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HEGEL, HAITI AND FANON

TOWARDS A DIALECTIC OF RECOGNITION

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'CAUSE SYNTHESIS NEVER STILL. READING CHARLIE JOHNS'S "A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY IN 100 PAGES"

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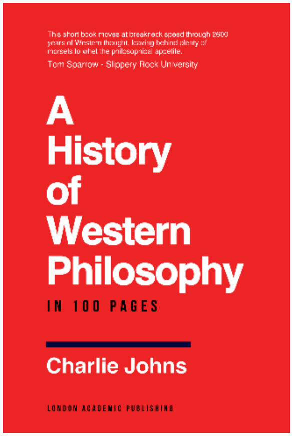
Abstract. Reading Charlie Johns's *History of Philosophy in 100 Pages*[1] is like stepping onto a street where Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Meillassoux walk beside you. The book refuses the stillness of catalogue entries, offering instead concepts as living "signatures"—each a doorway rather than a lid. Motion, speculative realism, and hermeneutical openness combine so that thinking is simultaneously historical, ethical, and cosmologically aware. Brevity becomes a vehicle for circulation: thought can be pocketed, read on a train, or left as a quiet provocation. Philosophy is restored as public, operative, and ethically alert, a Swiss army knife of ideas for anyone who wants to do things with thought.



[1] Charlie Johns is a British philosopher, author, and musician based in Lincoln, UK. He is affiliated with Goldsmiths, University of London, where his work explores the intersection of German Idealism, speculative realism, and contemporary science.

His publications comprise *After Speculative Realism* (Bloomsbury, 2025), *Hegel & Speculative Realism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), *Object-Oriented Dialectics* (Mimesis Press, 2022), and *The Irreducible Reality of the Object* (Springer, 2020), among others. In fiction, *Malchus* (2017), *Outlook* (2019), and *The Nettleham Gentlemen's Club* (Wipf & Stock, 2021)—works noted by authors Julian Barnes and D.M. Thomas for their intelligence and originality.

Johns has interviewed public intellectuals including Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek, Graham Harman, and Maurizio Ferraris. His writing spans both philosophical inquiry and narrative imagination, with a distinctive voice grounded in conceptual clarity and a fascination with the limits of thought.

Book Review
Charlie Johns. 2025. *A History of Philosophy in 100 Pages*. UK: London Academic Publishing.

Keywords: Charlie Johns, history of philosophy, Hegel, speculative realism, arch-fossil, residual realism

FROM HEGEL TO THE BUS STOP. THE PUBLIC LIFE OF PHILOSOPHY

One thing held fast: the book hooked me from the very first pages and didn't let go. Charlie Johns's opening gesture (Johns 2025, iii), waving at those "wealthy Englishmen" of Analytic Philosophy who mistook abstraction for depth and precision for truth, tamed ideas into diagrams and turned wonder into administration. They could spend years, he notes, proving numbers could be reduced to logical classes, all while the pulse of lived experience quietly faded.

Well, that's a wry jab, and here is a text that utterly delights: a rebuke at abstraction masquerading as insight and, not least, a polite incision through the skin of academic habits. Inasmuch as the author spares neither those of 1900–1950 nor all those who had long monopolised discourse, spinning truths into knots and reducing the world's hum to silence.

His remark, then, isn't gossip; it is a genuine declaration of method. Philosophy, he reminds us, was never meant to be an inheritance of privilege—a safe domain for fastidious exercises. It was a public act of thinking aloud. This book restores that urgency. It prizes development over display, movement over monument. Johns thinks historically—like a Hegelian—but writes briskly. Ideas step from the lectern, dust off the chalk, and start speaking anew. From that first note, the reader senses reversal—the history of thought ceases to be endured and turns into something to be lived, questioned, and occasionally laughed with.

Charlie Johns is like a man standing halfway between a library and a street corner—one foot among the thinkers, the other on the pavement where these ideas move, collide, and mutate. You can almost hear Hegel in the background—his monumental system here newly recast. Re-tuned to the rhythm of the present. What Hegel called the historical and logical dialectic of knowledge manifests, in Johns's hands, as an organic continuity—an intelligence that learns its own movement by never closing upon itself. "Intelligence (and intelligibility)", he observes, "is something continually developing, complexifying and changing" (Johns 2025, vi). This line could serve as the book's secret spine. Every figure becomes, for him, a mutation of this intelligence (*Geist / Verstehen*): Plato's Idea, Descartes's dualism, Spinoza's substance, Kant's rational architecture, Hegel's historic reason, through Heidegger's clearing and Deleuze's difference, until Meillassoux's arche-fossil and the philosophy of radical exteriority.

The aim, in the end, drifts beyond encyclopaedia toward synthesis. He offers what he calls "signatures of the concept"—apertures into living disputes, each signature a doorway rather than a lid. All the above resist the stillness of catalogue entries; they are unfolding "signatures of the concept", each an indispensable turn in thought's long self-discovery.

What he lays down in this hundred-page *History* begins thus where the museum tour ends—in a series of provocations and a quiet argument with the curators. His writing bridges speculative and immediate with a voice that never forgets the reader. Sentences feel like small lanterns, each lighting a passage you can walk through on a crowded platform or a sleepless night. Read aloud on a train, left on a lamppost "with the words *L'ami du peuple - Friend of the People* scribbled across" (Johns 2025, iii), or folded into a pocket—these pages want to be found as much as they want to argue.

Johns begins his compact account like someone who knows the routes of a city by heart and, at the same time, delights in cutting new alleys through it. It does not take long before the reader realises the narrative is a sequence of awakenings. Each thinker responds to what the present has not yet understood, and each idea, however ancient, feels vividly new. Amid its brevity, there is largeness. His method moves by compression, not reduction; the line between summary and insight is continually crossed until both dissolve into clarity.

If Hegel gives the architecture, realism gives him gravity. He calls this a "philosophical realism" history has too easily downplayed: less a flirtation with the abstract; instead, an ethical stance—a call to think beyond the human without abandoning the human altogether. Even when he writes of "reality beyond consciousness", he does so with an awareness that the gesture itself reshapes what consciousness can be. This is what makes the book feel contemporary: more than its references, it is the refusal of distance—a live, breathing act of thinking aloud rather than an exercise in ceremonial precision.

II. Breviloquence, or How to Fit Infinity into a Pocket

From the outside, the book is tidy — a tidy contents page, three-stage architecture, and a promise: to give us a map in place of catalogue. 1. *First Metaphysics*; 2. *Anti-Metaphysics* (*Vitalism, Structuralism & Cognition*); 3. *The New Metaphysics* (*Post-Structuralism & Speculative Realism*). That is not shelving; it is a pedagogic choreography that ushers the reader through questions that build on one another.

Part I sets the stage and gently reminds us why Hegel matters to Johns' method. The brief reading of Hegel on pages 11–12 marks a key juncture. Motion is restored: logic is no longer an abstract and immovable science—it is transformed into a dynamic itinerary; intelligence is a historical, unfolding power; the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* show to be two faces of a single process in which the implicit becomes explicit and identities are forged against their opposites. Surpassing any decorative role, Hegel stands as the engine powering Charlie Johns's "signatures of the concept" method: concepts do things, and their doing is temporal and public.

Part II is the book's corrective pulse. What looks at first like a detour emerges soon as a demonstration that metaphysics has been challenged and enriched by life, language and mind. Vitalism, in Johns' account, remains a philosophical response to modern, electrified intensity rather than mere relic of romanticism, *i.e.* the insistence that life and process matter philosophically, both as objects for explanation and as forces that reconfigure explanation itself. Structuralism is treated with the same rare mix of sympathy and exactness. The author recognises its analytic courage (to find patterns and orders beneath the immediate) while also showing how it invites a counter-move: the insistence on difference that breaks totalities into productive singularities. Taken together, they form a wider arc that bends toward post-structuralist reinvention.

Johns thus refuses the caricature that continental and analytic currents are irreconcilable: his book borrows the clarity of analytic attention and welds it to a continental appetite for scope. This is why he gives Wittgenstein (and the broader analytic impulse) a careful, if measured, nod. His *Foreword* explicitly disclaims wholesale negligence toward Analytic Philosophy and names G.E. Moore's common-sense realism and Wittgenstein's later "language-games" and "meaning-as-use" as refreshing counterpoints—small admissions that balance his broader continental leaning. It is less a gesture of inclusivity than a structural principle: he wants tools from every quarter so philosophy can be put to work.

Part III is where Charlie Johns lets his speculative realist impulse take a more nuanced shape, and where the book's argumentative texture thickens. The headings—"Against Universal Knowledge", "Against Reason", "Against Universal Truth"—are not slogans. They are diagnoses of what intellectual habits have outlived their usefulness in a world of emergent complexity. The anti-universal turn is approached with discernment, while a critical tension remains: Hegelian thought returns here as the sense that histories and systems give forms in which novelty can be recognised, before it surpasses and moves beyond them. The engagement "against reason" is thus more nuance than negation: it is the claim that reason must be historicised, inflated, and conversant with contingency if it is to remain a living instrument.

In the short cluster that follows, speculative realism comes fully into focus: Meillassoux's arche-fossil and radical contingency, the Antecedence Principle, cosmological extinction, withdrawal and vicarious causation. These cosmologies operate as carefully deployed moves. The arche-fossil becomes a litmus strip for the book's central question (what claims can we make about reality that are not merely anthropocentric?), and radical contingency presses us to imagine a world that could have been otherwise, thereby unsettling old claims of necessary, human-centred finality. Johns treats these ideas seriously and didactically: short, lucid expositions give the reader enough purchase to follow the contemporary debate without losing the work's compact tempo.

III. A Hundred Pages Before the World Blinks

The narrative closes by returning to John's philosophical centre: realism, this time conceived as residual insight, as what remains after systems: a persistent trace of reality itself (the surviving sense of reality after abstraction). In *Conclusion: Residual Realism*, he asks how to speak of "the real" after centuries of philosophical efforts to reduce it to thought. Drawing on one of his earlier books, *The Irreducible Reality of the Object* (2020), he argues that realism has long been philosophy's unspoken embarrassment. From Plato's imperfect forms to Descartes' incertitude and Kant's unknowable *Ding an sich*, thinkers have repeatedly fenced the real within the limits of consciousness. Residual realism, then, is what survives every time: a remainder that resists being assimilated into pure objectivity or pure subjectivity. Even the most rigorous science mediates the world—telescopes, microscopes, images—so the *in-itself* is always translated into *for-us*.

His realism is, therefore, paradoxical: committed to the real because it eludes capture. Every attempt to model, define or imagine reality takes place within transcendental conditions that make appearance possible but never present the thing in full. Quoting

Kant, he underlines that these conditions exist outside the world, yet bring worldhood into view. Between perception and the perceived, there remains "a shadow which can never be jumped on" (Johns 2005, 95).

The result is a gentle re-enchantment. Charlie Johns resists naïve objectivity as well as total idealism, restoring the dignity of the unknown. Reality is a persistent horizon of difference—a residue that thought cannot exhaust. Here, his Hegelian and speculative realist inheritances meet: the dialectic continues without closure; the object remains beyond full grasp.

In the *Post-Script: Tellurian Philosophy*, speculative thought comes down to Earth. Asking what remains if the cosmos outlives us, he aligns Meillassoux and Brassier with geology: systems unfold under a dying sun. Rather than despair, Johns reframes philosophy as a modest search for traces of the real in objects, anxieties, quarks and strings alike. The planet is as much environment as the condition of reflection.

This leads to a central image: the relative-absolute object. The Earth integrates what enters it (meteor, satellite, life)—absolute in integration yet relative to cosmic contingency. Life (prokaryotes to humans) is absolute within terrestrial conditions and relative to the wider universe. The pocket calculator illustrates this (Johns 2025, 99): its circuitry embodies an "absolute" logic of numbers. However, remove its battery and the absolute collapses—mathematical ideality depends on physical time, space and energy. Universals bear the signature of their medium.

Discussion closes by merging metaphysics and ecology: the Earth, like an organism, would "own its death" through its own physics. Philosophy's endurance lies then in travelling to the cosmos and returning humbled to tellurian roots. Humanity may be brief, but the questions and structures that make reality real will persist until the end of tellurian life.

As I see it, the most intriguing upshot in this volume is hermeneutical. Johns is understatedly Gadamerian without an explicit use of Gadamer's terms. The posture is the same—a philosophical style that accepts tradition as interlocutor, not tyrant; a confidence that understanding is a fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), historical, present, and future rather than a mere retrieval of lost meanings. Where Hegel supplies historical motion and Gadamer supplies dialogical openness, Johns supplies a readable way of doing both. The result is a tempered universalism: while avoiding claims of a single definitive perspective, it highlights particular forms of conceptual labour. Hegelian historicity, Wittgensteinian use, or the realist commitment to the object can be stitched together to produce thinking that is public, operative and ethically alert. Universalism is defined in a nutshell, in the sense of disciplined willingness and engagement with multiple traditions without claiming imperial closure or dominance.

It all began with the sound of glass breaking—the polite glass case around philosophy itself—and achieved a surge: a small combustion of thought refusing to stay immobile. What remains after the final page is ongoing circulation, not closure. Brevity here performs a gesture akin to what philosophy itself has always sought: the passage from multiplicity to coherence without surrendering the pulse of contradiction. Briefly said, Johns gives us a compact, Hegel-shaped map with room for detours—a Swiss army knife of ideas for anyone who wants to do things with thought.

HEGEL, HAITI AND FANON: TOWARDS A DIALECTIC OF RECOGNITION

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Abstract. In her now seminal work, Susan Buck-Morss links the Haitian Revolution with the slave writings of Hegel, positing that the revolt in Haiti constitutes a moment of dialectical import. She is not, however, the only dialectician to have read the Haitian Revolution through Hegel's master–slave dialectic. Indeed, Frantz Fanon's canonical *Black Skin, White Mask* also made reference to such events, although Buck-Morss' engagement with him, in her work, is sparse. In this article, then, through confronting Buck-Morss' account with Fanon, I argue that Buck-Morss' argument loses sight of the material utilised in the master/slave abstraction, namely the actual lived experiences of colonial subjects, thereby glossing over the particularity of the material. In contrast, Fanon's account reincorporates the concrete situatedness into the master/slave dialectic, thereby surpassing typical limitations of philosophical abstraction, which has concrete political implications.

Keywords: dialectics, Fanon, Hegel, Haiti, Buck-Morss, revolution, master, slave

A Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue
Frantz Fanon

The crossroads at which Haiti and dialectics both lie reflect the charged relationship between the latter and decolonisation more generally. On the one hand, dialectical thought has often been relied upon by ambitious theorists zealously waiting to transform existing social orders, with the Marxist tradition being the most influential instance of such an approach. Simultaneously, the conservative potential of Hegel's philosophy has been seen as merely attempting to simply justify the *status quo*, primarily due to the Eurocentric and largely linear, determinist teleology found within both Hegel and Marx's works. In seeking to reaffirm the importance of the universal within politics, and thus echoing these latter sentiments, contemporary dialectical thinker, Slavoj Žižek, has rather provocatively urged those on the political left to openly espouse Eurocentrism as opposed to relying upon a politics of difference, most commonly referred to as "identity politics" within contemporary political circles (Zizek 2019). However, such a sharp return to the universal may hail more woes than cheers if we do not carefully consider what such a move constitutes; to begin to ask such questions is the driving force of this essay, then.

One means to begin considering such issues lies at the junction between Haiti and dialectics, namely in Susan Buck-Morss' essay *Hegel and Haiti* (2000). Within said essay, Buck-Morss traces the link between the Haitian revolution and Hegel's *master-slave* dialectic – more appropriately translated as *lord-bondsman* dialectic – and argues for the idea that "Hegel's spirit is tainted with the blood and suffering of enslaved Africans," as Walter Mignolo describes it. Notably, Žižek celebrates Buck-Morss' work as "the most succinct formula of communism", thus aligning Buck-Morss with Žižek's own championing of the universal (Zizek 2019). In order to properly understand the potential problems of returning to the universal, however, it will prove necessary to look beyond Buck-Morss' resurrection of the universal. In other words, we need to look at actual postcolonial works, namely those that deal with the universal within the context of colonialism. Therefore, in this essay, I put Buck-Morss' account into conversation with Frantz Fanon's reformulation of the lord-bondsman dialectic in his work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). The consequence of this is twofold: firstly, it provides a point of critique for Buck-Morss from the perspective of an actual lived experience of Black existence; secondly, it places Fanon's theoretical stance into the context of Buck-Morss' historical analysis, allowing for a cross-temporal dialogue between these two dialecticians.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: in the first half, I introduce and summarise Buck-Morss' seminal work. In the second half, I introduce Fanon's text, discussing it in relation to Buck-Morss' paper, before concluding by reaffirming Fanon's importance to the political questions that Buck-Morss' work brings with it.

"Hegel and Haiti"

The premise of *Hegel and Haiti* is the eye-catching claim that Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic, arguably the most famous passage of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), was directly inspired by the contemporary Haitian Revolution. The argument, Buck-Morss declares, has seldom been made, and even less so has it been investigated by Hegel scholars: "One wonders why the topic Hegel and Haiti has for so long been ignored. Not only have Hegel scholars failed to answer this question, they have failed, for the past two hundred years, even to ask it" (Buck-Morss 2000, 849). Buck-Morss supports her claim that Hegel was familiar with the Haitian Revolution by referring to the fact that the revolution was ongoing while Hegel was writing *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and that he was an avid reader of such periodicals like the German *Minerva* and the English *The Morning Post* at the time, both of which covered the affairs in Haiti in depth. Buck-Morss argues that the conclusion to be drawn is that Hegel, who was at the time engaged in theorising through the historical project of freedom, was influenced, if not compelled, by his reading of journalistic depictions of a contemporary slave rebellion that she conceives as a concrete unfolding of the lord-bondsman dialectic.

Buck-Morss does not limit herself to such circumstantial pieces of evidence. However, she also points to specific nuances found in the relevant passage of Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* to highlight two aspects of his dialectic to further support her claim. Firstly, then, Buck-Morss points to Hegel's insistence that the two individuals initially confront each other in a "life-and-death struggle" in which "it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won" (Hegel 1977, 114). In other words, freedom can only be obtained through risking one's life. Secondly, Hegel gives priority to the bondsman in this dialectic because the bondsman, through his subjugation by the lord, transforms himself into an active individual with self-consciousness. The once bold and determined lord, meanwhile, slides into a sloth of self-absorption through his reliance on the bondsman's labour. Buck-Morss contends that both of these aspects resonate with the Haitian experience of revolution, from the flag that reads "Liberty or Death" – under which Saint-Dominguans overthrew Napoleon's army – which reflects the Hegelian encounter of "life-and-death struggle" (Buck-Morss 2000, 838)[1], to the fact that the Haitian slaves gained their freedom through their efforts *alone*, that is, without merely depending upon the generosity of others or simple formal recognition: "Those who once acquiesced to slavery demonstrate their humanity when they are willing to risk death rather than remain subjugated" (Buck-Morss 2000, 848). The significance of the Haitian slaves working alone is related to Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic because, "according to Hegel, it was the slave himself who was responsible for his lack of freedom by initially choosing life over liberty, mere self-preservation" (Buck-Morss 2000, 849), along with the fact that the lord's turn to self-absorption mirrors the ignorance of the colonisers with regards to the colonised, that is, the Haitian people. Concerning the oft-cited Marxist criticism that Hegel never actually included the step to revolutionary practice, Buck-Morss asserts that "the slaves of Saint-Domingue were, as Hegel knew, taking the step for him" (Buck-Morss 2000, 848 [Footnote 84]).

Buck-Morss' interpretation docks the Haitian Revolution amidst the late 18th-century revolutions and stresses its radical character. Slaves occupied by revolutionary political action, not mere rebellion against their owners, aimed at liberation from slavery, according to this interpretation. Through this practice, they are said to rise above mere life and have thus enabled political freedom. Therefore, in a fashion similar to Kant's interpretation of the world-historical meaning of the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution shows the possibility, and thus universality, of freedom within the context of colonialism:

> The actual and successful revolution of Caribbean slaves against their masters is the moment when the dialectical logic of recognition becomes visible as the thematic of world history, the story of the universal realisation of freedom… Theory and reality converged at this historical moment. Or, to put it in Hegelian language, the rational-freedom-became real. (Buck-Morss 2000, 852)

THE ONTOLOGICAL FLAW

For those familiar with Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), it likely comes as a surprise that Buck-Morss' *Hegel and Haiti* has but one acknowledgement of Fanon, and it is *only* a footnote at that (See footnote 89 of Buck-Morss 2000, 849. This is despite the fact that the two are dealing with the same dialectic – that of recognition – and their analyses are both situated within the context of race, slavery and colonisation. Furthermore, given what Buck-Morss is grappling with in her text, namely the issues of insurgency and universal futures, neglecting a thinker who can appropriately be described as insurgent, be it in his personal life or academically, a thinker whose work strove to dialectically overcome the historical priority of the universal, would seem, at first glance at least, to be a rather damning misjudgement on her side. That is not to suggest that the two share much beyond these common research interests; however, for instance, whereas Buck-Morss acknowledges the bloodbath of white-skinned individuals as *only* a retreat from the universal, Fanon instead sees in such violence the "only work" by those colonised that could ever lead to the universal. This is because, as articulated by Anthony Peter Spanakos, "it is only through violence, through the first drops of the coloniser's blood, that the colonised recognise that the distance between them and the coloniser has been a socio-historical product of a process of 'epidermalising' the coloniser's norms" (Spanakos 1998, 150). In other words, there is something supposedly distinct that juxtaposes the colonised and coloniser, at least so says the coloniser, but through the violence the colonised "discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler" (Fanon 2001, 35). The fundamental difference between Fanon and Buck-Morss, then, lies in what Fanon adds to Kojève's classical Marxist reading of the lord-bondsman dialectic: the requirement of black, and subsequently colonial, ontology.

Within *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon effectively argues that "ontology is made impossible" under colonisation, a result of the presence of "an impurity or a flaw that prohibits any ontological explanation" (Fanon 2008, 89-90). In other words, the two abstract individuals in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* are not abstract in any way; rather, they carry with them the burden of a colonial-racial history of which this "flaw" is a reminder: one is a human being, the other is not. In this sense, the colonised is overdetermined from beyond, and thereby forcibly entering a struggle they are guaranteed not to succeed in. One instance of this is seen in the chapter entitled "The Black Man and Language", in which Fanon explains how language, in the colonial context, is utilised as an instrument for instilling discipline rather than a means to legitimate communication. In the Haitian context, French becomes a marker of identity; one who speaks French well is regarded as white, while the white French person assumes any black person speaking in French will do so incorrectly. As Fanon writes:

> To speak gobbledygook to a black man is insulting, for it means he is the gook. Yet, we'll be told, there is no intention to wilfully give offence. Ok, but it is precisely this absence of will–this offhand manner; this casualness; and the ease with which they classify him, imprison him at an uncivilised and primitive level–that is insulting. (Fanon 2008, 15)

As a consequence, Fanon writes, "it is already safe to say that to speak gobbledygook means: 'You, stay where you are'" (Fanon 2008, 17). If, however, the colonised is able to demonstrate an expertise in French, they may indeed receive a kind of praise, although not one that invites much hope. Fanon summons up the instance in which he was enthusiastically told in response to his fluent French, "Basically, you're a white man" (Fanon 2008, 21).

The implication, then, is that the recognition of "the Other" in the vein of Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic is impossible within colonial contexts because the terms of the recognition are set by the colonisers, and these terms do not reflect the situation at hand. After all, most values that can be said to be "shared" are, in reality, impositions of the coloniser. Or, as Fanon writes:

> From time to time [the black man] fights for liberty and justice, but it's always for a white liberty and a white justice, in other words, for values secreted by his masters. (Fanon 2008, 196)

The Haitian freedom fighter, then, cannot be recognised as a self-consciousness, in the language of Hegel, but rather is always regarded as either white or black, but black in relation to the white man, not for-itself. This is a result of the colonised having no "ontological resistance" to support them because, as Fanon writes, "[t]heir metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished" (Fanon 2008, 90). Without ontological resistance, the colonised is doomed to a "zone of nonbeing" (Fanon 2008, xiii) – the aforementioned condition of being regarded as white or black in relation to white *solely* – and fails to appear at the position of reciprocity that is a necessary precondition of Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic. Fanon writes:

> For Hegel, there is reciprocity; here, the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. Likewise, the slave here can in no way be equated with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work. The black slave wants to be like his master. Therefore, he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and toward the object. Here, the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object. (Fanon 2008, 195; *See* also Footnote 10)

The actual relation between slaves and masters in colonial societies, then, lacks the basis for recognition that is presupposed in the Hegelian dialectic. Consequently, this ontological flaw means that subjective and independent action by those colonised is entirely necessary before the dialectic can be overcome; politics of difference thus become a crucial step toward the universal. Otherwise, the colonised concedes to an identity dictated by the terms of the coloniser, meaning that the colonised does not realise their freedom through the creation of their own values. Recognition, then, does not entail a victory for the colonised, at least in this rendition. Briefly turning to *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), we see this point come to the fore more readily than in *Black Skin, White Masks*. There Fanon writes:

> The struggle for freedom does not give back to the national culture its former values and shapes; this struggle, which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men, cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture. After the conflict, there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonised man. (Fanon 2001, 197-98).

