qualifications Framework aligned with the European Qualifications Framework are steps taken to achieve isomorphism within the same scope.

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A review of fields of use of blockchain technology in daily life

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Abstract: Blockchain is a distributed system in which all transactions are shared and recorded by the participants in the system (e.g. blockchain network). Blockchain is a form of data storing method. It is a system in which the data intended to be stored is established through structures named as "blocks," with each block related to the next by stamping and / or sealing. Particularly in the last few years, blockchain technology which is only now starting to be researched in Turkey and around the world, has many uses beyond only cryptocurrency. For researchers who are unfamiliar with the system, it will be helpful to begin with, concrete instances in order to better understand what blockchain technology is. Examining actual instances of blockchain technology application is the primary objective of this study. In this context, the study looked at the domains in which blockchain technology is applied through providing specific examples. The study concluded that the following domains have experienced the practical implementation and application of blockchain technology: supply chain, education, health, finance, digital identification, land registry, human resources management, customer recognition-commerce, e-voting, transportation, political participation and digital content industry.

Keywords: digitalization, blockchain, public services, public administration, Bitcoin

Introduction

The 21st century is characterised by rapid advances in technology and digitalisation. The advancements in information and communication technology, in particular, has accelerated and increased the speed and impact of globalisation. The process continues to develop so rapidly that any person living in the most remote corner of the globe has easy access to the information s/he requires at any time. Digitalisation has had an impact on a wide range of industries, including health,

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education, communication, and commerce. Especially, the internet has brought about a ‘new world’ through which people may meet almost all of their needs.

Digitalization is a transformative force that affects all institutions and organizations, from the public sector to the private sector. Concepts like speed, efficiency, cost effectiveness, performance, use of modern technologies, and assuring the maximum level of satisfaction for the service industry have become essential to institutions, particularly with Industry 4.0 (Soylu 2018). The conceptual framework of digitalisation must be employed if Industry 4.0 is to achieve its intended objectives. Both time and money are saved when digital technologies are used in the public and private sectors to produce goods and services. Organisations and institutions that implement digital technologies into their operations have a major competitive edge.

Blockchain technology is another aspect of digitalisation. The popularity of blockchain technology and its widespread practical application date back to 2009 with Bitcoin. The use of Bitcoin marks a watershed moment for blockchain technology. Taking a brief look at the developmental stages of Bitcoin, everything occurred following the 2008 global economic crisis. In an article released under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto, the author suggested that a new electronic currency might emerge without the involvement of a third party (i.e. decentralised), blaming the crisis' detrimental impacts entirely on centralised financial arrangements. Satoshi Nakamoto made the case for the integration of virtual currencies into the financial system in his 2008 paper. For this reason, blockchain technology has been used to develop a peer-to-peer, public, open-source shopping system. The primary objective of the system is to eradicate the banks, financial intermediaries, and other centralised entities. The incapacity of any country or entity to exert control over the system is referred to as “decentralisation” here. In this context, on January 4, 2009, Satoshi Nakamoto transferred 50 bitcoins to build the first blockchain block. This block was named genesis block. The blocks that are generated subsequently added to the genesis block and to one another in order for the system to be operational. The way the system operates is as follows: Every block has a unique code as well as the code of the block that came before it. Block transfers, together with the person who made them, are documented. As a result, every block is connected to the next. Thus, modifying a block requires modifying the related

blocks as well. This is almost impossible. The functioning of a central bank is not necessary for Bitcoin, in contrast to conventional printed money. That is to say that it does not rely on any centralized structure. Bitcoin is generated using data from the cryptographic data and is sculpted by codes and backdoors. Bitcoin, which is made out of open-source code using blockchain technology, can be viewed and verified by anyone. Users of Bitcoin are provided with both public and private keys. Only the owner may view the data in the private key, but everybody can access the data in the public key. Bitcoin is a decentralised, transparent, blockchain-based payment method that instantaneously confirms transfers and has no double-spending issues (Durmuş and Polat 2018; Erarslan 2020; Segendorf 2014; Vranken 2017). To be brief, Bitcoin uses the blockchain technology to operate in this manner. With the introduction of Bitcoin in 2009, a turning point for blockchain took place, and efforts have been made since then to apply blockchain technology in various industries.

The discussion regarding the potential applications of blockchain technology has been triggered by its popularity together with Bitcoin. The uses of blockchain technology are numerous and go beyond Bitcoin. There are a lot of applications for blockchain technology, as concluded by this study. According to the study, blockchain technology has been used and applied in a number of industries, including supply chains, education, healthcare, finance, digital identification, land registration, human resources management, customer recognition -trade, transportation, electronic voting, political participation, and the digital content sector. The defence industry, software, notary services, fundraising, cloud data and cloud computing, software and coding, foreign trade, aviation, search engines, anti-corruption, social assistance and records, taxation, auditing, cyber security, and intelligence were also found to be among the industries that will soon make use of the blockchain technology.

Methodology

In general, the study was designed to apply the framework of qualitative research techniques. Different theoretical frameworks and a wide range of disciplines are included in qualitative research methods. For this reason, it is difficult to give a broad definition of qualitative research methods. It is feasible to employ the method of qualitative research as an umbrella term because it covers multiple disciplines. Social researchers are particularly interested in qualitative research

methods, which may include document analysis, traditional/narrative review, cultural analysis, content analysis, descriptive approach, semi-structured interview, and others. The definition of the qualitative research method has also become more complicated due to the inclusion of numerous sub-methods. Nonetheless, if a broad definition is to be provided: “The research process in which qualitative data methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis (audio, content, etc.) are applied in order to present perceptions and events in an integrated manner with rational data in a natural setting containing accurate data” (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2006, 39). There are various sub-methods within the qualitative research method. Document analysis and standard traditional/narrative review methods are some of such methods. The “document analysis” method, a sub-category of qualitative method, was applied to compile the data collected throughout the study. “A methodical approach to the examination and evaluation of all documents, including printed and electronic materials” is what document analysis is (Kıral 2020, 173). Document analysis is the process of thoroughly examining relevant documents to determine the information that will be used to achieve the intended objectives. The documents collected through document analysis were put together using traditional/narrative review methods. Traditional/narrative review refers to “the studies that synthesise the findings, conclusions, and assessments of two or more published works on a specific topic. These are studies in which data collected from various methods and sources is synthesized by experts in the relevant field, without being limited to a single method” (Karaçam 2013, 27). Within this framework, books, articles, and websites on this particular topic were first identified. The documents obtained were analysed using the document analysis method. Following the document analysis, the data were systematised using the standard compilation process, and the study was thus concluded.

Examples for the use of blockchain technology in daily life

Supply chain, finance (digital currency), digital identification, land registry system, human resources management, customer identification system (Know Your Customer (KYC), transportation, digital voting, political participation, digital content management, entertainment, and distribution are among the industries where blockchain technology is actively used as so determined during the surveys conducted in the course of the operational process.

The supply chain industry was the first to use blockchain technology. Walmart, a Canadian company, is the one that actively uses the blockchain-based supply chain management system and benefits much from it. Walmart has experienced fraud and irregularities in commercial data, deviations in shipping company bills, and concerns with payment procedures, especially in the food supply chain process. Walmart has started taking the required steps to avoid these problems. Every year, Walmart Canada ships more than 500,000 items. Walmart Canada transports items susceptible to climate change, including perishable goods. In the typical supply process, the attributes for each product must be documented and presented to the carrier and other stakeholders. The fact that over 200 variables impact the invoices generated throughout the supply chain management process complicates the procedure even more. Additionally, 70% of payments are contingent on an agreement between parties once the process is completed. This causes delays in payments and frustration among carriers. To tackle these challenges, Walmart Canada's Research and Development Team (R&D) undertook a study. Some points were brought to light by the data that the analysis revealed. For example, bureaucratic procedures and the way the supply chain process is structured are quite intricate. Significant issues with interdepartmental communication and cooperation were identified as well. In order to address these problems and expedite the system, the R&D unit made the decision to switch to a blockchain-based structure. Based on the findings of their investigation, Walmart Canada applied to the reputable company DLT Labs and requested that they develop a system. In January 2019, DL Freight, a blockchain network, was established as a result of the research and experimental applications. In the beginning, 69 suppliers were added to the network. The system contains all data about the system, transporters, transported commodities, and supply chain procedures. The DL Freight blockchain network is constantly updated, from the carrier's proposal to proof of delivery and payment approval. All such data is automatically entered and synchronised in real time. This process is only accessible to the parties involved in the transaction. Since its implementation, DL Freight has achieved significant success. According to Walmart Canada's accounting department, whereas 70% of invoices were previously inaccurate, this figure has dropped to just 1% with the use of DL Freight. Additionally, because transactions are settled quickly

via blockchain, payments are no longer delayed. Employees have also welcomed this advancement (Vitasek et al. 2022).

Finance is one of the most relevant sectors where blockchain technology may be applied. Virtual currencies debuted with Bitcoin and have since grown to include a variety of digital currency projects. Examples for Blockchain-based virtual currencies include Ripple and Zcash. Ripple, a virtual currency, can deliver millions of dollars' worth of digital cash to another party in 3 to 5 seconds for 0.5 to 3 dollars. Similarly, Monero may transfer millions of dollars' worth of digital money in less than a second for \$0.01-0.05 (<https://xrpl.org/about/xrp> 2025; <https://cryptomus.com/tr> 2025). As seen through these examples, money that is physically difficult and expensive to carry or transfer can be transmitted rapidly and cheaply. This provides benefit in view of cost-effectiveness and saves time.

Another field of application for blockchain technology is digital identification. With the introduction of digital identification, the citizens of any country are registered on the blockchain system. The blockchain system stores all information about citizens, including their birth dates, photographs, and ID numbers. Instead of needing to carry ID cards, citizens are provided with readable QR codes or smart ID cards. Citizens can complete transactions by scanning either their QR codes or their smart ID cards. This not only eliminates identity fraud, but also reduces the paperwork associated with citizenship issues (Akcagündüz 2021). Digital identification can be used to enforce age restrictions, for instance, by preventing individuals under 18 from accessing nightclub or settings where alcohol is served. A person must pull out the ID card and hand it over to the personnel in order to access such a place. The officer checks every piece of information on the ID and obtains important personal data about the person in question. What must be verified here, though, is if the individual is younger than eighteen. Blockchain technology and smart contracts can be used to establish a system that allows people to consent to disclose only their age information in order to carry out that sort of verification (Usta and Doğantekin 2017). Similarly, identity recognition systems that cannot be changed by individuals can be developed utilising blockchain technology and smart contracts to avoid identity fraud (Akcagündüz 2021). One of the most evident examples of blockchain-based digital identification has been put into practice in the Swiss city of Zug. The technology, referred to as uPort, was built on the Ethereum blockchain, and it provides people with a blockchain-based identity for use in e-

government services. In this scheme, citizens who register for the system are first asked for their address. They receive a distinct and unchangeable digital (cryptographic) address in uPort after supplying the required data and undergoing the required verifications. Through cell phones, the address is connected to a digital wallet via the user's smartphone. Therefore, residents can quickly complete a variety of tasks, including surveys, voting, filing tax returns, paying parking fees, borrowing books, or renting bicycles, if they receive a digital wallet, address, and register using the blockchain (Bozdoğanoglu 2023).

Blockchain technology is also used in the land register system. Another country that makes use of a blockchain-based land register system is Georgia. The blockchain-based National Public Registry (NAPR) was established in Georgia. This government office generates a digital certificate for land titles using blockchain technology. NAPR aims the elimination of property ownership disputes and corruption in the land register system. NAPR makes use of the blockchain-based Exonum system to handle land-related operations, such as buying, selling, and registering property. Over 100,000 land records have been added to the blockchain since April 2016. Using its own blockchain, Exonum can handle up to 5,000 records per second between blocks. With the use of the Exonum protocol, NAPR is being expanded to offer more services, including notary services, mortgages, rents, and demolitions. Public trust in the NAPR system has increased as a result of the system's structure, which depends entirely on stakeholder approval, and the nearly insurmountable task of changing the blocks where transactions are recorded (Bozdoğanoglu 2023).

Blockchain technology is also used in human resources management. BEOWULF is a blockchain-based startup that applies this technology to HR processes. The company in question has efficiently rendered services to OPSWAT, a cybersecurity firm based in the United States, Asian Life Insurance Group (AIA), and Vietnam University of Science. Biploma is one of the applications the company has developed. Biploma allows for the blockchain-based execution of several transactions, including identification, diploma and education certificate verification. Fake diplomas and educational certificates, which are frequently used in job applications, can be avoided through Biploma. Hongbank University, Baria Vungtau University, and many more universities actively use Biploma (biploma.com 2024). BeSure Network is yet another practical example of a blockchain-based human resources app. BeSure Network registers people and

organizations engaged in industries including construction and furniture manufacturers through the blockchain network. All qualifications, diplomas, and reference scores from prior employers are added for both craftsmen and businesses throughout this registration process. This precludes untrained artisans and businesses from using fraudulent documentation. The most qualified people or businesses are selected for workplace and job safety thanks to the dependability offered by beSure Network (besureusa.com 2024).

Commerce is another application area for blockchain technology. Customer focus is especially important in business. Businesses who use blockchain-based ‘Know Your Customer (KYC)’ systems have a competitive advantage. Businesses (particularly in the service industry) carry out separate surveys for specific niche clients. The businesses attach particular importance on the customer segment referred to as “special” with high income. Information on such a customer’s profile, preferences, behaviours, attitudes, likes and dislikes etc. is essential for sustaining customer retention strategies targeted at this segment. For example, if a customer with this profile routinely shops at Branch A of a store, Branch A and its personnel will engage in a variety of activities to satisfy the client because they are aware of the customer's unique features and preferences. Thus, this approach ensures customer satisfaction in the most efficient, cost-effective, and timely manner, while also helping prevent potential losses for the customer (Usta and Doğantekin 2017). Kyc-chain is the most practical example that has been developed and put into practice in this respect. KYC-chain is a blockchain network, which provides services for customer lifecycle, behaviour preferences, and ID verification. Kyc-chain integrates its corporate and individual clients' shopping habits, traits, and customer lifecycle into the blockchain network. For every customer, it generates a unique password (self-key). When clients visit or stop by a store in another country or city, their information can be communicated to store personnel via the blockchain system thanks to a blockchain-based application that can be downloaded onto smartphones. Thus, customer satisfaction reaches to the peak level. Names, addresses, phone numbers, and dates of birth are among the details that are stored on the blockchain when kyc is generated. Each individual or business customer's identification is verified using such data, particularly if they plan to conduct financial operations. In addition, money laundering is curbed through the kyc-chain customer identification system. Suspicious activity can be tracked for consumer transactions using the

Anti-Money Laundering (AML) system. AML shields clients from financial crimes and assists them in complying with the legal requirements. This also prevents tax evasion. AML makes it very simple to combat fraud, account hacking, financing of terrorism, and other detrimental events that are frequently observed in the digital environment. Singapore is now the country making use of this system. With the blockchain network it developed, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) has backed this system by mandating banks and business enterprises to use kyc. Yet again, Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia are all using the kyc-chain blockchain system to make kyc necessary in the battle against money laundering (kyc-chain 2024).

The transportation industry also makes use of blockchain technology. Another example is the blockchain-based taxi app RideX. The Ethereum Blockchain network is used by the application RideX. Drivers use the RideX blockchain to offer prices in this application. After registering with the system using the KYC application, customers compare the available prices and make a taxi call. RideX allows users to pay with cryptocurrency (Somes 2019).

Blockchain technology is also being applied to electronic voting. Blockchain-based electronic voting systems have been established in many countries worldwide. For example, from February 4–11, 2017, the Spanish political party Podemos used an electronic voting system called Agora Voting, developed with blockchain technology, to hold a vote for its 155,000 members on party-related issues. Agora Voting is an open-source, secure, and end-to-end verifiable voting system that makes use of blockchain technology. Agora Voting was developed as part of the DCENT (Decentralised Citizens Engagement Technologies) initiative supported by the European Commission. The objective of this project is to promote democratic participation by developing a voting system that is trustworthy, transparent, fast, and efficient. It is an election environment that is transparent, trustworthy, and flexible provided by Agora Voting and it is encrypted by a web browser and kept private, even from the election authorities (Opendemocracy 2017; Intelligent Cities 2021).

Followmyvote is another application that applies blockchain technology to produce an electronic voting system. Numerous U.S. states have adopted the blockchain-based Followmyvote system. “The Truth shall set you free” is the tagline of Followmyvote, an initiative that works to foster efficient communication between people. Followmyvote wants to make involvement in the digital world safe,

fast, and efficient. With a focus on international political elections and referendums, Followmyvote aims to establish a blockchain-based, standardised, accurate, honest, trustworthy, and internationally recognised voting system. (Followmyvote 2021).

Russia is another country, which employs a voting system based on blockchain technology. The company Waves developed a blockchain-based voting system, which Russia has implemented in the Kurskaya and Yaroslavskaya oblasts as a demonstration project. Blockchain-based electronic voting system developed by Waves has a number of attributes. Auditability, privacy, consistency, verifiability, efficiency, and user-friendliness are some of these attributes. Only those who have been pre-authorized can access the system because of its accountability feature. None other than those defined in the system previously can access it. Voters are safely registered in the system using smart contracts once they have undergone the required verification processes. Cryptographic algorithms secure voting results, while adding blocks to the chain assures data immutability. Verifiability is provided by both a central authority and stakeholders. Smart contracts also facilitate verification. The system is incredibly simple in view of its use and application. As a result, the system might be defined as user-friendly. Thanks to the blockchain technology, vote results are not centralised. Data is compiled in a decentralised manner, allowing all stakeholders to have a control over it. This feature shows the system's consistency. The blockchain-based voting system developed by Waves is considerably advanced in terms of efficiency and speed. Waves' system is capable of processing almost 1,000 blockchain data points per second (Wavesenterprise 2021). As can be seen, one of the most advanced versions of blockchain-based electronic voting systems is the "Waves Enterprise Network" which was developed by Waves and implemented in Russia. Russia plans to enhance the system further so that it may be used for electronic voting across the country. Agora Voting, Followmyvote, and Waves Enterprise are blockchain-based electronic voting systems that have mostly been used in small-scale units with local populations. In their pilot applications, all three platforms have had notable success. There exist several other examples for blockchain-based voting systems (Akcagündüz 2022).

Blockchain technology is also being used by political parties and political engagement. Blockchain technology is being used to organise some political parties, and these parties are taking different paths. For instance, the Russian Development Party (Partiia Rosta) has upgraded

to a new blockchain application. The Waves blockchain platform has been used by the said party to issue a coin. Upcoin, which started out with 10 million units, is meant to be used by members of political parties in social activities, meetings, and other events. According to Waves platform founder Sasha Ivanov, this is the world's first effort of its type. According to Ivanov Upcoin will eventually be used for all social, cultural, and related events,. Every community member who registers on the Waves-created blockchain network receives a wallet. Extra bonuses are awarded to members that transact on this network. The Upcoin network can also be used for payments, crowdfunding, and voting (Sezgin and Yertüm 2023; Waves Tech 2017). Another striking example is the Flux Party, which was established in Australia through blockchain technology. A blockchain-based mobile application has been developed by Flux Party and made available to its members. This application will allow elected parliament members to poll their voters on their favoured vote and ask them questions prior to a parliamentary vote. For example, MPs can cast their votes in parliament according to the results of a poll on whether Bill A should pass or fail that was carried out using a smartphone app built on blockchain technology (Sezgin and Yertüm 2023). As can be seen, blockchain technology has become prevalent throughout political parties and participation in politics, and remarkable instances are starting to appear.

Blockchain technology is also used in the management, distribution, and entertaining of digital content. The blockchain-based SingularDTV project might be cited as an example in this respect. Transforming the entertainment sector into a decentralised structure is the primary objective / vision of this effort. Through the use of blockchain technology, the SingularDTV project seeks to provide consumers with decentralised access to games, artwork, books, movies, videos, and other media. How will this be accomplished, then? First of all, the artist—the person who produces a play, artwork, book, film, video, etc.—is viewed as an equal partner and stakeholder in this project. A director might shoot a movie, for instance. He has no doubt that the movie will draw interest. However, he has no capital. In this case, the public is informed about the project by the director. It is said that anyone who contributed to fund the movie will receive some profit share if it is a success thanks to blockchain technology and smart contracts. This is executed through blockchain technologies and smart contracts. The profit share that each contributor to fundraising for the

film will get in the event that the film goes on sale is specified by smart contracts. In this manner, cryptocurrency collected through blockchain is used to raise money from those who support the movie. Smart contracts specify the amount of the profit to be shared for a contributor to the movie's financing will receive in the event that the film is sold. In this way, funding is generated from people who believe in the film using cryptocurrencies collected through the blockchain. The amount of funds raised and who donated how much can transparently be seen. The film generates a certain amount of revenue when it is watched online for a specific cost. The blockchain is then used to distribute the profits to investors. In return for SingularDTV tokens (SNGLS Coin), users can access films, music, books, and other artistic creations within the ecosystem of the SingularDTV. Any user who wants to watch a movie on the SingularDTV service buys SingularDTV tokens against a price. After that, they can use this token to watch the film of their choices. According to the smart contracts, artists receive higher payments the more times the film is watched. In addition, artists make use of the SingularDTV blockchain network to help facilitate shopping and negotiate with clients on a variety of subjects (Tapscott and Tapscott 2019).

Blockchain technology is also being used in the field of health care. Government records are of paramount significance to citizens in the healthcare industry. Significant problems might emerge if these data end up in the hands of malevolent people. An occurrence that happened in the United States in 2015 can serve as an example of this circumstance. About 10 million people's health information was obtained without authorization by a hacker in the US and later sold for \$1 million (Babaoğlu and Karasoy 2022). Similarly, counterfeit drugs are a widespread problem in the healthcare industry. A study performed by Jamil and colleagues (2019) is particularly significant. According to Jamil and his colleagues, counterfeit drugs account for up to 30% of the market in developing countries. According to the same study, which used World Health Organisation statistics, nearly 30% of all pharmaceuticals sold in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are counterfeit. According to these statistics, one out of every 10 medications sold worldwide is counterfeit. 361,000 children die each year as a result of using counterfeit drugs. 30 billion dollars are spent on counterfeit drugs every year (Cnnturk.com 2017; Jamil, Hang, Kim and Kim 2019; Carda and Kısa 2023). To prevent medicine counterfeiting, Jamil and his colleagues suggested a technology called

“Hyperledger Fabric,” which has a blockchain-based architecture. The Hyperledger Foundation developed the Hyperledger Fabric blockchain network, which is built on smart contracts and open-source technology. It is evident from reviewing the Hyperledger Fabric website that blockchain-based healthcare services are being provided within the framework of many the examples from various countries. The Aruba Health App is one example. Indicio.tech worked with the Aruba Health Department to develop this app, using Hyperledger Fabric blockchain technology. Those who wish to travel to the island of Aruba need to employ this method to complete the necessary health exams and upload them to the app. Following the completion of the necessary medical examinations, each visitor receives a distinct digital traveller ID and it is uploaded to the system. Access to lodging facilities, dining establishments, and entertainment venues can all be facilitated by the blockchain-based ID that contains health records. People can use QR codes to confirm their identity and gain access to the places of their choice. Furthermore, if people uploaded all of their health/medical history, blood type, medications, and chronic diseases to the system by QR code when visiting a hospital, doctors will have easy access to this data. As an example, during the pandemic, the Aruba government has also employed blockchain-based digital identity information to prevent tourists from leaving their hotel rooms until they have a negative PCR (coronavirus test) result (Aruba Health App., 2021). Another instance of a blockchain-based health application is the “MediLinker” program (Bautista et al. 2023), which was developed by a team from multiple academic disciplines at the University of Texas in the United States. Hyperledger Fabric has been actively working to combat the circulation of counterfeit drugs by developing a blockchain-based system that aligns with the Drug Supply Chain Security Act (DSCSA) and serves the needs of licensed pharmacists in the United States. These efforts have given way to the generation of a dedicated application called XATP. This platform allows all stakeholders in the pharmaceutical supply chain to be authenticated through secure digital identities. The system is designed to facilitate safe and transparent information exchange throughout pharmaceutical transactions. Each company records the drugs that it manufactures on the blockchain-based XATP. XATP-supported barcode readers make it simple to verify the authenticity of the drugs by scanning the barcodes printed on them. Members of LedgerDomain and Hyperledger, as well as other stakeholders from the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries,

worked together to develop XATP. By confirming distributor ID's on the blockchain and assisting with verification requests, XATP provides a "Verification Routing Service". By scanning the 2D barcode on any medicinal products in the United States, pharmacists are able to receive all the information they need regarding recalled, counterfeit, and expired or low-stock drugs (hyperledger.org 2021).

Conclusion

The research conducted by the study highlighted how blockchain-based projects have been expanding constantly at a rapid pace. Security, speed, and cost are the three factors that are most important in ensuring the development of blockchain-based projects. Security is the most noteworthy feature of blockchain technology. A blockchain is generated by connecting blocks with cryptographic codes that range from 17 to 41 digits. When blocks are linked together, the codes embedded within them are interconnected as well. For example, an 82-digit blockchain structure is generated when a block with a 41-digit password is put next to another block ($41 \times 2 = 82$). In this manner, an unbreakable encryption system is created when blocks are joined to one another. The primary reason for selecting the blockchain system is this particular case. A further benefit of blockchain technology is its speedy composition. For example, Ripple, a blockchain-based currency initiative, can transfer \$1 million in 3 to 5 seconds. As highlighted by this example, blockchain technology significantly accelerates data transport. In addition to speed, blockchain provides significant cost advantages. Using the Ripple blockchain-based currency project as an example, the cost of transferring one million dollars ranges between 0.5 and 3 dollars. Blockchain-based cryptocurrency projects keep up their research and development to make transactions quicker and less costly. Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) for digital or cryptocurrency have recently been installed in several countries, including Turkey. The use of such ATMs is increasing. Once more, blockchain-based payment systems that may be used with smartphones appear to be drastically reducing the necessity of actual currency for shopping purposes in the near future.

Blockchain-based supply chain systems have been demonstrated to bring substantial benefits in terms of swift employee wage payments, preventing the transportation of counterfeit goods, and resolving problems encountered in the transfer of perishable goods during the

work process when looking at specific application examples. Blockchain technology has also contributed to the development of digital identification, opening up a significant application for it. Digital identification made it simple to determine who had COVID-19, particularly during the pandemic. All transactions (such as shopping and lodging) are carried out using digital IDs in countries that have made the switch to digital identification. This makes it simple to identify people who are infected with COVID-19 and to place limitations on their travel. No matter where they go, healthcare professionals have immediate access to the digital identities of people whose medical data has been uploaded to the system if they feel uncomfortable. Once more, the implementation of the blockchain-based moveable property registration system can avoid document forgeries (counterfeit documentation) as well as the loss of data resulting from natural disasters. There have been major advantages to using blockchain technology in the human resources process (document verification). By identifying phoney degrees and educational certificates during the hiring process, for instance, the issues that institutions might have encountered have been avoided.