For Fanon, successfully achieving recognition, and thus freedom, requires *action* explicitly, as opposed to reaction (that is, by entering a dialectic of recognition on terms set down by the coloniser), and in the case of colonialism, the most appropriate action is violence: to be merely recognised by the colonised is to concede to an identity that is constructed by the colonised, while to act is to exceed that identity, thereby producing a new identity and achieving freedom. In contrast, Buck-Morss does not investigate the insight that the ontological flaw generates. Instead, she reads into Hegel's silence the reality of the Haitian revolution, thereby positing that where Hegel's dialectic does not match the experienced reality, "the slaves of Saint-Domingue were, as Hegel knew, taking that step for him". Fanon does not treat Hegel in the same vein; he acutely interrogates the missing step, as opposed to providing a conclusion for Hegel that was never found in his actual writing. Interestingly, Fanon comes to this realisation after turning towards the notion of labour within the lord-bondsman dialectic, an aspect of said dialectic that Buck-Morss never discusses in her seminal work. I shall not discuss this decision of Buck-Morss to neglect the aspect of labour any further because it would only amount to speculation on my part, however, that Fanon comes to this insight after turning to labour makes a great deal of sense: as he argues, the ontological flaw lies in the colonised turning to the coloniser, not labour, and consequently seeking recognition on grounds produced by the coloniser.

THE PARTICULAR IS THE UNIVERSAL

The ramifications of this difference in approach begin to explain the contrasting conclusions that both Fanon and Buck-Morss come to. For instance, as a result of not probing the Hegelian dialectic, Buck-Morss aligns herself with the same measurement for progress as Hegel, that being freedom solely in a *formal* sense. This is seen in her celebration of the Constitution of 1801, written by Toussaint, which she highlights for its universalising content rather than for any impact it had (Buck-Morss 2000, 834).

Fanon, meanwhile, accords such formal freedom with the reason why slavery was abrogated from above and "the black man was acted upon" (Fanon 2008, 194). Fanon's point, then, is two-fold: firstly, that the actual impact of freedom is what one should strive for; and secondly, that formal freedom and claims of universal equality, while beautiful words, are even worse than mere empty promises–they are actively dangerous in the sense that they create an impediment along the road to the actual universal by passing on conflicts with the status of particular.

Secondly, Fanon's analysis can be said to, in a sense, pre-empt the sort of criticism of John Rawls put forward by Jamaican philosopher Charles W. Mills, a criticism pertaining to our starting point in questions of humanity (Mills 2005). If we take our starting point in questions of recognition as one that places us on equal footing, then we would be right to follow Buck-Morss' lead of championing universal humanity. However, if we see struggle as a necessary stepping-stone towards recognition, and most importantly, if we see that struggle as being the successor of a necessary pre-dialectical struggle that is one-sided, then that will inform our understanding of the later struggle. In other words, if we agree with Fanon in recognising the struggle for recognition as the heir to another struggle, one that already has the agents of the later struggle on unequal footing, then we cannot claim that the individuals of the later struggle are abstract, thus transforming our understanding of the later struggle in the fashion Fanon posits. Fanon thereby takes the ontological dominance of whiteness as something that must be recognised and resisted in the later struggle, less the universal claims to freedom be repeatedly postponed to the future, as Fanon's experience suggests it is.

Returning to Buck-Morss' analysis, then, Fanon's critique of Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic aligns him with Dessalines' constitution of 1805 as opposed to the constitution of 1801 that Buck-Morss champions; indeed, Buck-Morss even goes as far as to denounce the former, due to it being a "deliberate retreat from universal principles" (Buck-Morss 2000, 835).

In the constitution of 1805, all Haitians are declared to be Black, thus granting an advancement of Being to those who were previously lost to a "zone of non-being" (Fanon 2008, xii). Fanon's critique of the lord-bondsman dialectic thereby calls for an immediate scepticism toward the formalism read into the constitution of 1801 by Buck-Morss. Furthermore, if one accepts Fanon's critique, the sort of white dominance seen during Fanon's lifetime, and indeed still very readily seen today in light of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, becomes easily explainable *despite* formal claims of universality: formal claims to freedom do not guarantee freedom; in fact, they impede it. Thus, in accounting for the lived reality of black existence, Fanon adds to the lord-bondsman dialectic in a way that Buck-Morss does not and cannot as a result of her starting point. After all, and as Fanon reminds us, "a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue" (Fanon 2001, 31).

Attempting to justify this omission on the side of Buck-Morss is one that will prove speculative and will thus be avoided here. However, returning to the political context that I sketched at the beginning of this work, it would seem that the championing of the Haitian Revolution in the name of universalism is something that should be further scrutinised; that is not to suggest that the status of Buck-Morss' work should be withdrawn, only that, as Buck-Morss herself concedes, "There [is] much research to do" (Buck-Morss 2000, 852). The celebration of it, so plainly without proper attention given to the claims of Fanon, merely obscures the contradictions inherent to such a revolution, ones that Fanon did well to place the limelight on already. Yet, this is given no attention by Buck-Morss. Selma James, a Jewish socialist-feminist thinker, once claimed that "if sex and race are pulled away from class, virtually all that remains is the truncated, provincial, sectarian politics of the white male metropolitan Left" (James 1974, 92). Without discussing the fact that the Haiti that Buck-Morss champions was established on the subjugation and rejection of Black women, a point well made by Ehrmann in *Haitian Revolution* (Ehrman 2018, 72), James' quote still seems like a fitting conclusion to this paper: if we fail to properly address the actual context in which these struggles are found, we risk concealing, purposefully or not, the contradictions that such struggles for recognition, and ultimately freedom, are tied up with. Fanon's reformulation of the lord-bondsman dialectic shows the limits to abstraction for philosophy, then. More importantly, however, is that Fanon shows how one can go beyond those limits by reincorporating the reality of lived experiences and concrete situatedness (social, ethnic, historical) into philosophy: to strive towards reaching the universal values that Buck-Morss and Žižek hold dear, thus requires that one carefully consider the particulars, such as the black experience that Fanon was readily pointing to forty years before Buck-Morss' seminal essay.

NOTES

1. As Hegel writes, "And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence ill the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing, moment, that it is only pure being-for-self. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (Hegel 1977, 114).
2. For a thorough overview of Kant as a revolutionary enthusiast, *see* Beck 1971, "Kant and the Right of Revolution." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (3): 423-432. doi:10.2307/2708356.

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DETERMINING PERSONAL FALSITY: A GADAMERIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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Abstract. This paper attempts to develop a criterion for determining when one's own opinion is incorrect. I first establish a Gadamerian critique of Enlightenment objectivism, and continue by stating that neither radical objectivism nor radical relativism is an applicable standard within epistemology. There must be both some valid and some invalid opinions. In dialogue with Georgia Warnke, the discussion of right and wrong perception is based on the minimums of immediate illegitimizing of certain prejudices: part-whole incongruity and dogmatic opinions.

Further, in conjunction with María Lugones's theory of "world-travelling", I state that one is unable to adequately dismiss an individual's opinion on a phenomenon until they have "travelled" to the individual's "world" and experienced the phenomenon through that individual's personal epistemology. To get a proper and best-as-possible understanding of someone's stance, especially a stance that opposes one's own, one must address or interrogate the prejudices that are tied to the stance itself, and meaningfully investigating another person's prejudices/perceptions requires travelling to their world. As this is incredibly difficult to do and requires high amounts of time and epistemic/hermeneutic labour, it becomes more efficient to be reflexive for only oneself than for others. I develop a criterion to determine such personal falsity, where, first, building off Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Alcoff, one must determine either propositional/theoretical or practical/educational expertise in the individual with the opposing opinion to one's own. An expert's differing stance is merely a signal to continue with research into the relevant inquiry. One must maintain the belief that opinions necessitate their own change, and expertise does not always stem from those with the most prestige behind their name. Humility is the crucial factor in the opinion-changing process that stands as the fountainhead of good knowledge.

Keywords: philosophical hermeneutics, epistemic justice, prejudice, expertise, Gadamer, epistemology, world-travelling

INTRODUCTION

Every day, you are wrong, and someone else is right. At least, that's what the so-called "someone else" would claim. Trials surrounding epistemic rightness and wrongness have plagued philosophical debates for centuries, and continue to do so. Relativism and objectivism are often pitted against one another, with the idea that one can only hold either a relativist or objectivist epistemological position in life. I attempt to place forth a blend of the two dichotomies in order to pursue a more tangible and applicable philosophy. The discussion of objectivism finds its footing in Enlightenment-era philosophy. In *Discourse on Method* (1637), René Descartes put forward one of the most influential arguments on behalf of objective knowledge, a position that was endorsed throughout the Enlightenment period (~1637-1804).

The belief that one can achieve a bird's eye view of the world, void of all prejudice and personal status on the phenomenon, came under direct critique for many philosophers to come (Descartes 1986). The primary critique of Cartesian objectivism that I will work with in this piece is Gadamer's hermeneutics. The development of objectivism inevitably leads to Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment, and its "prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer 2014, 283). The remainder of my paper will be organised as follows: First, I will establish the foundations of Gadamerian hermeneutic understanding. I attempt to lay the base work for epistemological critiques through a Gadamerian perspective that are the core building blocks of my argument. Second, I will discuss illegitimate prejudices in conjunction with Georgia Warnke's work in order to establish points of view that can be readily dismissed by other individuals (Warnke 1997). Third, in dialogue with Maria Lugones's idea of "world-travelling", I will discuss why it is so difficult to determine falsity within other individuals and why I maintain a preference in discussing personal falsity over the opinions of others (Lugones 1987). Finally, I will establish my criterion for determining personal falsity within one's own opinions and the basis for such an epistemological framework. With this, the changing of an opinion is understood as a process involving a plethora of steps, culminating in the understanding of the flexibility of knowledge predicated on the humility to listen and continue the process of learning.

PART I: GADAMERIAN HERMENEUTICS

The pinnacle of Enlightenment influence on epistemology was the development of its concept of objectivity. Critical Enlightenment theory, Cartesianism, for instance, claims that true knowledge can only be obtained by transcending one's own prejudices and biases so as to reach an "objective" level of understanding. For Enlightenment thinkers, truth and/or knowledge can only be discerned through a bird's-eye perspective (Descartes 1986). Many scrutinised the very possibility of wholly transcending one's own prejudices, and asserted, instead, that if objectivity requires us to do so, then it is simply unattainable. Gadamer would be counted among such critics.

As stated prior, Gadamer's primary critique of the Enlightenment is its "prejudice against prejudice itself" (Gadamer 2014, 283). According to Gadamer's phenomenological analyses, transcending one's prejudices so as to perform impartial inquiry and thereby arrive at objective knowledge is an impossible ideal for human beings. Instead, Gadamer recommends that we should embrace our prejudices and attempt to understand them, or at least understand that they perform a productive rather than obstructive role in the process of human understanding. Gadamer states, "a person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting". In that, upon first encounter with a new phenomenon, the observer projects interpretation onto the phenomenon at hand (Gadamer 2014, 279). This projection then aligns itself with the phenomenon and is returned back to the individual. The observer may now repeat the projection until the phenomenon matches the interpretation. This form of understanding, in which Gadamer frames human knowledge, must start with an initial basis projection: "interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones" (Gadamer 2014, 279).

With this, Gadamer asserts that understanding is not just enhanced or affected by personal bias and prejudice; rather, understanding is predicated upon such. For instance, if an individual encounters an unfamiliar object, say a piece of new technology they have never seen before, to understand the object, they will begin by comparing it to what they already know. They may state that it has the appearance of a computer but the shape of a phone, etc. Therein, they will project previous bias or "prejudice" onto the new technology at hand to begin to understand. If the new technology does not act like a computer, for example, then the individual will project a new understanding onto the object. This will repeat until the individual's understanding satisfactorily aligns with the phenomenon at hand. Due to this predication of projection, from Gadamer's perspective, individuals cannot escape and/or transcend their respective histories and social location(s) within the world, whilst such experience is vital for understanding. This means that *all* truth-claims are inevitably located in some way (culturally, historically, socially, etc). For that reason, Gadamer insists that we must allow for the possibility of a variety of knowledge(s) rather than conceptualising a singular, objective truth. As in, an individual may find satisfactory congruency between their projection and the phenomenon at hand that differs from someone else's understanding, allowing for two separate yet permissible understandings of the same object (Gadamer 2014). Likewise, an individual can approach a phenomenon from a wholly different bias than another, and the two individuals can reach the same satisfactory understanding from separate paths. As in, there can be multiple means to the same end and one means to different ends.

If understanding grounds itself in our biased perceptions of the world, to which we cannot escape, then we must acknowledge and accept these prejudices. Gadamer states, "the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself', in that the Enlightenment thinker, grounding oneself in objective knowledge, projects meaning onto phenomena from a prejudiced lens against prejudice (Gadamer 2014, 283). If one encounters a phenomenon with the ideal of objectivity and dislike for personal bias, then they are not truly encountering the phenomenon objectively. It is a cyclical process of hypocrisy, as the more defiant of prejudices one becomes, the more prejudiced they act.

With this in mind, it is important to recognise that Gadamer does not use the word "prejudice" in the more colloquial sense with which we are familiar today. He more so defines it as the standards of information we hold and the background(s) we, as knowers, come from: "*prejudice* means a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (Gadamer 2014, 283). To Gadamer, "prejudice certainly does not necessarily mean a false judgement, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value", in that prejudice has the connotation one prescribes to it through their usage (Gadamer 2014, 283). With the ascertainment of a multiplicity of satisfactory interpretations, evidently, there is a multiplicity of satisfactory prejudices.

While Gadamer's theory of knowledge is more attainable than Cartesian objectivity, some have concerns with Gadamerian philosophy and its close ties with epistemological relativism. There must be times when one interpretation outweighs another. There must be times when someone is "wrong" and someone else is "right" in their understanding of the same phenomenon. In my stance against objectivism, I do not wish to relinquish the use of the terms "right" and "wrong", for they are colloquial and frequent; I more so wish to diminish the ties those terms have to objectivist claims. There will never be a point of view so objective and true that it can be deemed universally "right" with all opposing views universally "wrong". Yet, there are many times when one individual is *at least* less wrong than another and therefore "right".

The question, therefore, becomes: if there is no objective truth, and for that reason, there will always be a multiplicity of plausible interpretations, how can one distinguish between right and wrong interpretations?

PART II: ILLEGITIMATE PREJUDICES

There are criteria that can be used such that some prejudices/interpretations can be discredited and deemed wrong. In her piece entitled "Legitimate Prejudices", Georgia Warnke argues that a point of view or interpretation can be rejected if it is either a) incongruous with the whole and/or b) dogmatic (Warnke 1997). Both Gadamer and Warnke believe that this delegitimisation will not be immediate; points of view that are incongruous and/or dogmatic still need serious contemplation and engagement to ensure illegitimisation. Continuing, Warnke states that if an interpretation of a phenomenon demonstrates part-whole incongruity, then it can be deemed illegitimate. This is congruent with a long line of hermeneutics, which has long argued that for an interpretation to count as plausible, there must be a harmony of parts that leads the individual to the "whole" or the complete understanding of the phenomenon at hand. If the parts contradict and/or are incompatible with the interpretive whole, then their interpretation/prejudice is illegitimate. This would be a valid yet unsound argument; the conclusion leads from the premises but one, if not more, of the premises is untrue (Warnke 1997). An example of this illegitimate prejudice would be the floatation test for witch trials. The idea was that all witches float in water, so if a woman is thrown into a body of water and sinks, she is not a witch. The argument is sound [p1: all witches float, p2: that woman did not float, c: therefore, she is not a witch], but premise 1 is false. Therefore, there is a part-whole incongruence to the perception of women/witches and their ability to float in water.

On the other hand, if a prejudice/interpretation does have part-whole congruency, it does not automatically deem that prejudice as legitimate, for part-whole incongruity is only a disqualifier, rather than a qualifier. If a prejudice/interpretation is stubbornly held to be true, then it may also be illegitimate, particularly when counter-evidence or a counter-interpretation has been offered but the dogmatic interpreter fails to engage with such evidence/interpretations because they believe that their interpretation is the *only* correct one; they believe they have nothing left to learn from anyone or anything else (Warnke 1997). Further, a dogmatic point of view is a view that one holds whilst still encountering opposing points of view that they then adamantly reject or do not take seriously. For example, many individuals believe that vaccines cause autism even though a plethora of studies have shown the invalidity of such a claim. Those who believe that vaccines cause autism hold said belief stubbornly true, as many opposing arguments have invalidated or opposed the claim.

Although Warnke's two disqualifying criteria are helpful, and it is understandable how one might be able to invoke them during an interpretive dispute, Warnke does not seem to acknowledge just how *dangerous* particular illegitimate prejudices/interpretations are and/or can be. As such, I would like to expand upon Warnke's conception of the dogmatically-held prejudice, and argue that an individual's prejudice must urgently be discredited if it is not only dogmatic (*i.e.* "my interpretation is correct, and no further inquiry or dialogue is needed) but also apparently "dangerous". A dangerous prejudice furthers, enables, or enacts harm upon a person or group of persons. It is likely a bigoted and demeaning point of view. These views are not simply "wrong" but also deeply threatening, as they often perpetuate violence against others. Therefore, a view can and ought to be discredited if it meets one or both of Warnke's disqualifiers, part-whole incongruity and dogmatism, but is also inherently dangerous. An example of a dangerous prejudice would be that a wife cannot say no to their husband. By simply holding this belief, the believer creates harm and danger. This is a point of view that can be deemed illegitimate.

Most illegitimate prejudices can fit one or more of these categories: there is danger in believing that vaccines cause autism, as not vaccinating children places them in danger of many preventable illness; there is a part-whole incongruence to the belief that vaccines cause autism, as the premise that leads to the conclusion to not vaccinate children is false; and the belief that vaccines cause autism is held dogmatically, as it has been opposed and disagreed with many times. When a belief is not dogmatic or dangerous or incongruent, it does not follow that the belief is thereby legitimate. A belief is not inherently legitimate because it is not disposed of as illegitimate through said criterion. A point of view will always be up for debate.

PART III: WORLD-TRAVELLING

For the opinions that are not incongruous, dogmatic, or dangerous, it is unfair and difficult to adequately deem such opinions as false. To do so would involve understanding the individual's other prejudices and environment to determine where their point of view stems from within their personal epistemology. That is to say, to wholly conceptualise an individual's understanding of a phenomenon, one must travel to their world and enter their rhizomatic epistemology. The concept of "world-travelling" in a relationship sense comes from Maria Lugones's piece "Playfulness, World-Travelling, and Loving Perception". According to Maria Lugones, to properly love and connect with someone, one must travel to their world. One must see one's own self through the other's eyes and begin to understand the epistemological framework within which individual operates within (Lugones 1987). This requires an immense amount of empathy and also an immense amount of time and epistemic labour.

I agree with Lugones that meaningful connection requires world-travelling. In my view, however, world-travelling not only makes possible an emotional bond with other people, but it likewise makes possible an epistemic bond with other people. In fact, the emotional bond might be made possible by the epistemic bond. My version of world-travelling is not only the process by which we can grow to love other people, but it is also the process by which we can grow to understand other people and learn about the world as they experience it. This process might teach us how another person understands the world, and why they understand it in that particular way (*i.e.* the experiences they've had in the past, and how those past experiences shape their expectations for the future). As such, I believe that one cannot actually identify someone else's point of view as incorrect until they've travelled to their world. Deeming someone else's stance as incorrect without understanding where that stance originates from within the individual is inconclusive and problematic. Most people have reasonings behind their beliefs and reasonings behind those reasonings and so on. To get a proper and best-as-possible understanding of someone's stance, especially a stance that opposes one's own, one must address the prejudices tied to the stance itself. This addressing inherently involves travelling to their world.

"World-travelling", as Lugones understands it, is a difficult and heavy task. One must engage with the individual at intense and almost uncomfortable levels. One must see their own stance on a phenomenon through the eyes of their opposer. World-travelling is emotionally fatiguing. Therein, it is unfair to ask that one travel to every single person's world to properly understand their stances; nonetheless, this would be an impossible feat. Most simply do not have the time or energy to empathise with *every* person they encounter, though it would be ideal to do so. For these reasons, I cannot adequately set forth criteria to determine whether another person's point of view is incorrect, but at a minimum, I can put forth criteria to determine whether my own point of view is incorrect. I do not have to travel to my own world and empathise with my own self because I am already in said world, understanding said self. I can, nevertheless, be self-reflexive and attempt to bring into focus the prejudices from which my own beliefs derive.

PART IV: CRITERION

Now, I will begin to establish my criterion for determining personal falsity. I would like to enact a specific setting in which I can operate to make my criteria more tangible to the real world. The criteria I put forth most directly apply to one-on-one dialogue, in which the other person has a directly opposing stance on an issue. For comprehension's sake, I will utilise the same theoretical example throughout this section of a dialogue between two conversation partners on the relevance of racism to the issue of police brutality. Let's refer to the first conversation partner as Nathanial, a black physician who has both witnessed and experienced police brutality, and I'll refer to the second conversation partner as Sarah, a white graduate student who specialises in literature and has watched documentaries on police brutality. When engaged in dialogue with someone who expresses an opposing/contradictory viewpoint, it is first essential to deduce whether the individual is more of an expert *in the relevant field of inquiry*.

Generally, one conceives of an "expert" as someone with an abundance of "theoretical or propositional knowledge" (*S* knows that p*)* relevant to the topic under discussion. Here, however, I define an expert as someone who possesses either theoretical/propositional or practical/experiential knowledge, or both. As Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Martín Alcoff elucidate in their paper, "Are 'Old Wives Tales' Justified", knowledge comes about in two forms: theoretical/propositional and practical/experiential. The lack of one form of knowledge does not negate the applicability of the term expert to the relevant person under investigation. Here, an expert can entail either educational knowledge or experiential knowledge, otherwise known as "practical and propositional knowledge" (Dalmiya Alcoff, 1993).

As Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Martín Alcoff elucidate in their 1993 paper, knowledge comes about in two forms: propositional and practical. By and large, traditional epistemology has limited its attention to propositional knowledge, with the consequence that most persons with practical knowledge have been overlooked and/or denied the status of "expert" (Dalmiya Alcoff, 1993). I would like to continue with this notion and argue that one does not need both propositional and practical knowledge to be considered an expert, but of course, that would be ideal. In my view, the lack of one form of knowledge does not negate the applicability of the term expert to the individual under investigation.

If Sarah were to converse with Nathanial about police brutality, Nathanial would qualify as more of an expert in this field of inquiry, as Nathanial has more *direct and first-person experience* with the relevant subject matter. His personal experiences and first-hand accounts are simply more germane to the argument than to Sarah's indirect or third-person exposure to the topic. It is *experience* and not identity that stamps Nathaniel as an expert on this topic.

This analysis of expertise coaxes an implicit hierarchy of knowledge. This hierarchy is inherently imperfect. There is no sure way to determine who is more of an expert all the time, or in every case. There will, undoubtedly, be ambiguous cases, and just such cases ought to invite scrutiny, dialogue, and careful consideration. Likewise, there may be cases where discourse partners have equivalent measures of expert-conferring knowledge (of both the propositional and/or practical kind) or where discourse partners have equivalent measures of practical versus propositional knowledge. As such, this hierarchy has limitations, cannot be universally invoked, needs to be sensitive to nuances of the situation, and is, for these reasons, inherently imperfect. Even so, I argue that it nevertheless provides a good aid for determining expertise and interpretive legitimacy. If I can definitively identify myself as lower on the epistemic hierarchy than the other person with whom I am in dialogue, then it is likely that I ought to take their account more seriously than I take mine.

Following the acknowledgement of expertise within the opposing individual, one should proceed with a "confirmation process". Encountering an individual who has an opposing viewpoint and who is also an expert in the field of inquiry at hand should be a signal to reconsider one's position. True change of opinion should come when their opinion is confirmed.

One must search for the opinion of other experts within the relevant field of inquiry so as to determine whether the opposing viewpoint stands. If multiple experts likewise hold the opposing viewpoint, then it is likely time to change opinion. We cannot change our opinion after one expert provides an opposing account. That is why the confirmation process is key. An expert's differing stance is merely a signal to continue research into the inquiry at hand.

Throughout all of this, the most important feature involved in the process of identifying that one's own view is hermeneutically weaker than those advanced by other persons with whom one is in conversation, is neither a particular step nor even the process as a whole. Most importantly, it is the *attitude* that one holds toward knowledge and opinion in general, and toward their own truth claims in particular. Humility is keenly necessary, especially when in dialogue with those who have practical and/or experiential expertise about the topic under discussion. If I have formal training on the topic under investigation, yet I am confronted with an opposing viewpoint from someone whom I consider "less educated", it takes humility to recognise that while my discourse partner might lack "formal training" on the issue, they've nevertheless developed expertise on the topic through personal experience. Miranda Fricker, who works in epistemic injustice, might consider this an instance of "testimonial justice". There is a wide range of human beings who deserve to be listened to and taken seriously as it pertains to particular issues, even though they might lack formal training and therefore theoretical/practical knowledge on the topic under investigation. As a corrective, Fricker recommends the virtue of *testimonial justice,* which she defines as the "virtue [such] that the influence of identity prejudice on the hearer's credibility judgment is detected and corrected for" (Fricker 2007, Sec. 9). Further, truly listening to others and reconsidering one's point of view takes a whole reworking of what some may consider knowledge and prestige of opinion. This is easier if one understands the process of changing opinions as 1) continuing their education and 2) opinions as something that are meant to be changed. One's opinion should always be flexible to change and capable of manoeuvring. One should never be stern in an opinion, as one's opinion is always a product of their biases and social location. An unchanging opinion or point of view on any subject matter would need to be objectively true to be deserving of not changing; otherwise, it would be considered "dogmatic" under Warnke's perception. As this objectivity is impossible to achieve, one must always allow their prejudices and biases the fluidity to change and adapt to the evidence surrounding them. Changing one's opinion is not black and white; it is a process that involves time and humility.

The Enlightenment era re-envisioned the definition and creation of true knowledge, which was heavily criticised and reinterpreted. Gadamerian hermeneutics sheds light on the incessant bias the Enlightenment had against prejudice and that several understandings can coexist about the same phenomenon. While this view of knowledge was more achievable, it began to breach the realm of radical relativism and deny the validity of "right" and "wrong".

There must be some minimum of illegitimate knowledge to prevent dangerous or problematic opinions from ensuing. Yet, it is difficult to determine someone else's own stance as inadequate or "wrong", as one cannot be self-reflexive on someone else's behalf. However, one can be self-reflexive with respect to their own stances and opinions. To determine inadequacy within one's opinion in the face of an individual with an opposing stance, one must first understand the other individual as a practical and/or propositional expert within the field at hand. Further, this signal of change leads to a confirmation phase, in which one confirms or denies the opposing viewpoint by engaging with the opinions of other experts. Throughout all of this inquiry, one must hold the attitude that opinions and knowledge are meant to change over time. Change predicates opinion, and a change of opinion is not the dissolution of the ego but the continuation of education. Humility is the crucial factor in the opinion-changing process that stands as the fountainhead of good knowledge.

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A Philosophical Analogy Between Quantum Theory and Phenomenal Consciousness

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Abstract. This study outlines the core objective: to explore an analogical argument between quantum mechanics and phenomenal consciousness. The work proposes that phenomenal consciousness and quantum phenomena share structural features—such as observer-dependence, contextual emergence, and perspectival constitution—that justify the use of analogy not as metaphor, but as a philosophical method. It also critically examines the status, limits, and epistemic implications of analogical reasoning in this context.

Keywords: quantum mechanics, phenomenal consciousness, observer-dependence, emergence, perspectival constitution

Introduction

Despite remarkable interdisciplinary advances in the study of philosophy of mind, there remain persistent conceptual gaps at the heart of its domains that resist resolution through standard explanatory strategies. In the study of philosophy of consciousness specifically, this takes the form of what David Chalmers famously called "the hard problem"—namely, the challenge of explaining how and why subjective experience arises from physical processes in the brain. While the so-called "easy problems" of consciousness address how the brain performs functions like attention, discrimination, and information integration, the hard problem concerns the first-person perspective itself: the "what-it-is-like" character of phenomenal states[1].

A structurally analogous challenge arises in the foundations of quantum mechanics. Despite being the most empirically successful physical theory to date, quantum theory contains its own unresolved interpretive dilemma: the measurement problem. At its core lies a conceptual discontinuity between the mathematical formalism of quantum theory—which allows quantum systems to exist in superpositions of multiple potential states—and the definite outcome observed when measurements are performed. This discontinuity raises conceptual questions about the relationship between observer and system, as well as between parts and wholes. Specifically, it calls into question whether the components of a quantum system can be fully individuated and described independently of the system as a whole.

These two problems—the hard problem of consciousness and the quantum measurement problem—arise in distinct scientific and philosophical contexts, yet they share a common structural form. Both confront the difficulty of explaining the transition from potentiality to actuality, from multiplicity to unity, from abstract formal description to concrete lived or observed reality. Both also involve epistemic transitions, where the very act of knowing appears to co-constitute what is known. Notably, they raise symmetrical interpretive questions:

- How does reality shift from objective multiplicity to subjective unity?
- How do we move from the whole system to individual experience or observation?

These structural parallel invites deeper philosophical reflection. Perhaps the persistent difficulties encountered in both domains do not stem solely from empirical insufficiencies or technical gaps, but from foundational epistemic and metaphysical assumptions—particularly the enduring separation of subject and object, observer and observed, part and whole, mind and matter. If so, then it may be possible to explore a shared conceptual framework, grounded in perspectival reasoning and contextual ontology, that illuminates both problems by revealing the underlying structure of our knowledge and the reality it discloses.

Analogy as a Tool for Bridging Conceptual Gaps

1. The Role of Analogy in Early Modern Science and Philosophy

From the early seventeenth century onward, analogy played a central—though increasingly contested—role in the development of modern science and philosophy (Foucault 1970, 56). While the Renaissance worldview had embraced *analogy* and *similitude* as organising principles of knowledge, the rise of mechanistic science sought a clearer divide between descriptive fidelity and poetic or symbolic thinking. Yet, even amid the methodological turn toward precision, analogy persisted as a powerful epistemic tool.

Francis Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), recognised the usefulness of analogical inference as a heuristic device. Although critical of "idols of the mind" and mystical resemblances, he did not entirely reject analogical thinking. Instead, he sought to discipline analogy under empirically grounded reasoning. Bacon considered analogies useful for developing provisional hypotheses, particularly when confronting hidden processes in nature that elude direct observation.

Isaac Newton explicitly defended analogical reasoning in his third Rule of Reasoning in Philosophy from the *Principia Mathematica* (1687/1999), where he argued that "to the same natural effects we must, as far as possible, assign the same causes." His famous claim that "Nature is ever consonant with itself" (Rule III) implies an ontological continuity across domains—a justification for transferring knowledge from known systems (like celestial mechanics) to unknown ones (like terrestrial physics or biology). This analogical confidence proved productive: eighteenth-century physiology often modelled bodily systems after Newtonian mechanics, treating organs as pumps, levers, and filters.

In Kant's critical philosophy, analogy took on a transcendental function. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A176/B218–A218/B265), Kant introduces the *Analogies of Experience*, which are not merely heuristic devices but a priori principles governing the temporal structure of perception. For Kant, analogy is not just a comparison between particulars; it expresses necessary relational structures (e.g., causality, simultaneity) that make coherent experience possible. Furthermore, Kant appeals to teleological analogies—particularly in biology—where mechanical explanation proves insufficient. Here, he grants analogy a regulative role, guiding inquiry into living systems even when full explanation remains unavailable.

Even as the Enlightenment prioritised mathematical clarity and empirical rigour, analogy remained vital for engaging with phenomena that eluded strict formalisation. Thinkers like Goethe and Schelling employed analogies not only poetically but philosophically, treating nature as a living, self-organising whole. Their use of analogy allowed a non-mechanical understanding of organic and mental life, suggesting that structural similarity could reveal deep ontological connections beyond surface causality.

What we may more meaningfully bring into focus is that analogy remains a deeply embedded, if unofficial, method of knowing, even after the "disqualification" of resemblance as a basis for truth. Even if we cannot assume that analogy reflects a deep cognitive mode that mirrors the structure of reality itself, modern science and philosophy of science are still, in deep ways, indebted to analogy—not as primitive resemblance, but as structured similarity, proportional relation, and dynamic mapping.

2. The Need for Analogical Tools in Irreducible Domains

In domains where the objects of inquiry resist direct observation, formalisation, or reductive decomposition, analogical reasoning becomes not merely useful but methodologically indispensable, providing a structured means of engaging with conceptual opacity and ontological complexity. On the one hand, we might say that analogy plays a vital role in model-building, hypothesis formation, and conceptual innovation—especially when dealing with phenomena that evade direct empirical access. In particular, where the traditional subject-object dichotomy falters, analogy provides a relational logic that can bridge otherwise incommensurable explanatory domains.

On the one hand, analogy plays a vital role in model-building, hypothesis formation, and conceptual innovation—especially when grappling with phenomena that evade direct empirical access. On the other hand, it remains in tension with the dominant ideals of modern scientific rationality, which prioritise deductive certainty, empirical verification, and linear causal explanation. This epistemic double status places analogy at a unique crossroads: both as a creative heuristic and a contested form of justification.

The key philosophical insight guiding this framework is that analogies are not epistemic "gaps" to be eliminated, but structured inferences that extend known relations to new domains. Far from functioning as mere cognitive scaffolding, analogies enable us to map known relations from systems we understand onto domains that resist direct description, thereby generating insight and coherence.

Phenomenal consciousness and quantum phenomena are exemplary in this respect. Both exhibit:

- Observer-dependent features
- Emergent structures
- Contextual behaviour
- Discontinuities between formal description and lived or observed reality

Moreover, both domains pose explanatory gaps that are not merely empirical but structural. In the case of phenomenal consciousness: *How do physical neural patterns give rise to subjective, first-person experience?* In quantum mechanics, *How does a probabilistic superposition transit to a definite measurement outcome?* These are not mere technical gaps; they point to structural discontinuities between different levels of description. Analogical reasoning may help us navigate these discontinuities by identifying formal and structural similarities across domains, without forcing premature reduction or metaphysical collapse.

Additionally, in both domains, we are dealing with systems whose behaviour cannot be understood merely by analysing their parts in isolation. Phenomenal consciousness is not reducible to individual neurons or brain states, but arises from integrated, temporally extended, perspectival processes. Likewise, quantum behaviour emerges from whole-system configurations rather than localised components. Similarly, quantum systems exhibit holistic behaviour—such as entanglement—that defies classical localisation or part-whole separability[2].

Crucially, both domains share a deep epistemological challenge: they cannot be fully accessed or described from a detached, external vantage point. Phenomenal consciousness is essentially first-person, and external accounts always risk omitting the qualitative texture of experience. In quantum mechanics, measurement is not neutral—it actively participates in shaping the system, rendering observer-independent descriptions fundamentally incomplete.

Given these parallels, analogical reasoning becomes not only useful but epistemologically responsible. It encourages a kind of epistemic humility: a commitment to a contextual, perspectival, and interpretative model that honours the complexity of the phenomena rather than forcing conceptual closure. As such, analogy offers more than a linguistic convenience—it provides a structural mapping that can guide interpretation, and even reshape our assumptions of how we get knowledge to the world.

As Paul Bartha suggests (Bartha 2010), analogical arguments can justify conceptual transfer across domains when similarities are deep and systematic. In articulating an analogy between the perspectival structure of phenomenal consciousness and the observer-dependent framework of quantum reality, we are not collapsing one into the other, nor making merely metaphorical gestures. Rather, we are using analogy as a philosophical instrument—not to explain away consciousness via physics, but to reframe both domains as co-emergent aspects of a unified, participatory ontology.

THE ANALOGICAL ARGUMENT OF QUANTUM MECHANICS AND PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS

1. STRUCTURAL PARALLELS

At its core, the analogical framework rests on a shared resistance to complete objectification in both quantum physics and the study of phenomenal consciousness. Neither domain can be fully accounted for through third-person, detached observation; both demand a reconceptualisation of knowledge and being as contextual and perspectival.

In the case of quantum mechanics, reality does not consist of fully determinate, observer-independent properties. Instead, quantum systems exist in states of superposition until a measurement occurs, and the outcome depends on the context of observation, including the choice of measurement setup. The observer is not external to the system but actively participates in the emergence of definite outcomes, introducing a profound form of observer-dependence and contextuality (Bohr 1935; Wheeler 1983; Rovelli 1996).

Similarly, phenomenal consciousness—the "what-it-is-like" aspect of experience—cannot be meaningfully described as a static object or reducible state. It is inherently perspectival: it always occurs for someone, from a particular vantage point, and in a particular context of experience. It can also be considered contextual (emerging from the interplay between self and world) and self-referential (referring to its intrinsic capacity to incorporate itself within its own experiential framework) [Chalmers 1996; Zahavi 2005]. A structural analogy can be phrased as follows:

> Just as quantum physical reality does not exist in a fully determinate and observer-independent form prior to measurement, but rather emerges through the contextual interaction between system and observer, so too

phenomenal consciousness cannot be understood as a pre-given, objective entity, but only as a contextually relational and perspectival process that arises through the interaction of subject and world.

In both domains, reality is not "already there" in a fully articulated, detached form; instead, it is co-constituted through the interplay of the observer and the observed, the knower and the known. Thus, the analogy rests on a shared participatory ontology, in which epistemic access to reality (how we come to know) carries ontological implications (what reality is). This challenges the traditional ideal of total objectivity and instead affirms that meaningful reality arises through interaction, situatedness, and perspectival engagement (Heisenberg 1958; Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991).

Crucially, it is important to mention again that this structural analogy does not imply identity between the two domains—quantum systems are not conscious, and phenomenal consciousness is not simply a quantum effect. Rather, the analogy offers a philosophically significant mapping that allows us to reframe both phenomenal consciousness and quantum reality as irreducible, participatory processes that resist full externalisation or reification.

To clarify the analogy, we may identify four key structural parallels:

I. Observer-dependence in quantum mechanics ↔ Perspective-dependence in phenomenal consciousness
   - In quantum mechanics, the outcome of an observation depends on the experimental setup and the interaction with the observer.
   - In consciousness, phenomenal experience is always bound to a first-person perspective—there is no "view from nowhere."

II. Collapse of superposition to an actual physical outcome ↔ Formation of a coherent experience in the present moment
   - Measurement collapses a quantum system from a set of potential possibilities to a single actual outcome.

  - Phenomenal experience is actualised as a coherent moment of lived experience—a shift from multiple potential meanings or stimuli into a single, immediate present (Varela 1999).

III. Quantum entanglement ↔ Whole-part relation in phenomenal consciousness
  - Quantum entanglement reveals that certain systems exhibit non-separable, holistic properties—such that the system as a whole cannot be fully understood by analysing its parts in isolation.
  - Phenomenal consciousness emerges from an embedded relation to the world, shaped by the subject's capacities for interaction and its environmental coupling.

IV. Contextuality in quantum mechanics ↔ Perspectival framing of meaning and knowledge
  - The outcome of quantum measurements depends on the context; there is no "predefined property" waiting to be revealed.
  - Phenomenal consciousness is likewise context-sensitive: meaning is not intrinsic but emerges from the perspective and situation of the conscious subject.

2. The Type of Analogical Argument at Play

Philosophically, the argument aligns with what Paul Bartha (2010) terms an analogical argument by explanatory extension. This form of reasoning justifies the transfer of conceptual structures from a source domain to a target domain, based on the presence of systematic structural similarities. In this case:

- The source domain is quantum mechanics, which has developed a rigorous, though interpretively diverse, framework for dealing with observer-dependence, emergence, and contextuality.
- The target domain is phenomenal consciousness, which lacks a unified theory but exhibits comparable structural features—

particularly its resistance to reduction, its perspectival nature, and its embeddedness in subject–object dynamics.

Quantum theory may offer a language and structure that, when analogically applied, can reorient our epistemic and metaphysical assumptions about phenomenal consciousness—not by providing a mechanistic explanation, but by suggesting a contextual, process-oriented, and participatory model. It is this qualitative and perspectival nature of phenomenal consciousness that makes it particularly amenable to analogical exploration alongside the participatory structure of quantum mechanics.

Under this view, we may define phenomenal consciousness as follows:

> Phenomenal consciousness is an active, meaning-generating process that mediates between subject and world. It refers to the qualitative, first-person character of experience and can be understood as the local perspective at the interface between subject and object.

THE EPISTEMIC STATUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL LIMITS OF THE ANALOGY

While the analogy between quantum mechanics and phenomenal consciousness offers a potentially generative framework, its philosophical legitimacy must be assessed according to standard criteria for evaluating analogical reasoning. In both the philosophy of science and informal logic, strong analogical arguments are typically (Bartha 2010; Hesse 1966):

a. Similarity of relevant structures
b. Richness of shared relations and patterns
c. Explanatory power in the target domain
d. Absence of decisive disanalogies

A. SIMILARITY OF RELEVANT STRUCTURES

The analogy at the heart of this framework stands on two strong structural parallels. Both quantum systems and phenomenal consciousness challenge the traditional subject-object dichotomy and highlight the perspectival nature of experiencing reality:

- In quantum mechanics, the observer is an active participant in the manifestation of physical reality (Bohr 1935; Wheeler 1983).
- Similarly, phenomenal consciousness is a subjective, perspectival process—it is *what-it-is-like* for a subject to experience, and as such, is irreducible to third-person description (Nagel 1974; Chalmers 1996).

Both domains emphasise contextuality and non-linearity. They require abandoning a purely mechanistic, detached view of explanation in favour of frameworks that recognise the interdependence of observer and system.

B. Richness of Shared Relations and Patterns

The analogy deepens further when one shifts focus from entities to processes, from substance metaphysics to interaction and participation. Quantum physics and phenomenal consciousness both exhibit non-trivial emergence, in which wholes are not reducible to their parts:

- Quantum entanglement reveals non-local correlations that defy classical separability.
- Phenomenal consciousness too arises from integrated, dynamic patterns of subject-world interaction and affective-cognitive organisation.

The analogy thus draws on shared patterns of emergence, limitation, and perspectival framing, reinforcing its structural coherence.

C. Explanatory Power in the Target Domain (Phenomenal Consciousness)

While the analogy does not claim to "solve" the hard problem of consciousness, it offers a conceptual reframing that expands the space of philosophical inquiry:

- It resists both materialist reductionism (which treats consciousness as a byproduct of physical computation) and ontological idealism (which denies the reality of the physical world).
- Instead, it opens a middle path toward a non-reductive, participatory ontology, in which subjectivity and objectivity co-emerge through relational processes.

This allows us to view self-referentiality, perspectivism, and phenomenal presence not as anomalous features of the world, but as integral to its unfolding structure.

D. DISANALOGIES AND POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES

Despite its strengths, the analogy faces legitimate limitations, which must be acknowledged to avoid category error or overreach:

- Quantum mechanics is a formalised mathematical framework with experimentally verifiable predictions, while phenomenal consciousness is qualitative, non-formalizable, and not directly measurable.
- Quantum features like superposition, entanglement, or wavefunction collapse are physical processes (whether metaphysical or operationalist), whereas consciousness involves meaning-making, which belongs to a different order of description (Dennett 1991; Block 1995).
- There is a risk of category error or metaphorical overreach if the analogy is treated literally rather than heuristically or structurally.

Yet even with these disanalogies, the analogy retains philosophical value when used heuristically and structurally rather than mechanistically. It does not offer a unifying theory but a conceptual framework that fosters cross-domain insight.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRECEDENTS OF SIMILAR ANALOGICAL USES

The analogical strategy employed here is not without precedent in the philosophical tradition. On the contrary, it resonates with several historical approaches that have used analogy to rethink the structure of reality and experience:

- Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy relies on analogy between physical events and experiential moments, describing reality as composed of "actual occasions" that are relational, temporal, and internally structured. Although his physics was pre-quantum, his metaphysical vision anticipated many of the relational features now central to quantum theory (Whitehead 1929).
- Niels Bohr's complementarity principle suggested that different perspectives (e.g., particle vs. wave) are not contradictory but mutually necessary to fully understand quantum phenomena. This idea has been extended analogically to epistemology, highlighting the value of perspectival integration in domains beyond traditional physics (Bohr 1958).
- John Archibald Wheeler's "Participatory Universe" frames quantum reality as incomplete without observation, positing a cosmos in which meaning and structure emerge through observer-system interactions. Wheeler explicitly invoked the analogy between physical participation and cognitive perception, suggesting a metaphysical unity between knowing and being (Wheeler 1983).
- Carlo Rovelli's relational interpretation of quantum mechanics proposes that the properties of physical systems are not absolute but only exist relative to other systems. This relational ontology analogically challenges classical notions of objective, observer-independent reality and foregrounds the fundamental role of interaction and perspective in constituting physical facts (Rovelli 1996).
- QBism (Quantum Bayesianism) interprets quantum states as expressions of an agent's personal beliefs about measurement outcomes rather than objective features of reality. This approach analogically emphasises the participatory role of the observer in constructing knowledge, blurring traditional boundaries between

epistemology and ontology, and fostering a subjective yet consistent account of quantum phenomena (Fuchs, Mermin & Schack 2014).

These precedents support the legitimacy of using structural analogies as tools not just for communication, but for philosophical theorising.

Toward a Unified Interpretative Framework

The analogical argument explored throughout this research leads us to a broader philosophical vision—one that views phenomenal consciousness not as a distinct realm separate from physical reality, but as an interwoven expression of a deeper, participatory structure of being.

At the heart of this proposal lies a reframing of the subject–object relation. Rather than treating the subject (the observer, the knower, the experiencer) and the object (the observed, the known, the measurable) as independent entities, this framework sees them as co-constituted within a dynamic process of interaction, where the meaning of each arises only through a situated perspective [Rovelli 1996; Zahavi 2005; Varela et al. 1991]. This is not to imply that subject and object exist in some abstract or indeterminate state until observation occurs; on the contrary, both possess definite states before and after measurement—this being the minimal naturalistic assumption one can reasonably make. However, their pure or precise identity and role are only fully determined in and through the act of observation/experience itself.

Open Discussion Points on the Analogy's Legitimacy

The analogical framework developed here—as a philosophical bridge between quantum mechanics and phenomenal consciousness—presents a promising conceptual structure for understanding relational, participatory processes across domains traditionally considered disparate. However, as with any framework that seeks to operate at the intersection of distinct ontological and epistemic domains, further elaboration is both necessary and welcome. The following considerations are not limitations in the negative sense, but rather constructive openings—points where the analogy invites further philosophical development, interdisciplinary integration, and conceptual precision.

I. On the Relation Between Epistemic Structures and Ontological Commitments

A central philosophical consideration concerns the status of perspectival structures. Both in quantum theory and in consciousness studies, we confront scenarios where detached, objective access is limited: the observer in quantum mechanics plays an irreducible role in the emergence of measurable outcomes; the subject in consciousness cannot be excluded from the phenomenal field it discloses.

The challenge is to determine whether these features reflect epistemic constraints—limits in how we access reality—or whether they are ontological indicators, pointing to a fundamental interdependence between being and knowing. Rather than seeing this as a problem of projection (mistaking "how we know" for "what is"), the proposed framework leans toward a non-dual reading, wherein epistemic structures are themselves expressive of ontological participation. This interpretation finds resonance in Wheeler's "participatory universe" (Wheeler 1983), Bohr's complementarity principle (Bohr 1958), and Whitehead's process metaphysics (Whitehead 1929), all of which suggest that the conditions of intelligibility are inseparable from the ontological structure of reality itself.

Carlo Rovelli's relational interpretation (Rovelli 1996) further develops this view by proposing that physical properties only exist relative to interactions between systems, dissolving the idea of absolute, observer-independent states and reinforcing the inseparability of epistemic perspectives and ontological facts. Similarly, QBism (Fuchs, Mermin & Schack 2014) emphasises the agent's participatory role in assigning meaning to quantum states, underscoring that the formalism of quantum mechanics encodes personalist knowledge rather than an objective external reality, thus bridging epistemology and ontology in a fundamentally participatory framework.

This position does not negate the importance of maintaining philosophical clarity about the boundaries of knowledge and metaphysics, but it encourages a view where epistemic and ontological dimensions are dynamically entangled, much like the very phenomena under study.

II. On the Potential for Formalisation through Relational and Systemic Models

To move the analogy beyond heuristic value, a productive path lies in exploring formal and interdisciplinary frameworks that can model the relational and dynamic properties central to both quantum systems and conscious processes. Several existing approaches already point in this direction.

For instance, Integrated Information Theory (IIT) models consciousness as arising from irreducible patterns of causal interdependence within physical systems (Tononi 2004), offering a potential interface between informational structure and subjective presence. In parallel, quantum information theory describes entangled systems not through fixed properties but via relational correlations—a structural similarity that mirrors perspectival, non-substantialist accounts of consciousness.

Moreover, autopoietic and enactivist theories of mind provide robust models of consciousness as a self-organising, world-involving process, where cognition is not a computational function but a relational loop between organism and environment (Maturana & Varela 1980; Thompson 2007). These approaches suggest that the analogy could be systematically enriched, lending it both explanatory weight and cross-disciplinary coherence.

While these theories differ in their specific frameworks and emphases, their ongoing interaction and dialogue—centred on relationality and the perspectival co-constitution of experience—constitute a fertile ground for advancing a more integrated and coherent understanding. This convergence opens promising avenues for enriching the analogy with explanatory depth and cross-disciplinary rigour.

III. On the Respectful Acknowledgement of Domanial Differences

It is crucial to acknowledge the specificities of the domains involved. Quantum phenomena and consciousness differ in scale (subatomic vs. organism-level systems), ontological register (physical processes vs. experiential awareness), and processual modality (formal mathematical description vs. qualitative immediacy).

Maintaining a disciplined awareness of these differences allows the analogy to function effectively without overstepping its philosophical bounds. This involves resisting both reductionism (e.g., reducing phenomenal consciousness to quantum states) and metaphorical inflation (e.g., treating wavefunction collapse as a direct correlate of experiential unity).

Rather than seeking premature unification, the analogy is best understood as a structural and epistemic/metaphysical proposal—one that preserves the distinctiveness of each domain while highlighting their relational and participatory resonance. In this way, it functions as a philosophical lens, revealing contours of meaning in both quantum theory and consciousness studies, without erasing their irreducible features.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In my view, these open points signal the philosophical maturity of the analogy, rather than its fragility. They invite further work: in clarifying the ontological and epistemic status of relationality, in exploring formal models that preserve perspectival integrity, and in engaging with disciplinary differences without abandoning the search for deeper coherence. In doing so, the analogy may continue to develop—not as a closed system or final explanation, but as a living conceptual bridge, connecting domains that together illuminate the contextual nature of reality itself.