Blockchain technology is on track to become an important milestone in terms of political participation and transformation of the political parties. The way to direct democracy appears to have been paved with blockchain-based voting technologies which provide a secure, fast, and transparent voting procedure. Likewise, political parties structured through blockchain-based communication networks contributed to digitalise the traditional political party organisational structure. Blockchain technology has had an impact on the pharmaceutical industry. The scope of the global counterfeit drug trade and its detrimental effects, especially on the mortality of infants, have been examined based on the data provided in the study. Blockchain-based solutions make it simple to address this issue and its detrimental effects. Finally, customer recognition and transportation both apply blockchain technology. Taxi apps that are simple to use, secure, and make use of blockchain technology are becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide in the urban transportation industry. Trade and relationship with customers have been significantly enhanced with the blockchain-based customer identification/KYC system.

The study also found out that numerous investigations into the applicability of blockchain-based systems in various industries have been carried out. The United States, China, the United Arab Emirates,

Estonia, and others have all invested significant amounts to support these studies. Nevertheless, it has been noted that these studies have not yet been put into practice and are still in the theoretical study or pilot application stage. The defence industry, notarial services, fundraising, cloud data and cloud computing, software and coding, foreign trade, aviation, search engines, anti-corruption, assistance programs and documentation, taxation, auditing, cyber security, and intelligence have all been identified as domains where blockchain technology will be used in the near future. To put it briefly, blockchain technology can be applied to practically every aspect of life. It seems that it is to be employed in every aspect of life in the near future.

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From butterflies to backyards: Ecoprecarity and everyday life in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*

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Abstract: Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) presents a powerful literary response to the complexities of climate change, social inequality and human vulnerability. Kingsolver is one of the supreme predominant writers in American literature. Most of her novels are considered as semi-autobiographical works. This novel set in Rural Appalachia, centres on the accidental discovery of a displaced colony of monarch butterflies and the transformation it triggers in Dellarobia Turnbow, an intelligent woman but stifled housewife. This paper explores *Flight Behavior* through the lens of ecoprecarity, a theoretical framework that foregrounds the entangled vulnerability of both human and nonhuman life in the face of environmental degradation and socio-economic marginalization. Through the character of Dellarobia demonstrates that climate change is not merely a global crisis but a deeply personal and domestic one, playing out in kitchens, barns and backyards. The novel suggests that effective environmental communication must include empathy, local knowledge and the capacity to listen across class and cultural divides. The monarch butterfly becomes a central symbol of ecological dislocation and aesthetic wonder, while also reflecting Dellarobia's personal transformation and the broader fragility of life under climate stress. The paper investigates how the novel bridges the gap between scientific knowledge and rural experience, revealing how class, gender and geography shape access to and trust in climate discourse.

Keywords: Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*, climate fiction, monarch butterflies, ecoprecarity

Introduction

In recent years, literary studies have perceived the emergence of environmental humanities as a vital interdisciplinary response to the environmental crisis of climate change. As the realities of the Anthropocene, a term used to denote the epoch in which human activity has become the dominant force shaping Earth's systems begin to

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permeate cultural consciousness, literature has taken urgent role in uttering the difficulties of ecological degradation, loss of biodiversity and the uneven distribution of environmental precarity. Climate fiction or “cli-fi” has thus become a significant genre through which writers imagine and critique the socio ecological entanglements of contemporary life. Barbara Ellen Kingsolver is one of the most famous female writers in American Literature. She mostly writes semi-autobiographical works. She is a contemporary author in America. Her works focus on the environment and the feminine. She received notable awards like the Pulitzer Prize. Her notable novels include *The Bean Trees* (1988), *Animal Dreams* (1990), *Pigs in Heaven* (1993), *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), *Prodigal Summer* (2000) and *Flight Behavior* (2012). The chosen work of Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* offers a rich grounded narrative of climate disruption and its intersection with rural life, gender and socioeconomic instability. This novel is set in the Rural Appalachian town of Feathertown, Tennessee. The protagonist Dellarobia Turnbow, a disillusioned housewife whose life takes an unexpected turn when she discovers a colony of monarch butterflies wintering in the woods behind her farm, a phenomenon caused by climate change. The presence of these misplaced butterflies serves as a visual and symbolic manifestation of environmental instability, portraying the attention of scientists, journalists, religious leaders and environmentalists. Especially compelling is not just its ecological theme, but its focus on the human dimensions of climate change particularly how it affects those living at the margins of education and wealth. This paper employs the theoretical lens of *Ecoprecarity Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture* (2012), was most notably developed and articulated by Pramod K. Nayar. In *Flight Behavior* portrays climate change not as a distant scientific thought but as a deeply felt lived experience. The term “ecoprecarity” adapted from Judith Butler’s broader concept of precarious life (2012). It refers to the fragile interdependent conditions of both human and nonhuman lives under environmental threat. As a critical framework, ecoprecarity foregrounds the ways in which environmental degradation disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations those already experiencing economic hardship, social exclusion, or gendered forms of oppression. By focusing on everyday characters like Dellarobia, Kingsolver reframes environmental catastrophe as not only a planetary emergency but a domestic, intimate crisis rooted in relationships, labour and land. This introduction situates *Flight Behavior* within the growing field of ecocritical and environmental literary studies, while also pointing

to the novel's unique contribution its articulation of ecoprecarity through the lens of Rural Appalachian life, maternal subjectivity and local resistance; how precarious lives, both human and nonhuman, are entangled in a shared ecological destiny. This article explores how Kingsolver blends personal transformation with ecological awareness, this study argues that *Flight Behavior* serves as both a cautionary tale and a literary space of resistance, where the ecological imagination is grounded in care, kinship and the possibility of ethical awakening in the most unexpected places not in laboratories or legislative halls, but in backyards, barns and the broken silences of women's lives.

Research methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in ecocritical theory with a specific focus on ecoprecarity. The analysis is textual and thematic, incorporating close reading of the novel for ecologically significant motifs, metaphors and character development. Theoretical synthesis of ecoprecarity is articulated by scholars such as Judith Butler, T.J. Demos, Rob Nixon and Anthony Burke. Contextual exploration of Rural Appalachian life illuminates the socioecological implications of climate change at the grassroots level. This interdisciplinary method draws upon environmental humanities, sociology and literary criticism to demonstrate the relevance of everyday life in climate fiction.

Literature review

Barbara Kingsolver's literary work has long engaged with environmental and ethical questions. Scholars such as Ursula Heise and Scott Slovic have recognized her as a major voice in climate fiction. *Flight Behavior* in particular has attracted critical attention for its portrayal of scientific discourse and the communication gap between rural populations and climate experts (Sanders; Toker).

However, few studies have approached the novel through the lens of ecoprecarity, a relatively new framework. Judith Butler's conception of precarious life and Rob Nixon's slow violence provide foundational insight into how environmental and human vulnerabilities intersect. T.J. Demos further advances this by emphasizing the political and ethical urgency of recognizing shared planetary precarities. This paper builds upon these theoretical insights to fill the gap in Kingsolver criticism by addressing how *Flight Behavior* makes ecoprecarity legible in everyday rural life.

Discussion

In *Flight Behavior*, the monarch butterfly emerges as a powerful and multi-layered symbol that connects ecological upheaval with human vulnerability. Barbara Kingsolver does not present the butterflies as mere background to the plot instead, they become central to the novel's meditation on climate change, displacement, beauty and survival.

the ecosystem of the earth and its various regions have been rendered fragile and precarious in the Anthropocene and represented in terms of the degradation and destruction of habitats, animal populations, climate and Nature, which we have always taken for granted is threatening to life itself with toxic landscapes all around. (Nayar 2019, 8)

Their unexpected appearance in the Appalachian Mountains far from their traditional wintering grounds in Mexico serves as a biological anomaly, but also as a metaphorical disruption in the natural and social orders. This displacement is at the heart of the novel's exploration of ecoprecarity. Traditionally, monarch butterflies follow a precise and inherited migratory route across North America, a delicate pattern passed down through generations. Their sudden misdirection to Feathertown is not just a scientific puzzle but a symbolic signal that the planet's ecological systems are unravelling. Kingsolver uses this unnatural migration to demonstrate the invisible, slow violence of climate change, a term coined by Rob Nixon to describe environmental degradation that is gradual and dispersed yet deeply destructive. The butterflies' misplacement is a subtle yet dramatic indicator that something fundamental in the natural world has gone wrong and this dislocation resonates with the character's own experiences of disorientation and insecurity. For Dellarobia Turnbow, the novel's protagonist, the butterflies represent both wonder and warning. At first, she interprets their arrival in almost religious terms, viewing them as a vision or miracle that might offer an escape from her stifling domestic life.

Every bough glowed with an orange blaze. "Jesus God," she said again. No words came to her that seemed sane. Trees turned to fire, a burning bush. Moses came to mind, and Ezekiel, words from Scripture that occupied a certain space in her brain but no longer carried honest weight, if they ever had (Kingsolver 2012, 19).

However, as she learns more from Ovid Byron, the African American scientist studying the butterflies, she comes to see them as a living testimony to climate change. The monarchs, fragile and vulnerable, mirror Dellarobia's own sense of entrapment and displacement within a

rigid socioeconomic and gendered structure like her they are at the mercy of forces beyond their control.

The monarch butterfly represents precarity and beauty and their delicate wings and temporary lifespan embody the fragility of life both human and nonhuman under threat from environmental collapse. displacement and disruption Just as the butterflies have lost their natural migratory path, the people of Feathertown face lost opportunities, broken traditions and unstable futures. Transformation and hope as creatures that undergo metamorphosis, monarchs are also symbols of change and renewal. Dellarobia their presence marks the beginning of an intellectual and emotional awakening, an ecoconsciousness rooted not in privilege but in pain, wonder and critical awareness. As well, Kingsolver uses the butterflies to highlight the disconnection between scientific discourse and public awareness. The very word Tennessee made those audiences burst into laughter, she'd heard it.

They would never come see what Tennessee was like, any more than she would get a degree in science and figure out the climate things Dr. Byron described. Nobody truly decided for themselves. There was too much information. What they actually did was scope around, decide who was looking out for their clan, and sign on for the memos on a wide array of topics (Kingsolver 2012, 228).

While Ovid Byron tries to communicate the significance of their arrival in terms of climate science, the local community initially interprets it through religious, mystical, or sensational lenses. This tension reflects a broader issue in climate communication how facts are received, misunderstood, or ignored when they challenge deeply held cultural beliefs or when they emerge in contexts of economic hardship and social conservatism.

The monarch butterflies assist as living metaphors for ecoprecarity. Their vulnerability and haunting beauty remind readers that environmental conversion is not a distant intangible issue, it is a deeply intimate morally urgent reality that touches every corner of life from global ecosystems to isolated farmsteads. Through adjusting her narrative on these creatures, Kingsolver transforms them into a narrative device that bridges science, emotion and ethics showing that climate change is not just about polar bears or statistics, but about the fragile pulse of life itself flapping just outside our backdoors.

Dellarobia as picture of the ecoprecarity

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* places the character of Dellarobia Turnbow at the center of its narrative not only as a character suffering

from personal disturbance but as a powerful literary embodiment of ecoprecarity the condition where ecological instability and social vulnerability intersect. Through Dellarobia, Kingsolver personalizes the theoretical crisis of climate change grounding it in the everyday struggles of a woman caught between environmental catastrophe and domestic confinement. “They would say the same thing she’d heard her mother-in-law tell Cub: that Dellarobia was a piece of work” (Kingsolver 2012, 13). Dellarobia is a young mother in her late twenties, living in Rural Appalachia, married into a farming family that is both financially strained and socially conservative. Her life is marked by early motherhood, intellectual stagnation and unrealized potential. She is intelligent and curious but has had her ambitions stifled by economic limitations and cultural expectations. This stalled potential reflects the broader sense of entrapment that characterizes communities living on the margins communities that are most exposed to ecological shifts but least equipped to address them. Kingsolver appeals to a subtle parallel between Dellarobia’s personal disorientation and the dislocation of the monarch butterflies; just as the butterflies arrive in the wrong place at the wrong time. Dellarobia finds herself misplaced in a life that does not fit her identity or aspirations. “She found herself still rooting for this sliver of a generation that had made its way down the precarious mountain to rest on a blighted orchard” (Ibid, 581). Her spontaneous decision to hike into the woods anticipating an affair acts as a symbolic crossing of thresholds. Instead of finding escape, she encounters the miracle of the butterflies which sets in motion her awakening not just to nature, but to her own inner life and activity.

This awakening coincides with her exposure to scientific discourse, especially through her collaboration with Ovid Byron, the entomologist studying and researching butterflies. Dellarobia becomes an association character between the academic knowledge and the local community’s suspicion, yet she also experiences how environmental knowledge fails to empower when systemic inequality persists. Despite her growing understanding of climate change, Dellarobia is still tethered to a socioeconomic reality that constrains her self-determination dependent on her husband’s family lacking access to higher education and constantly judged by community norms. This tension illustrates the heart of ecoprecarity knowing the crisis but lacking the means to respond to it effectively.

Dellarobia’s gendered experience also enhances another layer to her precarity. Kingsolver paints her as emotionally burdened by motherhood,

emotionally isolated and often dismissed by those around her. Yet she emerges as a perceptive observer of both people and the natural world and it is through her eyes that the reader comes to grasp the beauty, danger and urgency of the butterflies' arrival. Her transformation is not only ecological but epistemological she begins to see the world and herself, through a sharper lens, asking deeper questions about survival, responsibility and the future. Dellarobia's story speaks to the disproportionate burden placed on women, particularly rural women, in the age of ecological crisis. She performs invisible labor domestic, emotional, intellectual and her journey shows how climate change is not gender neutral. While environmental discourses often focus on policy, statistics, or biodiversity, Kingsolver insists that we also attend to the domestic sphere where ecological and emotional vulnerabilities converge.

Science, class and communication

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* presents a compound interplay between science, class and communication, highlighting how environmental knowledge is produced circulated and often resisted within socially stratified communities. The novel explores the gap between scientific understanding and public belief showing how this divide is not merely about access to information but deeply embedded in issues of class identity, cultural values and mistrust. The character of Ovid Byron, a Caribbean American scientist studying the displaced monarch butterflies represents formal scientific authority. He arrives in Feathertown with the tools, language and urgency of climate science determined to understand the environmental anomaly and share its implications with the broader world. However, his efforts to explain the butterflies' misplacement and the role of global warming are met with suspicion and indifference by the local Appalachian community. As he conveyed the things of science they could accept the things and some of the things Dellarobia learned from him. This tension reflects a broader cultural divide between those who speak the language of data, models and environmental forecasts and those whose knowledge is rooted in daily survival, tradition and lived experience. Kingsolver shows how class based experiences shape the reception of science. The residents of Feathertown, many of whom struggle with poverty and limited education do not reject science out of ignorance but because it often comes from outsiders who do not share their values or hardships. "Humans are hardwired for social community," he said (Kingsolver 2012, 446). For them, the language of science can seem alienating, condescending, or

irrelevant in the face of more immediate concerns like debt, crop failure, or family responsibilities. When scientific discourse enters such communities, it risks being interpreted not as helpful truth but as exclusive intrusion, especially when it challenges deeply held beliefs or religious worldviews. This communication gap is further complicated by media distortion and political manipulation. Kingsolver introduces scenes in which national reporters oversimplify or sensationalize the situation, portraying the townspeople as either backwards or pitiable. These portrayals reinforce stereotypes and widen the rift between scientific narratives and local trust. The novel critiques not only the failure of science to reach ordinary people, but also the failure of media and institutions to respect the cultural complexity of the communities most affected by ecological change.

Dellarobia Turnbow becomes a key figure in bridging this divide. Although she starts out with little formal education, she is deeply curious and observant. Her growing relationship with Ovid Byron and his research team reveals how scientific communication can succeed when it is grounded in mutual respect, patience and human connection. Dellarobia does not simply absorb scientific facts and she interprets them through the lens of her own experiences, emotions and social context. Her evolving understanding becomes a model for inclusive environmental literacy, showing that ordinary people are capable of complex ecological thought when approached with care and dignity. “Stop the logging, stop the lies! Save the monarch butterflies!” (Ibid, 324) Kingsolver thus uses *Flight Behavior* to argue that science must meet people where they are not just physically, but socially and emotionally. Effective communication must navigate the cultural geographies of class, avoiding assumptions about intelligence or ignorance. The novel suggests that climate change cannot be addressed through facts alone; it requires storytelling, empathy and a willingness to listen across divides. *Flight Behavior* reveals that the climate crisis is also a crisis of communication and trust. It is not enough to know the science; people must feel that it matters to their lives and futures. Bridging the gap between scientific knowledge and everyday understanding requires breaking down hierarchies, building relationships and respecting the intelligence of lived experience even in the most remote backyards.

This study reveals several significant findings regarding the intersection of eco-precarity, gender, class and environmental consciousness in *Flight Behavior*. Barbara Kingsolver’s novel demonstrates how climate change is not an abstract scientific

phenomenon, but a deeply personal and embodied experience, especially for those who inhabit socially and economically precarious positions. The findings of this research are organized under key thematic revelations that emerged through close textual analysis and theoretical engagement.

Ecoprecarity as embodied experience

The novel exemplifies that environmental vulnerability is experienced most acutely by those already living in forms of social and economic precarity. Dellarobia Turnbow's life is marked by financial instability, limited access to education, gendered expectations and rural isolation. Her exposure to the effects of climate change represented by the arrival of the monarch butterflies mirrors the precariousness of her own life. The research finds that Kingsolver's narrative strategy blurs the boundary between ecological crisis and personal crisis, suggesting that the health of the planet is inseparably tied to the well-being of individuals and communities.

Symbolism of the monarch butterflies

The monarch butterfly functions as a rich ecological and metaphorical symbol within the novel. The butterflies' disrupted migration becomes a signifier of a disordered climate system. Yet they are also figures of wonder, beauty and transformation. The study finds that this dual symbolism reflects the dual nature of ecoprecarity; it is both a site of existential risk and a potential catalyst for personal and communal awakening. Dellarobia, the butterflies initiate a profound journey of intellectual growth, emotional honesty and ecological awareness. The science-class divide highlights Kingsolver's critique of the communication gap between climate scientists and working-class communities. Ovid Byron represents scientific experts but his language and urgency often fail to resonate with the local population. The study reveals that class-based differences in access to language, education and media heavily influence how climate information is received. Kingsolver suggests that the failure to effectively communicate climate change to vulnerable populations is not merely a matter of literacy but of cultural disconnection and systemic neglect. The novel underscores the gendered nature of environmental precarity. Dellarobia's role as a mother, wife and caregiver reflects the unequal burden women often bear in times of crisis. This study finds that Kingsolver places emotional and ecological labour traditionally performed by women at the center of environmental ethics. Dellarobia's gradual empowerment challenges the patriarchal structures

of her community and models a form of resistance rooted in knowledge, care and observation. The study shows that this narrative choice affirms the ecological significance of ordinary lives and encourages a bottom-up, community oriented understanding of climate responsibility. Transformation through environmental consciousness finally, this paper finds that *Flight Behavior* encourages a hopeful but realistic vision of ecological transformation. Dellarobia's intellectual awakening does not solve the larger climate crisis, but it signifies the importance of individual agency within a collective struggle. Kingsolver's novel affirms that when people begin to see their lives as interconnected with ecological systems, they become capable of new kinds of resistance, empathy and responsibility.

Kingsolver recommends that one of the primary steps toward solving ecological problems is developing environmental empathy, the ability to care about nature and understand how deeply connected to it. In the novel, Dellarobia starts to notice changes in the natural world around her, especially the arrival of the monarch butterflies. As she learns more about their journey and the effects of climate change, she begins to feel a strong emotional connection to their struggle. This kind of empathy comes from close observation and personal stories, not just from reading scientific articles. Kingsolver believes that if people can see nature with attention and emotion like Dellarobia does they will be more likely to care for it. Stories, especially those rooted in everyday life, help people connect their own struggles with those of the environment. Encourage people to pay attention to nature in their daily lives and to share stories that help others feel connected to the environment.

Decentralized environmental education

The novel shows that climate education should not only come from top scientists or distant institutions, but also from within communities. Dellarobia learns about climate change not in a classroom, but by talking to scientists, watching the butterflies and thinking about her own life. Kingsolver advocates that knowledge can be dominant when it attaches science with people's values, culture and experiences. Often, rural or working class communities' impression is left out of climate discussions because the language of science can be technical or disconnected from their daily lives. Kingsolver shows that if education is made more relational, local and practical, it can inspire more people to get involved. Create learning spaces that mix scientific facts with local experience and make education more personal and community-based.

Ethical reorientation through care and solidarity Kingsolver requests for a change in how we treat both people and nature. She shows that we must act not out of fear or guilt but out of care, attention and shared responsibility. Dellarobia begins to question her place in the world and starts to care not only for her children but for the butterflies, the land and even strangers like the scientists. This sense of connection makes her stronger and more hopeful. The novel encourages us to build community solidarity, where people support each other through climate challenges. It also asks us to treat animals, plants and the earth not as resources to use, but as living beings we depend on and must protect. Build communities that care for each other and the environment and make kindness and respect a central part of how we respond to climate change.

In *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver suggests that the solution to ecoprecarity does not lie in grand actions alone. It lies in small, thoughtful changes paying attention to nature, telling stories, teaching others in meaningful ways and building stronger, more caring relationships with both people and the environment. These are not just environmental solutions, they are ethical choices, ones that ask us to live more gently and responsibly on the earth.

Conclusion

This novel expresses a powerful story about ecoprecarity, a term that means living with both environmental dangers and social problems like poverty, lack of education and gender inequality. The novel shows how climate change is not only about rising temperatures or melting ice caps, but also about how real people, especially those living in difficult situations, experience it in their everyday lives. Through the image of the monarch butterflies which end up in the wrong place due to climate disruption Kingsolver gives us a symbol of nature in danger. But these butterflies also represent beauty, change and hope. When Dellarobia, a poor and frustrated woman in a small rural town, discovers the butterflies, it begins a transformation in her own life. She starts to see the world differently and begins to think for herself, ask questions and learn.

Kingsolver shows that climate change is deeply personal and emotional, especially for people like Dellarobia who live in rural areas, struggle with money and are often left out of the bigger conversations about science and the environment. She makes us understand that climate issues are connected to gender and class. Women in poor communities often suffer the most, yet their voices are rarely heard by connecting human lives with the health of ecosystems. Kingsolver is asking readers

to think differently about the environment. She wants us to see that we cannot fix climate change without understanding the real, everyday struggles of people who live close to the land. The novel suggests that solutions to environmental problems must include the experiences and wisdom of ordinary people, not just scientists and politicians. In the end, *Flight Behavior* is a call to care for each other and for the earth. It teaches us that real change comes when we listen to unheard voices, when we care for the world around us and when we realize that human life and nature are deeply connected.

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Keywording ethics and accountability in public service: An enlisted governance terminologies

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Abstract: In line with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this qualitative research "keywords" basic terminologies as enlisted from Philippine policies regarding ethics and accountability in public service for use in governance. Although "keywording" usually searches for words or terms on the internet and/or in any platform for both online and non-online engine, this paper strategizes the selection of basic terminologies that is rationally sorted and/or lifted from the policies regarding ethics and accountability in public service based on judgement and/or expertise in the scholarship. Results show that varied terminologies derived from policies can be used in familiarizing cases and/or situations that will help, aid and/or operationalize governance. Cases that manifest violation thereof exemplify that no public servant is above the law and should serve accordingly for public interest. The enlisted governance terminologies can serve as basis and/or guide in the design and formulation, for both scholars and practitioners in public administration, especially in the day-to-day public affairs, leadership by upright example, agenda setting and planning, administrative services, critical-decision-making, conflict resolutions, consultancies and discussions, exchanges for policy and organizational development in governance and the like. Sorting out terminologies from policies all the more prove that public service and/or duty is good governance in ethics and accountability.

Keywords: keywording, ethics and accountability, public service, enlisted governance terminologies

Introduction

The face of the workplace is constantly evolving as one generation begins to retire and another moves up to take its place. In 2010, an office may have a mix of baby boomers (and older), Gen X-ers, and

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Gen Y-ers (Millennials) all working together. In addition to generational differences, differences in education, upbringing, social norms, and values may create cultural gaps that may lead to misunderstandings or conflicts at times. In reality, a variety of perspectives in the workplace can actually benefit and strengthen an organization (*Skills to Pay the Bills 114 Professionalism*). Moving forward with the myriad changes in the workplace, this holds true in government service where there are activities on a day-to-day basis, movement and turn-over of job responsibilities of public officials and employees cutting across from job placement, hiring, retention until retirement and the like. Dealing with governance realities require an upright-cutting-edge moral conduct in the delivery of public service from the street-level bureaucrats, middle and top-management in their differentiated duties according to the standards set-forth therein.

In the 21st century new world order, there is growing interest more than ever before in issues related to democracy and good governance around the world. This is a reflection of the increasing acceptance of the fact that democracy and good governance are not a luxury, but a fundamental requirement to achieve sustainable development (Jaja & Aditya 2022). Public service has become one of the yardsticks and indicators that reveal whether or not the governance is soundly implemented in terms of the bureaucratic capacity (Asrini et al. 2019). In liberal democracies ethics in public service is about the application of moral standards by representatives of the people and by officials in the government. It is the manifestation of what individuals in these positions feel they ought to do in contexts where their own judgement has to be applied. In the modern world, however, the tendency is to reduce the opportunities for discretion wherever possible (Chapman 2003).

Moral issues and decadence do plague governments leading to graft and corrupt practices that create a culture of “mistrust” among citizens as “people” in a body “politic”. Scandals involving public officials have captured world attention these days. Precipitated by shady privatization deals, the diversion of aid, widespread public sector patronage, crony capitalism, and campaign financing abuses, people are debating outright corruption and unprofessional behavior in government (United Nations 2000).

Along actualities, one of the many challenges that a public servant encounters, is the *time-honored principle of upholding ethics and accountability in the discharge of public duty*. What “ought” to be a

“public servant” is the panacea to any public concern on its desire to uplift the standard of public service for all taxpayers who deserve utmost priority and attention. Clients in any corporate practice are the focus, more so, in the delivery of goods and services in governance. Ethical questions and behavior in the public service and issues of public accountability should be in place all the time as no one owns the bureaucracy (CNU Self-Instructional Module, n.d.). It is not just the people but also the system in administration in order to achieve the ideals of good governance in practical situation/s as needed.