NOTES

1. *Phenomenal consciousness* refers to the qualitative, experiential aspects of consciousness—what 'it feels like to'. This is distinct from *higher-order consciousness*, which involves the availability of information for self-reflection, reasoning, speech, and behavioural control. While the latter is generally treated as a functional property, the former raises deeper metaphysical questions about the nature of subjectivity.
2. While quantum systems exhibit holistic and non-local correlations, the *experience* of measurement remains a localized event. Each observer registers outcomes from their own spatiotemporal standpoint. The term *non-locality* refers not to the transmission of information or experience across space, but to the statistical correlations between outcomes of measurements performed on systems that were previously entangled. These correlations cannot be accounted for by local causal mechanisms.

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TRACING THE BORDERS OF HUMAN FREE WILL. SKETCHES AFTER MICHAEL NOVAK

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Abstract. This contribution aims to reconstruct the concept of *common good*, as elaborated by the American-Slovakian philosopher Michael Novak in his text *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Published in 1993 by The Free Press, this book deals both genealogically and theoretically with this notion, indicating it as the only one capable of guaranteeing integral development for human beings in the new millennium.

The *common good*, in fact, has the merit of tracing the limits within which human beings can be defined as persons and, in this context, indicate their freedom. This contribution, taking its starting point precisely from this definition, will be concerned, on the one hand, with presenting the fundamental stages which, according to Novak, have contributed to the formation of the *common good* as we know it and, on the other, with highlighting the innovations proposed by Novak himself.

The working methodology is historical-hermeneutic. After having framed the text from a historical point of view, enucleating the author's editorial motives, we will move on to analyse its key moments in order to highlight its most decisive contents.

Keywords: freedom, goodness, free will, Catholicism, capitalist ethics

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to understand how the thought of Michael Novak, as analysed in the living voice of some of his texts, traces the limits of human freedom in society between Catholic and capitalist ideals. So, he can fully and freely self-determine himself and call himself a good subject within the society in which he lives. To understand Novak's work, reference will be made to the theoretical systems elaborated in *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1993). Influenced by the thought of Catholic social ethics, both academic and Vatican, this text has the merit of investigating the depths of the human spirit as it grapples with the construction of a new society, disengaged from the ideals proper to the history of thought up to the 20th century and open to the formation of social agglomerations that aim at both the fulfilment of the individual and the satisfaction of the needs of his group. This process is carried out in order to build a theory of socio-political and economic action that is guided by the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity towards society, and that pushes for the defence of the dignity of the individual, with a view to the realisation of the common good, both of society as a whole and of individuals as its constituents.

1. Freedom and Centrality. The Importance of the Catholic-Capitalist Ideal for the Common Good

> Indeed, besides the earth, man's principal resource is man himself. His intelligence enables him to discover the earth's productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied. It is his disciplined work in close collaboration with others that makes possible the creation of ever more extensive working communities, which can be relied upon to transform man's natural and human environments. Important virtues are involved in this process, such as diligence, industriousness, prudence in undertaking reasonable risks, reliability and fidelity in interpersonal relationships, as well as courage in carrying out decisions which are difficult and painful but necessary, both for the overall working of a business and in meeting possible setbacks. (John Paul II, 1991).

Borrowing the quote that begins the introduction to *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, we return to Michael Novak to the important role John Paul II played in the creation and renewal of his theological-economic and political thought. The passage from *Centesimus Annus* quoted here is fundamental for tracing the hermeneutic track towards understanding a part of the American philosopher's thought, the one related to tracing the relationship between Catholic thought and capitalist ideology. In this sense, the encyclical quotation is already illuminating. First of all, the correlation between man and the world is posited as fundamental, since without one, the other cannot be and vice versa. In addition, it is stated that for man, the main reference for self-enhancement is his own person. This consideration is fundamental because, given the truth of the correlation, for man to turn to himself means to understand what his own potential is, to understand the potential of others as well, and to open himself to the world with this awareness. Therefore, through and after this work of turning, he will be able to satisfy both the needs of his fellow human beings and those of the world around him.

The immediate consequence of this is being able to operate in the world with 'disciplined work, in close collaboration'. This expression deserves a closer look. John Paul II indicates that work must be disciplined, but not in the sense of scrupulous and slavish observance of rules, but in the derivative sense from the Latin *discipulus*. Thus, the man who works with discipline becomes a disciple of the needs of the society in which he lives and understands what the real needs of his environment are. The result is that man, every man, will be able to produce what he really needs and in the ways that most respect his society, understood both as an associated group of men and as a fragment of the world in which these men exercise themselves in various activities. But the Pope does not limit himself to this ontological consideration and proceeds further, indicating how, from the point of view of the anthropology of society, this work is to be carried out, namely, through the exercise of 'close collaboration', so as to say, in solidarity. Having become a principle of Christian ethics since the appearance of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in 2004, solidarity is that principle that allows each person to act within society through an immediate understanding of the needs of those around them. It might seem redundant to what has been stated before, but solidarity adds an extra element of suggestiveness. Deriving etymologically from *solidum*, which in Latin meant the obligation to pay someone jointly and severally, it indicates the need to share and to universally allocate available goods to all men in such a way that each can enjoy the same degree of well-being. In this way, it will be possible to satisfy the needs of the individual and ensure the prosperity of their society at the same time.

Thus, the expression used by John Paul II in his encyclical takes on universal value, determined by the need to guarantee the universal and transversal common good. This is why, again following the Pope, the human environment and the natural environment are to be righteously modified by man, according to his needs, but disengaged from a mere 'rhetorical' exercise of his free will and through the exercise of the virtues that contribute to the formation of a good person and a good society. [Novak himself warns that the use of '*individual*' is normally accepted in this type of discussion. However, to be truly adherent to Catholic thought, it is necessary to use '*person*'. To respect the author's instructions, the noun '*person*' will also be used in this contribution instead of '*individual*'. On the concept of person, *see* the enlightening and still topical introduction by Joseph Endres (Endres 1972).]

This opens, through the application of virtuous behaviour, to the conscious use of this way of acting in solidarity, which enables all individuals to discover themselves as protagonists of the present and future of the societies in which they live. This is particularly important when linked to the fundamental topic of social ethics, namely that of understanding how the individual and society can go hand in hand. Taking up the prodromes of the theorisation of social ethics as an academic discipline, we can problematise with Heinz-Dietrich Wendland that the great difficulty man faces in discovering himself part of the world is the resolution of the dilemma between individuality and sociality (*see* Wendland 1970, 21-34). If the former, in fact, refers to the making of man through his individual beliefs and aspirations in respect of the principle of self-determination, the latter refers to the opposite tendency, i.e. respect for the social rules that limit action and, therefore, the making of the person.

The result is a practical contradiction that would make it way more difficult the realisation of the man-world relationship, as conceived by John Paul II. Man would be faced with a choice, either to be for himself or to be for others. In both cases, however, the principle of self-determination would be violated and, consequently, the concept of disciplined solidarity would be more of a constraint than a drive towards realisation. With Wendland himself, however, we are able to overcome the difficulty, because he shows us the true meaning of 'social ethics' (*see* Wendland 1970, 8). It is social and individual in equal measure, insofar as the two former attributes are two sides of the same coin, that of ethics. Society, in fact, is an extension of individuality, without which it could not exist and which accommodates man's free self-determination. Starting precisely from his individuality, the assumption remains valid: every man is a person precisely because no one can be truly isolated in society. [This is an aspect that, in the course of the history of thought, has been successfully addressed by Edith Stein, who forcefully proclaimed the entirely social aspect of man. *See* Stein, 2013, 37-38.] In this way, acting according to the principle of solidarity means truly listening to other human beings, understood as an integral part of society and realised in themselves in their potential. In other words, the dignity of man is transversally respected according to all the dictates of his individuality and sociality. From an economic-political point of view, this enables the realisation of the Catholic thought connected to the establishment of capitalist ideology, since neither the individual nor society is forced to withdraw from each other to ensure the existence of either.

And it is precisely from here that Novak, recognising the words of social ethics, brings out two attributes that are necessary and sufficient for human economic policy to preserve every human being:

1. Presence of the element of solidarity;
2. Presence of a connection between the individual and society at the socio-political level.

These two attributes open up for a non-contradictory dialogue between Catholicism and capitalism, addressing what John Paul II calls, in the quoted passage from *Centesimus Annus*, 'possible set-backs'. According to Novak (Novak 1993, XIII), this theoretical element finds its full practical realisation mainly in two geographical poles, historically since the second decade of the 1980s: Eastern Europe and Latin America. These poles show that since the collapse of socialism, the socio-political sphere in those regions of the world has sought a foothold in a new type of social action that respects both society and the individual. Hence, we see the emergence of Catholic-capitalist thought and language, which seems to be the one that best meets this need for respect. This, following Novak's argument, happens on three levels. [Novak warns that, in this context, it is necessary to speak of Catholicism and not Christianity, as the former offers a better perspective than the latter in terms of its theoretical, hermeneutical and historical inclusiveness. In this regard, *cf.* Novak, 1993, *Preface and Introduction*.]

The first level is that of *consensus*, which inaugurates the dialectic between Catholicism and capitalism since it intercepts the introductory stage of the constitution of a society. Consensus, in fact, allows both horizontally and transversally all the members of a given society to understand what their actual needs are and how they should be satisfied. Once the best proposals have been identified, the members of that society will generate agreement, and thus consensus, on needs and satisfactions. The result is that such a society will be built on sound theoretical and practical ideals, not only of political innovation, but of respect for a tradition of thought that aims to defend both society and the people in it. In fact, society will be able to stabilise and begin to act functionally. This opens up the second level, that of the consolidated economy. This level is a direct and almost natural consequence of the previous level, in that the functionality of action allows society to be able to progress with respect to the ideals from which it starts and thus consolidate its role in the panorama of the world's societies. By consolidated economy, of course, we do not just mean the pecuniary aspect of society, but that entire system of values that gives rise to social roles and the application of the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity that make the very existence of its parts possible. Finally, the third level, that of personal initiative. Having established that the first and second levels create and stabilise a society based on the Catholic-capitalist ideal, and being aware that society and the person are sides of the same ethical-social coin, it will be possible to open a space for the person and his capacity to realise himself and all his potential within the social group of reference. This includes promotion in both public and private spheres, acting in solidarity, free professionalism and all activities that, in general, allow society to progress. The union of these three levels fully and concretely realises the functioning of society according to the Catholic-capitalist ideal.

Novak, however, warns that such a system is entirely feasible on a theoretical level of discussion, but has found little application in today's existent societies, because none of them has succeeded in balancing the Catholic side with the capitalist side, sometimes resulting in a society too little open to the risk of investing in itself, and sometimes in a society too greedy to excel over its own members and others, failing the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. The reason for this imbalance, however, is not due to systemic dysfunctions or the prevarication of one social group over another, but to a more 'simple' misunderstanding of the role that persons should play in such societies. In fact, it is often the case that man as an individual is involved only at the moment of the beginning of the movement to apply the ideal, as if he were a 'demiurge' who, once given the initial touch, would let society develop according to its natural and uncontrollable becoming. In reality, in order for the Catholic-capitalist ideal to be realised, the very opposite must happen, *i.e.* man must be trusted and given credit for his creative abilities at all times. Following the suggestion of *Centesimus Annus*, Novak proposes that the application of the principle of solidarity, exemplary of all other principles and values of social ethics, makes it possible for every man to be able to act according to virtue. That is, to realise himself according to his own personality both intellectually and volitionally. Each person will know what he wants and will want what he knows, realising a virtuous circle that realises and perfects society. Thus, almost by collating the theorisations of Wendland and John Paul II, Novak succeeds in precisely defining that man must be at the centre, that he is a person and not an individual because his free initiative realises not only his usefulness in the society in which he lives, but above all his usefulness, his living as stated before for himself and for society. This opens, as Felice argues, to the redefinition of the traditional notion of social justice (Felice 2022, 96). [*See* Felice's volume for an exhaustive and complete bio-bibliographical apparatus on Novak.]

The concept of capitalism proper to the Catholic-capitalist ideal, then, is no longer to be understood as a mere economic conception, but shifts from indicating a *modus* of getting rich to a true perspective of life, thus moving from a *tour court* capitalism to a human capitalism. And Novak, in this sense, also indicates what the characteristics of this capitalism must be that keep the person, his actions and his relations with society at the centre. Maintaining, while detaching himself from it in content, the Weberian theory of the man who embraces capitalism by vocation, Novak argues that the first two moments that endorse the birth of capitalism, keeping the person at its centre, are inventiveness and initiative. As we understand, the birth of this existential perspective is subsequent to the three moments that generate the Catholic-capitalist language. Once society and its people understand how to 'speak' using such language, the history of that society can begin. And the beginning occurs by recognising the inventiveness of each individual member of society who is able, through his or her spirit of initiative, to bring something innovative and original to the world he or she is experiencing. Consequently, this contribution will develop the progress of the same society that 'undergoes' it, in a virtuous spiral that allows for authentic and human development. Automatically, due to the spirit of sociality innate in all human beings, the third moment proper to the development of the society taken as a model here is cooperation. A multifaceted concept often used in our contemporary socio-economic debates, for Novak, it represents the gateway to strengthening the internal cohesion of any group of individuals. Co-operation, in fact, does not only mean helping each other, but bringing the concept of social cohesion to maturity through the mutual recognition of innovation and inventiveness, which allows the image of 'making (human) capital together' to emerge.

This leads to the last moment, which Novak defines as that of *know-how*, which certifies, stabilises and systematises the competences of each individual person. This one will be proficient and successful in building a society that recognises and stands on the potential expressed by each individual human being. The Catholic-capitalist ideal, thus, progressively moves away from the socio-political hermeneutic standard, to embrace the ethical one: to be a capitalist in the Catholic sense means to recognise that society is truly free when each individual can freely self-determine in it, contributing to its development.

2. Creative Person, Capitalism and Catholicism. Novak in Dialogue between Tradition and Innovation

The implication of what was expressed in the previous paragraph is summed up in an eminently cogent way by Novak with the introduction of the expression 'creative person', which he defines as the epilogue of his research on the relationship between Catholicism and capitalism.

Indeed, the author argues, 'the most valid justification of the capitalist system is not only the fact that, poor though it is, it protects freedom better than any other known system [...]. The real moral force of capitalism lies in its ability to foster human creativity' (Novak 1993, 237). Novak's statement, however comprehensible it may be on a superficial reading, contains within it a number of issues that will have to be addressed in order to render his idea unobjectionable. In the first instance, he calls the capitalist system a 'poor system'. Such juxtaposition, in absolute value, is heuristically untenable, since it is not possible to say that a capitalist system that transversally seeks the greatest profit is simultaneously poor. According to Novak's new perspective, however, this is an adequately demonstrable fact. If we admit, in fact, that the capitalist system must be a structure governed by Catholic ethics, then it will be relatively easy to assert that every human being, in such a system, will naturally aim to express himself. Moreover, it will show his power of invention and initiative and not to accumulate wealth. Therefore, the capitalism proposed by Novak ontologically guarantees this lack. A lack that is certainly not to be understood in a negative way, since it indicates that every person places himself at the centre and is aware of his centrality.

Another concept that needs to be clarified to understand Novak's theory is that of capitalism promoting human creativity. Again, it is difficult to equate the concept of capitalism with that of creativity, as one would immediately be tempted to equate the former with nouns such as wealth, profit, gain, etc. In fact, consulting any of the dictionaries available to us, one notes that capitalism is defined as 'an economic system in which a country's businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit by private owners rather than by the government' (Oxford Dictionary, entry 'Capitalism'). Thus defined, it does not allow any room for human creativity.

However, Novak has already suggested that a capitalism that allows itself to be inspired by Catholicism will soon abandon this conception, to make room for the person. The ontological change of such a form of capitalism was already evident in the first paragraph of this contribution, when we described the moments leading to the formation of Catholic capitalism. Here, we show how Novak introduces a new element of discussion, which is the connection between capitalism, ethics and creativity. Man's action in this new type of society is guided by the binaries of capitalism and (Catholic) ethics, but is not bound by blind adherence to their normative statutes. Man naturally knows what his role is in this new type of society, since the dictates of Catholicism he finds himself complying with are inherent to him and are species-specific to the very society in which he finds himself living: this stems from the historical stratification that has led to the all-human awareness of roles in the world. As Bianchi suggests, 'man's creative gifts are nothing but resources developed over millions of years to satisfy existential needs. A fundamental event in human history must have been the intuition that what a single individual cannot do, an organised group can' (Bianchi 2018, 79). Thus, there is no contradiction between a society governed by Catholic ethics and simultaneously driven by a capitalist-type system. The only thing to keep in mind, Novak points out, is the character of the vocational trait of such a system, so that the human creative trait can enable a social 'I', 'you' and 'we', 'fostering the full development of that capacity' (Novak 1993, 227).

Thus, Novak invites us to reflect on what he calls the 'seven moral issues for developing a social ethic suited to our times' (Novak 1993, 221). These, we would add, are also diriment to understanding how a person frees himself from his shadow, becomes an integral part of society as a person, and turns into his centre by exercising his total freedom in view of the common good:

1. *Human sociality*. This is a question rooted in man's historical and intellectual past, for from the very beginning of the history of thought, asking how human beings can preserve their individuality while coexisting within them the unbounded desire to associate with others. An understanding of human sociality is necessary to understand why family, friends and, in general, civil society are agglomerations in which each person can best express himself. They are also the places where they can apply the principles and ethical values, of which subsidiarity is the clearest expression.

2. *Principle of subsidiarity*. A direct consequence of human sociality is the application of the principle of subsidiarity. Well before its standardisation by the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Novak recognises the centrality of this principle, since it is the one that succeeds in maximising cooperation between different human beings, so that every part of society receives the same help and collaboration, in order to achieve the common good. This stands as a guarantee of the process of applying the principle of subsidiarity because, when correct, it leads to the whole well-being of the social environment.

3. *Human Dignity*. What has now become the cornerstone of social-ethical speculation on man represents for Novak the starting point for understanding human freedom and responsibility. Indeed, when discussing human freedom, it is usual to invoke the concept of free will to show that each person is born ontologically free to decide what is best for him or her, almost being able to do what he or she wants. In reality, freedom as understood here does respect free will, but in its original Catholic connotation, it is closely linked to dignity. [And it could not be otherwise, given the Catholic-capitalist proposal that Novak inaugurates and carries forward.] In this perspective, it consists of the free capacity that each person has to recognise his or her individual and social limitations and, from these, begin his or her proposal of self-determination that opens up a good life. Such a self-determined good life through dignity also carries within itself the principle of responsibility, which admonishes man about the consequences of his actions. Once again, Novak finds a way to show that man must be at the centre of all ethical speculations about his role in society.

4. *Necessary virtues*. Clearly, dignity and freedom enable man to self-determine, but what are the starting points of such self-determination? Who or what makes it possible for man to realise that such action leads him to ethical success? Novak's answer, borrowing precisely from Catholic ethics, is the concept of

virtue. For the American thinker, this concept takes on historical-intellectual value with the entry into the field of the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, who Christianly defines the concept of 'person, quite distinct from the concept of the individual' (Novak 1989, 28). Man, identified as a person, receives from the moment of his creation the status of *imago Dei* and, because of this, is invested by *analogia entis* with the virtues that God himself possesses. Man is indeed endowed with free will, but he is inherently derived from the divine nature. This one, when man withdraws into himself, emerges in all its power and enables him to discern right from wrong, thus giving him the possibility of creating a society that has objective moral values, referring to the subject, but valid and valuable for the whole of society. The consequence is that virtue, or rather virtuous action, brings about the downfall of ethical relativism and thus generates a virtuous and value-stable society.

5. *Creative subjectivity*. To speak of objective values and virtues that derive from man's filiation to his Creator runs the risk of arguing about the actual practical flattening of people's lives in relation to a system that already provides that man innately knows how to choose what is right. Novak amends this risk by introducing the question of creative subjectivity. Every person is, indeed, formed in the manner just described, but he or she is not a passive object of the making of society, but is a subject (in the Latin sense of the term, *subiectum*) that underlies and forms the basis of any ethical development of the reference group. It is creativity, 'creativities', that makes it possible for a society to survive and to recognise itself in its members.

6. *Unity and diversity*. A direct consequence of the previous question is the recognition that each person is identical and different to all others. In the first moment, that of identity, one reaches the realisation that all people in society act as a *unicum*. Thus, the Catholic-capitalist ideal can be realised. In the second moment, precisely in order to avoid anthropological flattening, diversity

comes into play. I.e. the creative moment that allows each man to understand the ways in which he can be a protagonist in the society in which he lives, this time in his being a *unicum* with respect to others.

7. *Being, acting and receiving the Grace*. With these three terms, Novak finishes the discussion of moral questions about man and indicates a practical way for every person to realise freedom and the common good in society. First, one *must be*: by abandoning the Protestant ethic of capitalism by accumulation, every man will be aware that to show and realise oneself in a society means to build a stable and inalienable welfare for the social body itself. Next, one *must act*: conscious of his centrality, the self-conscious person will be able to act with the awareness of one who knows that his contribution is certainly positive for the society in which he lives. Thus, all of this is conducted in the light of an ethic that defends and reassures him. Finally, precisely because of the Catholic perspective of the proposal, it is necessary to put oneself in a position to receive Grace and hope to receive it: while recognising the centrality of man and his freedom to self-determination, Novak is convinced that human beings cannot easily complete the task that the author himself assigns to them. This task can be facilitated by divine Grace, which, by giving itself to man, illuminates his path.

Thus, through the resolution and collation of these issues, Novak has ready the reference system for the construction of a free society, which enables free men themselves to create freely and exercise their creativity in self-determination.

3. Traces for Future Research

In this part, we shall trace the main line of argumentation that leads Novak, within one of his major works, to reconsider the role of man in the world, inheriting here and there the tradition on man that from Thomas Aquinas through the Renaissance arrives at our contemporary times. The journey inaugurated by Novak, thanks also to the concepts of Catholic-capitalist society, freedom and the common good, intends to reach a goal: to understand how a potential new society that might arise in our world might be able to enable its members to express themselves to the fullest extent of their potential.

What, almost certainly, Novak did not know while writing his texts is that his thought managed to cross the boundaries of his own theorising, especially in the direction taken by 21st-century Catholic social ethics, which, in some ways, is indebted to Novak himself with regard to speculation on the status of man in the world.

In an era ethically characterised by the negative connotation usually attributed to human action, which takes the form of the emergence of the so-called 'science of the Anthropocene', Novak's rediscovery may allow us to understand more about the human being. Without having to give up the new moral acquisitions, but rather by turning to the tradition, of which Novak himself is now a fully-fledged member. We are enabled to give to any human being the possibility to understand the world and understand himself, in order to improve his living conditions and those of the society in which he lives. Novak himself is aware that his proposal is more a theorisation of the perfect society to be realised in our contemporary times, rather than a socio-anthropological description of one that already exists. However, he himself is confident that mankind, by recovering itself, will indeed recover the conditions to be able to realise his system. Concluding in Novak's own words, 'new wealth can be created. Human beings themselves are the primary cause of the wealth of nations' (Novak 1993, 237).

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THIRTY-THREE MOMENTS OF THE SOVIET POSITION ON THE GERMAN QUESTION. A MICROHISTORY

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Abstract. This article presents the microhistory of the Soviet position on the German question from 1985 to 1990, drawing on Russian-language archival materials, mainly Gorbachev's correspondence published by the Gorbachev Foundation. In addition to offering this microhistory, it aims to illuminate the long-debated "not one inch eastward" assurance by analysing its context. This research demonstrates that, during 1989-1990, Western oral pledges to the Soviet leadership regarding NATO's non-enlargement sometimes specifically referred to the territory of the (former)[1] GDR, at other times to the Eastern Bloc beyond the (former) GDR, and in some instances resembled a general promise of NATO's future non-enlargement to the east. Furthermore, the article highlights that during the negotiations on Germany, the Soviets had concerns about pro-NATO aspirations in the Eastern Bloc (beyond the GDR) and the risks of future NATO enlargement eastward, beyond the (former) GDR. Ultimately, the article proposes a theoretical framework to explain why the Soviets accepted a *status quo* that risked NATO's eastward expansion, despite their awareness of the associated risks and the absence of any legal guarantees against enlargement.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Gorbachev, FRG, GDR, NATO, Warsaw Pact, German question, German reunification, reunified Germany's military status, "not one inch eastward" assurance

1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this article is inspired by the 1973 Soviet espionage thriller TV series "Seventeen Moments of Spring". Although the connection between the two is mainly symbolic, readers might discover allusive parallels and differences. The series portrays seventeen days of a Soviet spy planted in Germany, who successfully carries out his mission just before Germany's defeat in World War II. At that pivotal moment, the Soviets emerged victorious while Germany was defeated and divided. In contrast, this article explores another historical development involving the Soviets and Germans, portraying thirty-three moments of transformation in the Soviet position on the German question at the end of the Cold War. Here, unlike in the earlier case, Germany prevails and reunifies, while, considering what happened to the USSR later, the Soviet Union is defeated.

Since the period of détente, the 1970 Treaty of Moscow and the Helsinki Final Act served as the framework for relations between the USSR and the two Germanies. However, the late 1980s marked a significant shift in the Soviet stance. Under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, the two Germanies were reunified, with the Soviet Union among the approving parties. This period reflects a fascinating transformation in the Soviet position, shifting from a focus on maintaining the status quo of the two Germanies—one in NATO and the other in the Warsaw Pact—to endorsing a unified Germany in NATO. Overall, the entire process reflects a shift in the Soviet position from hardline rigidity to greater flexibility, culminating in September 1990 when they signed the Two Plus Four Agreement in Moscow, which was ratified in March 1991.

Readers may find this article novel for three main reasons: a) it presents a microhistory of the transformation of the Soviet position on the German question from 1985 to 1990, following Soviet negotiations and structural-conjunctural changes during this period, primarily based on Russian-language archival materials of Gorbachev's correspondence published by the Gorbachev Foundation; b) it attempts to shed new light on the long-debated and politicized discussion about the "not one inch eastward" assurance, clarifying its context, extent, and meaning; and c) it outlines the security concerns of the Soviets regarding the risks of NATO's expansion beyond (former) GDR territory before and during the negotiations on Germany. This particular feature is important since it revises some conventional wisdom regarding the "not one inch eastward" assurance debate, specifically the notion that the promise concerned (could have concerned) only the (former) GDR territory, as the Soviets were not even considering NATO enlargement further eastward than the (former) GDR territory at that moment (this notion is also supported by additional reasons and arguments).

Besides describing the transformation of the Soviet position on the German question, this article clarifies that: a) the "not one inch eastward" assurance, which was reformulated to the Soviets in diverse forms by Western leadership during the negotiations on Germany, sometimes referred specifically to the (former) GDR territory, at other times clearly to the Eastern Bloc beyond the (former) GDR, and in some instances resembled a general promise of NATO's future non-enlargement to the east; and b) well before and during the negotiations on Germany, part of the Soviet leadership was indeed concerned about the risks of NATO enlargement beyond the (former) GDR. This concern is clearly evident in their correspondence and memoranda of conversations. In addition, these Soviet suspicions are further justified now by new evidence from Czech, German, Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian archives presented in the recently published article in a journal on international security.

Also, this article attempts to provide a theory explaining why the Soviets ultimately accepted the status quo that risked NATO's further eastward expansion beyond the (former) GDR territory, despite being aware of such risks and without receiving any legal promise of NATO non-enlargement[2].

2. From the *Status Quo* to the First Moment of Change

The point of departure for Gorbachev's policy regarding the two Germanies was the framework established by the 1970 Moscow Treaty and the Helsinki Final Act. These agreements clarified the reality of two German states and the inviolability of frontiers (although both also contained the option for freedom of self-determination).

Gorbachev's first formal meetings as General Secretary of the Soviet Union with German leaders were held on May 5, 1985, in Moscow. He first met Erich Honecker of the GDR, and later that day, he met Herbert Mies (Leader of the West German Communist Party, DKP) from the FRG and Horst Schmitt (Leader of the Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin, SEW) from West Berlin. The first meeting of Gorbachev with the FRG government representative was with the leader of the opposition, Willy Brandt, on May 27, 1985, in Moscow. Gorbachev expressed his support for the 1970 and 1975 agreements; regarding the Soviet position on German unity, he reminded Brandt of Stalin's words in 1942, spoken on the eve of the Nazi invasion, about Hitler's coming and going, but the German people and the German state remaining (Gorbachev 2008a, 568). He also spoke about his concerns regarding the risks of the "absorption of socialist countries". "This is, first of all, interference [...] and NATO is discussing this topic, but if this were the basis of policy, it would be a course for war", he mentioned (Gorbachev 2008a, 288). Some may not be entirely wrong if they find these words somewhat prophetic (but in the new context, of course).

At the Politburo meeting on March 17, 1986, Gorbachev mentioned that the question regarding the FRG was serious, but he advised the others not to engage in contacts with the FRG at the highest level just yet (Gorbachev 2008b, 488-489). Some weeks later, on June 13, again at the Politburo, Gorbachev said that at all meetings with partner countries, there was a general agreement that they all needed to work with the FRG. "They are all very connected to it, economically—first of all", he said. In the end, Gorbachev emphasised that they should not destroy the relationship with the FRG under any circumstances (Gorbachev 2008c, 161).

On July 21, 1986, Gorbachev met with Hans-Dietrich Genscher for the first time – they met in Moscow. According to a Pravda article published the following day, Gorbachev emphasised the importance of the 1970 and 1975 frameworks and discussed the responsibilities of both the USSR and the FRG in constructing a "European home", while remaining committed to their military-political alliances. He cautioned that dismantling the established structure in Europe would only result in chaos. Gorbachev also pointed out inconsistencies in the FRG's policy (Gorbachev 2006, 15). While it is unclear what specific issues he was referring to, his remarks during the July 24 Politburo meeting about his conversation with Genscher suggest that their discussion was not quite harmonious: "We got some things across to their understanding… We didn't mince words", Gorbachev stated (Gorbachev 2008c, 340).

A year later, on the eve of the Glasnost policy, during his meeting with Erich Honecker on May 28, 1987, in Berlin, Gorbachev was officially still adhering to the *status quo*. However, in his discourse, one could sense his reform-mindedness and his attempt to influence his East German colleague. The situation in Europe is changing, and a new alignment of political forces is emerging, Gorbachev told Honecker. "We in the Politburo have discussed this issue more than once, and we believe that it would be useful for us to think together about relations with the FRG" (Gorbachev 2008d, 52). Two weeks later, on June 11, Gorbachev spoke about this conversation at the Politburo, mentioning that he had advised Honecker to find common ground with the FRG (Gorbachev 2006, 43).

The first clear moment of change in the Soviet position on Germany is evident in the June 11, 1987, Politburo memorandum. Here, Gorbachev stated that they needed "to do something extraordinary in relations with the FRG [in order to] pull this country closer". It was also mentioned for the first time in Politburo meetings that the issue of German unification had gained traction in the West German press. "Our reaction is being tested through the media. They want us to decide", said Gorbachev (Gorbachev 2006, 43).

3. From the First Moment of Change to the End of the Brezhnev Doctrine

Even though the Soviets were convinced among themselves that they needed to draw the FRG closer and should be prepared to take extraordinary steps, in diplomatic meetings, they signalled only moderate openness, and their position still remained tough. On July 7, 1987, Gorbachev met with West German President Richard von Weizsäcker and Foreign Minister Genscher in Moscow. "We feel that we need to rethink our relations with the FRG", Gorbachev told his German guests. "The Soviet Union advocates a serious, permanent, and thorough political dialogue with the FRG". Gorbachev also made it clear that, although the Soviets were ready to consider all issues of mutual interest, they did not intend to back away from any position (Gorbachev 2008d, 253, 255).

The conversation also focused on the German question, and Gorbachev expressed the Soviet's alertness regarding statements from the FRG that the German question remained open and that not everything was clear concerning "the lands in the east", as well as the legitimacy of Yalta and Potsdam (Gorbachev 2008d, 254). In response, Weizsäcker stated that while Germans may live in two different states, belong to different security alliances, and have opposing social systems and ideologies, they are still one nation (Gorbachev 2008d, 591). Noteworthy is Gorbachev's reaction to this statement: he remarked that he would prefer not to theorise about the concept of a nation in this context and emphasised the importance of the political aspect instead: "There are two German states with different socio-political systems and values", he said (Gorbachev 2008d, 591). To summarise this conversation: Weizsäcker argued for the concept of two states and one nation, while Gorbachev focused on the idea of two states, preferring "not to theorise" about the concept of a nation, clearly indicating that he disagreed with Weizsäcker's point of view.

The Soviets may have adhered to the *status quo* in their foreign correspondences, but among themselves, they were clear about a new openness. This readiness is evident from the Politburo meeting on July 16, 1987. Here, the head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU and a long-time former Soviet ambassador to the USA, Anatoly Dobrynin, summarised Gorbachev's position: "The main idea of Mikhail Sergeyevich is to rethink the entire complex of relations between the FRG and the USSR. And we are implementing this - entering into a large dialogue with one of the largest countries" (Gorbachev 2006, 56).

The second moment of change in the Soviet position on Germany is evident from Gorbachev's meeting with the Minister-President of Bavaria and leader of the Christian Social Union, Franz Josef Strauss, on December 29, 1987, in Moscow. Here, Gorbachev signalled an end to the Brezhnev Doctrine: "We need to de-ideologise international relations. Let each nation choose its own path, its own system, religion, ideology, and its own way of life. It is the sovereign right of each nation to make its own choice without prompting or coercion" (Gorbachev 2009a, 176). This may be one of the earliest signals from Gorbachev to German politicians (if not to the Westerners in general) about ending the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Another novelty of Gorbachev's meeting with Strauss is that, unlike his earlier meeting with Weizsäcker and Genscher, Gorbachev did not question or engage in an argument about the concept of two states and one nation when Strauss spoke about it and when he said that he viewed this setting as a certain task imposed on Germans by history. Additionally, the CSU leader reassured Gorbachev, stating that they were not forcing the issue of German reunification, as this may happen in ten, fifty, or even a hundred years and made it clear that the key to unification was in Moscow and not in Washington (Gorbachev 2006, 75).

On May 11, 1988, Gorbachev met the new leader of the SPD, Hans-Jochen Vogel, in Moscow. Interestingly, during this meeting, Gorbachev addressed the Soviet view of the American approach toward the Soviets, which he deemed ineffective. However, from today's perspective, it appears to me that this approach was, in fact, quite effective, ultimately leading to the collapse of the USSR—an outcome that may not have been the Americans' intention. "[Americans] are still trying to act from a position of strength. Someone has hammered it into their heads (or perhaps they decided it themselves) that 'Gorbachev and his team' are now in a difficult situation, and more can be squeezed out of us", told Gorbachev to Vogel (Gorbachev 2006, 87). This passage helps clarify Soviet perceptions of American intentions toward them, which, according to Gorbachev, were aimed at squeezing out as much as possible during a time of Soviet difficulty.

On October 19, 1988, Gorbachev met with representatives of the magazine Spiegel, led by its publisher Rudolf Augstein, at the Central Committee of the CPSU (Gorbachev 2009b, 530). In response to Augstein's question about whether he considered the German question still open, Gorbachev replied that any attempts to blur the boundaries between sovereign German states, especially through coercive experiments, were unacceptable, if not catastrophic (Gorbachev 2009b, 254). This passage is important because, in addition to showing that Gorbachev remains committed to the status quo of two German states, it also reflects some moderation in his position. When Gorbachev speaks about the unacceptability of blurring the borders, he emphasises "any attempts" but places special emphasis on coercive measures. What would Gorbachev have answered if he were asked about blurring the borders between the two Germanies based on the sovereign right of each nation to make its own choice without coercion? Would he have accepted such a process if it took on without coercion? – I believe he would.

Gorbachev's next meeting, which took place five days later, lends more credibility to the above-stated thesis. On October 24, Gorbachev had his first meeting with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl – they met in Moscow. During this meeting, Kohl appeared to be well-informed about the recent cracks in Gorbachev's hard-line policy on Germany. He explicitly emphasised the unity of the German nation and stated that the changes they spoke about were only possible through peaceful, non-coercive means and in collaboration with their neighbours. He also conveyed a calming message regarding the likely long wait—possibly spanning several generations—for German reunification. On his part, Gorbachev replied that discussions about addressing the question of unification with the political thinking of the 1940s and 1950s were provoking a reaction. Here, Gorbachev emphasised the unacceptability of approaching the unification question based on the political thinking of the era of the 1940s and 1950s. Additionally, it seemed, beyond it, there were no Soviet red lines. This particular feature of change constitutes the third moment of the Soviet position on the German question (Gorbachev 2006, 131, 133).

During June 12-15, 1989, Gorbachev visited the FRG. In his conversation with Kohl on June 12, Gorbachev once again signalled the end of the Brezhnev Doctrine. "In relation to our allies, we have a firm concept: each is responsible for themselves. We do not intend to teach anyone […] In my opinion, what I have said clearly indicates whether there is a Brezhnev Doctrine or not", he said (Gorbachev 2006, 161-162). The next day, while signing Soviet-West German documents, Gorbachev and Kohl made a joint statement, stating that all nations and states must have the right to freely determine their fate and build relationships based on international law, including choosing their political and social systems, while respecting self-determination; war should no longer be a tool of politics (Gorbachev 2006, 180-184) - this was nothing but a formal and public renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine. Two days later, at a press conference in Bonn, Gorbachev spoke those famous words about nothing being eternal under the moon and that the Wall may disappear when the conditions that gave rise to it are no longer present (Gorbachev 2010a, 505-506). This was the fourth moment of the Soviet position on the German question.

4. From Political Changes in the GDR to the Fall of the Berlin Wall

During the autumn of 1989, very significant political changes took place in the GDR—changes that played a crucial role in the fall of the Wall and in the reunification the following year. Honecker's problems, both political and ideological, had long been visible; moreover, Gorbachev and Honecker seemed to be a really bad match. After recovering from serious health issues, Honecker faced an increasing refugee problem in the GDR; and in parallel, the internal SED process that led to his pressured resignation also entered a paroxysm. Therefore, Gorbachev's visit to the GDR on October 6-7 truly seemed like Judas's embrace of Jesus Christ. In the streets, people chanted: "Gorby, help us! Gorby, save us!" and in the SED cabinets, the second man of the GDR—Egon Krenz—was on the rise.

On the other hand, a Protestant reverend from the GDR—Markus Meckel—and the son of a pastor, Martin Gutzeit, were on their way to the formal foundation of the East German Social Democratic Party (SDP) on October 7, 1989, in Schwante, a town near Berlin (on September 18, they had the first initiative group meeting) (Meckel 2020, 202, 210)[3]. The SDP, together with the CDU in East Germany (where Lothar de Maizière successfully pressured the resignation of Ulbricht-Honecker period party leader Gerald Götting in November 1989), emerged victorious in the forthcoming March 18, 1990, GDR general election and participated in the 2+4 process, with Meckel representing the GDR as its Foreign Minister and Lothar de Maizière leading the government. The Honecker-Krenz substitution, alongside the foundation of the SDP, was the fifth moment that had an effect on the Soviet position on the German question. The cherry on top was the fall of the Wall on November 9—an event that drastically changed the socio-political atmosphere not only in the two Germanies but also worldwide, as it signified not only the inevitability of German unification but also the end of the Cold War. This was the sixth moment of the Soviet position.

5. This Will Happen Anyway – Forewarnings From Western Leaders

The fall of the Wall had a tremendous impact on the German question and acted as an accelerant for the entire process. This caused discomfort for the Soviets and made them realise that, with or without their support, Germany was going to reunify—and it would happen soon. The fall of the Wall also had a significant impact on internal political processes in the GDR. After the substitution of Honecker by Krenz as General Secretary of the SED, it was time for a change in government. Honecker's Prime Minister (Chairman of the Council of Ministers) was to be succeeded by a more reform-minded cabinet led by Hans Modrow. In a phone call on November 11, following the fall of the Wall, Kohl informed Gorbachev that a new government would be formed in the GDR the following week and that the FRG welcomed the start of reforms in East Germany (Gorbachev 2006, 247). The Stoph-Modrow substitution marked the seventh moment that affected the Soviet position on the German question.

On November 16, 1989, Gorbachev's adviser, Vadim Zagladin, met with Klaus Blech, the FRG ambassador to Moscow. Blech informed and somewhat tried to calm Zagladin by mentioning that, unlike some circles in West Germany, the FRG leadership was not considering the immediate reunification of Germany (Gorbachev 2006, 251). This was the eighth moment that affected the Soviet position—the Soviets were signalled that unification was going to happen, but the FRG leadership viewed it as a non-immediate process. This may have calmed the Soviets for a couple of weeks until Kohl's famous speech at the Bundestag, which clearly signalled the acceleration.

On November 28, 1989, Kohl addressed the Bundestag with a speech titled "From Confederative Structures to Federation". In this speech, Kohl outlined his famous Ten Point Program, which profoundly alarmed the Soviets (as well as some Western leaders, as this came as a real surprise) and became one of the critical turning points in the acceleration of German reunification. Inter alia, Kohl spoke about establishing confederal institutions, FRG-GDR integration, the irreversible process of change in the GDR, and much else[4]. If one were to give this address an informal name, it might be: "small steps were good, but now it is time for big steps". This marked a pivotal moment in the history of the FRG, signalling the end of the policy of small steps in favour of larger, bolder actions. In parallel, Lothar de Maizière became the leader of the East German CDU—a party that emerged victorious in the upcoming March 18, 1990, general election in the GDR and formed a ruling coalition with the SDP. This was the ninth moment that affected the Soviet position.

In early December, Gorbachev was on his way to the Malta Summit. Before Malta, he visited Italy. This visit is important as Gorbachev once again faced the topic of the unity of the German nation and had to express his view about it. On November 29, in a meeting with Giulio Andreotti in Rome about German nationhood and statehood Italian Prime Minister explicitly stated: "This is one nation, but two states. This is our firm, indeed very firm position" (Gorbachev 2006, 265). Some may not pay attention to the order of topics presented in the sentence, but Andreotti's arrangement is quite balanced and diplomatic. He explicitly states that Germans are one nation while putting emphasis on the fact that there are two German states.

On December 1, Gorbachev and Andreotti held a joint press conference at Sforza Castle in Milan. While responding to a question from Italian *Il Messaggero* about German reunification, Gorbachev stated: "There are two German states—members of the UN. The people of each of them have the sovereign right to determine their own fate" (Gorbachev 2010b, 519, 206). Here, Gorbachev did not deny or refuse the existence of a single German nation; rather, he emphasised that each people in both Germanys had the sovereign right to self-determination.

During December 1-3, 1989, Gorbachev attended the US-Soviet summit in Malta. On December 2, during a one-on-one meeting, President Bush made his famous statement for the first time that he was not going to "jump on the wall" (Gorbachev 2010b, 521). In Malta, the Soviets received a clear signal from the Americans that Germany was going to reunify, but the Americans promised to act cautiously. At the December 3 meeting in a larger group, President Bush conveyed to Gorbachev that he hoped the Soviet leader understood the impossibility of expecting them to disapprove of German reunification. He emphasised the importance of maintaining a sense of restraint in their discussions, expressing a desire to avoid any position that might be perceived as provocative (Gorbachev 2010b, 524). Notably, Bush also responded to Gorbachev's remarks about the significance of the freedom of choice for people in Eastern and Western Europe regarding their preferred systems. Bush asserted that Western values respected the self-determination of individuals and did not advocate for "the imposition of [their] system on Romania, Czechoslovakia, or even the GDR" (Gorbachev 2010b, 235, 524). Even though Bush spoke about the enlargement of the Western space rather than specifically about NATO, this likely represents the first, albeit general, promise which could be placed within the context of the "not one inch eastward" pledge.

The Malta Summit marked the tenth moment concerning the Soviet position on the German question. At this summit, the Soviets were indirectly, yet clearly, signalled that Germany was on the path to reunification. They also received a general indication that the expansion of the Western sphere would remain within the margins of the freedom of choice for peoples.

Two days later, on December 5, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze met with Genscher in Moscow. Their conversation is notable because the Soviet foreign minister expressed concerns about the potential expansion of NATO beyond the GDR. In this tense meeting, Gorbachev voiced his dissatisfaction with Kohl's ten points, particularly the idea of confederation. He argued that since confederation implied common defence and foreign policy, besides other options, it theoretically left open the possibility of the GDR's future membership in NATO, which was unacceptable to them. Shevardnadze added, "Today this style is applied to the GDR; tomorrow it could be applied to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and then to Austria" (Gorbachev 2006, 277). Shevardnadze may have been mistaken about Austria, but his concerns regarding Poland and Czechoslovakia were indeed realistic, especially considering that, according to currently available data, Eastern Bloc countries, in different ways, expressed their NATO aspirations as early as January 1990.

After the Malta summit, Gorbachev had a meeting scheduled with French President François Mitterrand in Kyiv. On December 6, Gorbachev's advisor, Zagladin, met with Jacques Attali, the aide to Mitterrand. Attali remarked that France did not want the reunification of Germany in any way, although it understood that, ultimately, it would happen (Gorbachev 2006, 285). A similar message was conveyed by President Mitterrand during his meeting with Gorbachev on the same day. He expressed that he was not afraid of German reunification as the German component should become one element of a common European structure (Gorbachev 2006, 287). France was clearly signalling that Germany was going to reunify.

On December 21-22, 1989, Zagladin met with Karl Lammers, the Speaker on disarmament issues for the CSU-CDU Faction in the Bundestag. Lammers was likely the first to tell the Soviets that the FRG would remain in NATO, while also noting that NATO would undergo a process of politicisation—moving away from its military component and transforming into a political organisation (Gorbachev 2006, 294). This notion of NATO's transformation and politicisation later became an integral element of the Soviet-Western agreement on unified German membership in NATO.

Lammers also discussed the potential future of overcoming military blocs. He suggested that it made sense to consider creating a neutral bloc in Europe, encompassing countries from Sweden to Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary to the neutral Balkans (Gorbachev 2006, 302-302). Although this scenario was quite explicit, it is worth noting that, for the first time, the conversation theoretically involved the creation of a mutual bloc, where some Eastern Bloc and communist countries would join a unified Germany and Sweden. The Zagladin-Lammers meeting marks the eleventh moment of the Soviet position.

From the fall of the Wall until this point, Western leaders had forewarned the Soviets that Germany was going to reunify. Subsequent correspondences indicate that the Soviets understood this message well and recognised that reunification was inevitable; Hence, the focus of the discussion had shifted to the political-military status of the reunified Germany.

6. Reunified Germany: Neutral, Non-Aligned, or Partially in NATO?

On the night of January 15, 1990, East Germans streamed into the Stasi headquarters in East Berlin[5]. This event had a devastating effect on the GDR leadership and the state as a whole. Modrow discussed the drastic situation facing the GDR after this development during a meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow on January 30. Similarly, Kohl addressed the issue during his visit to Moscow on February 10, remarking that it could be stated that around January 20, the authority of the GDR government collapsed (Gorbachev 2011a, 597-598, 617). This was the twelfth moment of the Soviet position.

On January 26, a narrow group meeting on the German question took place in the building of the CC CPSU, where Soviet leadership recognised that German reunification was inevitable. Soviet KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov suggested the need to gradually prepare their people for this reunification, while Soviet Prime Minister

Nikolai Ryzhkov acknowledged that they could not preserve the GDR (Gorbachev 2011a, 595-596). In discussing the future military status of a reunified Germany, Gorbachev explicitly stated that "nobody should expect that a united Germany will join NATO" (Gorbachev 2011a, 192). He also cautioned that it was crucial to work with the other socialist countries, warning that if they abandoned them, those countries would be picked up by others (Gorbachev 2011a, 194) - although not clarified, there is practically no way he had anything other than NATO in mind. Here, Gorbachev also mentioned that the GDR was "the special case", meaning that its disintegration from the Eastern bloc was inevitable. "Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary […] will suffer, but they cannot go far". And "Poland is a special case […] Poland, both economically and politically, and historically, does not depend on us" (Gorbachev 2011a, 192-193). We leave it up to the reader to decide what Gorbachev's expectations were regarding the process of decomposition of the Warsaw Pact in the near future. This was the thirteenth moment of the Soviet position.

On January 30, Gorbachev met with the new GDR Prime Minister, Hans Modrow, in Moscow. Modrow informed Gorbachev that the concept of one nation in two states was no longer on the agenda and that reunification was inevitable (Gorbachev 2006, 315). He presented Gorbachev his cabinet's concept for German unification, which outlined a long-term process supporting confederalization and military neutrality[6]. Both leaders agreed to support the long-term reunification process by advocating for military neutrality. This was the fourteenth moment of the Soviet position. The following day, at the Tutzing Evangelical Academy, Genscher delivered his famous Tutzing formulation, highlighting the increasing desire for the withdrawal of Soviet forces in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, which worried the Soviets. He asserted that NATO should clearly communicate that there would be no eastward expansion toward Soviet borders[7].

On February 9, 1990, Gorbachev met the US State Secretary James Baker in Moscow. Here, Baker made his famous "not one inch eastward" assurance. "We understand that not only the Soviet Union, but also other European countries need guarantees that if the United States maintains its presence in Germany within NATO, there will be no extension of jurisdiction or NATO military presence even by an inch in the eastern direction", said Baker. At the end of their conversation, when Baker asked Gorbachev about his preferred scenario, he offered an option: "a united Germany maintaining ties with NATO, but with the assurance that NATO jurisdiction or troops would not extend east of the current line" (Gorbachev 2011a, 615-616). The phrase "current line" is crucial, as it specifies that Baker is referring to East Germany, not the territories beyond it; as of February 1990, this line aligned with West Germany's eastern border. While this comment clarifies the territorial issue, the initial remark lacks this specificity. Given the Soviet Union's concerns about NATO's potential expansion beyond East Germany at that time, along with Genscher's Tutzing formulation and the ongoing fractures within the Warsaw Pact, it is questionable how exactly Baker's first statement would have been interpreted by the Soviets or what he truly meant. From my perspective, it seems to be a general promise of no NATO expansion beyond East Germany, but this is debatable. This was the fifteenth moment of the Soviet position.

A day later, on February 10, Gorbachev met with the German Chancellor in Moscow. Kohl clearly stated that the FRG had no intention of neutrality (Gorbachev 2011a, 618). During this meeting, Gorbachev suggested a new option: "Nonalignment. India, China — these are the countries that belong to this status! This is not neutrality" (Gorbachev 2011a, 275). He also spoke about the option of nonalignment for a unified Germany in a telephone call with Modrow two days later (Gorbachev 2011a, 280). This was the sixteenth moment of the Soviet position. At the February 10 meeting, Kohl also addressed the issue of no NATO enlargement: "I believe that NATO should not expand its sphere of action [...] I correctly understand the security interests of the Soviet Union". Considering the Tutzing formulation and the internal context within the Soviet Union, as well as the ongoing process of deconstruction of the Warsaw Pact, I believe Kohl meant NATO expansion to the east in general, which, of course, included the territory of the GDR (but was not exclusively concerning it) (Gorbachev 2011a, 275).