Familiarizing the mandate of ethics and accountability in public service will allow scholars and practitioners in governance to define in situations certain terminologies that will limit authority and minimize discretion and/or arbitrary decisions from the street-level bureaucrats, middle-and-top managers and even with those stakeholders involved in civic and public affairs for the welfare and common good of all, i.e., for public utility, literacy and good governance.

In line with the United Nations’ *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, this research in public administration aims to determine ethics and accountability using “keyword analysis” in order to enlist terminologies for use in public service. In so doing, this selection intends to answer the following problem statements, to wit: Firstly, what are some selected mandated ethics and accountability policies in public service? Secondly, how are policies basically keyworded as enlisted vis-à-vis cases and situations in governance? Thirdly, based on the findings, what can be concluded and/or recommended to advance public duty? All problem sets corresponding the answers derived from the data on input, process and finality, in a way, will help design, formulate, aid and/or operationalize governance in both theory and practice. In so doing, this research comes as an impetus.

Research paradigm

The United Nations’ *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* stipulates the seventeen (17) as itemized goals for the following,

No poverty (SDG 1), Zero hunger (SDG 2), Good health and well-being (SDG 3), Quality education (SDG 4), Gender equality (SDG 5), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduced inequalities (SDG 10), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Climate action (SDG 13), Life below water (SDG 14), Life on land (SDG 15), Peace, justice,

and strong institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) (United Nations. [2015] 2019).

The research paradigm is aligned with the United Nations' Seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals more specifically with SDG 15 and 16 respectively to include good governance principle, ethics and accountability policies as keyworded to cite administrative cases and situations that befit public service. Further, this can be exemplified in professionalizing work in advancing public interest in advancing SDG 1-14 including fostering and building partnerships under SDG 17. Public Service Delivery requires good governance, leadership, "theoretical-to-actual and vice-versa" management styles and the like. Public service ecosystems are an increasingly influential concept in public administration and management theory (Osborne et al., 2021). The governance principle is an important aspect of good governance, and its implementation is believed to have a good impact on governance outcomes, such as corruption reduction and performance improvement. The governance principle has been developed for several types of organizations (Zaitul et al. 2023).

Good governance

Good governance has been the subject of theoretical and pragmatic discourses during the last three decades. Recently the indeterminate terms "governance" and good governance are being gradually used, in the literature of political science, administrative sciences and development studies. It is being increasingly recognized that good governance is legitimate, accountable, and effective ways of obtaining and using public power and resources in the pursuit of widely-accepted social goals (Ali 2019).

Integrity is one of the moral principles related to moral uprightness. Recently, there are a lot of issues discussed regarding the integrity in public sector administration especially in public sector. Currently governance in public administration has been exposed to public criticism due to the governance failure, fraud, corruption, and poor internal control (Jaja & Aditya 2022). In a time of great change, accelerating globalization and increasing uncertainty, all countries, whether developed or developing, are searching for a new form of governance that is better adapted to the times so as to gain an advantage in economic competitiveness and create substantial and sustainable social growth. As governance theory is becoming the dominant political theory in response to the change, the values backing

the discourse and texts consistent with them have helped revise the theory of government in mainstream politics and were agreed upon by global politicians, scholars, officials and entrepreneurs (Keping 2018). Good governance sets the normative standards of development. It fosters participation, ensures transparency, demands accountability, promotes efficiency, and upholds the rule of law in economic, political, and administrative institutions and processes (*Good Governance and the Rule of Law*, n.d.). It is the active and productive cooperation between the State and citizens, and the key to its success lies in the powers participating in political administration. Only when citizens have sufficient political power to participate in elections, policy-making, administration and supervision can they prompt the State and join hands with it to build public authority and order (Keping 2018). The concept of good governance involves 3 main actors, namely the government, the private sector and civil society, with their respective roles and functions. In its implementation and realization, it is the full responsibility of the government (Raga Lay 2022).

In a nutshell, good governance refers to the public administration process that maximizes public interest. One of its essential features is that it is a kind of collaborative management of public life performed by both the State and the citizens and a new relationship between political State and civil society, as well as the optimum state of the two (Keping 2018). States have an obligation to complete the right of every citizen through government system to increase quality and to guarantee public service in accordance with general principles of good governance (Winarno & Retnowati 2019).

Ethics and accountability in public service

Ethics refers to principles by which to evaluate behavior as right or wrong, good or bad. In the public sector, ethics refers to well based standards of right and wrong, and prescribe what public servants ought to do. Accountability is a key principle of good corporate governance (*Ethical Issues in the Public Service*). Ethics in the public service are broad norms that delineate how public servants should exercise judgment and discretion in carrying out their official duties. These values and norms are better reinforced if there exist a system of administrative policies, management practices, and oversight agents that provide incentives and penalties to encourage public servants to professionally carry out their duties and observe high standards of conduct (United Nations 2000).

Accountability is the obligation of a public servant or department to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner (*Ethical Issues in the Public Service*, n.d.). This is to state that ethics and accountability is required to achieve good governance in public service, a time-honored and perpetual must for all officials and employees therein. Certainly, governance is centered on the need to account for the changing relationship between government and society. The growth of the fragmented or hollow state has brought about a fundamental shift in the process and nature of public administration, a change that has altered conceptions of what government should do and how government should go about doing it (Frederickson et al. n.d.).

Professionalism

Professionalism in the public service is an over-arching value that determines how its activities will be carried out. It encompasses all other values that guide the public service such as loyalty, neutrality, transparency, diligence, punctuality, effectiveness, impartiality, and other values that may be specific to individual countries (*Professionalism and Ethics in the Public Service: Issues and Practices in Selected Regions*, n.d.).

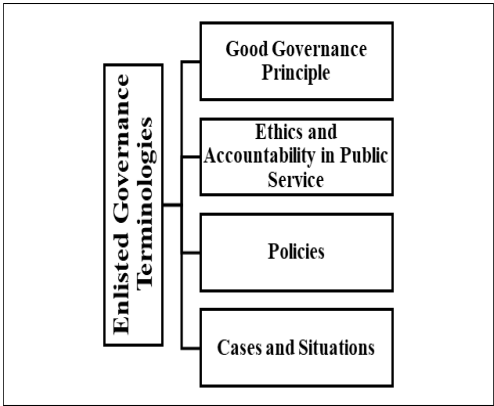


Figure 1. The Research Paradigm

Policies: Governing ethics and accountability in public service

Public Service is expressed per policy provisions as follow: The 1987 *Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines* stipulates, Article II. Declaration of Principles and State Policies. Section 26. The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law. Section 27. The

State shall maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption (Ibid.). Article IX. Constitutional Commissions. Section 1. The Constitutional Commissions, which shall be independent, are the Civil Service Commission, the Commission on Elections, and the Commission on Audit (Ibid.). Article XI. Accountability of Public Officers. Section 1. Public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must, at all times, be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and efficiency; act with patriotism and justice, and lead modest lives (Ibid. Article XI). Executive Order No. 292 s. 1987. Instituting the “Administrative Code of 1987” (*Administrative Code of 1987*).

RA 6770 Ombudsman Act of 1989 states, Section 1. Title. — This Act shall be known as “The Ombudsman Act of 1989.” Section 2. Declaration of Policy. — The State shall maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption (*An Act Providing for the Functional and Structural Organization of the Office of the Ombudsman, and for Other Purposes, Republic Act. 6770*).

Republic Act 3019 expresses, Section 1. *Statement of policy*. It is the policy of the Philippine Government, in line with the principle that a public office is a public trust, to repress certain acts of public officers and private persons alike which constitute graft or corrupt practices or which may lead thereto (*RA 3019. Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act*).

RA 1379 is an Act Declaring Forfeiture in Favor of the State any Property Found to have been Unlawfully Acquired by any Public Officer or Employee and Providing for the Proceedings therefor (*RA 1379*).

Republic Act No. 6713, known as the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees is a law establishing a code of conduct and ethical standards for public officials and employees, to uphold the time-honored principle of public office being a public trust, granting incentives and rewards for exemplary service, enumerating prohibited acts and transactions and providing penalties for violations thereof and for other purposes (*Republic Act No. 6713: An Act Establishing a Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employers, to Uphold the Time-Honored Principle of Public Office Being a Public Trust, Granting Incentives and Rewards for Exemplary Service, Enumerating*

Prohibited Acts and Transactions and Providing Penalties for Violations thereof and for Other Purposes; Section 1. Title. This Act Shall Be Known as the “Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees”); Civil Service Commission Resolution No. 002515. Revised Dress Code Prescribed for All Government Officials and Employees in the Workplace (*Mc19s2000, Mc2s2022*).

Republic Act No. 11032 is an Act Promoting Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Delivery of Government Services, amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 9485, otherwise known as the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, and for other Purposes (*RA 11032*); Act No. 3815 (December 8, 1930. An Act Revising the Penal Code and Other Penal Laws. Preliminary Article – This law shall be known as “The Revised Penal Code” (*The Revised Penal Code*).

Lastly, other existing policies that are not contrary to public interest, e.g., Legislative Enactments, Executive Orders, Decrees and/or Ordinances, Judicial Decisions, Quasi-Legislative/Executive/Judicial Functions of Administrative Bodies and Agencies, Rules and Regulations and the like in the International, National, Regional and Local Levels of the Government.

Methodology

This qualitative research employs “keyword analysis” in deriving basic terminologies from Philippine policies on ethics and accountability in public service for use in governance. Although “keywording” usually searches for words or terms on the internet and/or in any platform for both online and non-online engine, this paper strategizes the selection of basic terminologies that is rationally sorted, highlighted, and/or lifted from the policies regarding ethics and accountability in public service based on judgement and/or expertise in the scholarship.

The chosen terminologies will, then, be triangulated and/or validated by a practitioner, a scholar in governance and the available sources on review of related studies and literature, thereby, deriving an enlistment of governance terminologies for use in public service that can be utilized as a resource material and/or guide for both scholars and practitioners in public administration especially in day-to-day affairs, administrative services, critical-decision making, conflict resolutions, consultancies and discussions, exchanges for policy and organizational development in governance and the like. All

terminologies are assigned usage as: mandated, determined, needed and/or applicable per the situation that befits each policy respectively. Practices per agency vary accordingly in the application of policy per ethics and accountability in public service. Although perpetual precepts of laws apply, it is divergent but convergent in nature. Such that, cases are defined, substantiated, validated, induced and/or generated per bases of law.

For research ethics, all cases per policy application in governance including all references are left undisclosed and sensitized per data privacy, in order to preserve and/or protect both private and public interest. Any disclaimer invoked, in case, there are matters violative in nature without the notion and/or intention of the writer in ensuring that nothing detrimental results therein, such that, this study does not discredit good governance (despite issues, cases, problems, concerns and challenges) for those public servants that uphold the best interest of the state following good morals and right conduct per conscientious governance and administration as there are also best practices that could be highlighted in any subsequent research for future studies.

Results and discussions

The United Nations' *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* stipulates the seventeen (17) as itemized goals for the following,

No poverty (SDG 1), Zero hunger (SDG 2), Good health and well-being (SDG 3), Quality education (SDG 4), Gender equality (SDG 5), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduced inequalities (SDG 10), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Climate action (SDG 13), Life below water (SDG 14), Life on land (SDG 15), Peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) (United Nations [2025] 2019).

Administrative practices have always been acknowledged as a crucial tool for establishing good governance. Strong evidence shows that good governance extensively influences citizens' behaviors toward government (Jameel et al. 2019). As such, policy provisions guide public servants in the observance of ethics and accountability in public service. The policy codes are stipulated with excerpt policy provisions and/or statements in deriving keywords as enlisted governance terminologies for use.

Table 1. Policy Provisions and/or Statements: Ethics and Accountability in Public Service

Policy Codes in the Philippines	Excerpt Policy Provisions and/or Statements, et. al. vis-à-vis Ethics and Accountability in Public Service	Derived Keyword(s) from Policy Provisions and/or Statements, et. al.
A. The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines: Article II, Sections 26 & 27; Article IX, Section 1; Article XI, Section 1	Article II: Declaration of Principles and State Policies. Section 26. The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law. Article II: Section 27. The State shall maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption. Article IX: Constitutional Commissions. Section 1. The Constitutional Commissions, which shall be independent, are the Civil Service Commission, the Commission on Elections, and the Commission on Audit Article XI: Accountability of Public Officers. Section 1. Public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must, at all times, be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and efficiency; act with patriotism and justice, and lead modest lives	• Equal Access to Opportunities for Public Service • Prohibition of Political Dynasties • Honesty and Integrity in Public Service • Against Graft and Corruption • Constitutional Commissions • Civil Service Commission • Commission on Elections • Commission on Audit • Public Officers and Employees • Accountability • Public Office • Public Trust • Utmost responsibility • Integrity • Loyalty and Efficiency • Patriotism and Justice • Modest Lives
B. Executive Order No. 292 s. 1987	Instituting the “Administrative Code of 1987”	•Administrative Code
C. Republic Act 6770 (Ombudsman Act of 1989)	Ombudsman Act of 1989. An Act Providing for the Functional and Structural Organization of the Office of the Ombudsman, and for other purposes	•Office of the Ombudsman •Structural Organization
D. Republic Act 3019	Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act “Receiving any gift” includes the act of accepting directly or indirectly a gift from a person other than a member of the public officer's immediate family, in behalf of himself or of any member of his family or relative within the fourth civil degree, either by consanguinity or affinity, even on the occasion of a family celebration or national festivity like Christmas, if the value of the gift is under the circumstances manifestly excessive.	•Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices •Receiving any gift
E. Republic Act 1379	An Act Declaring Forfeiture in Favor of the State Any Property Found to have been Unlawfully Acquired by any Public Officer or Employee and Providing for the Proceedings therefor.	•Forfeiture in Favor of the State •Unlawful Acquisition of State Property •Public Officer or Employee

Keywording ethics and accountability in public service

F. Republic Act 6713	Republic Act No. 6713, known as the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees • Norms of Conduct of Public Officials and Employees	• Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees • Norms of Conduct • Public Officials and Employees • Commitment to public interest • Professionalism • Justness and sincerity • Political Neutrality • Responsiveness to the public • Nationalism and patriotism • Commitment to democracy • Simple living
G. Civil Service Commission Resolution No. 002515 and/or CSC Resolution No. 2400766	Revised Dress Code Prescribed for All Government Officials and Employees in the Workplace • Official Attire ASEAN-Inspired for the First Monday; Filipiniana-Inspired for the Second-Fourth; Agency-prescribed office uniform for the day for Tuesday to Friday Weekend; Smart Casual for the Days without agency-prescribed office uniform • Appropriate Attire; Other Prohibitions and Exemptions	• Revised Dress Code • Government Officials and Employees • Workplace • Official Attire • Appropriate Attire • Other Prohibitions and Exemptions
H. Republic Act 11032	An Act Promoting Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Delivery of Government Services, amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 9485, otherwise known as the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, and for other purposes	• Ease of Doing Business • Efficient Delivery • Government Services • Anti-Red Tape
I. Act No. 3815 Revised Penal Code	Preliminary Article – This law shall be known as “The Revised Penal Code.”	• The Revised Penal Code
J. Other Existing Policies Not Contrary to Public Interest	Legislative Enactments, Executive Orders, Decrees and/or Ordinances, Judicial Decisions, Quasi-Legislative/Executive/Judicial Functions of Administrative Bodies and Agencies, Rules and Regulations and the like in the International, National, Regional and Local Levels of the Government	• Legislative Enactments • Executive Orders and/or Ordinances • Judicial Decisions • Quasi-Functions of Administrative Bodies and Agencies including LGUs, SUCs and GOCCs • Rules and Regulations

The Constitutional Provisions of the Philippines and all related laws and regulations from A to J clearly stipulate the observance of rules,

standards and norms for public employees to follow in order to satisfy good governance mechanism that will advance public service. This means that all public servants are required to follow the basic tenets of law corresponding the realities in governance. Although, no systems work perfectly, stipulating rules can somehow minimize if not eliminate problems arising in administration, government can still manage and/or cope ways, thereby, continuously improve, advance, and progress public service.

Good Governance has been in argument from three decades in context of theoretical approach. It is specified and encompassed in Political Science of development in reverence of administrative component to achieve social goals of society. The wide range of Good Governance topic has been understood to create an atmosphere of Accountability, Transparency, Rule of Law, Consensus orientation, Effectiveness and Efficiency so as to develop the region with international and national standards of the State (Rahim 2019)). The universal principles of good governance in ethics and accountability are laid down by the policies as evidently mandated to have been the bases by which to serve the citizenry. Generally, political dynasties and nepotism; bribery and receiving of gifts and all acts contrary to public service are prohibited.

All prohibited acts are regulated, apprehended and/or countered by the agencies of the government on appropriate actions and charges to counter against public employees and officials who will violate the conduct of ethics and accountability in public service. Such agencies include the constitutional commissions (CSC, COA and COMELEC), the Ombudsman, Sandiganbayan and all Judicial Courts, Quasi-Bodies and the like that are jurisdictional on cases filed before them.

Ethics and accountability in public service is manifested by professionalism in the observance of principles by law including the wearing of proper and appropriate attire, good behavior, conduct and composure in the office. Yet, it has been endeavoring to renovate national governance in the direction of good governance to improve the quality of public services to meet the requirements of an increasingly high level of education and social life democratization (Chien & Thanh 2022). With all policies therein, the enlisted keywords remind all public employees that the time-honored principle of ethics and accountability, despite challenges plaguing government service, still are in full-authority mandating all in public service to do what is right, proper, and/or appropriate.

The *enlisted governance terminologies* serve as guide for use in determining cases and situations that can alleviate, prevent, and can possibly eliminate the violations committed by public servants that are directly and indirectly plague government service. Scandals involving public officials have often captured world attention. Most of these scandals are as a result of the deteriorating ethical behaviors of the public officials who have indulged themselves into all sorts of malpractices. There is therefore a genuine demand that public sector institutions should strengthen ethics, integrity, transparency, accountability, and professionalism, to protect public resources and enhance public sector performance (Ssonko 2010).

Table 2. Enlisted Governance Terminologies per Keyword Derivation from Policy Provisions and/or Statements vis-à-vis Ethics and Accountability in Public Service

Enlisted Governance Terminologies	Sample Issues and/or Cases vis-à-vis Ethics and Accountability in Public Service
A. The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines: Article II, Sections 26 & 27; Article IX, Section 1; Article XI, Section 1 • Equal Access to Opportunities for Public Service • Prohibition of Political Dynasties • Honesty and Integrity in Public Service • Against Graft and Corruption • Constitutional Commissions • Civil Service Commission • Commission on Elections • Commission on Audit • Public Officers and Employees • Accountability • Public Office • Public Trust • Utmost responsibility • Integrity • Loyalty • Efficiency • Patriotism and Justice • Modest Lives	X Fund Scam (1973-1982) Hello X! Scandal (2004) X Corruption Scandal (2020) X Contract Deal Controversy (2021) X Flood-Control Issue (2025)
B. Administrative Code of 1987	Nepotic Appointment Prohibition under Book V(A), Chapter 8, Section 59 Sibling of X is hired even if the standard qualification does meet the requirements of the position. Padrino system in the government.

C. Republic Act 6770 (Ombudsman Act of 1989) • Office of the Ombudsman • Structural Organization	The Office of the Ombudsman secured the conviction of X over a graft case. Ombudsman imposes a 6-month suspension without pay on X Officers whom the NBI filed a complaint against the alleged misappropriation of P2 billion X funds. Ombudsman suspends 5 execs over falsified land titles.
D. Republic Act 3019 • Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices	A petition case appealed by X to Supreme Court reviewing the decision of Sandiganbayan against anti-graft and corruption complaint filed against X, in violation of Section 3c of RA 3019. Penalized, imprisonment of 6 years and one month and disqualification from holding public office. Mayor X of a certain municipality, committing the crime by receiving an honorarium from Agency X in the amount of 17, 512.50 pesos, despite the fact that Mayor X is not entitled to receive it, in violation of Section 3e of RA 3019. Penalized, imprisonment of 6 years and 1 day minimum to 8 years and perpetual disqualification from holding public office.
E. Republic Act 1379 • Forfeiture in Favor of the State • Unlawful Acquisition of State Property • Public Officer or Employee	Office of the X vs X. X was administratively and civilly charged with acquiring unexplained wealth. Heirs of X versus Republic of the Philippines. PCGG sought a review of the dismissal. The Court found X to have amassed wealth totaling P2.1M from 1968 to 1980 against X total income for the period 1967 to 1980 totaling only P766,548.00. An ill-gotten wealth from X and Y amassed unexplained assets on account, was run and filed cases before and after the courts.
F. Republic Act 6713 • Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees	People of the Republic of the Philippines versus X for Failure to Submit a Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN) under oath since 1998. X vs. Department of X was filed with a complaint stating a violation of Section 8 (A) of RA 6713 due to the questionable assets given with salary and failure to provide detailed SALN. X pleads guilty to ethics violation; Investigation disclosed that from January to October 2014; X repeatedly used two private vehicles owned by a contractor with several ongoing projects in a certain Local Government Unit. Office of the Ombudsman versus X. School Principal X went to a private school (to attend a school function) in X instead of rendering the required number of hours work, a prohibition to engage in the private practice of the profession. Office of the Ombudsman dismissed former X of an agency due to “conduct prejudicial to public interest” and “simple misconduct

G. Civil Service Commission Resolution No. 002515; CSC Resolution No. 2400766 • Revised Dress Code • Government Officials and Employees • Workplace • Official Attire • Appropriate Attire • Other Prohibitions and Exemptions	X wearing indecent attire in the office.
H. Republic Act 11032 • Ease of Doing Business • Efficient Delivery • Government Services • Anti-Red Tape	X unresponsive of citizen concerns in the discharge of public duty. X accepts gifts, fees and money for personal favor and gain.
I. Act No. 3815 Revised Penal Code • The Revised Penal Code	Health Activist Imprisonment per Violation of “Offending Religious Feelings” under Article 133 of the Revised Penal Code X, a Provincial Guard, is prosecuted for the crime of infidelity in the Custody of Prisoner.
J. Other Policies Not Contrary to Public Interest • Legislative Enactments • Executive Orders and/or Ordinances • Judicial Decisions • Quasi-Functions of Administrative Bodies and Agencies including LGUs, SUCs and GOCCs • Rules and Regulations and the like	Other Sample Issues and Concerns for Special Topics/Problems in Public Administration and All Levels of Governance in the Philippines

The contribution to policy and practice is an increased understanding of a coherent, rather than fragmented, welfare system for users/citizens (Eriksson et al. 2020). As mandated, determined, needed and applicable are used to apply to cases and situations that require observance in order to eliminate the violation per ethics and accountability in public service. The findings show that cases involving money that are in violation thereof are common problems along with other prohibited acts that are contrary to the precepts and/or principles of good governance and professionalism. This means that violations following bad governance are not supposed to be tolerated, in turn, should face charges to prove the point that while it is true, that systems are imperfect, those who are answerable to the public should be held accountable. All of which should follow clear protocols and channeling in exhausting all remedies on due process in legal and/or administrative proceedings to prove that all systems work to maintain integrity and good governance. Cases and situations in government service per all enlisted terminologies are proof that laws

are perpetual and that no one is above the law. While others still violate the provisions, the government is obligated to counter against public employees that continue to ill-repute governance. This supports the claim of Ogunyemi Ajibola, et al, as it was recommended, among other things, that political office holders should demonstrate a positive attitudinal disposition to good governance to increase their striving for achievement (Ajibola et al. 2022). This reminds all public servants to do good governance in public service despite all challenges that plague government service. Such observance can help government fight graft and corruption, remedy administrative problems, expedite cases of public concerns, promote the well-being of the citizenry and the system itself. Integrity is one of the moral principles related to moral uprightness. Recently, there are a lot of issues discussed regarding the integrity in public sector administration especially in public sector. Currently governance in public administration has been exposed to public criticism due to the governance failure, fraud, corruption, and poor internal control.

Conclusions and recommendations

In line with the Seventeen (17) United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals* specifically SDGs 15-17, ethics and accountability in varied terminologies derived from policies can be used in familiarizing cases and/or situations that will help, aid and/or operationalize governance. Cases that manifest violation thereof exemplify that no public servant is above the law and should serve accordingly for public interest. The enlisted governance terminologies can serve as basis and/or guide in the design and formulation, for both scholars and practitioners in public administration, especially in the day-to-day public affairs, leadership by upright example, agenda setting and planning, administrative services, critical-decision-making, conflict resolutions, consultancies and discussions, exchanges for policy and organizational development in governance and the like. Sorting out terminologies from policies even more prove that public service and/or duty is good governance in ethics and accountability.

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Cultural entrepreneurship: Challenges and emerging directions

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Abstract: Cultural entrepreneurship (CE) has emerged as a vibrant field of inquiry at the intersection of cultural sociology, organizational studies, and the economics of creative industries. At its core, CE is concerned with how entrepreneurs mobilize cultural resources—stories, symbols, practices, and identities—to create new ventures, generate value, and gain legitimacy. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which often foregrounds capital accumulation and market entry, CE emphasizes the symbolic and interpretive dimensions of entrepreneurial activity, where meaning-making and cultural resonance are as critical as financial performance. This dual focus reflects the growing recognition that in contemporary economies, value is rarely “given” but must be actively constructed and communicated. This review seeks to synthesize several premier scholarly contributions, highlight recurring mechanisms, and outline debates that continue to shape the field. By doing so, it situates CE as a domain that bridges meaning and markets, showing how cultural value becomes economic value through entrepreneurial agency.

Keywords: cultural entrepreneurship, creative industries, cultural resonance, cultural labor, entrepreneurial agency, platform capitalism, designing legitimacy

Introduction

Cultural entrepreneurship (CE) has emerged as a vibrant field of inquiry at the intersection of cultural sociology, organizational studies, and the economics of creative industries. At its core, CE is concerned with how entrepreneurs mobilize cultural resources—stories, symbols, practices, and identities—to create new ventures, generate value, and

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gain legitimacy. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which often foregrounds capital accumulation and market entry, CE emphasizes the symbolic and interpretive dimensions of entrepreneurial activity, where meaning-making and cultural resonance are as critical as financial performance. This dual focus reflects the growing recognition that in contemporary economies, value is rarely “given” but must be actively constructed and communicated.