On February 12, 1990, Zagladin spoke with Condoleezza Rice, who was President Bush's advisor on Soviet and Eastern European affairs at the time. Rice explicitly stated that the primary guarantee for the "normal" development of a unified Germany was its membership in NATO. She made it clear that the United States viewed NATO as the foundation of its presence in Europe, emphasising that "we do not intend to withdraw from Europe". Rice also noted that NATO was evolving and would continue to change in the future (a process that ultimately reached the NATO London Declaration in July 1990 and the CFE Treaty in November 1990) (Gorbachev 2006, 365). Here Soviets were clearly told that the unified Germany was going to remain in NATO; neutrality or nonalignment was not an option. This was the seventeenth moment of the Soviet position.

The formal establishment of the 2+4 mechanism at the opening of the Ottawa Open Skies Conference, held from February 12 to 14, 1990, and attended by the foreign ministers of NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and observers from the CSCE, marked the eighteenth moment of the Soviet position.

On February 21, Gorbachev addressed a Pravda correspondent's question about Germany by discussing the transformation of NATO and the WP. He noted that while preliminary conditions for a new security system were emerging, the roles of these alliances remained significant, albeit modified due to reduced military confrontation and increased political cooperation. He emphasised that Germany's reunification should consider the necessity of maintaining the military-strategic balance between the two organisations (Gorbachev 2011a, 319). The Soviet Union's expression of readiness for the transformation of NATO and the WP marked the nineteenth moment of the Soviet position.

On February 28, Gorbachev and Bush spoke on the phone. Bush informed Gorbachev about his recent meeting with Kohl at Camp David (this is the meeting where he famously stated, "We prevailed and they [Soviets] did not. We cannot let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat" (Gates 1995, 492)). Bush conveyed that he and Kohl agreed that a united Germany should remain in NATO and that American troops should stay in Europe as long as Europeans desired, but not for much longer. He also stated that they were in favour of a special status for the former territory of East Germany (Gorbachev 2011a, 650-651). It is clear that the primary scenario they discussed at that moment was a special status of the (former) GDR, which included, among other things, the non-expansion of NATO into its territory after reunification. Bush's proposal for a special status for the territory of the (former) GDR marked the twentieth moment of the Soviet position.

The results of the March 18, 1990, general election in the GDR, where the East German CDU received 40.8% and the SDP - 21.9%, leading to the formation of Lothar de Maizière's government, marked the twenty-first moment of the Soviet position.

On April 10, 1990, Gorbachev met with British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd in Moscow. Here the change in Gorbachev's position regarding unified Germany's membership in NATO was that now Gorbachev stated that the inclusion of Germany (in general) in NATO was unacceptable (Gorbachev 2011b, 226) - not the inclusion of reunified Germany in NATO in <u>any form</u> (as Gorbachev stated in the March 6, 1990, meeting with the delegation from the GDR (Gorbachev 2011a, 393), or on March 7 while answering questions from Pravda (Gorbachev 2006, 381)). This signalled that the Soviets were ready to discuss a special status of the (former) GDR, while the territory of West Germany would remain in NATO. This marked the twenty-second moment of the Soviet position.

On April 18, 1990, Valentin Falin, the head of the International Department of the CC of the CPSU and successor to Anatoly Dobrynin, wrote a policy brief letter to Gorbachev. Falin wrote that if Western countries had previously raised the price of concessions regarding the non-expansion of NATO's sphere of activity to the GDR until March[8], then approximately a month ago, discussions had begun in their circles about how this obligation would not extend in "crisis situations" (Gorbachev 2006, 402). What Falin meant here was the expansion of Articles 5 and 6 of the NATO charter (collective defence responsibility in case of an attack on one member), to the territory of the (former) GDR. Falin was absolutely right - this issue was raised by Western representatives in the forthcoming meetings. Even if the territory of the (former) GDR were to be granted special status, the NATO collective defence umbrella would still cover it during critical situations. This marked the twenty-third moment of the Soviet position.

Falin also wrote about the signals from the WP countries intending to seek future NATO membership: "[there is] the statement from the newly elected Volkskammer of the GDR in favour of Germany's participation in NATO, along with similar statements previously made by the Poles, Hungarians, and Czechoslovaks" (Gorbachev 2006, 403). What Falin could have meant here aligns with insights from Simon Miles, as presented in his 2024 article in the journal *International Security*. According to the sources discussed, in early 1990, the Czechoslovak leadership was vocal about its aspirations for NATO membership. At a January meeting, the Czechoslovak delegation, at the meeting of young diplomats and scientists of WP member states in Sofia, dismissed the notion of "natural common interests" with the Soviet Union, instead aligning with other Eastern European nations that viewed NATO as essential for a unified Europe. Following a visit to NATO headquarters in February, Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier noted that NATO was crucial for ensuring security for both reunified Germany and former WP members (Miles 2024, 51-85)[9].

On April 29, 1990, Gorbachev met the new head of the GDR government, Lothar de Maizière, in Moscow. Here, Gorbachev discussed another option for the military status of the unified

Germany - dual membership in NATO and the WP (Gorbachev 2011b, 374-375). Maizière replied that the GDR leadership did not consider the consolidation of a unified Germany's membership in NATO as obligatory, advocating instead for a policy promoting the dissolution of military blocs, including NATO. Maizière proposed a particular model for the (former) GDR's special status. He stated that there should be no NATO troops in this territory, and the forces that previously constituted the national army of the GDR should be technically affiliated with the WP and under no circumstances should be connected to NATO military structures (Gorbachev 2006, 417). This meeting marked the twenty-fourth moment of the Soviet position.

On May 4, 1990, Chernyaev wrote a report letter to Gorbachev. The letter is Chernyaev's report on the May 3 Politburo meeting. There is no stenogram of that meeting available in the published materials, only Chernyaev's report letter and his notes taken during the May 3 meeting. In the letter Chernyaev wrote that it was clear Germany was going to remain in NATO (since later Gorbachev ceased to propose the idea of unified Germany's dual membership in NATO-WP and expressed support for the French model, Chernyaev likely aimed to convey that unified Germany would fully join NATO, and that the Soviets had no real tools to prevent it. Thus, he argued that in such a situation, it was better for the Soviets to accept this flow of events now rather than initially disagree and ultimately concede later. Chernyaev used an allegory of a passenger trying to catch the train: "Why should we chase after a departing train when we obviously have no chance to board it? And what if we arrive only to find ourselves in the middle of the train?" He suggested that if Gorbachev accepted Germany's NATO membership as inevitable and supported it, they could still remain at the forefront of the process. Otherwise, if they were late, they would likely end up not at the front but somewhere in the middle. He also wrote that the assumptions that the reunification of Germany and the possible subsequent accession of Poland to NATO would bring the borders of the bloc closer to the Soviet borders were irrelevant (Gorbachev 2006, 424-425). It seems that during the May 3 Politburo meeting, members discussed such scenarios.

Chernyaev recorded in his diary that during the May 3 meeting, Gorbachev delivered a steely speech, insisting, "Do not let Germany into NATO and that's that! I will risk breaking the Vienna negotiations if it comes to that". He noted that a document outlining this position had been signed by Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Yazov, and Kryuchkov; Chernyaev also captured Ligachev's alarmist cry of "NATO is getting close to our borders!"[10] It becomes clear from observing the subsequent negotiations that Gorbachev followed Chernyaev's advice. Realising that the Soviets were unable to outpace the West, Gorbachev chose to join them to maintain the status of the winner. This explains why the Soviets ultimately accepted the status quo, which risked NATO's further eastward expansion beyond the (former) GDR territory, despite being aware of such risks and without receiving any legal promise of NATO non-enlargement. This was the twenty-fifth moment—very decisive and fundamental—in shaping the Soviet position.

7. Reunified Germany in NATO: Special Transitional and Post-Transitional Status

On May 18, 1990, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze met with Baker in Moscow. Baker told Gorbachev and Shevardnadze that the United States wanted a unified Germany to become a member of NATO, not out of fear of the Soviet Union, but because they believed that if Germany were not firmly anchored in European institutions, conditions could arise that might lead to a repetition of historical conflicts (Gorbachev 2006, 438). This assertion raises an intriguing question about U.S. intentions: Was there genuine scepticism regarding Germany's autonomy, or was this a diplomatic tactic aimed at calming Soviet concerns and securing their approval for full German NATO membership? Here Baker also explicitly stated that "our policy is not aimed at separating Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union" (Gorbachev 2006, 438). This statement is part of the broader "not one inch eastward" assurance, indicating that Baker was not only focused on the (former) GDR territory but also on the Eastern Bloc beyond the (former) GDR.

Baker outlined the nine offers the U.S. was prepared to make to the USSR regarding Germany, which included, among other things, a reduction in the size of the Bundeswehr, Germany's commitment not to produce nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, an agreed transitional period during which NATO forces would not be stationed in the territory of the (former) GDR while Soviet troops remained there, the evolution of NATO to reassess its military strategy and enhance its political role, the unification of Germany to include the territories of the FRG, the GDR, and Berlin, and the transformation of the CSCE into a permanent institution involving European countries, the Soviet Union, and the United States (Gorbachev 2011c, 517-518). This was the twenty-sixth moment of the Soviet position.

On May 25, Gorbachev met Mitterrand in Moscow. Here, Mitterrand clarified to Gorbachev that, as far as he knew, his US partners, there was no way Americans would agree to dual membership of a unified Germany in both NATO and the WP (Gorbachev 2006, 461). This meeting was significant because Gorbachev, for the first time, mentioned an alternative option for Germany's NATO membership—the French model—whereby a unified Germany would join the political organisation of NATO but not its military structures[11]. Mitterrand deemed this option crucial, stating that "this is a key moment", to which Gorbachev responded that Mitterrand was the first to whom he presented it (Gorbachev 2011c, 133, 535). This was the twenty-seventh moment of the Soviet position.

From May 29 to June 5, 1990, Gorbachev was on his state visit to Canada and the USA. On May 31, he met President Bush at the White House, where they further solidified the points presented by Baker in Moscow two weeks earlier. An additional agreement between the two leaders was that the superpowers would respect any choice a unified Germany made regarding its military status. Therefore, the foundation of unified Germany's military alignment was to be determined by its own choice, rather than being imposed by the superpowers (Gorbachev 2011c, 542). While it was unlikely that Germany would choose not to join NATO, the political-diplomatic framing of this decision satisfied all parties, including the Soviets. This was the twenty-eighth moment of the Soviet position.

On June 6-7, the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee had their 24th meeting in Moscow[12]. At this meeting held at the "Oktyabrskaya" hotel in Moscow, a decision was made to dissolve the military structures of the Warsaw Pact[13]. This was the twenty-ninth moment of the Soviet position.

On his way back from the USA, Gorbachev visited London and met British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on June 8. Here, Gorbachev's rhetoric regarding the American position has notably changed. He presented himself as someone who understood the American perspective and the circumstances behind their support for the unified Germany's membership in NATO, stating that without this, "the political influence of the USA on the continent will significantly decrease". He also remarked, "Nothing in the world will go well if we do not cooperate with the United States in all areas". This discourse indicated that Gorbachev was agreeing to the U.S. proposal (Gorbachev 2011c, 306-307). This meeting is also important since Gorbachev proposed a new model for unified Germany's membership in NATO, as well as for other countries (I believe he had in mind other WP countries that might want to join NATO later): "I want to [...] create yet another model [of NATO membership] [...] The reform of NATO and the Warsaw Pact [...] would lead to the possibility that any state could join one of these organisations. Perhaps someone else will want to join NATO? [...] A transitional period is necessary for the process of forming European security structures, during which the troops of four powers will remain on the territory of this country". He told Thatcher that the Soviets were going to develop a sufficiently strong concept on this matter and that they would share it with her (Gorbachev 2011c, 309). This marked the thirtieth moment of the Soviet position.

On July 5-6, 1990, NATO issued a Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council—commonly known as the London declaration—which, among other things, aimed at changing NATO's military strategy[14]. At the press conference following the meeting, President Bush announced that NATO was no longer a threat to the Soviet Union (Gorbachev 2012, 549). A week later, in a meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow on July 14, NATO's Secretary General Manfred Wörner assured Gorbachev that the London declaration was not mere propaganda but a very serious document, indicating that they had decided to change their military strategy. He mentioned that he had set up a special group consisting of political and military officials that would develop the details concerning changes in military and nuclear strategy. "We are seeking ways out of confrontation and transitioning into a new era of cooperation", mentioned Wörner (Gorbachev 2012, 549-550). The London declaration marked the thirty-first moment that influenced the Soviet position.

On July 15, Gorbachev met Kohl in Moscow. In line with the agreements made between Gorbachev and the American leadership, they expressed their mutual agreement on a 3–4-year transitional period for the presence of Soviet troops in the (former) GDR following reunification (Gorbachev 2012, 553). Gorbachev clarified that during the transition period after reunification, while all of Germany would become a de jure NATO member, the territory of the (former) GDR would, de facto, remain under the sphere of influence of the Warsaw Pact. After this transitional period, he stated, "the question will lose its sharpness" (Gorbachev 2012, 253). These words are significant, as they suggest that Gorbachev was more concerned about the 'sharpness' of unified German membership in NATO—especially given the potential opposition from the people and conservative leadership in the USSR—rather than the outcome itself. Now it was important to settle the issue relatively calmly, and later the matter would lose its sharpness. This aligns with the concept of KGB chief Kryuchkov's suggestion during the January 26, 1990, Politburo meeting about gradually preparing the Soviet people for German reunification - This time, the Soviets would gradually accustom their people to the idea of a unified Germany's membership in NATO. This was the thirty-second moment of the Soviet position.

Final oral agreements on the German question were clarified and achieved the next day, on July 16, in Arkhyz, North Caucasus. Here, Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Kohl and Genscher agreed that the total sovereignty of Germany would be restored immediately after reunification. During a transitional period of three to four years, Soviet troops would remain stationed in the territory of the (former) GDR, after which they would withdraw. Meanwhile, no NATO troops would enter the (former) GDR - only German Bundeswehr troops, which were not under NATO command. Additionally, U.S., British, and French troops would remain in Berlin during this transitional period, with their numbers unchanged and no nuclear armaments present. NATO's collective defence articles 5 and 6 would apply immediately after reunification[15]. The size of unified Germany's military would be capped at 370,000 soldiers. After the transitional period, when Soviet troops left the (former) GDR, U.S., U.K., and French troops would also withdraw from Berlin, and no foreign troops would be stationed in the (former) GDR territory. Only German troops under NATO command (and theoretically those not under NATO command) would remain, with no nuclear armaments allowed (Gorbachev 2006, 507-524). These agreements, reached by Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Kohl, and Genscher in Arkhyz, formed the basis of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, signed by the 2+4 powers on September 12, 1990, in Moscow. This marked the final Thirty-third moment of the Soviet position. In Arkhyz, they established their conclusive stance on the German question, which was incorporated into the Two Plus Four Agreement in Moscow.

On September 12, 1990, when the 2+4 parties signed the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany[16], the Soviet position's five-and-a-half-year odyssey on the German question finally reached its final harbour.

8. Final Chords

On September 20, 1990, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze addressed the Committee on International Affairs of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR regarding the Two Plus Four Treaty, evaluating how this agreement aligned with the state and political interests of the USSR. This speech is significant for two main reasons. First, from a historical perspective, it represents a kind of inverted Versailles or Potsdam policy speech. The Treaty of Versailles and the Potsdam Agreement advocated for the territorial downsizing and division of Germany to ensure security. Shevardnadze argued that the real threat existed as long as Germany remained divided. He asserted that after reunification, this threat disappeared (Gorbachev 2006, 576). According to this logic, division was the source of instability, and reunification corrected it. Second, He emphasised that no agreements, regardless of their quality, could guarantee a state's security if that security lacked internal support. He noted that if negative, destructive tendencies persisted in the country, and if the division of economic, financial, and other state structures continued, no international agreements would be able to provide reliable security and a peaceful life. He pointed out that foreign policy is essentially an extension of domestic policy, which should always be remembered (Gorbachev 2006, 577). This warning precisely describes what happened to the Soviet Union. It illustrates that no matter what oral or written pledges—whether treaty-based or not—a country may receive, these cannot resolve its security issues if the domestic situation deteriorates.

On November 9, 1990, the Soviet Union and the FRG signed several partnership agreements in Bonn: Treaty on Good-

Neighbourliness, Partnership and Cooperation between the FRG and the USSR, Treaty on the Development of Large-Scale Cooperation in the Field of Economy, Industry, Science and Technology; and Agreement on Cooperation in the Labour Field (Gorbachev 2013, 483). On November 19, in the framework of the CSCE Summit meeting in Paris, 22 member states of NATO and the Warsaw Pact signed the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe[17] and published a joint declaration of non-aggression. This long-awaited treaty aimed to establish a framework for the mutual transformation of both alliances and was expected to lead to the creation of a common European security. This arrangement served as one of the security guarantees for the Soviet Union when it agreed to a unified Germany's membership in NATO. It likely also influenced their decision not to demand a treaty-based guarantee against NATO's expansion beyond the (former) GDR. Thus, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was one of the major blows to the Soviet house of cards.

On February 25, 1991, at a meeting in Budapest, the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee decided to dissolve the Warsaw Pact. Then, on July 1, 1991, at the Warsaw Pact Summit in Prague, the participants formally dissolved the Pact. In parallel, COMECON was also dissolved (on June 28, 1991). On March 4, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ratified the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, as well as the partnership and cooperation agreements signed with the FRG on November 9 (Gorbachev 2006, 637).

9. Conclusion

The position of the Soviet Union on the German question underwent a drastic transformation during the Gorbachev period. If in March 1985, the USSR clearly supported the preservation of the 1970 and 1975 status quo, which, according to their interpretation, meant two German states (while the question of national unity remained a topic of debate), de facto in mid-July and de jure in September 1990, the Soviets agreed to the conditions outlined in the Two Plus Four Agreement, which solidified not only the reunification of the German nation into one state, but also the full membership of that state in NATO, along with some special transitional and post-transitional arrangements. This article details the microhistory of this five-and-a-half-year odyssey of the Soviet position on the German question, based on Russian-language archival materials from Gorbachev's correspondence published by the Gorbachev Foundation, moving step by step through thirty-three moments of change.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOVIET POSITION ON THE GERMAN QUESTION

If, at the beginning, the Soviets debated the national unity of Germany (e.g., with Weizsäcker on July 7, 1987), by December 1987 (during the Gorbachev-Strauss meeting) and October 1988 (during the Gorbachev-Kohl meeting), they had ceased to engage in this debate. They signaled to the Germans the end of the Brezhnev Doctrine during the Gorbachev-Strauss meeting in December 1987 and publicly denounced it during Gorbachev's visit to the FRG in June 1989 (and de facto confirmed by their non-interference when the Wall fell) (In terms of publicity, Gorbachev's December 1988 address to the UN General Assembly was, of course, a turning point). If initially, the Soviet position did not consider reunification of Germany in any form and by any method, during the October 1988 meeting with Kohl, Gorbachev emphasised that it was the methods of the 1940s and 1950s that were unacceptable for reunification. If shortly after the fall of the Wall, the Soviets still questioned and denied the possibility of German reunification, at the end of 1989 and the start of 1990, they eventually became convinced that it was inevitable. If shortly after the fall of the Wall, the Soviet position regarding the potential military status of a reunified Germany did not accept its membership in NATO in any form, advocating instead for military neutrality, by February 1990, the Soviets proposed a non-aligned status (which differed from neutrality); Later, in April, they suggested Germany's dual membership in NATO and the Warsaw Pact and by May, agreed to total membership under the condition of non-expansion of NATO into the (former) GDR. Also in May 1990, Gorbachev proposed a French membership model for Germany, and by June, a special new model (which required further elaboration). Finally, in July 1990, the Soviets agreed to total unified German membership in NATO, along with special transitional and post-transitional arrangements embedded in the Two Plus Four Treaty.

"NOT ONE INCH EASTWARD" DEBATE AND SOVIET CONCERNS ABOUT NATO'S EASTWARD EXPANSION BEYOND THE GDR

As Gorbachev outlined in his May 1985 meeting with Brandt, if the absorption of socialist countries that NATO was discussing were to become the basis of policy, it would lead to a course for war (it is worth noting that the Soviet-Western transformation had not yet begun at that moment). By May 1988, Gorbachev informed Vogel that Americans were acting from a position of strength, believing they could extract more concessions from 'Gorbachev and his team'. He found this strategy ineffective, but it underscored Soviet caution. In Malta, Bush assured Gorbachev that Western values respected self-determination and would not impose their system on Romania, Czechoslovakia, or the GDR. Though he emphasised the enlargement of Western space rather than particularly NATO, this likely was the first general promise which could be linked to the "not one inch eastward" pledge. In December 1989, when the Soviets expressed dissatisfaction with Kohl's Ten Points to Genscher, as, besides other options, it theoretically left open the possibility of the GDR's future NATO membership, Shevardnadze warned that this approach could also be extended to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria.

In January 1990, Gorbachev warned the Politburo that if socialist countries were abandoned by them, they would likely be picked up by others (although not clarified, there is practically no way he had anything else rather than NATO in mind). He viewed Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary as problematic but likely to survive, while the GDR and Poland were considered "special cases". In February 1990, Baker assured the Soviets that if a unified Germany joined NATO, its jurisdiction and troops would not extend to the (former) GDR territory. He also generally discussed the non-expansion of NATO to the East. A day later, Chancellor Kohl spoke about NATO's non-expansion, considering Soviet security interests. Given Genscher's Tutzing formulation—of which Baker was also well aware—there is little chance that Kohl meant only the (former) GDR territory and not eastern territories beyond it. In April, Falin warned Gorbachev that Poles, Hungarians and Czechoslovaks made statements intending to seek future NATO membership. In early May, the risks of Poland's accession to NATO were discussed in the Soviet Politburo. Also, in May 1990, Baker explicitly stated to the Soviets that US policy was not aimed at separating Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union. In June 1990, during a conversation with Thatcher, while proposing a new membership model for Germany, Gorbachev mentioned that someone else, besides the GDR, might want to join NATO in the future. Though he did not specify, the context suggests he was referring to NATO membership aspirations to the east.

The "not one inch eastward" assurance was communicated to the Soviets in various ways by Western leaders during the negotiations on Germany. At times, it referred specifically to the (former) GDR territory, while at other times it clearly encompassed the Eastern Bloc beyond the (former) GDR, and in some other instances, it resembled a general promise of NATO's future non-enlargement to the east. This was not a written, treaty-based commitment—binding or non-binding—but rather an oral political promise made by specific Western leaders to specific Soviet leaders. Nevertheless, as we see, oral political promises can have consequences too at different times and with different leaders - we cannot undo this[18]. The reasons why such elements are instrumentalised deserve further research and analysis, but it is indeed a fact that this particular assurance has been made, and now it is instrumentalised. What our research aimed to clarify is whether the “not one inch eastward” assurance, in addition to applying to the (former) GDR, also extended to the territories and states further east. Our findings confirmed that it did.

WHY ACCEPT THE *STATUS QUO* THAT RISKS NATO’S FURTHER EASTWARD EXPANSION? - CHERNYAEV’S TRAIN ALLEGORY

As our article clarified, the Soviets were aware of the risks of NATO’s further eastward expansion beyond the (former) GDR territory, yet they did not demand any legal promise of NATO non-enlargement to the east. The question now to be answered is: why? The key determinant here, we believe, is reflected in Chernyaev’s allegory of a passenger trying to catch a train (which we will refer to as the *Chernyaev Train Allegory*), which he presented to Gorbachev in his May 1990 letter, while trying to convince him to accept unified Germany’s total membership in NATO and support it. Since he was convinced that this would happen regardless of Soviet support or disapproval, he questioned the wisdom of chasing after a departing train when there was little chance of boarding it, or, in the best-case scenario, arriving only to find themselves in the middle. He advocated for full Soviet support of Germany’s NATO membership, as this option would allow the Soviet Union to remain in the locomotive—at the forefront of the entire process. Respectively, the Soviets preferred to go along with the flow of events rather than initially disagree and ultimately concede later. Agreeing to *Chernyaev’s Train Allegory*, by recognising that they could not outpace the West, Gorbachev chose to align with them to maintain the status of a winner.

Besides, as was indicated by the NATO London declaration and the CFE Treaty, NATO and the WP were on their way to a significant transformation and no longer viewed themselves as enemies. Gorbachev expected this process to evolve into a common European security architecture, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the blocs to form a unified security framework from Lisbon to Vladivostok. But as Shevardnadze noted, foreign policy was merely an extension of domestic policy, and no international agreements were to guarantee a state's security without internal cohesion and stability. Thus, the breakup of Gorbachev's Soviet Union may have denied the world the opportunity to build a common security architecture.