The intellectual roots of CE are diverse. Foundational contributions in sociology, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural fields and Howard Becker’s notion of art worlds, laid the groundwork by illustrating how cultural production is embedded in networks of power, convention, and symbolic capital. In parallel, scholarship in organizational theory, especially work on institutional logics, legitimacy, and categories, provided analytical tools to understand how entrepreneurs introduce and normalize novelty. Over time, these strands converged into a coherent research agenda on CE, exemplified by the seminal contributions of Lounsbury and Glynn (2001, 2019), who defined CE as storytelling and identity construction aimed at securing legitimacy and resources.

The scope of CE scholarship today is broad. It encompasses studies of cultural and creative industries—such as fashion, art, music, publishing, and film—as well as research on how entrepreneurs in other domains rely on cultural narratives to frame innovation and attract audiences. It also spans methodological approaches, from archival histories of cultural movements (DiMaggio 1982) to quantitative models of category spanning and qualitative ethnographies of creative labor. This review seeks to synthesize these premier contributions, highlight recurring mechanisms, and outline debates that continue to shape the field. By doing so, it situates CE as a domain that bridges meaning and markets, showing how cultural value becomes economic value through entrepreneurial agency.

Intellectual foundations

The intellectual foundations of cultural entrepreneurship (CE) rest on a synthesis of sociological theories of cultural production, economic analyses of creative industries, and organizational approaches to meaning-making. From sociology, Pierre Bourdieu’s *field of cultural production* remains a cornerstone. His theory emphasizes that artistic and cultural practices operate within structured fields of power, where actors compete to accumulate economic, social, and symbolic capital

(Bourdieu 1993). This perspective highlights that CE is not merely an act of creativity but also a struggle for recognition within stratified systems of legitimacy. Complementing this, Becker's *art worlds* (1982) conceptualized cultural production as inherently collaborative, where conventions, networks, and collective action sustain creativity. By emphasizing the cooperative infrastructures behind cultural goods, Becker's framework broadened CE beyond heroic individuals to include communities, intermediaries, and shared norms.

Economics of the creative industries provides a second foundational stream. Richard Caves (2000) captured the distinctive “nobody knows” dynamics of cultural markets—where uncertainty about consumer demand is high—and explored how contracts, reputation, and repeated collaboration mitigate risk. Hesmondhalgh (2013) expanded this line by critiquing labor precarity, ownership structures, and power asymmetries within cultural industries. These insights temper idealized views of entrepreneurship by situating CE within broader political-economic constraints.

Organizational and institutional theory constitutes a third crucial strand. DiMaggio's (1982) historical account of Boston's cultural institutions illustrated CE as elite-driven organizational innovation, while subsequent work by Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) reconceptualized entrepreneurship itself as a cultural process of storytelling and identity construction. Later advances in institutional logics and category theory (Rao et al. 2003; Jones et al. 2012) demonstrated how CE can generate new cultural categories and reshape market expectations. In sum, CE's intellectual heritage spans cultural sociology, creative-economy research, and institutional theory. This interdisciplinary foundation underscores that cultural entrepreneurship is at once symbolic, economic, and organizational, making it a uniquely integrative domain of scholarship.

Core mechanisms and themes

Cultural entrepreneurship (CE) scholarship converges on a set of mechanisms that explain how meaning is constructed, communicated, and legitimized in markets and institutions. While the field spans multiple disciplines, five thematic domains consistently surface: (1) narrative, identity, and legitimacy; (2) categories, logics, and market formation; (3) optimal distinctiveness and audience evaluation; (4) devices, intermediaries, and valuation; and (5) work, careers, and the

cultural labor process. Each of these themes illuminates different facets of how entrepreneurs connect cultural value to economic value.

Narrative, identity, and legitimacy

At the heart of CE is the recognition that storytelling is not an ancillary feature of entrepreneurship but a core mechanism of resource acquisition. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) articulated this in their seminal article, arguing that entrepreneurial narratives act as “cultural scripts” that imbue new ventures with meaning and legitimacy. Entrepreneurs craft stories that link novel ideas to familiar cultural resources, thereby making their innovations intelligible and credible to stakeholders.

Subsequent work shows how narratives operate at both individual and organizational levels. Navis and Glynn (2011) advanced the concept of “legitimate distinctiveness,” explaining how entrepreneurial identities must balance conformity with differentiation. Entrepreneurs who emphasize uniqueness without anchoring themselves in cultural categories risk alienating audiences; conversely, those who conform too tightly risk being dismissed as unoriginal. Narratives therefore become tools for navigating these tensions, enabling entrepreneurs to appeal simultaneously to novelty-seeking and risk-averse stakeholders. Moreover, storytelling in CE extends beyond firms to broader movements. DiMaggio’s (1982) account of cultural elites in Boston illustrates how narratives of refinement and progress were deployed to institutionalize “high culture” organizations. These examples underscore how cultural entrepreneurs use stories not only to secure funding but also to shape collective identities and societal values.

Categories, logics, and market formation

A second major theme is the role of categories and institutional logics in structuring entrepreneurial opportunities. Categories provide cognitive templates through which audiences evaluate offerings. Entrepreneurs who seek to introduce radical novelties often face the challenge of category absence—that is, their innovations do not neatly fit existing classificatory schemas. Jones et al. (2012) examined how modern architecture emerged as a new category by combining different logics—artistic, technological, and professional—into a coherent identity movement. Similarly, Rao et al. (2003) showed how nouvelle cuisine chefs disrupted entrenched culinary conventions by framing their practices as a legitimate category shift rather than mere deviation.

Both studies highlight CE as a form of *institutional entrepreneurship* that remakes cultural landscapes by aligning practices with new logics. Categories are thus not static containers but contested and evolving constructs. Entrepreneurs engage in “category work” to either conform to or reshape the classificatory systems that govern markets. This insight reinforces the idea that markets themselves are cultural achievements, built and sustained through ongoing entrepreneurial action.

Optimal distinctiveness and audience evaluation

Research on category spanning adds further nuance to the theme of legitimacy. Hsu et al. (2009) documented how organizations spanning multiple categories face evaluation penalties, as audiences struggle to interpret ambiguous identities. This finding sparked a rich debate about “optimal distinctiveness.” Entrepreneurs must differentiate themselves enough to appear innovative but not so much that they become incomprehensible. Haans (2019) refined this logic by showing that when all organizations differentiate, the returns to distinctiveness diminish, creating cyclical dynamics of differentiation and conformity. More recent work by Cudennec & Durand (2023) demonstrated that category nesting and evaluator expertise can mitigate penalties, allowing some category spanners to thrive. Piazzai (2024) added further complexity, revealing how the specificity of labels and cognitive economy shape categorization outcomes. Together, this body of research highlights CE as a balancing act: entrepreneurs must carefully calibrate distinctiveness relative to audience expectations and institutional contexts. Rather than a fixed formula, optimal distinctiveness is contingent and negotiated, reflecting the interpretive flexibility of markets.

Devices, intermediaries, and valuation

Cultural goods are characterized by uncertainty and subjectivity, making valuation a central challenge. Karpik’s (2010) theory of “singularities” argued that cultural products cannot be valued by price alone; instead, they rely on judgment devices such as guides, rankings, and reviews. These devices structure audience attention and shape perceptions of worth. Intermediaries play a similarly pivotal role. Khaire (2017) illustrated how fashion editors, art curators, and literary critics function as “pioneer entrepreneurs” who co-create value by framing and endorsing cultural goods. Hargadon and Douglas (2001)

showed how Edison strategically aligned the electric light with existing cultural templates, smoothing its acceptance as a legitimate innovation. Such studies reveal that valuation is rarely the outcome of isolated entrepreneurial action; it is the product of interaction among creators, intermediaries, and evaluative infrastructures. In contemporary contexts, digital platforms amplify these dynamics. Algorithmic recommendation systems, influencer endorsements, and social media metrics now act as judgment devices, reshaping how cultural value is produced and circulated. This evolution underscores the continuing relevance of valuation studies for CE.

Work, careers, and the cultural labor process

Finally, CE research increasingly engages with the lived realities of creative work. Eikhof and Haunschild (2006) explored how “bohemian entrepreneurs” blend lifestyle aspirations with market demands, highlighting the tension between autonomy and precarity. Their findings underscore that CE is not only about market construction but also about sustaining viable careers in environments marked by instability and short-term contracts. This focus links CE to broader debates about cultural labor. Scholars of the cultural industries, such as Hesmondhalgh (2013), emphasize structural inequalities, gendered labor patterns, and the erosion of stable employment. Integrating these insights into CE prevents the field from overly romanticizing entrepreneurship as a site of pure creativity. Instead, it foregrounds the everyday negotiations by which individuals and collectives navigate cultural and economic imperatives.

Taken together, these themes demonstrate that CE is a multifaceted process in which entrepreneurs (1) construct narratives to secure legitimacy, (2) engage in category work to create or reshape markets, (3) manage distinctiveness to appeal to diverse audiences, (4) rely on devices and intermediaries to establish value, and (5) navigate precarious labor conditions to sustain careers. Each theme reveals CE as a dynamic interplay between meaning and markets, agency and structure, creativity and constraint. By tracing these mechanisms, CE scholarship shows that entrepreneurial success is rarely reducible to financial acumen alone. Instead, it emerges from the capacity to mobilize cultural resources, align with institutional logics, and embed innovations within the evaluative infrastructures of society. This recognition positions CE as a vital framework for understanding

entrepreneurship in both cultural and non-cultural domains, where symbolic resonance and legitimacy often determine material outcomes.

Methodological tendencies

Cultural entrepreneurship (CE) research has developed through a diverse methodological repertoire, reflecting the interdisciplinary foundations of the field. Because CE is situated at the nexus of meaning, markets, and institutions, scholars have employed historical, qualitative, and quantitative approaches—often in combination—to trace how cultural value is created and legitimized.

Historical and archival methods have been central in illuminating long-term processes of cultural market formation. DiMaggio's (1982) analysis of nineteenth-century Boston, for example, used archival evidence to demonstrate how elites mobilized resources and narratives to institutionalize high culture. Similarly, Jones et al. (2012) reconstructed the emergence of modern architecture as a new cultural category through historical documents and discourse analysis. Such studies show how CE often unfolds over decades, requiring historical depth to capture category creation and institutional change.

Qualitative and interpretive approaches dominate in work that foregrounds meaning-making and identity construction. Ethnographies and case studies, such as Becker's (1982) art worlds, reveal how networks of artists, intermediaries, and audiences co-produce cultural goods. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) used qualitative data to illustrate how entrepreneurs employ stories to gain legitimacy. More recently, ethnographic work on creative labor has emphasized the everyday practices and negotiations of cultural workers (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006), highlighting tensions between autonomy and precarity. These approaches are particularly powerful in capturing the symbolic and narrative dimensions of entrepreneurship.

Quantitative and computational approaches have become increasingly prominent, especially in research on categories and evaluation. Hsu et al. (2009) used large-scale categorical data to document penalties for category spanning. Haans (2019) developed econometric models to refine the concept of optimal distinctiveness. Cudennec & Durand (2023) and Piazzai (2024) extended this tradition with computational analyses of categorical nesting and labeling. These approaches allow scholars to test generalizable hypotheses about how audiences evaluate novelty and distinctiveness.

Mixed-method designs are gaining traction as researchers seek to integrate meaning-centered and outcome-oriented perspectives. Khaire (2017), for instance, combined archival research with interviews and industry analysis to explain how “pioneer entrepreneurs” in creative industries translate symbolic value into economic markets. Lounsbury and Glynn’s (2019) synthesis in *Cultural Entrepreneurship* explicitly calls for multi-level and mixed-method studies that bridge micro-level storytelling with macro-level institutional dynamics.

In sum, CE’s methodological landscape is pluralistic. Historical depth, ethnographic sensitivity, and quantitative rigor are all mobilized to capture the processes by which entrepreneurs construct meaning, gain legitimacy, and shape markets. This methodological diversity is not a weakness but a reflection of CE’s integrative ambition: to understand how symbolic value becomes economic value across time, space, and scale.

Points of debate and critique

Although cultural entrepreneurship (CE) has become a well-established area of inquiry, the field remains marked by theoretical tensions and conceptual debates. These debates are not merely academic; they shape how scholars understand the balance between creativity and commerce, the role of power and inequality, and the limits of entrepreneurial agency. Three areas of critique stand out: (1) the tension between romanticized creativity and structural power, (2) competing views of singularity and standardization in valuation, and (3) unresolved questions around distinctiveness, conformity, and audience evaluation.

Romance vs. power

One of the most persistent critiques of CE research is that it risks romanticizing entrepreneurship as an inherently creative and emancipatory act, downplaying structural constraints. Lounsbury and Glynn’s (2001) framing of CE as “stories that secure resources” positioned entrepreneurs as cultural innovators, yet subsequent critics argued that this perspective obscures the broader inequalities embedded in cultural fields. Bourdieu’s (1993) theory of the cultural field reminds us that cultural value is never neutral but produced within hierarchical structures of capital and symbolic power.

Hesmondhalgh (2013) similarly challenges celebratory views by foregrounding labor precarity, concentrated ownership, and systemic

inequalities in the cultural industries. Scholars in this tradition argue that CE should account for not only how entrepreneurs succeed but also how barriers to entry, class distinctions, and institutionalized forms of exclusion persist. In other words, CE cannot be fully understood without situating storytelling and category work within the political economy of cultural production. This tension illustrates the need for CE to engage more directly with questions of inequality, labor exploitation, and cultural policy.

Singularity vs. standardization

A second line of debate concerns how cultural value is conceptualized: as singular, unique, and irreducible, or as standardized and commodified. Karpik's (2010) theory of "singularities" argues that cultural goods resist comparison and depend on judgment devices such as reviews, rankings, and critics to create commensurability. This view emphasizes the uniqueness of cultural products and the symbolic labor required to render them meaningful.

By contrast, Caves (2000) and other creative-industry economists focus on the contractual and organizational mechanisms that standardize uncertainty in cultural markets. Repeated collaborations, contractual safeguards, and market conventions temper the "nobody knows" property of creative industries. While Karpik underscores cultural uniqueness, Caves underscores organizational routines—two perspectives that sometimes appear at odds.

Khaire (2017) offers a synthesis by demonstrating how intermediaries translate symbolic value into market value, bridging the gap between singularity and standardization. Her work suggests that CE involves precisely this balancing act: entrepreneurs must highlight uniqueness while simultaneously embedding their products in standardized evaluative infrastructures. This tension continues to animate scholarship on valuation, especially as digital platforms introduce algorithmic forms of standardization that reconfigure judgments of cultural worth.

Distinctiveness, conformity, and audience evaluation

Another prominent debate centers on the paradox of distinctiveness in entrepreneurial identity and categorization. Foundational studies (Hsu et al. 2009) argued that category spanning results in penalties, as audiences struggle to interpret ambiguous signals. This led to the influential concept of "optimal distinctiveness" (Navis & Glynn 2011),

where entrepreneurs must simultaneously conform to category expectations while differentiating themselves enough to attract attention. Yet, critiques highlight that “optimal” is not universal but contingent. Haans (2019) demonstrated that distinctiveness may lose value when all organizations pursue it, suggesting cyclical dynamics between differentiation and conformity. More recent work by Cudennec & Durand (2023) showed that nested categories and evaluator expertise mitigate spanning penalties, while Piazzai (2024) found that label specificity shapes cognitive efficiency in evaluation. These studies challenge one-size-fits-all models, pointing instead to nuanced accounts of when and for whom distinctiveness pays off.

The broader critique here is that CE research has sometimes leaned too heavily on the distinctiveness-legitimacy framework, potentially narrowing its explanatory power. Scholars increasingly argue for more dynamic models that account for shifting institutional logics, multi-level evaluations, and global variation in categorization practices. Together, these debates suggest that CE scholarship must continue to evolve in three key ways. First, it must move beyond entrepreneurial agency alone to engage with structural inequalities and political economy. Second, it must reconcile competing accounts of uniqueness and standardization by theorizing how symbolic and economic logics intertwine. Third, it must refine its treatment of distinctiveness and legitimacy, acknowledging that cultural evaluation is contingent, contextual, and mediated by shifting infrastructures. By embracing these critiques, CE research can avoid romanticism, enrich its theoretical foundations, and remain relevant in an era where cultural production is increasingly shaped by global markets, algorithmic platforms, and contested identities.

Emerging directions

While cultural entrepreneurship (CE) has matured into a robust scholarly domain, it continues to evolve in response to transformations in cultural production, markets, and society. The future of CE research lies in grappling with new technologies, global dynamics, and methodological frontiers. Four promising directions stand out: (1) digital intermediation and platform capitalism, (2) geographies and cultural policy, (3) designing legitimacy, and (4) evaluation under complexity.

Digital intermediation and platform capitalism

One of the most significant shifts reshaping CE is the rise of digital platforms as primary sites of cultural production and consumption. Platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and TikTok act not only as distribution channels but also as *cultural intermediaries* that algorithmically curate and recommend content. Unlike traditional critics or curators, platform algorithms are opaque and dynamic, continuously reshaping audience attention. Scholars have begun to conceptualize algorithmic rankings, trending lists, and influencer endorsements as new forms of *judgment devices* (Karpik 2010). These devices standardize visibility while simultaneously creating unpredictable “viral” successes. This duality complicates existing theories of valuation: cultural entrepreneurs may gain exposure through algorithmic amplification, yet they are also subject to the volatility of opaque ranking systems. Future CE research must account for how entrepreneurs navigate platform governance, datafied reputations, and monetization models. In doing so, it can connect with broader literatures on platform capitalism and digital cultural labor (Nieborg & Poell 2018).

Geographies and cultural policy

A second emerging direction concerns the spatial and policy contexts in which CE unfolds. Much of the foundational literature examined Western cultural industries, yet cultural entrepreneurship is increasingly global and shaped by diverse institutional environments. Scholars have called for expanding CE to encompass non-Western contexts, where different histories of cultural capital, policy frameworks, and creative ecosystems produce distinct trajectories.

For example, research on urban cultural economies highlights how cities actively brand themselves as creative hubs, leveraging festivals, incubators, and cultural infrastructure to attract talent and investment (Florida, 2019). However, critics note that such policies often reproduce inequalities, privileging elite cultural forms while neglecting grassroots practices (Comunian, 2011). By situating CE in comparative and global contexts, scholars can analyze how state policies, regional networks, and transnational flows shape opportunities and constraints for entrepreneurs. This approach aligns CE with research in economic geography and cultural policy studies, expanding its relevance beyond firm-level analysis.

Designing legitimacy

Another promising frontier is the shift from understanding legitimacy as a narrative outcome to analyzing it as a *designed artifact*. Glynn and colleagues (Lounsbury & Glynn 2019) argue that entrepreneurs increasingly curate not only stories but also material symbols, organizational practices, and governance structures to appear legitimate. This “design turn” emphasizes how entrepreneurs deliberately craft signals of credibility—whether through certifications, partnerships, or aesthetic choices—that resonate with multiple audiences.

Recent empirical work demonstrates how legitimacy is *engineered* in contested fields. For instance, Navis and Glynn (2011) showed that entrepreneurs balance conformity and differentiation to cultivate “legitimate distinctiveness.” Going forward, research can explore how design practices interact with shifting institutional logics—such as sustainability, diversity, or digital transparency—and how legitimacy is negotiated across globalized, multi-audience environments. This focus deepens CE’s engagement with organizational design, signaling theory, and institutional bricolage.

Evaluation under complexity

Finally, evaluation remains a central but evolving frontier in CE. Earlier research focused on penalties for category spanning (Hsu et al., 2009) and the idea of optimal distinctiveness. Newer work complicates this picture by introducing contingencies. Cudennec & Durand (2023) show that category nesting and evaluator expertise reduce penalties while Piazzai (2024) highlights that two aspects of labels, i.e., *specificity* and *distinctiveness*, determine the outcomes of mediators’ categorization decisions.

Future research must move toward multi-level evaluation models. Entrepreneurs face simultaneous judgments from consumers, critics, algorithms, and regulators, each with distinct logics. These evaluations may conflict or reinforce one another, creating complex legitimacy landscapes. Scholars could also examine temporal dynamics—how early categorizations constrain or enable future growth—and cross-cultural differences in evaluation. By theorizing evaluation under complexity, CE can better explain why some ventures thrive in uncertain, pluralistic markets while others fail despite strong narratives.

Taken together, these emerging directions highlight CE's adaptability to contemporary transformations. Digital platforms demand new theories of algorithmic intermediation; global geographies call for comparative analysis of policy and cultural capital; the design of legitimacy links symbolic and material practices; and evaluation research must capture multi-level, dynamic, and cross-cultural complexities. Rather than a closed field, CE remains an open and evolving framework. By engaging these frontiers, scholars can extend CE beyond its initial focus on stories and legitimacy toward a broader, interdisciplinary agenda that addresses pressing challenges in cultural production, entrepreneurship, and society.

Conclusion

Cultural entrepreneurship (CE) has grown from a peripheral concept to a central paradigm in organizational studies, cultural sociology, and creative-industry research. At its core, CE demonstrates that entrepreneurship is not solely about assembling financial resources or exploiting market inefficiencies, but also about mobilizing cultural narratives, symbols, and logics to render novelty legitimate. This review has traced the intellectual foundations of CE, highlighted its core mechanisms, synthesized methodological tendencies, and evaluated ongoing debates. In doing so, it underscores that CE is a deeply interdisciplinary field with enduring theoretical and practical relevance.

One of the key contributions of CE scholarship is its insistence on meaning-making as a market process. Through narratives, entrepreneurs construct organizational identities that balance distinctiveness and conformity, thereby appealing to both risk-averse investors and novelty-seeking consumers (Lounsbury & Glynn 2001; Navis & Glynn 2011). Studies of categories and institutional logics demonstrate how entrepreneurs not only participate in markets but actively create them by redefining classificatory systems and aligning with new cultural frames (Jones et al. 2012; Rao et al. 2003). Research on valuation further clarifies that the worth of cultural goods cannot be separated from judgment devices and intermediaries, whether critics, rankings, or digital algorithms (Karpik 2010; Khaire 2017). Together, these insights reveal CE as an arena where symbolic and economic dimensions are inseparably intertwined.

At the same time, critiques remind us that CE is not a neutral or universally empowering process. Bourdieu's (1993) field theory and

Hesmondhalgh's (2013) analysis of cultural industries foreground structural inequalities, concentrated ownership, and labor precarity. This tension calls for a critical CE that recognizes how cultural entrepreneurship both reproduces and resists existing hierarchies. Incorporating perspectives from labor studies, political economy, and critical cultural policy will ensure that CE avoids the trap of romanticizing entrepreneurial creativity while neglecting its structural constraints.

Looking forward, the field is poised to address several pressing challenges. The rise of digital platforms has transformed the mechanisms of visibility, evaluation, and distribution, raising new questions about algorithmic gatekeeping and data-driven reputations (Nieborg & Poell 2018). Similarly, the globalization of creative economies highlights the need for comparative, cross-cultural analyses that examine how CE unfolds differently in diverse policy and institutional environments (Comunian 2011; Florida 2019). Finally, recent work on the design of legitimacy points toward a more integrative understanding of how entrepreneurs craft not just stories but also practices, symbols, and governance structures to signal credibility in complex, multi-audience contexts (Lounsbury & Glynn 2019).

In synthesizing these strands, this review suggests that the future of CE research lies in bridging micro-level storytelling with macro-level institutional dynamics; in integrating cultural uniqueness with organizational standardization; and in situating entrepreneurial action within the broader political, digital, and global transformations of cultural production. Rather than a bounded subfield, CE should be understood as an evolving lens for analyzing how culture and commerce intersect in the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, the enduring insight of CE is that entrepreneurship is a cultural practice before it is an economic one. Entrepreneurs succeed not simply by offering new products or services, but by embedding those offerings within narratives, categories, and evaluative systems that make them meaningful and valuable. Recognizing this has profound implications not only for academic theory but also for practitioners, policymakers, and cultural workers navigating uncertain environments. By continuing to develop its interdisciplinary toolkit and engaging critically with issues of inequality, digital mediation, and global diversity, CE scholarship can illuminate the cultural foundations of markets and the entrepreneurial foundations of culture.

Although this review synthesizes premier contributions to cultural entrepreneurship (CE), it is not without limitations. First, the selection of literature, while broad, is necessarily partial. The review has foregrounded canonical works and leading theoretical debates but may underrepresent emerging scholarship in adjacent domains such as digital cultural labor, feminist perspectives, and postcolonial critiques. A second limitation concerns scope: most cited research draws from Western contexts and established creative industries (arts, fashion, architecture, etc.). As a result, the dynamics of CE in non-Western economies, grassroots cultural movements, and informal creative practices remain less visible. Finally, the review privileges scholarly articles and monographs, overlooking practitioner perspectives and policy documents that also shape CE in practice.

These limitations point to productive avenues for future research. Scholars should extend CE into diverse cultural and geographic contexts, exploring how entrepreneurship interacts with local traditions, indigenous knowledge, and regional policy frameworks. Future work must also address the role of digital platforms and algorithms in shaping entrepreneurial narratives and valuations. Moreover, integrating critical approaches from labor studies and political economy can sharpen analyses of inequality and power in cultural markets. By tackling these questions, CE scholarship can achieve greater inclusivity, relevance, and explanatory depth in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape.

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From fun to financial ruin: Exploring the criminological aspects of online gambling

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Abstract: This study investigates the lived experiences and criminological dimensions of online gambling among Filipino individuals in Zamboanga del Sur. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research explored four key areas: (1) the participants' experiences with online gambling, (2) its effects on their quality of life, (3) how they coped with its consequences, and (4) the policies that may be proposed to mitigate its impact. Informants were purposively selected from police reports, barangay referrals, and school guidance offices, ensuring that only individuals with verified gambling-related issues were included. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed fifteen emergent themes. Online gambling typically began through social and digital influences, with Facebook ads, vloggers, and peer recommendations as key exposure points. Initial emotional highs and perceived rewards sustained their engagement, eventually evolving into habitual and unstructured gambling routines. As financial losses accumulated, awareness of addiction increased, but many remained trapped due to platform accessibility, false hope, and mental strain. Participants experienced emotional instability, relationship conflicts, and disruption of work or school performance. Financial instability forced some to pawn personal items, borrow excessively, or neglect basic needs. While recovery efforts were often self-initiated, professional help was rarely sought. Coping strategies included deleting apps, shifting to new routines, reconnecting with family, and relying on faith. The study's findings were anchored in Routine Activity Theory, General Strain Theory, and Social Learning Theory, highlighting how environmental exposure, emotional strain, and peer influence contribute to gambling behavior. It is recommended that interventions include digital platform regulation, financial literacy programs, school-based prevention efforts, and community-based counseling services that are accessible and affordable. Ultimately, this study points out that it takes a multi-sectoral response to address the rising harm of online gambling and safeguard vulnerable individuals.

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Introduction

In recent years, online gambling has rapidly grown into a global phenomenon, attracting millions of users through its accessibility, anonymity, and promise of instant rewards. Marketed as an entertaining and potentially profitable pastime, online gambling has become particularly appealing to younger, tech-savvy individuals. However, what begins as recreational fun can often spiral into a compulsive behavior with serious consequences. The ease with which people can place bets anytime, anywhere has transformed gambling into a high-risk activity that can have profound impacts on mental health, personal relationships, and financial stability (Harris 2021).

While much of the existing literature has emphasized the psychological drivers of gambling addiction, such as compulsive tendencies, thrill-seeking behavior, and escapism, there is an urgent need to explore how addiction to online betting can lead individuals toward criminal behavior. As people fall deeper into addiction, they may exhaust their resources, prompting them to engage in unlawful acts such as fraud, theft, or cybercrime to sustain their gambling habits (Sirola et al. 2021). The role of online betting platforms in enabling, facilitating, or even promoting such behaviors is a critical area of concern. Current regulations in the Philippines are relatively lax, particularly when compared to stricter legal environments in other countries (Lamoste 2020), allowing many foreign-based gambling platforms to operate with minimal oversight (Ko et al. 2024). The PNP arrested 1,245 e-sabong suspects in 2023, and as of February 2024, 789 operations had been reported. This demonstrates the proportionate rise in online gambling activity.

Despite growing awareness of the harmful effects of online gambling, there remains a significant gap in criminological research, particularly in localized and rural contexts. Most studies tend to focus on urban populations or general psychological profiles of addicted gamblers, neglecting the unique socio-economic conditions and cultural factors that influence addiction in less-studied areas. In provinces such as Zamboanga del Sur, the lack of empirical, experience-based data limits the development of effective, region-specific interventions. This absence of context-aware research leaves local communities vulnerable, with limited resources to address the growing problem (Sirola et al. 2021).

This study sought to address the gap in understanding the consequences of online gambling addiction by employing a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals suffering from this addiction in Zamboanga del Sur. By conducting in-depth interviews with participants, the research would examine the multifaceted impacts of online gambling, including emotional, financial, and criminological consequences. The study aimed to reveal the complex ways in which online gambling environments contribute to harmful behaviors, such as financial ruin, emotional distress, and criminal activities. By capturing the voices of those directly affected, the research aims to provide policymakers, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and community organizations with valuable insights, urging the development of targeted intervention strategies to address the growing problem. In doing so, the study not only enhances our understanding of the intersection between digital addiction and crime but also sheds light on how the unique socio-economic conditions of rural areas, such as Zamboanga del Sur, influence these issues. This research thus contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by digital addiction, with implications for both local and national policy.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the coping strategies and lived experiences of Filipino online gamblers in Zamboanga del Sur. Phenomenology was deemed appropriate as it seeks to capture the essence of lived experiences and the meanings individuals ascribe to them, thereby allowing the researcher to understand how participants navigate the challenges associated with online gambling. As emphasized by Alipoyo (2022) and Bacroya and Aranjuez (2025), phenomenology values the perspectives of individuals as they make sense of their realities. Through this approach, the research aimed to reveal the emotional, economic, and social struggles that stem from online gambling addiction while also uncovering the resilience, coping mechanisms, and adjustments made by the participants. The phenomenological framework ensured that the study moved beyond surface-level descriptions, providing a deeper understanding of the criminological and human dimensions of online gambling in the local context.

The research was conducted in Zamboanga del Sur, a province identified with increasing incidents of online gambling, making it an appropriate setting to study the phenomenon. Ten (10) participants were purposively selected, all of whom had experienced adverse consequences of online gambling and were identified through referrals from the police, barangay, and school guidance offices. The participants were considered information-rich cases capable of offering detailed insights into the consequences of online gambling. Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide, which was validated by experts in criminology and qualitative research to ensure clarity, relevance, and sensitivity to the topic. The guide was divided into three major sections focusing on participants' experiences with online gambling, its impact on their quality of life, and their coping strategies. Interviews were conducted safely and confidentially, with consent obtained beforehand, and were supported by field notes and audio recordings to ensure accuracy and richness of data.

For data analysis, the study employed Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, as cited in Alipoyo (2022). This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and refining themes, and constructing a narrative report supported by direct participant quotations. Themes were systematically drawn to highlight patterns in participants' experiences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of online gambling addiction. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were provided with informed consent forms, confidentiality was ensured through anonymization and secure data storage, and individuals retained the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To uphold data privacy, digital files were permanently deleted after transcription, and hard copies were destroyed following the completion of the study. These measures guaranteed both methodological rigor and the ethical integrity of the research.

Results and discussion

This section presents the analysis of the data gathered through in-depth interviews with those addicted to online gambling who served as informants of the study. The data analysis utilized in the study was the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke, as cited in the study of Alipoyo (2022). The presentation is sequenced based on the statement of the problem, with the essence and implications presented at the end.

In this descriptive phenomenological study, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis that emphasizes the participants lived experiences. The researcher carefully engaged in the process of horizontalization, where every statement shared by the informants during the in-depth interviews was treated with equal value. All relevant data were then recorded and transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Through this approach, a thorough record of the informants' words and actions was preserved, reflecting the depth and essence of their experiences.

The next phase involved identifying significant statements from the transcriptions that directly related to the phenomenon of those addicted to online gambling. These statements were meticulously reviewed to ensure they captured the essence of the participants' experiences. Each statement was then clustered into meaningful units, grouped according to shared themes and ideas. By maintaining a focus on the participants' unique perspectives, the researcher constructed a detailed depiction of the phenomenon while discarding redundant or irrelevant information.

Through imaginative variation, the researcher sought to uncover the underlying meanings and essences of the experiences shared by the participants. This process involved examining the data from multiple perspectives, exploring different contexts, and considering varying dimensions of the phenomenon. Themes and patterns that emerged were integrated into a composite description, encapsulating the essence of the experience of online gambling addiction.

These fifteen emergent themes are formulated as answers to the sub-problems and are summarized as follows.

Experiences of informants in online gambling

The responses to the interview established the lived experiences of informants in online gambling. Five emerging themes were discovered in the study, such as social and digital influences spark gambling initiation, perceived rewards and emotional highs sustain gambling, online gambling becomes a habitual, unstructured routine, awareness grows when losses exceed perceived control, and platform choice is driven by profitability and accessibility. The following terms were covered comprehensively below:

Social and digital influences spark gambling initiation

This theme explores how the online gambling journey often begins through the influence of peers and social media exposure. Participants

admitted that their first encounter with online gambling was not intentional but was heavily influenced by people around them. Participant 1 shared, “My friend told me to try the game because there was a big chance of winning. Out of curiosity, I tried it (SS1, P1).” This statement shows how peer encouragement, coupled with the lure of easy money, plays a key role in breaking initial resistance to gambling. Social media platforms, especially Facebook, played a significant role in the initiation of gambling for many participants. For instance, participant 2 recalled, “It appeared on Facebook while I was scrolling (SS21, P2).”

Another said, “I saw bloggers on Facebook winning big amounts (SS41, P3).” These statements illustrate how gambling-related content appears passively yet frequently on users' feeds, promoting the illusion that big winnings are normal and attainable. This digital exposure conditions users to perceive gambling as a risk-free and rewarding activity, which encourages them to engage even if they did not intend to beforehand. Friends' personal stories of winning also served as powerful motivators. Participant 4 noted, “I was influenced by my friend who won. He told me to play because he won big (SS64, P4).” This reflects how social circles act as informal promoters of gambling, framing it as a shared opportunity rather than a potential risk. Similarly, participant 6 added, “On Facebook, you see people winning big, and it makes you want to join (SS105, P6).” These examples reinforce the idea that perceived peer success significantly contributes to gambling initiation, especially when amplified by social media. Digital accessibility further removes barriers. As participant 7 stated, “There were so many posts on Facebook, with links below, and I clicked because they had won (SS124, P7).”

With gambling apps and platforms only a click away, impulsive decisions become easier to make, particularly for those curious or hopeful for a quick win. The combination of personal influence, compelling digital content, and effortless access sets the stage for users to enter gambling with little to no awareness of its potential consequences. This theme reveals how gambling initiation is often not a planned act but the result of a persuasive digital and social ecosystem that glamorizes risk while concealing long-term harm.

Online gambling initiation is often fueled by peer influence, where individuals are lured into play through friends' suggestions or observed behavior. Research repeatedly demonstrates that adolescents are particularly susceptible to such social contagion, where behaviors and

norms spread through peer networks (Parrado-González et al. 2023; Russell et al. 2018; Sirola et al. 2021; Yip et al. 2017). For example, a longitudinal study found that perceived peer approval and personal susceptibility to peer pressure significantly predicted gambling initiation (Parrado-González et al. 2023). Likewise, qualitative evidence highlights how participants joined gambling because friends vouched for its legitimacy or potential for winning. This dynamic aligns with peer-based models of risk behavior, where personal experimentation is often socially driven rather than intentional.

Perceived rewards and emotional highs sustain gambling

There are captures about how early wins and the emotional gratification bring reinforce continued gambling behavior. Participants consistently expressed that their first encounters with online gambling were marked by excitement and minor or major wins that made the experience enjoyable and seemingly worthwhile. Participant 1 shared, “At first, I won a little, but I enjoyed it. That’s why I kept playing (SS2, P1).” Participant 2 echoed this, saying, “because I won, I just kept playing (SS22, P2).”

These wins, though sometimes small, created an emotional reward loop that fueled repeated engagement. For many, initial wins were not only emotionally satisfying but financially impactful, intensifying the motivation to continue gambling. A participant stated, “My first 10 pesos bet won 2,000 pesos (SS42, P3).” Another followed with an even larger win: “I deposited ₱500 and won ₱12,000, so I started playing every day (SS66, P4).” These extraordinary returns, though rare, gave players a false sense of control and success, prompting them to continue gambling daily in pursuit of the same outcome. Participants also revealed that the perceived possibility of large winnings served as a powerful psychological motivator. “Because you can win big amounts (SS87, P5),” reflected the deeply rooted hope that gambling could lead to sudden wealth.

Similarly, “I hoped to win big because I won the first and second time, so I kept on winning (SS106, P6).” The combination of occasional success and the emotional high of winning built an illusion that gambling was a reliable means of financial gain. This perceived success also translated into lifestyle satisfaction, reinforcing gambling as a means to fulfill personal desires. One participant noted, “I kept playing because I was winning and could buy what I wanted... I was motivated thinking I could get rich (SS146, P8).” Another summed it

up: “After winning big, I continued playing because I thought I could win again (SS186, P10).” These statements show how early wins fuel false hopes and emotional highs that sustain gambling behavior, blurring the line between fun and dependency.

Early small or large wins often act as powerful reinforcements that sustain gambling behaviors by triggering emotional highs and false beliefs of control. Empirical studies confirm the “big win effect,” where initial successes significantly increase subsequent gambling engagement and spending (Immunize Nevada 2024; Edson et al. 2023; Tan 2025; Sirola et al. 2021; Bolat et al. 2025). For instance, even modest early wins can induce overconfidence and optimism bias, giving players a warped sense of skill or luck (New York Post, 2024). Behavioral models, such as operant conditioning and reinforcement learning, explain that satisfiers like a win, increase the likelihood of repeating the behavior (Iyer et al. 2020). Combined, these psychological mechanisms explain why many gamblers chase the emotional high of wins (Edson et al. 2023; Bolat et al. 2025; Sirola et al. 2021).

Online gambling becomes a habitual, unstructured routine

This reflects how participants’ gambling behaviors evolved into daily patterns that consumed their time, disrupted sleep, and replaced normal routines. Many described gambling as an activity they engaged in every day without breaks. One participant shared, “I play every day, seven days a week (SS126, P7).” Another echoed, “I play almost every day (SS67, P4).” These statements show that what may have started as occasional play quickly became a persistent habit embedded in daily life. Participants also reported a lack of structure in their routines, with gambling occupying random and extended hours, especially at night. One said, “I kept gambling all night, and it became a routine (SS187, P10).”

Another stated, “I barely sleep anymore because I keep playing, thinking I’ll win (SS44, P3).” These accounts highlight how gambling not only disrupted participants’ circadian rhythms but also replaced essential activities like sleep and rest, further embedding the habit into their lifestyle. The habit was often justified by beliefs in “golden hours,” or specific times when winning was supposedly more likely. One participant said, “There’s a so-called ‘golden hour’... so I play during those times (SS165, P9).” This belief added a perceived structure to the otherwise unregulated habit, encouraging players to

organize their day or night around gambling sessions. Yet, instead of creating a healthy structure, it reinforced dependency and preoccupation, reducing time for work, family, and self-care.

Moreover, the emotional grip of gambling made participants prioritize it above relationships and responsibilities. One participant reflected, “There wasn’t a day I didn’t play, even on Sundays (SS107, P6).” Another added, “I played every day, I only slept for 2 hours, then played again (SS23, P2).” These narratives illustrate how the behavior evolved into an uncontrollable daily cycle, often unstructured and driven by compulsion rather than conscious choice. This theme underscores the dangerous shift from entertainment to addiction, marked by a loss of time, health, and balance.

Across multiple studies, online gambling is shown to foster habitual and compulsive behavior due to its ease of access and high-frequency engagement. The constant availability of gambling via mobile devices allows users to engage at any hour, reinforcing automatic patterns of use (Hong et al. 2019; CUHK Business School 2024; Karger 2025; Investopedia 2025). Research on mobile gambling indicates that intermittent reward scheduling and the “snacking” nature of app-based play contribute to persistent engagement even when real monetary rewards cease (Karger 2025). According to behavioral theories of automatization, repeated actions, such as nightly gambling sessions, become ingrained in everyday routines, making change increasingly difficult (Sirola et al. 2021; Hong et al. 2019; Karger 2025). This habitual pattern persists unless confronted by intentional disruptions or interventions.

The effects of online gambling on individuals’ quality of life

Gambling triggers emotional instability and mental strain

This theme captures how prolonged and excessive online gambling deeply affects a person’s psychological and emotional well-being. For many participants, gambling was not just a financial burden; it became a source of constant stress, anxiety, and mental exhaustion. As one participant stated, “It’s stressful, especially when I lose (SS8 P1).” Another added, “I get upset and sometimes misbehave at home (SS9 P1).” These initial signs of irritability and mood swings were only the beginning of deeper emotional disturbances caused by addiction. Over time, emotional distress worsened as losses accumulated and debts piled up. The weight of owing money became unbearable for many, triggering depression and avoidance. One participant shared, “I

became depressed because I always lost. I started hiding because my lenders were looking for me (SS27 P2).” Another admitted, “It’s exhausting to have so many people looking for me to collect debt (SS49, P3).”

This constant fear and pressure eventually evolved into paranoia, as captured by one statement: “I’m afraid I’ll be found by someone I owe and get sent to jail (SS51 P3).” The mental toll extended beyond fear and depression; it began to affect personal relationships and moral boundaries. One participant reflected on how gambling distorted their values, saying, “My mental and emotional state was affected because I even lied to my mother to play (SS71 P4).” The compulsion to continue playing despite the harm caused became emotionally overwhelming. “I’m super stressed because I don’t want to stop playing (SS94 P5).” These sentiments reflect the internal conflict between knowing the damage being done and still feeling unable to stop. As gambling addiction progressed, it disrupted both mental clarity and daily functioning. One participant admitted, “My life became chaotic, I lost clear thinking, I would fight my wife if she didn’t give me gambling money (SS110, P6).” The toll even manifested physically, as one described, “I experienced constant headaches from lack of sleep due to gambling overnight (SS191 P10).”

Online gambling has been shown to contribute significantly to emotional instability and mental health deterioration among users. Participants in the study reported symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and heightened stress, especially after financial losses or during debt collection encounters. This aligns with findings from Potenza (2022), who emphasized that gambling disorder is associated with high rates of comorbid mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. Emotional volatility is heightened in digital gambling due to its accessibility and speed, leading to more frequent and intense losses and wins, which create psychological turbulence (Hing et al. 2022). Moreover, the pressure to recover lost funds often leads to obsessive behavior and compulsive play, as supported by research on problem gambling dynamics (Chóliz 2021).

The burden of gambling often leads to interpersonal conflict and emotional withdrawal. In the current study, participants described episodes of anger, guilt, and aggression, particularly toward family members who questioned their gambling behavior. According to Gainsbury and Blaszczynski (2020), problem gambling often triggers strained social dynamics and increases emotional distance between

gamblers and their loved ones. The unpredictability of gambling outcomes can also cause mood swings and a dependence on gambling for emotional highs, followed by devastating emotional lows after losses (Shaffer et al. 2021). Such cycles of emotional instability can lead to social isolation and worsen psychological resilience over time (NCRG 2023).

Gambling erodes relationships through conflict and detachment

This theme reveals how online gambling leads not only to personal distress but also to the gradual breakdown of meaningful social and familial bonds. Several participants shared that gambling consumed their time and energy, isolating them from the people who cared about them most. One described, “I no longer have time for my family (SS133 P7).” Another echoed this detachment, saying, “I have no time for family and friends anymore because I’m too tired (SS52 P3).” These statements reflect how gambling replaces personal connections with emotional fatigue, preoccupation, and withdrawal. The emotional toll extends beyond just being unavailable; it creates emotional distance and disconnection. One participant admitted, “I have no more time for my family because I’m always on my phone playing (SS170 P9).”

Another noted how deeply this addiction altered their sense of identity and belonging: “I had no time to talk or eat with them anymore. It felt like I was living a different life (SS192 P10).” Such detachment not only causes physical absence but also signals the loss of emotional connection and shared experiences. More seriously, the addiction caused tension and emotional rupture within intimate relationships. A particularly painful confession came from a participant who said, “It felt like I lost my love for my wife because I chose gambling over her (SS112, P6).” The act of consistently prioritizing gambling over a spouse or family eventually weakens the foundation of love and trust. Another participant acknowledged the wider damage: “My relationship with my family and friends has become bad (SS95, P5).” These words reflect how deeply gambling can strain not just romantic relationships but also friendships and broader support systems. Finally, the emotional chaos brought by the addiction left some participants feeling overwhelmed and mentally unstable. One admitted, “I feel like I’m going crazy (SS132, P7).” This mental and emotional unraveling often coincided with detachment from loved ones, suggesting that as gambling deepens, individuals become

increasingly disconnected not only from others but also from themselves. The theme ultimately shows that gambling is not a solitary problem; it radiates outward, damaging the emotional ties and daily interactions that form the fabric of a person's social life.

Online gambling creates a ripple effect that extends far beyond personal financial loss; it fractures the social and emotional fabric of relationships. Participants described withdrawing from conversations, meals, and shared activities with their families, signaling a growing detachment fueled by their gambling behavior. This detachment is echoed in research by Hing et al. (2022), who found that problem gambling significantly increases the risk of relationship breakdown due to secrecy, dishonesty, and preoccupation with gambling. As individuals immerse themselves deeper in gambling, their emotional availability decreases, frequently leading to feelings of neglect among partners, children, and friends (Orford 2021). Often, relationships shift from mutual support to mistrust, as deception and manipulation (e.g., hiding losses or borrowing without consent) become common coping mechanisms (Gainsbury & Blaszczynski 2020).

Neglect of work and school reflects gambling disruption

This theme explores how participants' excessive online gambling resulted in a serious decline in academic and professional functioning. Many described how gambling disrupted their daily routines, particularly through sleepless nights and daytime fatigue. One participant shared, "I stay up all night playing, wake up late, and lose motivation to attend school (SS171, P9)." The preoccupation with gambling not only replaced rest and responsibilities but also weakened the desire and capacity to meet work or academic expectations. Several participants acknowledged the widespread negative consequences of gambling in their lives, especially its impact on their routines and priorities. One remarked, "Scatter had a huge impact on me (SS193, P10)." Another similarly expressed, "It had a huge negative impact on my life (SS135, P7)." These statements emphasize that the consequences extended beyond finances; they fundamentally disrupted the individual's structure, motivation, and engagement with their daily obligations. The ripple effect of gambling also strained relationships and social roles. A participant shared how gambling led to the collapse of their marriage: "100%, my relationship with my wife is ruined. I don't think it can ever go back to the way it was (SS114, P6)."

Likewise, social circles deteriorated, as another said, “Yes, I lost my friends (SS96, P5).” These losses reflect how gambling not only disrupted academic and work performance but also undermined essential support systems, further isolating the participants. Ultimately, the disruption extended to a full transformation of the participants’ lives. Many described it as a life-altering experience with lasting consequences. One participant stated, “It had a huge impact on my life (SS74 P4).” Another added, “My life completely changed (SS53 P3).” These testimonies demonstrate that gambling reshaped not only how participants spent their time but also how they viewed their futures, responsibilities, and relationships. It highlights the urgent need for intervention when gambling begins to interfere with basic functioning and life direction.

Online gambling significantly disrupts individuals’ academic and professional responsibilities, as evidenced by many participants who prioritized gambling over work or school. Several were admitted to absenteeism, chronic lateness, or lack of motivation, particularly due to sleepless nights caused by extended gambling sessions. Research confirms this trend: productivity and focus are often diminished when gambling becomes habitual, leading to absenteeism, unfinished tasks, and deteriorating job or academic performance (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2021). These patterns are especially prevalent in younger individuals, whose school commitments clash with the addictive nature of gambling apps that operate 24/7 (Black et al. 2022). Consequently, the digital accessibility of gambling fosters continuous disruption to essential life routines.

Informants cope with the consequences of online gambling

Reduction efforts are self-initiated and struggle-driven

This theme highlights how participants attempted to reclaim control over their lives by taking personal steps to limit or eliminate access to online gambling platforms. Unlike formal interventions or professional treatment, these efforts were largely self-motivated, often occurring after repeated losses, emotional distress, or relational breakdowns. A common strategy involved removing digital access points, as seen in the statement: “I deleted all the Scatter apps (SS196, P10).” Others echoed the same action, such as “Delete everything to end this (SS139, P7).”

The deliberate removal of gambling apps signified both a cry for help and a firm attempt at withdrawal. “I uninstalled GCash and all

online apps (SS118, P6).” GCash, in particular, was a gateway platform that enabled easy deposits and bets, so removing it represented a crucial step toward limiting temptation. For many, uninstalling apps was not just technical; it was deeply emotional. “I deleted all the gaming apps (SS100, P5).” This shows a consistent, personal pattern of trying to break the cycle without external prompting. For some, the struggle became so intense that actions turned drastic and symbolic. One participant recalled, “I threw my phone in frustration, and now I don’t have one (SS79, P4).” This act reflects a profound inner conflict and frustration at the inability to quit, showing that the urge to change often came with emotional turbulence. Similarly, “I turned off my phone and deleted all apps and GCash (SS57, P3).” The statement illustrates how cutting off access became an act of self-preservation amid addiction. These testimonies reveal that while participants made sincere efforts to stop gambling, their journey toward recovery was riddled with emotional struggle and lacked professional guidance. The theme emphasizes the value of structured support systems, as most participants relied solely on their willpower and desperation to break free, often only after experiencing severe consequences.

Individuals affected by online gambling addiction often self-initiate reduction efforts, primarily motivated by emotional exhaustion and financial ruin rather than professional intervention. In the current study, participants shared how they deleted gambling apps, uninstalled GCash, and even discarded their phones in frustration, illustrating a desperate but self-driven attempt to break free from the addictive cycle. These behaviors reflect findings by Gainsbury and Blaszczynski (2020), who noted that self-help methods are commonly used by problem gamblers, especially when stigma or shame prevents them from seeking formal assistance. Often sporadic and emotionally driven, these self-initiated attempts lack the structured support that clinical interventions typically provide.

Support is sought informally: Professional help is rare

This highlights how individuals struggling with online gambling addiction primarily turn to family and personal strategies for help rather than seeking formal, professional intervention. A majority of participants expressed that their first instinct during moments of breakdown was to lean on loved ones rather than mental health professionals or addiction counselors. One participant shared, “I asked

my parents for help because I couldn't handle it anymore (SS197, P10)." This reflects a deep reliance on familial emotional support in times of crisis. Spirituality and prayer emerged as significant informal support systems, especially from family members who witnessed their loved one's distress. Another participant admitted, "I didn't seek a professional, but my mom kept praying for me so I wouldn't fall deeper into depression (SS198, P10)."

These statements show how support systems were deeply rooted in household faith and concern, rather than in structured psychological intervention or rehabilitation programs. Aside from turning to loved ones, many participants also adopted personal methods of reducing gambling exposure, particularly through the restriction of digital access. For instance, one said, "I disregard my phone now; I use it only for calls and texts (SS140, P7)," while another added, "I stopped using my touchscreen phone and switched to a keypad phone just for calls and texts (SS119, P6)."

These choices show a conscious effort to cut off gambling triggers through device limitations rather than seeking external behavioral therapy. Further, individuals attempted to reconnect with their responsibilities and routines as a form of personal rehabilitation. One shared, "I started helping with house chores. I also stopped using my phone (SS81, P4)." Another noted, "My whole family found out, so I stopped using my phone to avoid seeing gambling content (SS58, P3)." These statements demonstrate how recovery often begins with family intervention and self-discipline. Despite the gravity of their situation, most participants did not seek professional counseling, underscoring a gap between addiction severity and formal treatment engagement, a crucial consideration for future community-based support initiatives.

Despite the significant psychological and financial consequences of online gambling, many individuals choose not to seek professional support. Instead, they turn to informal sources such as family members, friends, or spiritual practices. This pattern was evident in the participants' testimonies, where most expressed relying on family encouragement or prayer rather than counseling or clinical intervention. This finding is consistent with studies by Hing et al. (2021), which highlight that feelings of shame, guilt, and fear of stigma prevent gamblers from accessing formal help. Moreover, Gainsbury et al. (2020) noted that culturally embedded values, particularly in collectivist societies, often favor family-based coping over institutional aid.

Coping involves lifestyle change and self-discipline

This reflects how individuals recovering from online gambling addiction actively adjust their routines and behavior to rebuild their lives. After recognizing the destructive effects of their gambling, many participants shifted toward healthier and more purposeful daily activities. One noted, “I go fishing with my uncle when my mom invites me so I can enjoy and relax (SS199, P10).” This activity not only offered a productive distraction but also restored family bonding and emotional connection. Rebuilding discipline in daily life became a cornerstone of recovery. Another participant shared, “It’s easier to wake up now, I no longer skip work, I’m saving money, and I’ve started repaying my debts (SS141, P7).” These efforts show the importance of regaining structure and responsibility, particularly in work and financial management.