NOTES

1. During the negotiations regarding Germany, the GDR was still in existence, but the discussions addressed the future of its territory. Thus, the negotiations focused on how to treat a state's territory that existed at the time but would soon cease to exist, becoming a 'former' territory. To reflect this duality, I chose to place the word 'former' in brackets—'(former) GDR'.
2. When discussing the "not one inch eastward" assurance, it is crucial to understand that there was neither a legal nor a binding promise. This is absolutely clear by now—at least from the legal and historical data available at the moment—thus, this question is not one of international law. However, even if there had been a legally binding promise, it might have become subject to *clausula rebus sic stantibus* (a clause in international conventions that provides for the unenforceability of a treaty due to fundamentally changed circumstances) - Jack Matlock, the US ambassador to Moscow (1987-1991), wrote in his post on his personal website - "When the Soviet Union collapsed, the 'circumstances' of 1989 and 1990 changed radically" (see: https://jackmatlock.com/2014/04/nato-expansion-was-there-a-promise/ (access: 04.08.2025)). The "not one inch eastward" assurance debate concerns: a) whether there was an oral promise made during the negotiations, and b) if so, whether it pertained only to the (former) GDR territory or also to eastward territories beyond it. While this debate may not be part of international law, it remains a significant aspect of, inter alia, international politics. Treaties, for example, have, inter alia, legal consequences, whereas political promises, though not legally binding, have consequences too. I am not in a position to precisely argue or test whether this particular causality is the main explanation for Russia's post-2007 policy in the post-Soviet neighborhood (it is very likely that this is

merely a tool of the Kremlin's propaganda), however, I firmly argue that promises in political-diplomatic negotiations can have very significant consequences; thus—promises matter and here we are.

3. For more details about the opposition in the GDR, see the book by the founders of the East German Social Democratic Party (SDP)—Markus Meckel and Martin Gutzeit—which includes annotated documents: Meckel, Markus and Gutzeit, Martin. 1994. *Opposition in der DDR. Zehn Jahre kirchliche Friedensarbeit – kommentierte Quellentexte*. Köln: Bund-Verlag.
4. For the Russian translation of Helmut Kohl's address to the Bundestag on November 28, 1989, see: Galkin, Alexandr and Chernyaev, Anatoly (eds.). 2006. *Mikhail Gorbachev and the German Question*. Moscow: Ves Mir. pp. 254-263.
5. For details about the storming of the Stasi headquarters in Berlin, listen to the BBC World Service's "The History Hour" podcast at: https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/w3csypzt (access: 07.08.2025).
6. For the Russian translation of Hans Modrow's concept: "For Germany, a single homeland (a concept for discussion on the path to German unity" see: Galkin, Alexandr and Chernyaev, Anatoly (eds.). 2006. *Mikhail Gorbachev and the German Question*. Moscow: Ves Mir. pp. 325-326.
7. For the original German version of Genscher's Tutzinger Speech, see: Genscher, Hans-Dietrich. 1990. "Zur deutschen Einheit im europäischen Rahmen". Tutzinger Blätter 2: 3-13 (https://das-blaettchen.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Tutzinger-Blaetter-2_1990.pdf access: 07.08.2025).
8. This source further confirms that during February and March 1990, the primary proposed Western scenario in Soviet-Western negotiations regarding the military status of a unified Germany was a special status of the (former) GDR, which involved the non-expansion of NATO to its territory.
9. In his article, Miles presents new evidence from Czech, German, Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian archives, revealing that between 1989 and 1991, non-Soviet Warsaw Pact members significantly influenced events at the end of the Cold War. They recognised that their ties with the USSR, defined by the Warsaw Pact, would hinder their success in the post-Cold War era, leading them to decide to dismantle the alliance. According to this data, by July 1990, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Polish delegations expressed a desire to exit the Warsaw Pact and sought to build closer relations with NATO.
10. For Chernyaev's notes in Russian, see the National Security Archive's publication titled "Diary of A.S. Chernyaev for the year 1990" at: https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/25163-document-19-dnevnik-aschernyaeva-za-1990-god (access: 07.08.2025).
11. This model was a result of the Gaullist policy and was installed after 1966.

12. For a list of multilateral meetings of the Soviet Bloc from 1947 to 1991 and their results, see the chronology compiled and edited by Linda Richter and Csaba Békés, available on the website of the Cold War History Research Centre, Budapest: http://www.coldwar.hu/chronologies/complete_meetings.html (access: 08.08.2025).
13. For more details about dissolution of the military structures of the Warsaw Pact, see the online article prepared by the Historical and Documentary Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry: https://idd.mid.ru/informational_materials/k-25-letiyu-rospuska-voennykh-struktur-organizatsii-varshavskogo-dogovora/ (access: 08.08.2025).
14. For the text of the London Declaration, see: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm (access: 08.08.2025).
15. Valentin Falin informed Gorbachev about this aspect in his policy brief letter as early as April 18, 1990.
16. For the French, English, German, and Russian language versions of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, see: https://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unit-content/-/unit/df06517b-babc-451d-baf6-a2d4b19c1c88/efe51364-e699-4d53-92ff-fe24f37e4d40/Resources#5db0b251-c5bf-4f5a-b5d0-2047f829c19a_en&overlay (access: 08.08.2025).
17. For the English-language text of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, see: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/14087.pdf (access: 08.08.2025).
18. Notably, the post-Soviet withdrawal arrangement in the Treaty on the Final Settlement regarding Germany (see Article 5.3), particularly the non-deployment of foreign armed forces in the former GDR territory, was tacitly upheld until October 2024. According to a 2020 article in Zeit Magazine, only Bundeswehr troops were stationed in the former GDR, with no foreign NATO forces present (see: Palm, Johannes. 2020. „Standorte ausländischen Militärs". Zeit Magazin. https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2020/03/militaer-standorte-usa-grossbritannien-frankreich-deutschlandkarte (access: 09.08.2025). But from October 2024 after opening the Bundeswehr's new tactical headquarters for monitoring the Baltic Sea region in Rostock (Commander Task Force (CTF) Baltic) which besides the Bundeswehr harbors naval forces of NATO from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden, this status quo has changed (see the information from *tagesshau* at: https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/bundeswehr-hauptquartier-rostock-100.html (access: 09.08.2025)).

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THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SEXES IN POST-WAR GERMANY

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Abstract. Macroscopically, in the broader context, the emergence of women's dominant role in society is attributed to the social reformations in the Sixties, not the reforms of the immediate post-war years. The normalisation of gender definitions foreshadowing people's affairs was based on the principle of male power, whose agency was declared dogmatic and authoritarian within traditional societal norms (family, workplace, sexuality, the army, religion, or other personal beliefs). Gender inequalities in post-war society were evident, even though the ambivalence on gender hierarchies during the war did not persist. Women performed certain societal roles, mainly as canonised collaborative nuclear family figures. The impact of the war has proven robust not only on the art sector but also on everyday life and social activities that shape gender relations. At the end of the 1930s, the archetype of male soldiers, acting as the safeguard of the family and the homeland, was still lingering to create social figures.

Keywords: Weimar Berlin, Nazi cinema, Third Reich, Cold War, social construction, nuclear family, sex reform, other

INTRODUCTION

The latter years of the war and the lawless period ahead of the liberation were characterised by the disruption of gender relations in terms of an overly distressing command on behalf of male authority. The *renegotiation* of gender relations became evident even through suppression to reinstate men as the dominant figure in domestic life. Prostitution and other forms of exploitation of women experienced an upsurge in the war years. Still, females became a hallmark of hedonism even in the immediate post-war years in the face of the veterans or the Allied soldiers. They abused sexuality that men were legitimate to go after as a 'reward' for their military virtue or any other war-related male competency.

The gender hierarchies that were gradually replaced by the collaborative nuclear family, bonded by ties of love between parents and children. The Sixties personalisation instigated a surge of capitalist-oriented market policies that came about as services, mainly in the vexed terms of fashion and lifestyle, were deployed in mass industry. Enepekides, through case studies, worked towards a model of gender relations that retained gender differentiation and, at the same time, gave way to raising new forms of unleashed female personalities and trending opportunities.

A new, ordered, gendered, and more mobile post-war society elevated women in the higher social scales of education and new forms of employment. The widespread assumption of a stalling process of assimilation of female citizens in modern democratic life was reversed through ever-increasing participation in electoral politics, which emerged after female suffrage in post-war Europe. The gender designation of women also came out as a result of their rise in population during the immediate postwar years. [For more information, *see* Jaskot 2012, 39].

Misogynism as a sign of the decaying correlation between women and democracy demonstrated Second World War remnants of abnormal societal operations: deviant social behaviour (protests, affairs with war criminals or dissidents), benign or innocent sexualism as an exchange for monetary or material paid prostitution, undefined political choices, or accession to feminist revolutionaries, blurred sexual and professional attitude. Social mobilisation provoked an overwhelming need for enrolment in social norms, expressed unconditionally (marginalisation, sexual affairs with wealthy men in terms of prostitution), that could promote procedures to accelerate their elevation in the societal hierarchy.

MAIN SUBJECT

The history of Weimar Germany and the Third Reich through the post-war decades, chromatised by the more significant part of the Cold War through the dawn of the 1970s, designates a fifty-year-long period of debated sexuality entangled with politics. As indicated, a history of the relationship between *female sexuality* and the *camera eye*, the *evolution of a camp vision* that brought the seed for the ambivalent interrelation between *Nazism* and *eroticism* (Mizejewski 1992, 6). German fascism triggered the rise of exuberant female sexuality, musical applications, the comic and the camp parody, *the so-called harassed bachelor* (Mizejewski 1992, 6), termed "Weimar Decadence". The persistent element of imminent female allure was performed through psychoanalytic perceptions of Nazism, lying against a phallic norm upon which the latter established its aesthetic politics.

The materialisation of Weimar Berlin, the iconography through pornography and sadomasochism, crafted a history of Gender that defended itself through the blurred nexus of 'visibility' and 'spectatorship'. The aestheticisation of the gender difference, expressed also in stereotypes, is depicted as a cultural construction via geopolitics and sexual attitude. The pleasurable spectacle is identified as *decadence*. Decadence is defined through the Jewishness, the effeminate beauty, the aberrant and the unknowable *Other* acting through their compelled invisibility and misappropriation. As Mizejewski puts it through a visible paradigm:

> The Fosse film conflates female sexuality and Jewish identity as similar terms of genital anxiety, reworking a historical anxiety seamlessly into one of the strategies of mainstream film" (Mizejewski 1992, 18).

A curious alienation from the mainstream state order demands was calling for an imminent crisis of the reliability of the spectacle (Mizejewski 1992, 18). A crisis of societal irrelevancy, that of 'knowability' relating to certain social norms. It is evident that:

> *Obsessed with categorisation and 'types' of women and sexual response, the Sex Reformers*

ultimately posited a 'normal' sexuality, so that 'the boundaries defining deviant groups and behaviour sharpened (Mizejewski 1992, 27).

Through this, it becomes clear that specific Nazi aesthetics imposed via categorisations in terms of Gender and society did not emerge as newly born abnormal anxieties but were based on previous customs, traditions, and ideas born in Weimar Germany to expand retrospectively even through the 19th century's anthropological preoccupations. Within this assumption, society is defined through *Sex, Race, and Eugenics.*

By showcasing Nazi cinema, the aesthetics of fascism promoted mass expression in art through censored production, aiming to build a mass culture appealing to the people's mentality and national consciousness. But a certain question is what triggered gender relations and sexual differences' crafting of social stereotypes? The dynamics of visibility, German fascism, along with mainstream cinema, and the biological order as a creed of the Third Reich promoted "visible differences of gender and race" and discrimination in which the authoritative male commanded over the female *Other* to the accreditation of an ever-dominant male governance of the world order, which is conquered by "strong, white males" (Mizejewski 1992, 14).

Popular understandings of 'Nazi eroticism', here stylised to the point of the surreal, focus on sexual performances and spectatorship in relation to Nazism. (For more, see Mizejewski 1992, 22).

The Sexual *'Other'*, the *'Odd'*, or irrelevant to modern-day coded as "fascinating fascism", highlighted 'cultural similarities', engulfed in gender and race properties that encouraged human capabilities through stereotypes. I should mention that the Nazi was perceived internationally as aberrant, not as a trauma, since the term applies to official contemporary state demands. On the other hand, Nazi repression appeared to trigger degenerate or even abnormal sexual functions of love and affection. The sexual and the political merged to produce theatre works as cultural products that assimilated society's sexual anxieties, oscillating between sadomasochism and fascism.

> Nazis used everything at their disposal – including culture – before the war's end (Jaskot 2012, 13).

Through a protracted period of Nazi propaganda, the Nazis asserted through culture their pervasive influence in *Western* society, even during the post-war decades, expanding through the 1970s. Even in the sexual attitude promoted within the patriarchal society, the dualism of dominance and submission was leveraged by the Nazis to legitimise their state politics.

> In Weimar Berlin, "while the liberal inquiries... were tolerated… hostile theories of homoeroticism were far more popular, as evidenced in Hirschfeld's repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to repeal Germany's Paragraph 175, the nineteenth-century national law that made homosexual activity a crime" (Mizejewski 1992, 26).

Homosexuality in the Nazis was initially considered 'aberrant', but later incorporated their principles to heighten white male autonomy from females, accrediting their sexual performance in terms of same-sex desire, which, as a mass, reinforced their authoritative superiority in 'nature'. The National Socialist theories of homosexuality as rival but slightly contradictory at their subsequent reconsideration were foregrounded by Weimar Sex Reform movement theories that, though, went hand in hand with the quote: "Third Reich's later goals of eugenics and control of deviance" (Mizejewski 1992, 26). Nazi propaganda targeted certain elements of Weimar tolerance on Cabarets' sexual liberation and the emerging roles in the frame of deliberate uniform re-appropriation of the society's norm.

The 'normalisation' of the liberated New Woman was ventured through their domestication within the later Nazi assumptions that stemmed from obsolete anthropological traditions, celebrating male authoritarian superiority.

CONCLUSION

The Third Reich demonstrates how gender relations interconnect with racist politics, German fascism, which, in the jargon of gender studies, is seen as sexism and, in terms of an ever-dominant manliness, as misogynism. Class struggle contributed to the configuration of the folklore community. Fascism relied more on sexual interpersonal anxieties, stemming from war psychopathologies, rather than 'class struggle', a fact that was considered irrelevant and incompatible with their aims and purposes. As it is argued: "The sexual anxiety concerning women is not accidental but a central fascist issue concerning boundary and self-versus-other" (Mizejewski 1992, 34). Nazi cinema bolstered sexual polarisation similar to the forms employed in Classic Hollywood Cinema. (Mizejewski 1992, 35).

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YORUBA DIASPORA AND THE "OBASHIP" SYSTEM. MAINTAINING TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract. Yoruba traditional political institutions have played a significant role in shaping governance and socio-cultural organisation in Northern Nigeria. The Yoruba monarch (*Oba*) in this region represents a symbol of cultural values, ethnic cohesion and political sagacity in a society with different historical, social and ethno-religious backgrounds. This study historicizes the Yoruba migration into Northern Nigeria as well as the emergence, structure, functions, significance and contemporary relevance of Yoruba monarchs (*Obas*) in the North, highlighting their roles as cultural custodians, mediators, and sources of authority. The study examines the adaptive strategies employed by Yoruba monarchs to navigate the complex socio-political landscape, characterised by ethnic pluralism and religious diversity, while maintaining a connection to their ancestral roots. It also addresses the challenges faced by these monarchies, such as the opposition of Southwest state governments, the impact of Western education, opposition of Yoruba *Obas* and groups in Southwest Nigeria, hostility from host communities, limited resources, absence of government support and policy, absence of legal backing, intra-ethnic clashes of interest and religious beliefs. By drawing upon historical analysis, ethnographic data, and contemporary accounts, this study aims to illuminate the pivotal role of Yoruba monarchs as both symbolic figures and active participants in the governance and cultural preservation of their communities. The study concludes that the *Obaship* Yoruba system in Northern Nigeria is a demonstration of cultural identity in a foreign land. Therefore, the study recommends that traditional political institutions and preservation of cultural values in diaspora should be strengthened and used as a means of conflict management, cultural diplomacy and peace-building in the host community.

Keywords: Yoruba diaspora, traditional institutions, Northern Nigeria, Obaship system

INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba, being one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, are found primarily in Southwest Nigeria and parts of the Republic of Benin, Togo Republic, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire, with a population exceeding 40 million[1]. Their rich cultural values, diverse religious practices and unique social lifestyle worldview dating back over a thousand years have produced a wealth of artistic, linguistic, and spiritual traditions that continue to resonate across the globe.

In Nigeria, the Yoruba inhabit Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, Lagos, as well as parts of Kwara, Kogi, Delta and Edo States. In the pre-colonial era, they organised themselves into many kingdoms, and the most prominent were the Oyo (which grew into an empire comprising some Yoruba-speaking and non-Yoruba-speaking tributary vassals), Ile-Ife, Ijesa, Akoko, Okun, Ekiti, Ondo, Ilaje, Egba, Ijebu, Igbomina and Awori kingdoms. The people of each of these kingdoms constituted a subgroup of the Yoruba[2].

As the Yoruba population and culture began to gain popularity in Northern Nigeria, they started to organise themselves into communities with effective governance and leadership to coordinate the affairs of the people in the host communities. In line with the traditional political structure of the people, the Yoruba community adopted the *Obaship* system in Northern Nigeria to preserve and maintain Yoruba culture in the region. Also, the Oba Yoruba system in Northern Nigeria promotes the identity, cultural values and spirit of oneness among the people.

The adoption of the homeland political system in the diaspora is a universal trend which is gaining extensive attention among scholars. It is referred to as "Diaspora Politics". This means the political culture of transnational ethnic diasporas, their relationship with their ethnic homelands and their host states, and their prominent role in ethnic conflicts. Thus, the system helps in coordinating, preserving and promoting the political affairs of the ethnic group. An example of Yoruba diaspora politics is the

Oyotunji Village, founded in Sheldon, South Carolina, United States, in 1970 by Efuntola Oseijeman Adelabu Adefunmi I, who became the first monarch (Oba) of the Yoruba community. Furthermore, there is the traditional ruler of Ilesa Ire Yoruba community in Florida, United States of America, Oba Iredele Ogunlano. Indeed, Oba Ogunlano was crowned as Oba by the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi. It was Oba Ogunlano's parents, the late Olomide Ogunlano and Omialadora Ajamu, who established the Ilesa Ire Yoruba temple and community in the USA. In a similar manner, Oba Yoruba was installed in Louisiana, USA, where he is responsible for preserving and promoting Yoruba culture, religion, ethics and history. Also, the influx and the increasing population of the Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire and the urge to promote, develop and preserve the Yoruba culture and language in the diaspora, especially among the youths who were born in the country and have never been to Nigeria before, led to the appointment of Oba Yoruba. The current Oba Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire is Oba Adebayo Yahaya Giwa (Ori Ade Ilu Cote d'Ivoire). According to the Ooni of Ife, he argues that the encouragement for the Oba Yoruba in diaspora is not only to promote the Yoruba culture but also to safeguard Yoruba culture across the world.

In a similar manner, the Hausa settlers in Yorubaland equally established communities and created strong ties with their homelands in terms of religion, culture, trade and social life since yesteryears. They appointed leaders amongst themselves to coordinate and govern the affairs of the Hausa communities. Indeed, there are several Sarki Hausawa in Southwest Nigeria where they ruled over the Hausa communities using the Emirate political system of administration and promoted the cultural values and heritages. For instance, there is Sarkin Hausawa of Lagos State and head of Arewa council (Alhaji Kabiru Garba), Sarki Hausawa in Ibadan (HRH Alhaji Ali Zungeru), Sarkin Hausawa of Idi-Araba, Lagos (Alh. Idris Lawal Haruna), Seriki Fulani in Badagry (Alhaji Mohammed Umar was installed on 6th January, 2025). There is Sarki Hausawa in Agege, who is also the chairman council of Arewa chiefs, Agege (HRH Alhaji Musa Mohammed Dogon Kadai). There are Sarki Hausawa, in Ile-Ife, Alhaji Lawal Isiyaka Yaro (Hausa Leader), Osogbo, Ede, Ado-Ekiti, Ikere-Ekiti, Akure, Abeokuta, Sagamu, Ijebu-ode, Ilesa and a host of other Yoruba towns and cities.

It is on this background that our paper focuses on the nature of Yoruba monarchism in Northern Nigeria and the factors that led to the emergence of the Obaship system there. Most importantly, the paper discusses the activities and relevance of Oba Yoruba in Northern Nigeria.

THE YORUBA IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

The actual period of the Yoruba migration to the Northern region could not be easily ascertained in this paper, but evidence abounds that the movement and the interaction between the Yoruba and Northern Nigeria could be dated back to the era of the old Oyo Empire and the Trans-Saharan trade, during which goods and services were exchanged between the two regions. Meanwhile, Olaniyi asserts that the migration of the Yoruba to the Northern region commenced since the pre-colonial days, from the 15th century, when a network of trade routes and itinerant caravan traders linked Kano commercially with Yorubaland (Olaniyi 2006, 67-89). The relationship between the North and Yorubaland during this period was anchored on trade and commerce, resulting in the settling down of some Yoruba traders in the Northern region (especially at trade centres and trade routes). The migration was also influenced by a combination of factors, which include historical link, skills acquisition and dispensation, as well as opportunities for construction works.

Indeed, the historical relationship between people of Northern Nigeria and the Yoruba runs deep. While the economists believe economic factors are the basic reasons for migration, philosophers and other scholars feel that a host of intervening factors are also involved in the migration, ranging from Islamic education, railway construction work, social factors, skilled and unskilled work.

As early as the 19th century, the Yoruba traders had been trading with the North in the areas of food crops such as yams, beans, pepper, rice, millet, potatoes, maize, and groundnuts in exchange with Yoruba goods such as textiles, baskets, mats, cassava flakes (Garri), kolanuts, mats, local soap, palm oil, shoes, farm products, traditional cloths and coconuts[3]. To this extent, most of the ancient towns like Kano, Jos, Bida, Daura, Zaria, Minna, Suleja, Kaduna, and Lafia (in the present Nasarawa State) turned into commercial towns due to the presence of the influx of the Yoruba in the towns and cities[4]. Indeed, Yoruba traders from as far as Ogbomoso, Ilesa, Okunland, Offa, and Ilorin easily brought items such as woven clothes to sell in the North[5].

Toyin Falola confirmed that many Ijesha-Yoruba women engaged in the textile and cosmetic trade across towns and cities in the northern region. The trade was referred to as "Osomalo", a Yoruba word which originated from the fact that the trade was based on a credit system during which the trader stood firm and relentless in collecting his debt back (Falola 1995, 172-173). The Yoruba traders (especially *alajapa*) also made the North their permanent home due to the peaceful nature and acceptability of the host communities[6]. Thus, the foundation of modern Hausa states was laid by the Yoruba migrants.

Before the British took over, Yoruba traders travelled through Northern Nigerian towns and built homes there for more than 500 years. For instance, in Kano and Bida, Yoruba traders built the *Anguwar Ayagi* and *Lalemi* quarters, respectively (Olaniyi 2006, 67-89). The early Yoruba settled in Bida, and the majority of them lived in such places as Tswatamukun and Makwala[7]. They were primarily involved in trade and commerce, and played a significant role in the development of the town. The Yoruba introduced new trade routes, which opened up new markets and created new opportunities for commerce.

By the 20th century, the Yoruba had established considerable contact and interactions with the people of Northern Nigeria in the aspects of politics, socio-culture, religion, economy, historical link, geography and diplomacy. Whatever the reasons for migration, there is a general belief among migrants that their aspirations would be met in the place of destination. This, by implication, means the decision to migrate is often made on the basis of perceived opportunities in the area of destination, in contradistinction to the known realities which have their attendant consequences.

By the middle of the 20th century, the Yoruba community had grown significantly, and their contributions to the socio-economic and political developments of their host communities were unprecedented. The peaceful interaction and relationship with their host enabled the Yoruba to establish a socio-cultural and political framework in Northern Nigeria in line with the Yoruba culture.

As earlier mentioned, one factor that aided the mass migration of the Yoruba to this part was the expansion of the railway lines in the 20th century. Most of the workers employed for the construction of the railway infrastructure in the North were Yoruba, and this changed their migratory and settlement patterns in both the rural and urban areas in Northern Nigeria. The opening of the Baro-Kano highway in 1912 signalled a turning point in the movement of Yoruba people to northern Nigeria.

By the 1920s, Bida and its environs, including Minna, began to take a cosmopolitan shape. Obviously, Northern labour was required in the construction of the Northern railway lines, but the southern semi-skilled and skilled labour was also required to make the lines function, since the railway had long been in Yoruba land; thus, the Yoruba people provided the semi-skilled labour and professionalism. Hence, some of the Yoruba railway workers and traders settled permanently in Northern Nigeria.

As a diasporic community, the Yoruba settlement attracted innovative entrepreneurs and artisans who introduced new skills such as painting, printing, photography, tailoring, mechanics, bicycle repairs, laundry, clothing materials, petty trading, construction, commercial road transport and auto-repairs[8]. Some of these early Yoruba migrants, together with later arrivals, took up new occupations such as block moulding, weaving and barbing, and became masters of those trades in the Northern Region. These Yoruba communities, conscious of their cultural heritage and identities, began to appoint leaders amongst themselves to coordinate their activities and connect them with their ancestral home. This equally distinguishes them from the host community, and this diasporic identity was expressed in the areas of settlement patterns known as *Sabongari*.