Similarly, “I’m saving money now to restore the savings I used up (SS120, P6).” It is highlighting a renewed commitment to fiscal responsibility and long-term recovery. Simple home-based tasks and entertainment also served as healthy replacements for gambling. “I just watch TV and help with cooking and cleaning at home (SS102, P5).” Illustrates how everyday chores became a means to stay grounded. Others shared more structured routines: I watch Netflix movies, cook at home, and join my mom in praying the rosary (SS82, P4). These new patterns signify emotional healing and the reintegration into family life. Lastly, digital platforms were repurposed for non-gambling content. “I watch TikTok and YouTube instead (SS59, P3).” The statement reflects a conscious effort to redirect screen time toward harmless entertainment. Collectively, these statements demonstrate that recovery from gambling is rooted in creating new habits, restoring personal discipline, and finding joy in simple, nondestructive routines, showing that sustainable change starts with everyday choices and intentional living.

Coping with online gambling addiction often requires individuals to make deliberate lifestyle changes anchored in discipline and daily structure. Many participants in the study reported shifting their routines from digital dependence to physical and social engagement, such as fishing, household chores, or watching movies with family. These behavioral changes reflect an intentional detachment from gambling triggers and a redirection toward healthier habits. According to Edson et al. (2022), successful recovery from gambling disorder

often begins with changes in daily routines and a focus on physical activities that restore control and purpose. Self-discipline is not only a reactive tool but also a preventive strategy, helping individuals create new behavioral boundaries.

Conclusion

This study draws attention to the complex nature of internet gambling addiction as a behavioral health issue and a criminological concern. Participants' accounts demonstrate how curiosity, peer pressure, and ubiquitous digital exposure may convert casual gaming into compulsive gambling, a phenomenon exacerbated by the seamless incorporation of mobile payment systems and the influential power of social media. Initial successes, emotional peaks, and misleading incentive systems reinforce this cycle, highlighting the disparity between statistical likelihood and personal decision-making. Consequently, these discoveries necessitate a multifaceted response. Policymakers should reinforce digital payment regulations and augment platform accountability; educators and mental health professionals must develop prevention programs targeting cognitive distortions and offering healthier coping mechanisms; and communities must bolster informal social controls to mitigate opportunities for harm. This research integrates criminological theory with lived experience to enhance knowledge of the societal consequences of online gambling and establishes an evidence-based framework for future interventions and legislative reforms.

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Society's fractured smile: The *Joker* between social deviance and cultural reflection. A sociological and bibliometric analysis of representations of marginality in cinema

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Abstract: The film *Joker* (2019), directed by Todd Phillips, has generated a major cultural and social impact, becoming an object of critical reflection on marginalization, mental health and systemic violence. This paper proposes an interdisciplinary analysis that combines a sociological perspective on cinematic narrative with a bibliometric investigation of international academic reception. The study utilizes a mixed-method approach, consisting of a qualitative sociological analysis of the movie content and a bibliometric analysis assisted by VOSviewer software. For the bibliometric analysis, 87 English-language scholarly articles were selected from the Scopus database, published between 2019 and 2025, using the keywords “Joker” and “movie”. Sociological analysis reveals major themes such as alienation, structural inequality, stigmatization of mental illness, institutional collapse and symbolic violence. These have been interpreted through the theories of Marx, Durkheim, Foucault and Becker. The bibliometric analysis highlights six distinct thematic clusters: translation and language, mental health and stereotyping, narrative archetypes, urban culture and media, the psychology of character and phenomenological representation. The co-occurrence map reflects the deeply interdisciplinary nature of the research and provides empirical support for sociological interpretation. The *Joker* functions as a cultural artifact that reflects contemporary social crises and generates a plural academic reception. The integration of sociological and bibliometric analyses validates the relevance of the film as a source of critical knowledge and as a tool for the symbolic representation of deviance, marginalization and fragility of social systems.

Keywords: *Joker*, sociological analysis, bibliometric analysis, mental health, marginalization, VOSviewer, cinema and society, social deviance, cinematic realism, cultural representation

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Introduction

Cinema serves as a vital medium for reflecting and interrogating the social realities that shape individual and collective identities. Through narratives, visual language and cultural representations, cinema strives to depict - often in nuanced and complex ways - the multiple experiences of people in their social contexts. By addressing significant societal dilemmas, films possess the ability to challenge, critique, and inspire dialog about prevalent issues - such as identity, class relations, gender dynamics, and psychological phenomena - that affect diverse communities today.

A significant dimension of the role of cinema is outlined in the analysis of psychological phenomena. Such a dimension is reflected in diverse societies. The way in which Turkish cinema, through its depiction of psychological counselling and therapy, reflects societal perspectives on mental health is a suggestive example. This kind of portrayal encapsulates cultural attitudes towards psychological issues and offers implicit critiques of the systems surrounding them, revealing fundamental prejudices and misunderstandings within society (Gençoğlu 2019). Thus, cinema becomes a canvas for exploring complex social realities, influencing viewers by raising awareness and encouraging dialogues about mental health (Gençoğlu 2019).

Cinema has the capacity to encourage critical engagement with civic and community issues. This world of the screen allows the audience to engage with and evaluate controversial moral dilemmas without the immediate weight of judgment often found in reality. This non-judgmental space encourages critical reflection on the social norms and behaviours portrayed in films, ultimately aiding in the evaluation and potential reform of civil structures (Dong 2022). By offering nuanced interpretations of characters' actions, the films stimulate discussions about empathy, responsibility, and the moral structure of society, revealing complexities woven into our social structure (Ibidem).

The intercultural dynamics of cinema continue to illustrate its role in navigating social realities and have been explored in various artistic productions. How an audience receives a movie can significantly influence the understanding and interpretation of cultural narratives. Moreover, globalization is reshaping cinematic expressions, leading to new social and cultural phenomena that resonate differently with different demographics. Thus, cinema reflects changing social realities

as its narratives interact with different cultural contexts, fostering both understanding and confusion in audience reception (Quan and Chen 2023).

In contemporary times, the evolution of movie consumption has transformed the way audiences perceive and interact with cinema. There is growing recognition of the importance of viewing outside the traditional cinema, through online channels; this new type of viewing facilitates interaction with films, highlighting that diverse viewing platforms can alter the social dynamics around film consumption (Aveyard 2016). The accessibility of cinema through these varied mediums invites wider audience engagement and creates new avenues for critical discourse about the social issues presented in films. Thus, the way we watch films shapes our understanding of and interaction with their thematic content, demonstrating the adaptive nature of cinema in reflecting ongoing social change.

The study of cinematic representation has illustrated that popular films often mirror the social and political issues of their time. Various scholars have observed that cinema not only entertains, but also educates audiences about pressing concerns rooted in social dynamics, highlighting themes of class and gender (Staat 2019). The narratives created in these films resonate with the historical and contemporary legacies rooted in society, inviting critical reflections on the current state of various demographic groups and their lived experiences (Ibidem).

Sociological interpretations of contemporary films offer profound insights into the complexities of modern society, engaging the audience in reflective processes about race, gender, class, social issues and cultural dynamics. By analysing films through a sociological lens, we identify patterns that not only reflect social change, but also provoke dialogue and critical thinking about pressing social issues.

Contemporary movies often act as mirrors reflecting various socio-political landscapes. A key role of cinema is its ability to portray issues ranging from micro-aggressions to systemic injustices in modern society. Even complicated issues, such as racism or the stigmatization of mental illness, can be more openly addressed. For example, the effectiveness of multimedia strategies, such as videos that address racism, in raising awareness when integrated into educational settings has been researched. This approach encourages audiences to actively engage with the content and reflect on their social positions, thereby strengthening critical discourse on racial inequality in the arts

(Ogunyemi et al. 2020). Engaging with these themes through film cultivates empathy and reframing viewers' perceptions of prevailing social narratives.

The representation of marginalized voices, especially in films from regions with a high degree of social precarity, illustrates how cinema can challenge dominant narratives and evoke collective memory and recognition. Films with characters from working-class backgrounds provide a lens through which social inequalities are examined, leading to a more nuanced understanding of marginality (Hadj-Moussa 2008). Such films advocate for recognition and a re-examination of social norms and expectations, illustrating the transformative power of cinematic storytelling.

The role of technology in filmmaking influences how sociological narratives are shared and understood. It becomes especially important to emphasize the importance of integrating new technologies into film production, resonating with the evolving ways in which audiences consume content in today's digital landscape (Harmash, Timlin, and Khymych 2023). Understanding film as part of a broader technological framework allows sociologists to explore how these innovations influence social perceptions and interactions with cultural products.

Film serves as a powerful platform for collective learning and social engagement. Viewing films as a shared experience enhances dialog and critical analysis among viewers, fostering a sense of community and collaborative reflection on contemporary issues (Beban and Korson 2025). This shared experience amplifies the impact of the themes presented in the film, encouraging a broader discourse about the societal challenges presented.

Portrayals of violence and its realism in films offer critical commentary on social attitudes towards aggression and conflict. The aesthetic elements used to depict violence can create a false sense of realism, potentially desensitizing audiences to real social violence while provoking discussions about morality and ethics (Bender 2014). This approach highlights the role that films play in shaping social perceptions of violence, often reflecting and influencing cultural mores. Examining cultural heritage through cinema emphasizes how films can interact with historical narratives to inform contemporary discussions of cultural identity. The ways in which representations of past struggles are transposed allow viewers to re-frame their understanding of current social structures and their implications (Guirao 2018). This historical framing plays a crucial role in

promoting critical engagement with current issues. At the same time, such a mechanism can operate on a multitude of issues, including those relating to mental health, through film productions that revisit issues in a variety of newer contexts or using other artistic media.

Contemporary sociological interpretations of film highlight ongoing struggles against systemic inequalities evident in various portrayals of race and class. For example, the representation of black women's experiences in contemporary films invites reflection on intersectionality and the multiple nature of oppression. Insights derived from studying these narratives emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics and impact of representation in media. The implications of cultural representations in shaping social narratives can be identified, revealing their influence on public perceptions and activism around social injustices (Mithani, Cooper, and Boyd 2020). Through critical analysis of films, sociologists can decipher the complex interplay between media representations and the lived realities of marginalized communities, enhancing societal awareness and advocacy efforts.

The sociological interpretation of contemporary films serves as a vital mechanism for understanding complex societal issues. By inviting audiences to confront and reflect on their perceptions, films illuminate the underlying structures that shape everyday experiences. This critical engagement promotes greater awareness and dialog about issues of race, gender, class, inequities, and cultural representation. As film continues to evolve with technological advancements and global dynamics, the need for sociological analysis remains essential to bridge the gap between entertainment and meaningful social discourse.

Bibliometric analysis of film-related articles can provide meaningful data that enhance our understanding of trends, themes and the academic landscape around film. This analytic approach uses quantitative methods to systematically collect and analyse bibliographic data to produce useful information for researchers and practitioners in film studies and beyond. This type of analysis enables statistical assessment of film-related literature and scholarly productivity. By focusing on publication trends or the frequency of topics and keywords, researchers can discern changes in interest over time, identifying topics that are gaining ground in scholarly discussion and those that may be declining. A critical advantage of bibliometric analysis is that it facilitates interdisciplinary connections in film studies. By analysing identified networks, researchers can uncover

relationships between disparate works and trending themes across fields. This interconnectedness is vital in film studies, where the exploration of film intersects with fields such as psychology, cultural studies, technology and sociology.

Cinematography plays an indispensable role in mirroring and shaping social realities, challenging viewers to confront ingrained prejudices, power dynamics and trends in society. It not only serves as a reflection of society, but also acts as an active participant in the discourse surrounding social, cultural and political issues, allowing the audience to navigate the complex landscape of modern life. Be it interpretations of personal trauma, explorations of social action or uplifting narratives of community resilience, cinema is an art form deeply entwined with the human condition and social consciousness. As we contemplate cinema's contributions to society, its multiple roles continue to evolve, adapting to new technologies, cultural shifts and audience needs. The dynamic social fabric in which these narratives are woven illustrates that a quest to understand and improve the human condition remains at the heart of the cinematic experience. Such a quest invites both reflection and action in a rapidly changing world.

The movie *Joker* (directed by Todd Phillips, 2019) has generated a significant cultural and social impact, becoming not only a cinematic phenomenon, but also a catalyst for debates on mental health, social inequality and systemic violence. Far from being merely an “origin story” for a villain from the DC Comics universe, *Joker* proposes an intense narrative with deep sociological valences: the alienation of the individual, the dissolution of moral norms, social marginalization and the effects of dehumanization in an urban context.

The sociological analysis of the film makes it possible to explore how the figure of the “misfit” is constructed as a product of an oppressive, dehumanizing system in which failed social policies, economic precariousness and the empathic rupture between individuals lead to deviance, rage and violence. *Joker* can thus be interpreted as an implicit critique of late capitalism and the erosion of social solidarity. In parallel, a bibliometric analysis of the scholarly literature generated around this movie (or in which it is used as a case study) can reveal the directions of academic interest in the *Joker* phenomenon. This dual approach - sociological and scient metric - offers an original and inter/trans-disciplinary perspective on the relationship between popular culture, cinema and social science. The combination of these two methods makes it possible to contextualize the impact of film, in the

social and theoretical spheres, and to identify the thematic networks of authors and disciplines that have been concerned with this subject. At the same time, we can arrive at a better understanding of how the *Joker* is integrated into global academic discourse.

The overall objective of the paper is to conduct an integrative sociological and bibliometric analysis of the movie *Joker* in order to understand its cultural, social and academic impact.

Specific objectives derive from the approaches of each method. The sociological analysis of the film aims to identify and interpret the main social themes (poverty, marginalization, mental illness, violence) and to investigate how the character Arthur Fleck reflects real social dynamics. At the same time, we propose to correlate the message of the film with relevant sociological theories (e.g. labelling theory, Marxist alienation, Durkheimian anomie). The bibliometric analysis maps the international scholarly output addressing the *Joker* from different perspectives (sociological, psychological, philosophical or cultural) and identifies the dominant themes and keywords in the analysed literature. The interpretation is based on the detection of thematic clusters and research trends by analysing the co-occurrence of terms using the VOSviewer program.

Linking the two dimensions allows us to compare the theoretical interpretations in the scholarly literature with the findings of our own sociological analysis and to assess the extent to which academic discourse reflects (or ignores) the social dimension of film.

Methodology

Research design: This paper utilizes a mixed-method research design, combining two complementary approaches: (1) a qualitative sociological analysis of the narrative and visual content of the film *Joker* (2019) and (2) a bibliometric analysis of the relevant scholarly output, in order to identify the directions of academic interpretation and its theoretical impact in the international literature. This dual methodological approach allows not only to investigate the symbolic and social content of the film, but also to understand how it is perceived, analysed and integrated into international scholarly discourse.

Qualitative sociological analysis: The qualitative analysis of the film *Joker* was carried out using thematic content analysis and narrative analysis, focusing on social representations of marginalization, mental illness, symbolic violence and identity crisis. The approach is anchored

in classical and contemporary sociological perspectives, such as anomie theory (Durkheim), alienation theory (Marx) and labelling theory (Becker), with a particular focus on the construction of social deviance in urban space and the individual-society relationship.

The source analysed is the film *Joker* (directed by Todd Phillips, USA, 2019), watched in its entirety and interpreted in relation to the socio-cultural context of its emergence and the dynamics of the main character - Arthur Fleck - as a product and symbol of social dysfunction.

Bibliometric analysis

Sources and selection criteria: for the bibliometric analysis, the Scopus database was used, due to its broad, interdisciplinary coverage and export functionalities for the VOSviewer software.

The selection criteria were as follows: keywords “Joker” and “movie” (combination used in the “title, abstract, keywords” field), articles written in English, publication period from the release date of the movie (October 2019) to the present (2025) and document types (scientific articles, excluding editorial reviews, conference notes and non-refereed material). Following the application of these criteria, 87 articles relevant to the area of interest were identified and selected.

Tools and procedures: The bibliometric analysis was carried out using the latest version of the VOSviewer software, which allows visual mapping of relationships between terms, authors and publications. Data export from Scopus was done in a format compatible (CSV) with VOSviewer, including the necessary metadata: title, authors, abstract, keywords and references. Co-occurrence analysis, using the keywords in the abstract and title as the unit of analysis. A minimum threshold of at least 5 occurrences was set for the inclusion of a term in the network. Thematic clusters were identified based on similarity between terms and co-occurrence relationships.

Methodological limitations: It is important to note that the bibliometric analysis is limited by the accuracy of the metadata indexed in the Scopus database and the variability in the terminology used by the authors. Also, the exclusion of other databases (e.g. Web of Science, Google Scholar) may affect the comprehensiveness of the analysis, but it was a methodological choice justified by consistency and accuracy. In addition, the analysis does not investigate the full content of the articles, but only the metadata and the thematic distribution.

Synergy between methods: The two approaches - qualitative and quantitative-bibliometric - are used in a complementary logic. If the sociological analysis provides interpretative depth on the content of the movie, the bibliometric analysis provides a global picture of its academic reception and the theoretical trajectories that have accompanied it in the scholarly literature. This combined approach allows for a complex understanding of how a cultural product such as the *Joker* functions simultaneously as a symbolic narrative and as an object of scholarly reflection.

Results

For the movie *Joker*, a sociological analysis framework can integrate multiple theoretical perspectives due to its complex content; in a succinct form, a sociological analysis based on multiple theoretical paradigms can identify relevant theoretical directions, key concepts integrated, social dimensions addressed, and themes captured cinematically. These will be summarized in Table 1. Relevant sociological theoretical directions used in the analysis:

Table 1: Relevant sociological theoretical directions used in the analysis

Theoretical direction	Social framework	Key concept	Practical application
Cultural Marxism Conflict theory Karl Marx (Musto 2010)	Structural inequality and social alienation	Alienate	-Social exclusion of the lower classes; -The elite's contempt for the masses (Thomas Wayne is a symbol of the ruling class); -Absence of social services reveals the collapse of psychological assistance.
Labelling and deviance Labelling theory Howard Becker (Becker 2018)	Symbolic interactionism	Deviance as a result of social labelling	-Arthur is labelled "weird", "crazy", which leads him to internalize this deviant identity; -Society creates the "Joker" through marginalization and stigmatization.
Sociology of emotions and symbolic violence Pierre Bourdieu (Samuel 2013)	Habitus and symbolic capital	Habitus, cultural or symbolic capital; Symbolic violence	-Arthur does not possess the necessary capital to be socially recognized; -His whole identity crisis reflects a lack of symbolic validation; -Everyday militias function

			as forms of symbolic violence.
Representing madness Michel Foucault (2020)	Social control and normalization	Power and the discourse on madness	-The film illustrates how society decides who is “normal” and who is “dangerous”; -Lack of medical treatment is a form of systemic exclusion.
Popular culture and media – coding / decoding Stuart Hall (Shaw 2017)	Cultural studies and media theory	Encoding decoding / model	Joker can be read as: -The dominant reading: a strong social critique; -Oppositional reading: the glorification of violence; -Negotiated reading: portrayal of a victim transformed into an anarchic symbol. The media message of Joker is not fixed; it allows for multiple interpretations. -Audiences decode the character and narrative through their own social positions; -Highlights the power of media in shaping, challenging, or reinforcing dominant ideologies.

Qualitative content analysis

The movie *Joker* is an artistic representation laden with social, political and psychological meanings. Beyond its fictional narrative, the movie functions as a mirror of structural tensions in contemporary societies. Through a sociological analysis of the film's content, we can identify key themes such as social inequality, marginalization, the collapse of public services, the effects of ignoring mental health, and the role of the media in shaping collective perceptions.

This interpretation is based on a qualitative approach to narrative content, focusing on five recurring themes. Their interpretation is supported by classical and contemporary sociological theories, such as anomie theory of Émile Durkheim (Serpa and Ferreira 2018), social stigma of Erving Goffman (Schumacher, Corrigan, and Dejong 2003), alienation of Karl Marx (Musto 2010), the discourse of power and normalization of Michel Foucault (2020) and the transformation of

reality into a “spectacle” through the media of Jean Baudrillard (Kellner 2011).

This analysis has sought to identify evidence of the presence of the identified themes from theoretical bases; in addition to direct observation of the narrative thread of the movie, the script of the movie, available online (<https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/movies/joker-2019-transcript/>), was used, from which relevant passages were extracted. Each selected example is accompanied by a commentary from a sociological perspective.

1. *Theme social and economic inequality.* The theoretical description traces the clear division between the elite and the underprivileged masses and the lack of access to basic public services.

“It’s day 18 of the garbage strike, with 10,000 tons of garbage piling up every day” - symbolizing the collapse of public services and the impact on the entire urban population.

“Even the nicest sections of the city are looking like slums” - indicates the level of decay affecting the middle and upper classes.

“Renters in the metro area are certain to feel the pinch...” - suggests rising living costs directly affecting vulnerable residents.

“Thomas Wayne... I’m gonna lift them out of poverty...” - top-down elitist discourse is a paternalistic approach to poverty.

2. *Theme of alienation and marginalization.* This follows how Arthur is excluded from social networks, misunderstood, treated as an anomaly.

“The other guys... they think you're a freak...” - certifies Arthur’s exclusion from the professional space, stigmatized by peers.

“You don’t listen, do you?... All I have are negative thoughts...” - confirms the feeling of not being heard, reflects isolation and deep alienation.

“You were the only one that was ever nice to me” - identifies the only gesture of empathy in a generally hostile social context.

“You live down the hall... I really need you to leave...” - describes the moment that demystifies the fantasy of the connection with Sophie; from this moment on, the isolation becomes complete.

3. *Mental health theme* focuses on criticizing the way society ignores mental distress and dismantles support services.

“You’re on seven different medications.... Surely, they must be doing something.” - reflects a mechanistic approach to psychiatric treatment without real empathy.

“They’ve cut our funding.... Social Services is part of that.” - plays the institutional collapse directly affecting people in need.

“How am I supposed to get my medication now?” - exposes the dangerous dependence on the public system with no alternatives for vulnerable people.

“My mother was delusional.... She was a sick woman.” - suggests a transgenerational inheritance of undiagnosed psychological trauma.

4. *Media and public image* follows how the media exploits Arthur's vulnerability for entertainment.

"Check out this joker..." followed by a humorous playback of the clip - the ridicule of mental suffering is revealed.

"You just wanted to make fun of me..." - deconsecrates Arthur's awareness of media instrumentalization.

"You may have seen that clip of our next guest..." - reveals how the media turns a marginal individual into a public spectacle.

"They don't give a shit about people like me." - offers an inside reflection on the institutional ignoring of the excluded.

5. *Violence as a form of protest*. This theme follows how the Joker resorts to violence as a reaction to marginalization and accumulated suffering.

"I killed those guys because they were awful." - violence is justified as a reaction to a world perceived as profoundly unjust.

"You get what you fucking deserve!" - this is the moment of symbolic explosion; crisis turns into revolt.

"Have you seen what it's like out there, Murray?.... Nobody's civil anymore." - portrays the decline of social cohesion and legitimizes extreme anger.

"Isn't it beautiful? [referring to Gotham burning]" - represents the moment when the Joker sees social chaos as a form of liberation and recognition.

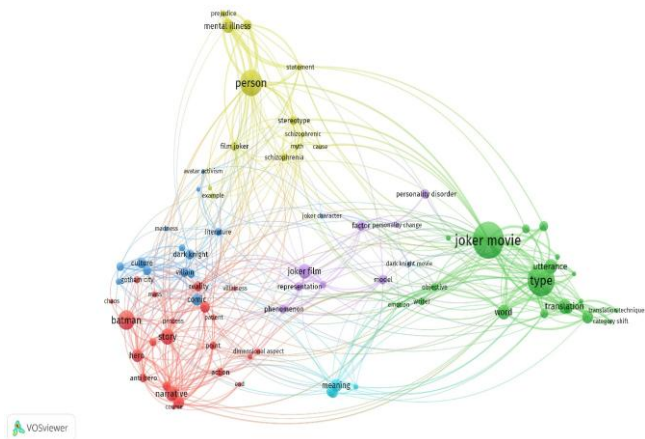
The thematic analysis of the movie *Joker* reveals the complexity of interactions between the individual and society in the context of a system marked by structural dysfunctions. Arthur Fleck becomes a metaphor for the marginalized, a product of social neglect, economic inequality and a media culture that exploits individual suffering for spectacular purposes. Through these themes, *Joker* can be understood as a sociological text in its own right, an exemplary case of the intersection between art, psychology and social reality. The movie provokes essential questions about social responsibility, empathy and the functioning of institutional structures. These themes not only reflect reality but amplify it, providing a platform for debate and critical reflection.

Bibliometric analysis

The map, generated using VOSviewer software, represents the co-occurrence networks of the terms extracted from the titles, abstracts and keywords of the 87 scientific articles selected for analysis (Figure 1). The size of the nodes signals the frequency of occurrence of terms, and the connecting lines indicate the thematic relationships (co-occurrences). The colours differentiate thematic clusters, i.e. groups of

terms that occur together frequently and reflect distinct fields of research.

Figure 1. Bibliometric map of co-occurrence of terms in the analysed articles (VOSviewer)



Green Cluster - Translation, language and discourse analysis

Central terms: “joker movie”, “type”, “translation”, “utterance”, “word”.

This cluster reflects the academic interest in linguistic analysis and language translation issues related to the *Joker*. Terms specific to translation (“category shift”, “translation technique”) and linguistics (“utterance”, “word”) appear, suggesting research that analyses: how the *Joker* was translated into different languages/cultures, the typology of lines or expressions used, and the cultural adaptation of the messages conveyed through language.

Fields involved: translation, applied linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies.

Yellow cluster - Psychology, mental health and stereotypes

Central terms: “person”, “mental illness”, “schizophrenia”, “stereotype”, “myth”.

This area revolves around representations of mental disorders in film. Relevant terms suggest: analysis of how the *Joker* cinematically represents mental illness (especially schizophrenia), the impact of these representations on stigmatization (“prejudice”, “stereotype”), and the relationship between mental illness and violence in the narrative.

Fields involved: psychology, psychiatry, sociology, media studies and film.

Red cluster - Narrative structure and archetypes

Central terms: “story”, “narrative”, “batman”, “hero”, “anti-hero”.

This cluster analyses the movie *Joker* from a narrative and mythological perspective: the opposition hero vs. anti-hero (*Batman - Joker*), the evolution of the main character and the moral and philosophical dimension of the story.

Fields involved: literature, narratology, philosophy, myth and archetype studies.

Blue cluster - Cultural and urban dimension

Central terms: “culture”, “comic”, “gotham city”, “villain”.

It highlights a line of research that positions *The Joker* in the context of pop culture and the fictional urban space of Gotham: the link to comics, fan culture and the cultural impact of the movie and the representation of the city as a symbol of social alienation.

Fields involved: cultural studies, imaginary urbanism, media studies, visual sociology.

Purple cluster - Narrative psychology and personality change

Central terms: “joker movie”, “personality disorder”, “model, factor”.

This area focuses on: psychological models applied to the Joker character, exploration of personality disorder and identity change, and the influence of environment and trauma on character development.

Fields involved: clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, film and psychology.

Cyan cluster - Meaning and phenomenology

Central terms: “meaning”, “phenomenon”, “representation”.

Suggests an interest in: the cultural and philosophical significance of the movie and how the Joker is interpreted as a social and artistic phenomenon.

Fields involved: philosophy, hermeneutics, aesthetics, semiotics.

Narrative analysis

The visualization reveals the complexity of the *Joker*’s academic approaches, positioned at the intersection of several research fields, such as:

Psychology and mental health: to understand how character reflects and influences perceptions of mental disorders.

Narratology and comparative literature: exploring narrative structure and modern mythologies.

Translation and linguistics: highlighting the interest in conveying the message in different cultural spaces.

Cultural and Media studies: addressing the symbolic influence of the Joker character in contemporary culture.

This map is an example of how a single cultural product, such as *Joker*, can become a hub of interdisciplinary content, offering multiple angles for research and reflection.

Translation and Applied Linguistics (Green Cluster)

The densest cluster is centred on the terms “joker movie”, “type”, “translation”, “utterance” and “word”, indicating a major concern for the linguistic dimension of film. Studies in this field investigate strategies of translation and cross-cultural adaptation of lines, expressions and registers of language, as well as the discursive typology used in the film. Translation techniques, the phenomenon of category shift, as well as the semantic and pragmatic implications of dialogues are frequently analysed.

Psychology, psychiatry and representations of mental illness (Yellow Cluster)

This cluster focuses on the term “person”, “mental illness”, “schizophrenia”, “stereotype” and “myth”, suggesting a line of research interested in how the movie *Joker* portrays mental disorders, especially schizophrenia. The authors examine the impact of these representations on the stigmatization of people with mental disorders, as well as the relationship between mental illness, violence and marginalization. It highlights a critical approach to the myths perpetuated by popular culture about mental health.

Narratology and the study of archetypes (Red Cluster)

Terms such as “story”, “narrative”, “batman”, “hero” and “anti-hero” compose a narrative cluster, reflecting an analysis of the movie from the perspective of story structure and evolution. The research focuses on the dynamic between the *Joker* and *Batman*, the narrative trajectory of the anti-hero, and the functions of modern archetypes in character construction. Themes of action, moral conflict and identity construction within the fictional universe are also explored.

Cultural and Media studies (Blue Cluster)

This cluster integrates terms such as “culture”, “comic”, “gotham city” and “villain”, suggesting an interdisciplinary approach to film in the context of popular culture. Gotham City is analysed as a symbolic space of social alienation and urban chaos, and the Joker is viewed as

a cultural phenomenon that transcends cinematic boundaries, with notable influence in public discourse, social activism and digital culture. The intersection between media studies, visual sociology and comics analysis is noted.

Character Psychology and identity shaping (Purple Cluster)

The terms “joker movie”, “personality disorder”, “model” and “factor” define a cluster oriented towards the psychological analysis of the main character. The studies explore the application of clinical models to the Joker’s behaviour and motivations, investigating elements such as personality disorder, identity change, trauma, and environmental factors that influence deviant behaviour.

Hermeneutics and phenomenology (Cyan cluster)

Terms such as “meaning”, “phenomenon” and “representation” indicate an interpretative and philosophical dimension. This cluster brings together research focusing on the meaning of film as a cultural object, modes of representation of reality and the aesthetic reception of film as a social phenomenon. Approaches include hermeneutical, semiotic and aesthetic perspectives.

The co-occurrence map highlights the deeply interdisciplinary nature of academic research on the *Joker*. It is analysed not only as a cinematic product, but as a cultural, psychological, narrative and linguistic phenomenon. The six identified clusters provide a broad picture of current scholarly concerns and emphasize the relevance of the Joker film to debates on identity, mental health, popular culture and intercultural communication.

Sociological perspective

If we look at this map from a sociological perspective, we can extract a number of relevant interpretations and research directions about the social reality reflected in the *Joker* and the way the movie is perceived as a form of cinematic realism.

The sociological analysis of the *Joker* based on the co-occurrence map of different terms used in scholarly articles suggests that the *Joker* has frequently been analysed through a sociological lens, particularly in relation to a number of themes.

Social marginalization and inequality: the connections between the terms “person”, “mental illness”, “society”, “reality”, “stereotype” and “prejudice” outline a vision of Joker as a victim of a dysfunctional social system. The film is often cited as a critique of social exclusion and society’s treatment of the vulnerable (the mentally ill, the poor,

individuals without institutional support). The Joker becomes the symbol of the alienated individual, ignored by social institutions, and his story offers a critical commentary on the degradation of public services, economic inequality and extreme individualism in contemporary capitalist societies. The terms included in this area indicate a research direction focused on the stigmatization of people with mental illness. Inspired by Erving Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, we can affirm that the movie explores the effects of social stigma applied to the deviant individual, in this case, the protagonist Arthur Fleck.

Cinematic realism and the representation of the social: the terms "reality", "phenomenon", "representation", "meaning" (in the cyan cluster) indicate that researchers have also focused on the dimension of social realism in film. Although inspired by comics, the *Joker* is treated by the authors as a social realist social drama movie, not just as fiction. We can find themes associated with realism. Gotham City is seen as a real metropolis in decline, similar to New York in the 70s and 80s. Economic inequality, urban violence, the collapse of social institutions and indifference to suffering are all presented in a hyper-realistic manner. The movie is thus perceived as a mirror of social reality rather than pure fiction. This perception is supported by the sober visual style, the grey aesthetics and the absence of surreal or fantastical elements. Within the semantic cluster of cinematic realism, film is analysed not as escapist fiction, but as a symbolic construction of social reality. In the spirit of the theory of social reality proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), the movie *Joker* can be interpreted as a 'symbolic universe' that contributes to the social construction of the real, providing a recognizable framework for experiences of alienation and structural injustice. The restrained visual style, the decrepit urban image of Gotham and the oppressive atmosphere are reminiscent of neorealist aesthetics, in which violence, alienation and marginalization are presented as systemic rather than individual phenomena. The *Joker* thus distinguishes itself from other productions in the DC universe by its explicit rejection of the fantastic, choosing instead to anchor itself in a recognizable reality marked by the collapse of social institutions.

Stigmatization and social myths about mental illness: in the yellow cluster, the terms "myth", "schizophrenia", "stereotype" and "cause" suggest that the film is also analysed in relation to how society creates myths and stigma around mental illness. Some scholars criticize the

film for reinforcing the idea that people with mental illness are violent, dangerous or uncontrollable. Here a conflict arises between the perceived realism of the movie and the social responsibility of cinema: the movie appears realistic, but can reinforce harmful stereotypes while both reflecting and distorting reality.

Protest, activism and collective identity: terms such as “avatar activism” or “mass” in the blue cluster indicate another sociological dimension, the *Joker* as a symbol of collective revolt movements. In some analyses, the Joker character is interpreted as a “radical populist” figure (someone who channels the frustrations of the masses against the elites). The film reflects contemporary social and political tensions - polarization, the collapse of social solidarity, anarchist movements - in a symbolic but easily recognizable form for today's audiences. Another central element in the cluster of terms is the social dynamics of protest and revolt. Terms such as “mass”, “avatar activism” and “chaos” suggest an interpretation of the Joker character as a symbol of collective violence and the rift between the masses and the elite. In line with the anomie theory formulated by Émile Durkheim (1897) and further developed by Robert Merton (1938), the movie can be interpreted as an allegory of the breakdown of social norms, where the lack of coherence of shared values generates chaos and extreme deviance. Thus, the Joker becomes a symbol of the individual who responds to marginalization through an extreme form of existential protest, channelling the frustrations of the excluded masses. The emergence of pro-Joker movements in the movie reflects the idea of collective identification with deviance, a phenomenon that can be sociologically explained by social contagion theory by Le Bon (1895) or social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979).

Moral ambiguity and social responsibility: the movie *Joker* is perceived by scholars not only as entertainment, but as a cinematic work of profound sociological relevance. It is cited in the literature as an example of cinematic social realism that reflects themes of alienation, the collapse of social services, the stigmatization of mental illness, inequality and mass revolt. It also raises ethical questions about the responsibility of media representations and their effects on social perceptions. Although the film is perceived as realistic, some authors emphasize the risk of spreading ambiguous messages, particularly in terms of the association between mental illness and extreme violence. This ambiguity has generated debates on the ethical responsibility of cinema in the construction of social images. From a

sociological perspective, this can be interpreted as a conflict between the educational and the spectacular function of visual art: The *Joker* proposes a compelling but controversial image of social reality.

In cultural and sociological studies, cinema is an essential medium for understanding how social reality is perceived, interpreted and symbolically reconfigured. The film *Joker*, directed by Todd Phillips, is an emblematic example of cinematic social realism, offering a dense narrative about marginalization, deviance and the collapse of social cohesion.

Conclusion

Sociological conclusions: The film *Joker* (2019) is an example of cinematic realism with profound sociological valences, highlighting the effects of social marginalization, the collapse of public services and the stigmatization of mental health. The figure of Arthur Fleck is constructed as a social product of exclusion, institutional dysfunction and lack of symbolic capital. The character becomes a metaphor for the alienated individual unrecognized by society.

The key themes identified in the movie are alienation, violence, mental illness, structural inequality and the media as a tool of humiliation. The *Joker* is not just a story about individual deviance, but about the social production of deviance in a dehumanizing urban context in which the individual is reduced to the function of a symptom of systemic failures. The co-appearance map validates this interpretation, highlighting the concentration of terms around concepts central to the sociology of deviance, exclusion and collective identity.

Methodological conclusions: The application of a mixed design (sociological analysis and bibliometric analysis) proved to be effective in exploring not only the narrative content of the movie, but also how it has been reflected and debated in the international scholarly literature. The bibliometric analysis, based on 87 articles from the Scopus database and processed with VOSviewer, provided a clear map of the thematic structure of *Joker* research, while validating the importance of the sociologically identified themes.

The complementarity between the qualitative (thematic content, narrative) and quantitative (co-occurrence of terms, clustering) approaches led to a multifaceted and contextualized understanding of the topic.

Thematic conclusions from bibliometric analysis: The bibliometric map revealed six major thematic clusters: film translation and

discourse - concern for the cultural adaptation of the language of film; psychology and stereotypes of mental illness - focus on schizophrenia, stigma and social myths; narrative structure and anti-hero - archetypes analysis (*Joker* vs. *Batman*); the urban dimension and pop culture - Gotham as a symbol of social alienation; psychological character modelling - personality disorders and trauma; phenomenology and representation - *Joker* as a cultural phenomenon with multiple levels of interpretation.

It confirms that the *Joker* is a point of interdisciplinary convergence, being analysed in the context of psychology, sociology, philosophy, translation and media culture.

Academic and cultural implications: The *Joker* becomes a critical platform for social debate, provoking reflections on the responsibility of social systems, moral ambiguity and the legitimacy of violence as a reaction to exclusion. The research around the film contributes to strengthening a framework of analysis in which cinema is treated not only as entertainment, but as a sociological artifact, mirroring the realities and conflicts of the contemporary era. It highlights the need for ethical responsibility in the representation of mental health in the media, given the risks of perpetuating dangerous stereotypes. The interdisciplinary analysis of the film demonstrates the potential of cinema to function as a tool for civic education, social awareness and theoretical reflection, especially in educational or activist contexts.

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Teacher challenges and parental roles in early childhood EFL instruction: A synthesis review of nursery education in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This article examines the primary challenges that early childhood teachers in Bangladesh face when teaching English to nursery-level pupils, with a focus on how parents can support them in this endeavor. The synthesis review utilizes secondary sources, including peer-reviewed studies, policy papers and educational reports, to identify major obstacles such as inadequate teacher training, insufficient educational resources and limited systemic support, particularly in rural areas. The study also reveals that parents who are actively involved in their children's education can significantly enhance their language skills. However, this kind of interaction is sometimes uneven or absent altogether, which makes learning a new language substantially more challenging. The results suggest that teachers, policymakers and families must work together to create a more supportive learning environment. The review emphasizes the importance of focusing policies on early language instruction and engaging parents. These policies could help close the gaps in early English education that currently exist in Bangladesh.

Keywords: development of the brain, language acquisition, social norms, parental support, education system

Introduction

Nursery education is fundamental in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development. During this initial stage, children establish relationships with teachers and peers, while also beginning to develop patterns of learning behavior (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll 2005). In Bangladesh, nursery education prepares children for formal schooling and introduces structured language

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learning, frequently through English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Teachers at this level often face challenges in sustaining student engagement, creating lessons tailored to developmental stages, and addressing diverse learning needs (Zamin, Lotfie, and Salleh 2022). Effective early education establishes routines for feeding, sleeping, and play, which contribute to children's sense of security and emotional stability (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll 2005). Children exhibit heightened receptivity to language acquisition in their early years; therefore, introducing English at this stage can enhance long-term proficiency, particularly if initiated before puberty (Siregar, Tobing, and Fitri 2021). Bangladesh has prioritized early English instruction to improve educational and economic opportunities, acknowledging English as a global lingua franca. However, this ambition encounters various structural and pedagogical challenges. Numerous educators report challenges in engaging nursery students, which are attributed to insufficient classroom resources, overcrowded environments, and inadequate professional training (Sayakhan & Bradley 2019; Elango et al. 2015).

Technology, while progressively incorporated into education worldwide, is still not fully utilized in numerous nurseries in Bangladesh. Educators frequently have limited access to digital resources, necessitating the use of antiquated instructional methods (Elango et al. 2015). The administrative workload - including lesson planning, documentation maintenance, and progress evaluation - further burdens the responsibilities of nursery educators.

Parental involvement, a crucial aspect of early language education, remains inconsistent Islam, F. (2016). In the absence of robust parental support, children may struggle to retain and apply their academic knowledge. This gap is particularly pronounced in households with limited English proficiency or where parents lack understanding of how to support language acquisition effectively. (Mathieson and Banerjee 2010)

This study aims to examine the primary challenges encountered by nursery teachers in Bangladesh regarding the delivery of English as a Foreign Language instruction and to evaluate the degree and effects of parental involvement. The review synthesizes existing research to provide insights that can inform more effective educational practices and policy decisions aimed at enhancing early English education nationwide. (Ansarey 2012)

Literature review

In the context of Bangladesh's education system, early childhood English instruction has gained increasing attention due to its potential to lay the foundation for long-term language proficiency and cognitive development. However, a critical examination of existing literature reveals a set of complex challenges that continue to affect the quality and accessibility of nursery-level English education. These issues span across teacher preparedness, curriculum design, instructional materials, parental involvement, and regional disparities—all of which directly influence children's early encounters with the English language. (Rahman, M. M. et al. 2019).

Shortage of trained teachers and resource constraints

An ongoing issue in much research is the shortage of professionally educated English teachers at the nursery level. Milon (2016) stated that many teachers lack the teaching skills and language skills necessary to teach English effectively to young students. This gap is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where schools often employ generalist instructors who lack specialized training in teaching language to young children. Das et al. (2021) make a similar point, noting that the uneven distribution of experienced teachers leads to significant disparities in the quality of education between cities and rural areas. Elango et al. (2015) also note that many nursery schools struggle to obtain basic supplies, such as age-appropriate books, audio-visual materials, and language learning tools that are centered on play. Even teachers who want to do a good job struggle to give interesting and useful classes without these aids.

Cognitive and developmental benefits of early language learning

Many academics have emphasized the importance of teaching a second language to young children, particularly for their brain development and academic readiness. Islam, M. S. (2019) states that young children who begin learning a second language in nursery school are more adept at being flexible and problem-solving than children who only speak one language. Farooqui (2014) supports this claim by stating that learning a second language, even before attending school, can help establish brain connections associated with memory and higher-order thinking. These benefits not only help kids excel in school, but they also prepare them for more challenging learning tasks later on. Gardner (2021) noted that this type of cognitive enrichment often enables

individuals to become more adept at adapting to multicultural and multilingual settings. This is another reason to teach English at an early age.

The cultural and social capital of English in Bangladesh

In Bangladeshi society, English is essential for both social and economic reasons. It is commonly used as a sign of education and social mobility. In this case, knowing how to speak English is not just an academic goal; it is also crucial for gaining college admission, securing a job, and engaging with the world. Salahuddin, Khan, and Rahman (2013) stated that being proficient in English is often associated with being part of the elite and advancing in society, especially in urban areas. Dillon (2019) states that children who learn English at an early age are more likely to succeed in school settings where English is the primary language of instruction. Many parents view paying for their child's English language instruction at nursery school as an essential step in ensuring their child's future is bright. Paul (2022) notes that this idea has led to a significant increase in the number of families, including those with low incomes, who want their children to attend English-language preschools.

Instructional approaches and limitations

Modern early childhood programs emphasize interactive, play-based learning methodologies that align with the developmental stages of young children. (Sayakhan and Bradley 2019) highlighted the significance of integrating songs, rhymes, storytelling, and games to enhance the enjoyment and retention of English learning. These approaches align with theories of learning that emphasize the importance of exploration and active engagement in the process of acquiring knowledge. Nonetheless, despite the increasing recognition of effective methodologies, numerous educational institutions in Bangladesh continue to rely on rote memorization and a teacher-centric approach to instruction (Sultana 2010). The lack of teaching strategies that cater to the needs of children in specific classrooms restricts student motivation and hinders effective language acquisition. Aboud and Hossain (2011) noted that schools in rural areas with limited resources often lack the necessary tools and training to adopt more dynamic instructional models, which exacerbates the achievement gap between urban and rural students.

Regional disparities in language education

Geographical and infrastructural differences persist as a challenge in delivering high-quality English language education throughout Bangladesh. Students in cities typically attend schools that are better equipped, have well-trained teachers, and offer opportunities to practice English both inside and outside the classroom. On the other hand, children who live in rural or distant locations typically attend overcrowded classrooms and do not have the opportunity to hear or speak English outside of their textbooks. Aboud (2006) and Rahman, M. M. and Pandian (2018) have demonstrated that the gap between rural and urban areas results in significantly different learning outcomes. For example, children in cities regularly perform better on English proficiency exams than those in rural areas. These differences between regions are not only about logistics; they also reveal deeper structural issues with the distribution of educational resources (Bhuiyan 2011)

Role of parental involvement in early language acquisition

The role of parents and caregivers is also vital for early English education to be successful. Numerous studies have shown that children learn significantly more when their language acquisition is encouraged at home. Adrian and Saefullah (2015) suggest that parents who regularly read to their children, discuss simple English words during daily activities, or watch educational shows together can help their children remember what they learn in school. Brumen (2011) also says that kids are more likely to enjoy and appreciate studying English if they do it alongside their parents. However, in Bangladesh, many parents lack the confidence or fluency to support their children effectively. (Sumarni, Vianty, and Andika 2021) stated that many parents recognize the importance of English, but they often do not feel prepared to help their child learn it. This separation is particularly apparent in homes with low incomes or in rural areas, where educational support may be limited.

Technology as a supporting tool

Another area of interest is the use of technology in early childhood classes, although it is not always employed in the same way. Schools with good resources combine digital media, smartphone apps, and smartboards to create English courses that are engaging for kids. However, most Bangladeshi nurseries, especially those in rural areas,

lack these types of tools or don't utilize them sufficiently. Elango et al. (2015) suggest that teachers are unable to use digital information in their lessons because they lack the necessary tools or training, despite evidence that it is effective. Rahim (2021) suggests that targeted investments in educational technology and teacher training could make a significant difference in how English is taught in nurseries.

Literature gap

There is a considerable amount of research on early childhood education in Bangladesh. Still, relatively little has been done on the specific challenges that arise when teaching English to children at the nursery level. Numerous studies have investigated broad issues related to teaching English in elementary and secondary schools. Still, there is limited research on the early stages of language learning, such as in nursery school, when children first start learning English.

One major problem with the research is that there aren't enough well-trained nursery teachers. Many sites discuss this problem, but few delve into the details of how it affects language teaching in both urban and rural areas. There has been insufficient research on the small details of how prepared teachers are, such as their knowledge of age-appropriate teaching methods, second language instruction, and working with multilingual classrooms. In many cases, teachers who aren't trained or lack the necessary qualifications are expected to teach English to children who are just beginning to learn how to think and speak. This results in uneven quality of teaching. (Rashid and Akkari 2020)

Another significant gap lies in the accessibility and quality of teaching resources. Many kindergarten and pre-primary schools in Bangladesh, especially those outside major cities, lack the basic teaching resources they need, such as engaging picture books, interactive media, or phonics-based learning tools. Some studies mention this lack of materials, but there isn't much research on how these problems affect student performance or teacher morale. Additionally, people often discuss how technology can help close these gaps, but there has been limited research on this topic in the nursery setting. There are additional linguistic and cultural elements that exacerbate the learning gap, but not enough research has been conducted on them. There are significant differences between English and Bangla in terms of phonology, syntax, and meaning. These variances make things more complicated for young learners who are

learning an organized language for the first time. Still, relatively little research examines how these structural differences impact people's ability to understand and use language effectively early on. (Sarmin 2022)

Finally, the literature doesn't say much about how parents don't want their kids to learn English at this early level. Many Bangladeshi families, especially those in rural or impoverished areas, may not immediately see the value of teaching English to their preschool-aged children. This lack of knowledge or interest may make it harder for children to acquire the language outside of school, which further widens the learning gap. There is considerable research that demonstrates how parents can help their children learn language at an early age; however, there is a lack of information on what happens when parents aren't involved. All of these gaps indicate that a comprehensive study is needed to examine the issues of training, resource availability, cultural and language barriers, and family roles in early English instruction. This review aims to address this by bringing together current knowledge and highlighting important areas where Bangladesh's nursery education system requires policy and teaching changes.

Research objectives and questions

The study aims to identify the key challenges faced by teachers in teaching English to nursery students in Bangladesh and to examine the role and importance of parental guidance in supporting English language education for these students.

The following specific questions are crucial to the study as they will help achieve the research aim:

1. What do the teachers face in teaching English to nursery students in Bangladesh?
2. What is the importance of parental guidance in educating nursery students in English in Bangladesh?

Research methods

Research design

This study employs a qualitative research design and a secondary data analysis approach to investigate the challenges that nursery-level English teachers in Bangladesh face and how parents can contribute to early language instruction. Instead of collecting new, original data through fieldwork, the study examined existing academic literature,

government publications, journal articles, and educational reports relevant to teaching English to young children.

Researchers can build on existing findings and identify common themes across multiple studies by conducting secondary data analysis. This strategy is both acceptable and practical because this review focuses more on combining patterns from various sources than on measuring variables. It provides a broader understanding of the institutional, educational, and social factors that influence how young children learn the English language.

Data collection

Relevant materials were selected through purposive sampling, with an emphasis on literature that specifically focused on early childhood English instruction, teacher training, educational disparities, and family engagement in the Bangladeshi context. The search encompassed peer-reviewed publications from both international and local journals, reports from educational NGOs and government agencies, as well as PhD dissertations and policy assessments from reputable academic institutions. Only literature published in English from 2000 to 2024 was included to guarantee the study captures both enduring tendencies and contemporary advancements.

Data analysis

A thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyze the chosen texts. Each paper was analyzed for recurrent themes, including educator qualifications, availability of learning resources, instructional tactics, and the impact of family involvement. Themes were subsequently categorized and analyzed in relation to the study's research topics. The objective was to discern both prevalent patterns and variations between urban and rural environments, as well as between public and private institutions. All interpretations were based on the context of early education in Bangladesh, with meticulous consideration of cultural and structural elements.

Ethical considerations

This study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from publicly accessible academic and policy sources, with no direct engagement with human participants. Consequently, official ethical approval was not necessary. Nonetheless, meticulous attention was devoted to faithfully representing the original authors' findings, carefully citing all sources, and preventing misinterpretation or selective reporting. The review adhered rigorously to ethical criteria about academic honesty, transparency, and responsible scholarship.

Findings and discussion

The study reveals significant differences in how English is taught to young children in urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. One of the most critical issues is the substantial discrepancy in teacher qualifications and access to professional development. Hossain's (2016) research indicates that 85% of teachers in cities are qualified, and 80% have received professional training. In rural areas, on the other hand, just 50% of teachers are certified, and 45% have had training. This disparity highlights a problem with the way rural schools operate: there aren't enough competent and professionally prepared instructors, which makes it challenging to teach English effectively. The lack of training opportunities exacerbates this problem. It makes teachers less effective at teaching and means that young learners don't have enough exposure to language.

There are problems with teachers, but there is also a glaring unfairness in how educational resources are shared. According to Rahman and Pandian (2019), metropolitan schools have significantly more textbooks (90%), audio-visual aids (70%), and learning materials (80%) than rural schools, which have only 60%, 30%, and 40% of these resources available, respectively. The lack of resources, especially interactive aids, makes it more challenging for teachers to employ a variety of engaging teaching methods in remote areas. This lack of resources exacerbates the learning environment and widens the gap between urban and rural nursery students.

Over time, there is also a continuous difference in how well students do and how motivated they are. According to Chowdhury and Kabir (2014), urban children typically perform higher on proficiency examinations, with an average score of 75 to 80, whereas rural students score between 50 and 55. In the same way, urban pupils stay highly motivated (85% to 90%), while rural students show less motivation, ranging from 60% to 65%. The fact that rural children continue to lag in both their academic performance and their interest in learning English suggests that the lack of resources and inadequate teacher training are significant barriers to their educational growth and motivation to engage with the language. Parental involvement is another key factor that influences children's English learning outcomes. In urban areas, parents are often more involved in their children's education, supporting homework and encouraging language development at home.

In contrast, rural parents may lack the awareness or resources to provide similar support, which can further widen the educational gap. These results demonstrate the lasting impact of unequal educational opportunities. They also highlight the importance of making targeted adjustments to enhance teacher training and resource allocation in rural areas.

In short, the research reveals systemic unfairnesses that harm rural nursery schools in Bangladesh. These include less qualified teachers, fewer resources, and worse student results. To ensure that all students have access to fair early English language education, officials and teachers need to focus on improving teacher training, distributing resources more evenly, and engaging students more in rural regions. (Hamid, Sussex, and Khan 2009)

Discussion

The study's results reveal significant issues with the current setup of early English language education for nursery children in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas. An important issue is the substantial disparities in teacher qualifications and access to professional development. There aren't enough educated teachers in rural schools, which makes it hard to use practical, age-appropriate approaches for teaching English. This lack of teachers not only makes the lessons less effective, but it also means that young learners have less exposure to the language during a critical period when they are learning it, a finding that other research has firmly supported (Das, Akter, and Chowdhury 2021). Hossain (2016) discussed the rural-urban gap in teacher training and qualifications. He points out that the dearth of properly trained instructors in rural regions makes early English instruction much less effective overall.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that educational resources are not distributed evenly. Rural students have significantly less access to essential materials, such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and supplementary learning tools, which are necessary to make classrooms engaging and interactive. In rural areas, these resources are not available, which limits opportunities for meaningful language practice and sensory learning (Rahman, M. M. and Pandian 2018). These are both widely recognized as necessary for acquiring language in early life (Aboud and Hossain 2011). The link between the availability of resources and student participation in learning highlights even further

how rural students fare worse than their urban counterparts, who often have access to better-prepared classrooms.

The survey also reveals a disparity in academic performance and motivation between students in cities and rural areas. Urban students typically show better English skills and more motivation to learn English. This pattern is consistent with previous research, which shows a strong link between motivation, language exposure, and helpful learning environments (Brumen 2011; Gardner 2021). Rural pupils may be less motivated because their classrooms aren't as engaging and their parents are less involved. As the research demonstrates, involving families is crucial for helping children learn to speak and write early in their development. Parents who read, talk, or watch English-language media with their children are more likely to help them understand the language more effectively and become more interested in it (Rahman, M. 1996; Adriany & Saefullah 2015). In rural areas, parents generally can't get involved as much since they are less educated and there are fewer opportunities for their children to learn.

These results indicate that teacher training, resource allocation and family involvement collectively contribute to the effectiveness of early English language instruction. To close the gap between cities and rural areas and provide all nursery students in Bangladesh with the same opportunities to learn, it is essential to consider these elements as a whole. Policy initiatives should focus on increasing the distribution of educational materials, encouraging parents to get involved through community-based activities, and making teacher training programs better for rural teachers. Only by working together in these areas can we make lasting advances in early childhood EFL education. This will enable more people to learn languages in a broader range of settings.

Implications and recommendations

The findings reveal that there are pressing and complex issues with teaching English to young children in Bangladesh. If these problems aren't fixed, the difference in language skills between city and country kids could not only remain the same, but also increase over time (Khulel 2021). This would have a significant impact on fairness in education and the future chances of many young learners. Policymakers, teachers, and parents must collaborate closely to enhance the country's early English learning environment (Rahman et al., 2019).

Strengthening teacher training programs - especially those that focus on teaching English to young children - is a crucial stage in the development of education. Teachers will be able to deliver practical and age-appropriate lessons for their students if they invest in professional development (Islam, M.S. et al. 2021). Schools must also ensure that teachers and students have access to the necessary tools to make classes enjoyable and dynamic, such as textbooks, audiovisual aids, and other learning materials. Even well-trained teachers may struggle to keep young students engaged without these tools (Hasnat 2017).

It's just as important to involve parents in their children's English learning journey. When parents engage in simple activities with their children, such as reading together, speaking English, or watching English shows at home, their children's interest and skills in the language increase significantly (Rouf and Rashid 2021). Community outreach and support can empower families, especially in rural areas where parents are less likely to be literate and involved.

To sum up, solving the problems with nursery English education requires everyone to work together to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared, resources are readily available, and families are supportive. Bangladesh can ensure that all young learners, regardless of their background, have a fair chance to learn English well and succeed in the future by working together in this manner.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of investigating the substantial differences in early English language education for nursery pupils in Bangladesh, particularly between urban and rural areas. The results show that the lack of qualified and professionally educated teachers in rural areas significantly compromises the quality of instruction. This means that young learners don't receive as much exposure to effective English language teaching at a crucial stage in their development. Additionally, rural students face challenges in accessing essential educational materials, including textbooks, audiovisual aids, and other learning tools. This makes it harder for them to learn, as it limits the variety and interactivity of classroom activities that are essential for language learning. Additionally, the level of involvement of parents is crucial for determining how motivated and skilled their children are. Urban families tend to be

more involved and supportive, which improves their children's learning experiences and outcomes.

These problems are all interconnected, making it challenging for both urban and rural students to learn the same language and remain motivated. This might perpetuate educational inequalities and limit opportunities for a significant portion of the population. To address these issues, we require a comprehensive and well-coordinated plan. It is essential to invest in specialized teacher training programs that equip teachers with the skills necessary to teach English effectively to young children. Ensuring that all students have equal access to learning materials and classroom resources will make it easier for them to learn actively and enjoyably. Additionally, increasing parental involvement through community outreach and educational programs may help bridge the gaps in motivation and support that hinder the learning of rural students.

Ultimately, overcoming these challenges is crucial not only for enhancing English language skills but also for promoting more equitable education and social inclusion throughout Bangladesh. Policymakers and teachers can enhance early English education by simultaneously improving teachers' skills, increasing resource availability, and engaging families more effectively. This will equip all young learners with the language skills they need to succeed in school and continue learning throughout their lives. It will also help to decrease differences and make society fairer.

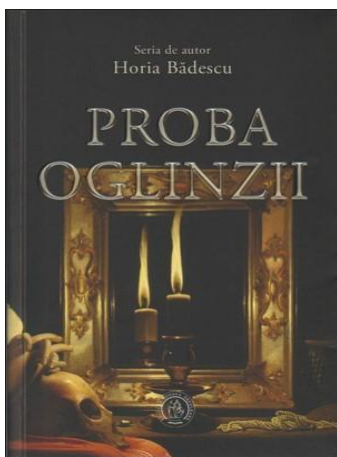
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BOOK REVIEW



**The power of metaphor:
Between erotic bait and exhortation-imperative**

Carmen Cozma *

Horia Bădescu. *Proba oglinzii / The Mirror Test*. 2024. Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană Publishing House. Pp. 419.

With a captivating title, which leaves no room for delay in-to a not at all easy but fascinating reading, Horia Bădescu collected - as he states in the Note on the last page of the volume – “texts that were published in *Curtea de la Argeș: Culture Magazine*”, as well as some revised and augmented papers that, over the years, have appeared in the magazine of Romanian literature, culture and spirituality, *Steaua*, and in the centuries-old tradition culture magazine: *Tribuna*.

One of the most valued Romanian contemporary poets who, among other things, enriched literary species through the *ronset*¹, Horia

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¹ See Horia Bădescu. 2013. *Cărțile viețuirii / The Books of Life*, in three volumes, namely: I. *La poarta cuvântului / At the Gate of the Word*. II. *Furcile caudine / The Caudine Forks*. III. *De la o zi la alta / From One Day to the Next*. Cluj-Napoca:

Bădescu is an outstanding novelist and translator (with a predilection for Francophone literature); he himself being translated abroad.

As a refined thinker and gifted master of *metaphors* – “these nano-myths [that] only translate existential genetics through poetic imagination” (Horia Bădescu 2024, p. 190) -, with an acute sensitivity to social, historical and cultural transformations at both the individual and societal levels so needed especially in our present troubled times marked by the phenomenon of digitalization that brings the deepening of man/woman’s self-alienation, Horia Bădescu is also a ‘man of the *polis*’ keenly anchored in tangible issues; and he does courageously assert his own value judgments, as is clear from the contents of his impressive essays². He always proceeds so with an insistence on *sapience*, encompassing both ‘practical wisdom’ and ‘soundness of mind’ (the very concepts of the ancient Greek philosophers’ *phrónēsis* / φρόνησις and *sophrosyne* / σωφροσύνη); that are nothing but the ‘active intelligence’ and ‘moderation’ manifested in full resonance with the defining trait of the Romanian ‘man/woman of the earth’, namely the “*tsăran*” - actually, his/her particular moral state and at, the same time, the defining feature of the Romanian moral identity. To the author’s attention is precisely “the wealth of wisdom of the earth that keeps itself in the temper of nature and in the moral state of the Universe, preserving together with itself the being and decency of the *tsăran*” (Idem, p. 352) in his/her core authenticity. Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that Horia Bădescu “has made a profession of faith towards the *rural world* and the *Romanian tsăran*”, expressing with *pride* his profound *love* for them [emph. ours]. “Because – in his words – I believe that great loves are those in which the mind and the heart

Eikon Publishing House; continued with: Horia Bădescu. 2021. *Dinaintea ta merge tăcerea / Silence Goes Before You*. Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană Publishing House; Idem. 2023. *Rana ascunsă a fiecărei zile / The Hidden Wound of Each Day*. Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană Publishing House.

² See for example some of the essay books published by Horia Bădescu: 1996. *Ieșirea din Europa. Eseuri / Leaving Europe: Essays*. Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House; 2015. *Dacă Orfeu / If Orpheus*. Cluj-Napoca: Limes Publishing House; 2022. *Între Scila și Caribda, încotro? / Between Scylla and Charybdis, Whereto?* Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană Publishing House; 2025. *Cafeneaua îngerilor. Schițe de portret pentru un istoricon literar-sentimental / The Angels’ Café: Portrait Sketches for a Literary-Sentimental Historicon*. Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană Publishing House.

ask and answer each other equally”³; feeling himself to be closely tied to those (“tsăranii”) to whom the poet dedicated such verses, of a genuine *requiem*: “Only the flowers lead them to the vow / and they pass through countless borderlines, / flayed saints, with their skins on their shoulders / the *tsărani* descend into the earth / to get hold their other settlement; / Like the stars, you see them and they are no more” (Horia Bădescu 2024, p. 356).

It should be noted that most of his poetry and prose already makes up in a devoted “Author Series”, within the editorial project carried out by Școala Ardeleană Publishing House; the project of which the book we are referring to here, *Proba oglinzii / The Mirror Test*, is part.

Through this book, Horia Bădescu reveals himself once again in the power of an in-depth and subtle philosophizing upon the great and serious problems of life, of *human beingness-in-becoming*, of Being, of human participation-in(to)-Being, of the „sacredness’ utterance”, and, not lastly, of meaning and the world. The bulk of his works focuses on the idea of *human being as the creator and bearer of Meaning* in life; ultimately, the “bearer of the sacred”; seeing that man/woman “participates in the transcendence of the world, ... a world that is value; more specifically, it is an ontological value” (Horia Bădescu 2024, pp. 115; 112). Hence, in the assumed status of a writer, “as a *sapiens* belonging to the humanistic culture”, he is always accompanied by the erotetics with regard to the nowadays’ role of poetic creation. In the words of the author, “The role of poetry would be to restore to man/woman the awareness of his/her limits and to guide him/her towards a revelatory approach, towards the idea that what is important is not the definition of the *ultimate truth* but the awareness of the fact that this *ultimate truth* exists; and that he/she, the human being, participates into it - but who ever listens to the voice of poets?” (Idem, p. 114).

Beyond the accents of sadness and bitterness, in several places of the book, in reference to the real situation in which humanity in general and Romanians in particular find themselves at present, nevertheless the dominant trust persists that there is a certain strength of the *human(ity)*; and there are possibilities of its recovery, of *human’s* permanent restoration. Because, at least “every year, at the beginning of the year”, the earthlings feel, more acutely, the presence

³ Horia Bădescu. “Moromete și Kant” / “Moromete and Kant”, first published in *Curtea de la Argeș: Culture Magazine*, No. 11 (156), November 2023, p. 3.

of the “God’s eyes and hand” [again, a saying used by the writer in its metaphorical-metaphysical meaning] (Idem, p. 247). And the Romanians’ wisdom / *sapience* crystallized in a history spanning thousands of years taught them that “it is not the times that are under man, but the poor man is under the times” – as the chronicler Miron Costin ([1675] 1961, XVIII.12) wrote⁴. But also, they learned that “under the burden of the times, you can only resist if your sources remain deeply enrooted. Because, where the cross of the winds is, you need stubbornness and deep roots so that the storms don’t uproot you.” (Horia Bădescu 2024, p. 247)

Reading the essay book entitled *Proba oglinzii / The Mirror Test*, we discover something of the poet and, at the same time, of the philosopher concerned with the specifically *human beingness-in-becoming* in a phenomenological approach, in terms of the Husserlian triad: *Auslegung, Aufklärung und Verstehen* / interpretation, clarification and understanding; or even more appropriately in the manner of phenomenology of life established by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, through the stances of the metaphysical *wonder(ment)*, aesthetic *fabulation* and moral *idealization*, always dealing with the intimate connection between the *po(i)etic* and *moral* senses, which are linked to the *intellective* sense⁵.

Horia Bădescu (2024) also unveils the strength of a clear awareness as regards the significance of historical events upon “world orders” (pp. 211-216) and the “horizon of memory” (pp. 12-13); without which is impossible to understand what really matters for the *human(ity)* we are / we become.

Thus, in a phenomenological key we reach to comprehend the challenge (and, no less, the call-exhortation alike) to *wisdom*, that shines throughout every page of the book; that is even explicitly formulated as starting point in the sequence entitled “The eulogy of wisdom” (Horia Bădescu 2024, pp. 14-19).

Actually, the very title chosen for this volume, *The Mirror Test*, it itself places us in the fullness of philosophical thought; bringing back

⁴ Miron Costin. [1675] 1961. *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei de la Aaron Vodă încoace / The Chronicle of the Country of Moldova from Aaron Vodă onwards*. Edited by P. P. Panaitescu. Bucharest: Publishing House for Literature, p. 193.

⁵ See Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. 1990. *Logos and Life*. Book 3: *The Passions of the Soul and the Elements in the Ontopoiesis of Culture*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers; Idem. 1995. Measure and the Ontopoietic Self-Individualization of Life. *Phenomenological Inquiry*, Volume 19, pp. 26-51.

to the forefront one of the oldest apophthegms inscribed on the pediment of Apollo's Temple at Delphi: Γνῶθι σεαυτόν / *Gnothi seauton* ("Know thyself"); and, as a result, the exhortation-command to become capable of appreciating / of judging yourself accurately! From the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece we have to learn how much the self-knowledge does mean in a *human life*, with its ups and downs, with the achievements and joys, but also with failures and sorrows, constantly having to cope with the existential trials and, no less, with the yearning for the necessary balance in life; and this, merely by deciphering the 'meaning of a life that is worthy to be lived', as we must reflect on it, according to Socrates and Plato.

In fact, our author warns, from the beginning, the reader: "Mirroring is self-searching, the mass of absolute loneliness. Looking at yourself in the mirror is an act of courage and an exercise in moral hygiene." For, "the obsession with mirroring, above all, lies – or at least it should be – under the rigor of self-judgment" (Horia Bădescu 2024, pp. 9; 10); and this, by resorting to the expressive power of metaphor.

And it is natural that, for a creator, for a *po(i)etic* (taking the concept from the Greek ποιητής) *master* like Horia Bădescu, who is moving "in the realm of words", advocating for the *human(ity)* within man/woman; who ceaselessly meditates on 'human condition in the world' and emphasizes that "Opposing humanity to man/woman is as absurd as opposing water to a river" (Idem, p. 25). And, further, he never stops wondering about the meaning of *to be*, about the being(ness) and the Being: "*To be!* A truly fundamental problem; but, how exactly, *to be?* For each one, *to be* means something different. *To be*, therefore, in accordance with oneself [emph. ours]. To be oneself in a world that encompasses everyone with the same right to be! Almost impossible! Isn't it?" (Idem, p. 26) It is a legitimate question once, for the writer, a permanently expressed thought is that *poetry* represents "the very state of Being of the self, that is, being existing in itself, understanding through this, both the human self and the self of the universe."⁶

So, in the tonality of the call to activate "the mirror test", a whole *ontology and gnoseology* emerge, being grounded on ethics and aesthetics, inasmuch as our own moral and *po(i)etic* senses will not

⁶ Horia Bădescu, [1994] 2015. "Poezie și Ființă" / "Poetry and Being". In vol. *Dacă Orfeu / If Orpheus*. Cluj-Napoca: Limes Publishing House, p. 7.

have atrophied – considering the artificialization (and together with it the shallowing) of ‘being in the world’ that is facilitated, even imposed, by the aggressive process of digitalization in which it seems we have become captives during the first quarter of the 21st century. And they stand as foundation for Horia Bădescu’s *concern for the human(ity) within man/woman*, for the world we live in nowadays. The author relentlessly expresses it, trying to awaken the human consciousness and, no less, to urge it to self-protecting and self-cultivating; by exploring the metaphorical but charged with lucidity language.

Beyond any contradictions of his guiding thought, taking into account the truthfulness of a very suggestive erotetic verse belonging to Friedrich Hölderlin, from the last elegy *Bread and Wine*: “what poets are for in a poverty-stricken time?”⁷, yet, our author exhorts and encourages us, somehow together with the German poet-philosopher, to “Seek out and find our own, however far it may be.”⁸

The architectonics of the book we are focusing on is structured in three sections, as follows: “The Mirror Test”; “Nasreddin’s *Kayak*”; and “The Safety Net” (“The Seat Belt”). In the essayist’s own metaphorical style, each of them integrates reflections, comments, arguments, etc. on topics of interest in the socio-cultural area considered within the experienced historical fact; and everything is unfolding in connection with themes in the tonality of the intention conveyed from the start.

Many ideas, concerns, questions, doubts, worries, attitudes towards life’s and literature’s happenings, either admirable or otherwise factual loaded with meanings’ encounters – even though exclusively in the peculiar reading span; and especially within the Romanian language’s beingness –, find their place in the very own interpretation of Horia Bădescu; contributing to the development of an allegorical exposure (eventually, the Tymienieckan phenomenological “fabulation”); and, by consequence, facilitating the development of understanding and explanation of his overarching thought, of his core aesthetical and ethical principle behind the entire structure; always in-to the “idealization” (so speaking in Tymieniecka’s ontopoietical terms, too).

⁷ See Friedrich Hölderlin. 1801. *Brod und Wein / Bread and Wine*, the 14th line of 7th stanza: “wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?” / “Who wants poets in lean years?” (Most often being translated as “What are poets for in a destitute time?”)

⁸ Idem, the 6th line of 3rd stanza: “Daß ein Eigenes wir suchen, so weit es auch ist.”

The essay entitled “The Sheep of Thought” [paraphrasing Jean Szlamowicz⁹] is very telling in this regard (see Horia Bădescu 2024, pp. 125-183).

The reader senses a dominant thread that can be uttered in the simple short Romanian wording, in accordance with a thousand-year-old tradition that finds its roots in the Geto-Dacians’ spirituality, and that sounds as an exhortation and commandment alike: “Be a total and harmonious human being!” The *dictum* means precisely that “you have to be born not just once, but several times in the same lifetime. Not denying the one you were, but completing yourself every time. By adding you(rself) to yourself. By reborn in a different way; but, nevertheless, always being the same” (Idem, p. 222).

We would like hereinafter to highlight that, within the book, a pertinent analysis is made on the *Eminescu case*, under the heading: “The Defamation of Eminescu” (pp. 310-347) - which says a lot about the degrading level of some noisy people but certainly otherwise anonymous values.

Sine ira et studio, Horia Bădescu approaches the matter that seems to be obstinately practiced from time to time against the “Absolute” in the Romanian spirituality, as the brilliant Italian philologist Rosa Del Conte¹⁰ called *the one* representing a pinnacle of creative genius, Mihai Eminescu. In fact, the issue at hand is that of defaming the supreme symbol, the *Archaeus* of the Romanian culture; *the one* who is recognized as being “the cultural consciousness (that was given to Romanians), from the beginning to the ultimate speculation”; “a *dārśanik*”/ the one who sees *through* and *beyond* the unseen, and, at the same time, “a *kavi*”/ poet-sage [so using the Bengali terminology]; *the one* whose “personal synthesis of poetic creation is also a synthesis of what one might call Romanian spirituality”; *the one* who, “in the plurivalence of orientations as a philosopher, like a giant writer, has bestowed us reflections and ideas of surprising originality and profundity”¹¹.

⁹ See Jean Szlamowicz. 2022. *Les moutons de la pensée. Nouveaux conformismes idéologiques*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

¹⁰ See Rosa Del Conte. 1961. *Mihai Eminescu o dell'Assoluto*. Modena: Società tipografica editrice modenese.

¹¹ We quoted the opinions of some connoisseurs who have appropriated Eminescu’s work in its essence, such as Constantin Noica, Amita Bhowe, Alain Guillemeu, and Edgar Papu.

Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889) is at issue, *the one* about whom Emil Cioran¹² says that “even a Buddha could be jealous of”. Or, as Horia Bădescu (2024, p. 283) highlights, “being one of the greatest Romantic poets of universal lyricism”, and “like them”, Eminescu is “the poetic expression of the transcendent, an ontological idea, if we can say so”; and for Romanians, he certainly is “our safety rock, our ‘seat belt’ against the accidents of a history to which we fall prey with suicidal unconsciousness and carelessness” (Ibid, p. 288). The author quite rightly recalls herein the words of Mircea Eliade¹³: “As long as there is a single copy of Eminescu’s poems somewhere in the world, the identity of the Romanian nation has been *projected into eternity*”; seeing that Mihai Eminescu is the *pillar of defense* thanks to whom the “Romanian nation earned its right to immortality”.¹⁴

Critically and sometimes ironically towards self-proclaimed intellectuals, extremely vociferous (as scribblers and/or dull speakers) vehicles of inconsistent characters, on the one hand, and on the other, with deep respect and gratitude, even with love towards honest scholars relating to the Eminescianism, Horia Bădescu (2024, p. 311) points out the need of a right judgment; noticing the unjustified slippages of those who manifest “hatred, ill-will, obtuseness, intellectual inadequacy or encomiastic debauchery and aberrant wandering. Since defamation has been often committed by those who go crazy in their projections and praises, too”. (Ibidem)

Under the seal of comprehending the value of Horace’s famous verse: *est modus in rebus*¹⁵ - in fact, a synthesis of the antique Greek philosophy of medianity -, distancing himself from detractors and flatterers alike, Horia Bădescu assumes the balance in commenting on and appreciating the work and personality of Mihai Eminescu; who “needs only to be read with an open mind and an open heart”, as the writer stresses (Ibidem).

¹² See Emil Cioran. 1936. *Schimbară la faţă a României / The Transfiguration of Romania*. Bucharest: Vremea Publishing House.

¹³ Mircea Eliade. [1975] 2000. “Postfaţă” la reeditarea volumului Mihai Eminescu, *Poesii*. “Ediție de pribegie”, 1949, Freiburg / “Afterword” to the reissued 1949 volume: Mihai Eminescu, *Poems*: “Exile Edition”. Our reference is to the anastatic edition republished in 2000: Mihai Eminescu, *Poesii*. Edited by Mircea Eliade. Norcross, GA: Criterion Publishing.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Quintus Horatius Flaccus. 41-40 BC. *Sermones / Satires*, I. 1, 106.

Otherwise, the selection of Eminescu's own verses as a kind of prologue for each of the four sequences of the essay we are concentrating on is highly suggestive. Thus, we are reminded of the lyrics belonging to the Poet, as follows: "1. (*Everybody is much flattered / If you are not his superior.*) ... 2. (*They will say that all is wicked who but little understands*) ... 3. (*Furthermore, they will endeavour to anatomize your morals, / To find blemishes and mischiefs, petty quarrels*) ... [and] 4. (*High above the rest, a pygmy will then set out to discourse, / Not to emphasize your merits but to praise his own, of course, / For your name is just a pretext. That is all you can expect*)"¹⁶.

These lyrics say it all; even more than the all, intuited by their exceptional creator, who had such a tragic destiny...

Let us always remember the *paragon* of the Romanian culture, Mihai Eminescu, with due reverence; to remember the 'essential Eminescu', with whom we must "nurture ourselves, so as not to remain hungry forever", as Constantin Noica draws our attention¹⁷.

Regarding the "Eminescu case", all that remains for us is to express the exhortation to get to the heart of Mihai Eminescu's thinking and to understand, at least, something of his poetry and prose, of his journalism and, above all, of his 44 handwritten notebooks that bring to light the remarkable philosopher that he was and he is. And thus, we'll succeed to stay away from the intellectual deficiency and moral littleness of denigrators who, not being able to produce any value, they just endeavour to trout out themselves from anonymity by clinging to the name of a great personality.

According to Horia Bădescu (2024, p. 275), "let us remember the one [who will] never be forgotten and [who is] the never-to-be-forgotten one. If the hatreds of the world and the times have brainwashed by the memory of what we are, let's remember ourselves who we truly are. [And for this] Let us constantly remember how much we need Eminescu".

Paying attention to the author's talent for exploring the metaphorical networks of the *logos* in-between its harsh pragmatic meanings (due to some not at all encouraging present realities) and its

¹⁶ Mihai Eminescu. [1881] 2004. *Scrisoarea I / First Epistle*. Translated by Leon Levițchi. In vol. *Poezii / Poems*. Bucharest: Teora Press, pp. 200-211.

¹⁷ Constantin Noica. 1992. *Introducere la miracolul eminescian / Introduction to the Eminescian Miracle*. Bucharest: Humanitas Press.

sacrality (thanks to the freedom of human specific idealization), we end these marginalia of an exercise in honesty with oneself to which *Proba oglinzii / The Mirror Test*, after all, invites. And it is an invitation that proves to be very useful. Since, in its entirety, the book is a *florilegium* of reflections on the veritable questions the contemporary man/woman - who risks losing the human(ity) within himself/herself - has to meditate on.

Therefore, in our trying to talk about this book – as Horia Bădescu (2024, p. 27) himself teaches us that it would mean “to reflect on one of the possible ways of expressing one’s own self” -, all we have left to say is: May the reader have the genuine *hedone* in its pure philosophical denotation (in terms of the Epicureanism’s “pleasure of the mind”¹⁸); the *pleasure*, even *happiness*, of meeting the essayist’s insight, which fully conveys a *life lesson* able to turn into an *intellectual*, *aesthetic* and *moral* challenge of constant scrutiny-meditation supported by the delight of reading. Because, undoubtedly, the reader will grasp, at last, the joy of a real *kairic* life experience to which Horia Bădescu urges us: a *deeply human experience* that, eventually, each of us needs at least from time to time.

¹⁸ In *Letter to Menoeceus* (c.300 BC), Epicurus emphasizes *hedone* / ἡδονή as “the highest good” and a means to a fulfilling life, to *eudaimonía* / εὐδαιμονία, being founded on *phrónēsis* / φρόνησις (the practical wisdom). See Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Book X [128] et seqq.