The establishment of *Sabongari* between 1911 and 1913 was a central thrust of the British divide-and-rule system constructed to make colonial rule flourish on ethnic division and the enforcement of segregation. In the colonial era, Yoruba immigrants in Northern Nigeria were British "protected persons", and the hosts were subjects. In the post-independence period, the citizenship status was reversed in favour of the host communities, who were regarded as indigenes and migrants as non-indigenes or settlers (Olaniyi 2004, 67-89). To this extent, after the exit of the British in 1960, the Yoruba, who had hitherto been protected by the British, had to devise a means of protecting themselves through the appointment of Oba Yoruba, who serves as the leader and protector of the Yoruba people in the host community.

The post-independence era witnessed more Yoruba migration to the North in an attempt to participate in the booming commerce. From Funtua, Nguru, Makurdi, Malamadori to Jos, Yoruba diaspora communities were established along the rail lines, taking advantage of modern communication for foodstuffs, livestock, groundnuts and kolanuts trades (*Ibidem*, 67-89). According to Olaniyi, the expulsion of Yoruba from Ghana in 1967 led to their migration to Northern Nigeria towns of Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Zaria, and Minna (*Ibidem*). In essence, the Yoruba who were displaced from Ghana and those searching for greener pastures saw the Northern region as a safe haven and a convenient place to settle down. Indeed, the population of the Ogbomoso migrants in Jos, Yola, Bida, Minna, Kano, Zaria and Kaduna right from the colonial period till date is unprecedented.

The Yoruba often maintain strong ties to their heritage, cultural values and ethics in the host communities over time. This has helped to preserve some of their traditional customs despite being far away from home. Additionally, the Yoruba language and local medicine and herbs (commonly called Agbo) have gained recognition in Northern Nigeria.

No doubt, between 1960 and 2024, the Yoruba had contributed significantly to the development of Northern Nigeria in the areas of politics, trade and commerce, (economy), health, education, religion, social, fashion, music and culture. The migrants to the Northern region not only preserve their cultural values in the region but also promote it. One of such cultural attributes of the Yoruba is the appointment of the Oba Yoruba in the Northern region.

EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF OBA YORUBA IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

The actual period and the specific town where the appointment of the first Oba Yoruba in Northern Nigeria took place could not be easily ascertained in this paper. However, evidence abounds that there were Yoruba leaders or *Baale* who organised and coordinated the affairs of the Yoruba in Northern communities during the colonial period. The Yoruba in Bida (1944), Minna, Kano (1974)[9], Zaria and Jos were among the earliest to appoint Oba Yoruba in their respective towns of residence with the approval of the Emirs or kings of the host communities.

The increase in the formation of different Town Unions or Associations (also referred to as Parapo), no doubt, paved the way for the creation of Yoruba Obaship in the North. In other words, the Yoruba Town Unions and Associations in various towns in Northern Nigeria constituted a central part upon which sustaining Yoruba solidarity and culture in the region was raised. Pertinently, the Town Unions and Associations such as Egbe Omo Ogbomoso in Minna, Kaaba Peoples Union (KPU) in Kaduna in the 1930s, Egbe Omo Oduduwa in Kano and Egbe Omo Ogbomoso in Jos maintain socio-cultural linkage with the homeland as well as maintain Yoruba identity in diaspora. Hence, the formation of Town Unions and Associations also led to the emergence of Yoruba Obaship in Northern Nigeria. This is in line with the Yoruba proverb that says that "Agba jowo la fi nso aya, Karin kapo yiye ni nyeni, Ai ko owo rin omo ejo, ohun ni iku se npa won (Ai rin po omo ejo l'onje omo ejo niya). The existence of these unions energised the Yoruba in the Northern region to come together and speak with one voice through the appointment of the Oba Yoruba. In unity, there is strength. Research has revealed that, in most cases, the President-General of these town unions or associations in diaspora were upgraded to the position of Oba Yoruba in such a town, during which all the sub or sectional Yoruba town unions were subservient to him.

The incessant political crises, ethno/religious clashes and other security challenges that ravaged Nigeria in the post-independence era inspired the Yoruba in the Northern region to form a formidable ethnic solidarity, resulting in the appointment of Oba Yoruba.

Though, the position of the Oba Yoruba in the North is not hereditary like the *Kabiyesi* or *Oba alayeluwa* (His Royal Majesty) in Yoruba hometowns, the Oba are appointed or elected by the Yoruba community in the town of residence/town unions and associations, and endorsed by the traditional ruler of the host communities after in-depth and intensive investigations about the personality of the candidate. The appointment or selection of Oba Yoruba is highly competitive and keenly contested since different interests are involved, ranging from political, town associational (union), educational, business, economic, and personal interests[10]. The appointment is also based on credibility, integrity and dignity of the candidate, while the process is transparent, democratic, free and fair. Once the Oba emerges through the rigorous screening exercise, he occupies the position till death except in cases of voluntary resignation, suspension, relocation back home, sickness, or removal by the host traditional ruler/local government chairman/state government. This permanent position of Oba Yoruba in Northern Nigeria is a similar feature of the Obaship institution at home towns in Southwest Nigeria.

In line with the general Yoruba monarchical system, the administration is headed by the Oba Yoruba and assisted by a handful of chiefs and other political figures under his jurisdiction, local or state governments, while the subordinate units, headed by Baales, concentrate only on the administration of the districts and villages in the local government. Like the Oba, the Baale also had a group of chiefs that assisted him in his area of jurisdiction[11]. Any erring Baale can be relieved of his post or sanctioned to certain punishment, respectively, for his offence since all Baales are responsible to the Oba at the central level, but this must have the consent of some offices in the administration.

As mentioned above, the *Oba Yoruba* is assisted by a good number of chiefs such as *Basorun* (prime minister), *Otun* (adviser to the king), *Balogun* (Chief Security), Iya Egbe (matron), and *Baales* (district heads). In some cases, the chieftaincy titles differ, but with the same purpose and functions. According to Oba Yoruba Gwagwalada, Oba Muraina Baladale, he listed the chieftaincy titles in his jurisdiction as follows: Otunba, Sobaloju, Bobagunwa, Iyalode, Iyaloja, Balogun Okunrin, Balogun Obirin, Ajiroba, Yeye Oge, Jagungbade, Akinrogun, Olori Ode, Iya Abiye, Bobakeye and Baale[12]. It is pertinent to state that the Baale are appointed by the Oba Yoruba to be in charge of a small district under his jurisdiction and oversee the affairs of the district[13].

The Oba is responsible for the protection of the lives and properties of the Yoruba under his jurisdiction. While he enjoyed a high degree of respect and was held in awe, he could not be an autocrat, as there were checks and balances, which shows that the concept of democracy is not an alien phenomenon to traditional socio-political institutions in Yorubaland. The Oba Yoruba remains the chief custodian of the people's history and culture as well as the rallying point of the Yoruba in Northern Nigeria. The *Oba* is a man of unquestionable personality, a man of high integrity, dignity and moral uprightness.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE OBA YORUBA IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

An important relevance of the Oba Yoruba is the preservation and promotion of the Yoruba culture, language and unity of the people irrespective of their state of origin. This confirms the Yoruba proverb that, "Omo ale omo ni fi owo osi juwe ile Baba re" and "Odo ti o ba gbagbe orisun e, yio gbe lojiji". "Omo to ba so ile nu, so apo iya ko, lojo ti iya ba jee nita, a ranti ile" (Disowning one's origin or heritage breeds future anguish; when pain takes its toll, the comfort of home is all that's left). The Yoruba monarch in the north performs executive, socio-cultural and political functions in the community. The *Oba* not only represents the people's culture (Olaoba 2013, 3); he is also a cultural ambassador of the Yoruba community in the host Northern region. The Obaship institution integrates the people and strengthens the cultural ties between the Yoruba in the Northern region and the Yoruba at home. Also, the Oba maintains peace and harmony between the Yoruba and the host community.

The Oba Yoruba serves as an agent of information dissemination and policy implementation. For instance, he disseminates important information on the new developments, changes, current issues and policies in hometowns to the Yoruba in the North so as to take necessary actions and implement accordingly. In a similar manner, the Oba communicates vital information that requires urgent attention from the king /local/state governments of the host community to the Yoruba in the town. In some cases, too, information through modern technology or mass media might need clarification and further interpretation; the Oba, therefore, uses his position to educate and enlighten his people on the policy. The Oba encourages the people to support the policy and pleads with the government for assistance when necessary.

On judicial matters, the Oba adjudicates on civil matters and domestic issues with the support of his chiefs (called Ijoye/Oloye) and Baales. The Oba resolves conflicts among his people, as well as the Yoruba and the indigenes. For instance, domestic issues, business clashes, land/farm disputes concerning the Yoruba citizens and/or between the Yoruba and the indigenes are addressed by the Oba. Among the Yoruba diaspora in northern Nigeria, the institution of *Oba* symbolises authority, solidarity, loyalty and the final arbiter in disputes. Disputes, civil disturbances, fights, debt recovery, marital issues, domestic issues, disagreements, differences and other minor cases are resolved by the Oba while promoting the cultural values of the ethnic group in the north (Ojo 2008, 27-43). These cases are treated by the Oba Yoruba using native or cultural intelligence. It is a way of reducing pressure on the Royal Majesties in their hometowns.

On political matters, the Oba Yoruba suppresses some of the likely political/religious crises which could have escalated to violent ethnic clashes in their respective communities and probably spread to Yorubaland in southwest Nigeria. This could have strained the existing cordial relationship between the Yoruba of the southwest and the north if the Oba had not intervened.

The institution of *Obaship* in the north unites the Yoruba as a socio-cultural entity irrespective of their different towns, religion, diversities and sub-ethnic groups. It gives a sense of oneness in purpose. No doubt, the Yoruba monarchs in Northern Nigeria are very sacrosanct and form the basis of unity and cultural preservation in the region. The Oba Yoruba in diaspora, in my opinion, is a way of bringing all the Yoruba citizens in the Northern region together with a view to addressing the security challenges threatening the unity of the country.

The Oba serves as a link between the host communities and the Yoruba settlers. It also creates peaceful coexistence between the host communities and the Yoruba.

In an advisory role, the Oba serves as a special adviser to the traditional rulers and Emirs of their respective host communities on issues that concern the Yoruba citizens. They are the go-between and the eyes of their people before the Emir or king.

On morality and social development, the Oba Yoruba, with the support of the council of chiefs revitalizes Yoruba identity, language, oral poetry (such as folktales, folklores, folksongs, praise poems or ancestral chanting and cognomen-oriki), adages, storytelling, proverbs, philosophical speeches, social etiquette, clothing and fashion, mode of dressing, beautification, morals and ethics. Through the Oba, good character, moral education (Eko-ile) and ethics, which are associated with Yoruba culture, are also promoted in Northern Nigeria (Ojo 2011, 173-191). In an attempt to unite and integrate the Yoruba in the North, the Oba organises Yoruba Cultural Day, which features cultural dance, music, beauty contest, fashion parade, Art exhibition, food exhibition, debate and local sports (*e.g.* Ayo game)[14].

The legitimacy of an Oba in any particular space is anchored on the consent of the majority of the governed through established and commonly cherished law, which often makes the inhabitants surrender their absolute rights to the Oba. To that extent, the Oba Yoruba in Northern Nigeria are legitimate and relevant as long as they are accepted by the governed (Yoruba community), host communities and the state government in the North.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISM AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE YORUBA *OBASHIP* SYSTEM IN DIASPORA

There have been a series of debates and criticisms concerning the relevance of *Oba Yoruba* in Northern Nigeria. A school of thought argued that it is a duplication of royalty and a flagrant hijack of royal responsibilities, which could lead to cultural conflict. It is argued that most of the Oba did not come from the royal house, hence no royal blood in them, therefore not qualified to be called Oba.

Another has condemned the system on the basis that an Ifa oracle was not consulted and that the candidate did not pass through the Council of *Afobaje* (king makers or traditional council of chiefs). Others claimed that the Oba did not pass through *Ipebi* for three months (seclusion home or confinement period) and the Oba did not pass through the traditional Yoruba rituals and usual sacrifices associated with the appointment of Obaship in Yorubaland.

A school of thought argues that Oba Yoruba lacks validity as no certificate of recognition and staff of office were presented to the candidate by the state government of their respective hometown. Yet, there is another school of thought that posits that the Oba Yoruba neither possesses nor wears the ancestral beaded crown, which is compulsory regalia of a typical Yoruba king, hence they are not recognised. Another school argues that there is no state government legislative approval or the governor's consent to the appointment and installation of Oba Yoruba in the diaspora. Some even claimed that the Oba Yoruba does not have Agbo Ile Oba (ancestral royal compound) or royal house in Northern Nigeria. Also, there are no procedures that must be followed to sustain the culture and tradition associated with the appointment or installation of an Oba.

Furthermore, the Yoruba Obas Forum (YOF) has also condemned in strong terms the installation of *Oba* Yoruba in the diaspora, describing such practices as fraudulent and alien to Yoruba culture and tradition[15]. The Forum also stated that having a Yoruba Oba in a state like Dallas in the United States of America (USA) and countries like France, Holland, and Ireland was nothing but a complete denigration of Yoruba culture and tradition. The Forum argues that the traditional institution remained the only sacred institution that had endured the rigours of civilisation, stressing that there was always a successive plan for the installation of an Oba in Yoruba land in order to avoid anarchy from the traditional institution.

The Forum stated that "Nobody can duplicate our sacred culture abroad. It is never done anywhere in the world. It is very bad when some people masquerade as an Oba in a foreign land, and as the custodians of Yoruba culture and tradition, we would not allow them to misrepresent us to the world"[16]. To the Forum, the practice is a mere duplication of traditional, sacred and royal functions of the Obaship system in diaspora.

However, this paper has debunked these arguments on the basis that the Oba Yoruba is not operating in southwest Nigeria but in Northern Nigeria, where the environment, culture and religion do not support ritualism, sacrifices and Yoruba traditional religion. The northern part of Nigeria is predominantly an Islamic region. Unlike the Oba in the southwest that ruled over a homogenous population and society with the same language, culture, attributes and history, the Oba Yoruba in the north ruled over a very complex, heterogeneous population and society with diverse sub-ethnic groups, different interests, different language and history. Therefore, they do not need a particular state government from the southwest to authenticate their role and give them certificates. Meanwhile, certificates and instruments of authorities are given to the Oba Yoruba by the Emir or king of the host communities where they operate in the northern region[17].

CONCLUSION

The Yoruba monarchical system across the Northern region is a demonstration of the Yoruba ethnic cohesion, intergroup relations and promotion of the Yoruba culture in diaspora. The Yoruba Obaship continues to inspire, unite, and empower people of Yoruba descent.

This paper has demonstrated that the circumstances and the situation in Northern Nigeria require the adoption of the Obaship system in the region. The system is to protect Yoruba culture from going into extinction and to promote unity, solidarity, cooperation, welfare and general interest of the Yoruba in Northern Nigeria.

As evident from the discussions in this paper, the roles of the Oba Yoruba in Northern Nigeria are not only relevant but a child of necessity in this period of cultural degradation and insecurity. The Obaship institution is an essential aspect of Yoruba culture that must be preserved and promoted across the boundaries of Yorubaland. In my own view, the adoption of the Obaship system in the North is not to needlessly duplicate the roles or responsibilities of Yoruba traditional rulers in the Southwest but to extend and perpetuate the robust political culture of the Yoruba in the Northern region. The Northern diaspora Obas are not only ambassadors of the Yoruba Kings in Northern Nigeria, but cultural ambassadors of the Yoruba race.

NOTES

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7. Oral Interview with Alhaji Jimoh Abdullahi, Male, Trading, 70+, Bida, 2/5/2023.
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ERASING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT IN SAM SHEPARD'S "TRUE WEST" AND "BURIED CHILD"

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Abstract. From a postmodern approach, this paper studies the notion of erasure in Shepard's *True West* (1980) and *Buried Child* (1979), and it focuses on the impossibility of erasing the agrarian past, as well as the inability to ignore the postmodern present. To better understand the playwright's redefinition of erasure, it is pertinent to first study the relationship between the past and the present in *Buried Child.* The author refers to Harold Bloom's *Anatomy of Influence* to examine the way Shepard revisits the frontier and the Corn King myth. Realism, postmodernist features, simulacrum, surrealism, absurdity, Aristotelian tragedy, dramatic elements, and thematic concerns are deployed to explore the protagonists' quest for self-definition, for finding out the characteristics of a true Westerner, and for disclosing that the true Western self is reformed through going beyond erasure and blurring the boundaries between temporal planes.

Keywords: truth, classical and postmodern, past vs. present, intertextuality, simulacrum, Western identity

INTRODUCTION

The present paper studies the notion of erasure in Shepard's *True West* (1980) from a postmodern approach and analyses the two brothers' different considerations regarding true Western identity. Indeed, unlike Austin, who is pragmatic and stands for the contemporary Western culture, Lee is isolated, and he prefers to live in the wild desert. What is specific about Austin is that he is preoccupied with the project of designing a scenario for his new movie. A sense of comedy arises when Lee believes that he has the true-to-life version of the West, but Austin informs Saul that Lee's version is mythical and unrealistic. In the same context, the dramatic aspects of *Buried Child* arise because of Dodge's inability to erase the roots of the past and Halie's refusal to erase the past or to forget about her lost son. The identity crisis in the two postmodern plays stems from the impossibility of erasure. The use of postmodern notions like simulacrum, intertextuality, deconstruction, plurality, and the absence of truth aims at presenting the impossibility of erasure and at reinventing a new, balanced and fluid compromise between the past and the present. The new stable self-emerges after the mission of decentralisation.

BACKGROUND

This part examines the aesthetics and poetics of erasure in Sam Shepard's *True West* and *Buried Child*. There have been various critical readings of the plays, but most critics have focused on the postmodern features without paying attention to the notion of *erasure*. To start with, in an article entitled 'A Postmodern Reading of Sam Shepard's *True West*', Joodaki focuses on binary opposition, metanarratives, duality, and the self-reflexivity of the text to show that Shepard can be considered a postmodernist writer. He concludes that 'the postmodern world can be regarded as a stage in which characters come, get decentered, fragmented and all of a sudden feel themselves in a catch from which there is no way out' (Joodaki 2013, 211). The postmodern features are made conspicuous through the presence of fragmented utterances, which reflect the divided inner souls of Shepard's characters. Joodaki's considerations of the stage as a 'postmodern world' show the role of the postmodernist trend in shaping the playwrights' ideas about the alienation of the postmodern and fragmented selves. This idea is explored to scrutinise the theme of erasure from a postmodern perspective.

In the same context, the Iranian scholar Vahdati emphasises 'The Postmodernist Rendition of Myth in Selected Plays of Sam Shepard'. He delves into the intricacies of the American self and focuses on several American idealised myths (the myth of rebirth, the myth of the cowboy, the myth of masculine autonomy, and the myth of incest). The aim is to lament over the loss of some ideals. He argues that 'Postmodern society has killed the beauty, life, and nature with its rough laws. The themes of an integrated American family, loyalty, love and greatness have given their places to the disjoined families that corrupt nature with their fake dreams of success and wealth' (Vahdati 2012, 254). Vahdati explores the differences between the past and the present and examines Shepard's nostalgic tone. This tone is traced to show the impossibility of erasing the roots of the past and to understand the characters' attempts at freezing the moments of the glorious past. On the other hand, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, Philip Auslander classifies Shepard among the most famous postmodernist writers who have sought to create new hope for the next generations and to enhance their sense of belonging. The critic refers to the notion of pastiche to prove that 'Shepard's concept of character seems to evoke the idea of the fractured, postmodern self…. Shepard points to a new, anti-modern understanding of dramatic character' (Auslander 2004, 120). The inner self of the postmodern character is tormented and fragmented because of the dissolution and erasure of traditional ideals. Accordingly, we shall dig deep into the close relationship between traditions of the community, myths of the past and burdens of an identity crisis.

On the other hand, in 'Shepard Writes about Writing,' Brenda Murphy analyses the theatrical performances of Shepard's plays and examines the postmodern theatrical techniques. She deduces that there are affinities between Shepard and some classical writers. However, the differences lie in Shepard's use of 'a dark Romanticism, closer to the Gothic imagination of Poe or the cosmic despair of Melville than to the transcendental optimism of Emerson' (Murphy 2004, 124). While some critics have focused on the idea of decentralisation in Shepard's theatre, others attacked the playwright for holding a central position, for embracing the values of mainstream culture and forgetting about the voices of the margin. For example, in her *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama*, Jeanette Malkin attacks Shepard by affirming: 'Shepard has always spoken from a well-centred posture: identified with a Midwest terrain, with a mid-1950s popular imagination, with a centred masculinity' (Malkin 1999, 155). He is attacked for being a misogynist and for giving women a secondary position. This view can be discussed by showing the way Shepard reinvents the image of Mother America and calls for empowering women and erasing all sorts of gender gaps. Malkin also differs from the critics mentioned above in the sense that she disagrees with the classification of Shepard as a postmodernist playwright. She writes, 'I find it difficult to accept plays that crave homecoming, that are set in the kitchen or salon, and that cannot evade connections of blood and soil-as still belonging to a postmodern aesthetic' (Malkin, 1999, p. 244). She considers Shepard a playwright good at writing family plays, but he cannot be considered a postmodernist writer. This claim is contested by offering a postmodern reading of *erasure* in Sam Shepard's selected plays.

MAIN FOCUS

The plays have a wide range of critical reviews, but to the author's knowledge, few critics have been interested in the poetics and the aesthetics of *erasure* in Shepard's plays and his transcending of the categorised division of the Old and the New West. This part seeks to examine the politics of erasure from a postmodern perspective. Baudrillard's interpretation of *simulacrum* is deployed to show that each brother is a replica of the other and that both of them fail at obliterating the past and the present or at finding a true self. Language games are also examined to question the notion of truth and to study the way characters recreate language according to their subjective needs.

ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES, PROBLEMS

The main argument in this part lies in the postmodern Adam's self-alienation and his vacillation between the values of the Arcadian old South and the New West. Accordingly, the controversial dilemma of the characters and their heated debate over defining a True Western self is studied through analysing the poetics and aesthetics of erasure. Moreover, this part addresses the issue of the convergence and the divergence between the past and the present. It sorts out the manner Shepard unearths the ghosts of the past and solves the identity crisis at the closure of the plays.

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

To better understand the notion of *erasure*, we'll start with a theoretical framework about its postmodernist interpretation. A historical account of post-Second World War America (the failure at erasing the boundaries of gender, race, ethnicity, the agrarian past and the industrial present) will also be taken into consideration. The notion of *True West* has been the source of debate among historians and critics. To start with, Limerick represents the dilemma of redefining an *Authentic West* using the following terms: 'the search to distinguish the Real West from the Fake West has become a nearly impossible quest, a game with ever-changing rules and no winner' (as cited in Handley & Lewis 2011, 1). It is a continuous quest as there are hazy lines between myth and reality. This blurred vision is the outcome of a cultural transition, of the urbanisation of the antebellum West and of the attempts at erasing the Agrarian past. From a postmodern angle, 'the primary concept under erasure is being itself, a presence that is now absent' (Erasure 2003, 14). It is the case of the old west, which is constantly present in the mindscape of Shepard's protagonists. Some characters in the plays under consideration are ostracised because of the continuous attempts at erasing the values of the past.

Indeed, what is specific about the agrarian West is that it was based on utopian ideals. At this juncture, the true Westerner used to be able to shape his destiny, and he used to be endowed with the principles of self-achievement, hope, and loyalty to his family. Indeed, 'national and hence the individual conscience was clear, had no past, only a present and a future' (Lewis 1995, 7). The Southern Agrarian American did not have a past because he contributed to putting the first bedrocks of a newly-invented nation, and in believing that he was setting the ground for a better generation. However, the urban Western citizen erased the values of the past, and the agrarian utopia was replaced by the nightmare of urbanisation. Accordingly, the postmodern Adam has faced the dilemma of being torn between the ideal values of the agrarian past and those of the urbanised present. Consequently, 'the Southern hero, [became] a useful foil for the unlovely present or symbol of some irreplaceable loss' (as cited in Gaston 1970, 178). The spiritual loss of the Southern hero is responsible for the identity crisis and the tragic downfall of the Southern families in the two plays under examination.

What is specific about the Agrarian South is that it cannot be erased from the national mindset. It has become part of the national memory to the point of associating it with authenticity. This romanticised vision can be traced in Turner's frontier myth, where he declared that the West succeeded in getting rid of the Eastern frontiers and in constructing a new democratic nation. Therefore, 'The great West thus became for Turner and his followers that mythical region that was more real than the real West. The physical area West of the Mississippi valley, because it had become a region of the mind and part of a national theology'(*apud.* Thacker 2006, 17). Put differently, some historians associate the Agrarian West with authenticity because it marks the beginning of the 'young nation'.

In addition to the Old South, the New South is also an important period that cannot be erased from the memory of the American Adam because it marks the development of the United States. In fact, after the Second World War, the land of opportunities has gained global power, and it has become the leader of the world. What is specific about the New South is its 'urban planning narrative that embodies a set of cultural values, notably privacy, exclusivity, and security. American suburbs, above all else, place a large emphasis on the primacy and the notion of safety and protection from the previous ills of the inner society' (Hanlon, 2018, p. 135). The American suburbs enhanced the socioeconomic progress as they helped some American citizens achieve certain financial, psychological, social and personal stabilities. This positive transformation was considered one of the major secrets behind the consideration of the West as 'a True West'. The Urban West could not be erased from the memory of the American Adam because it brought innovative ideas. Accordingly, some historians were fascinated with this phase, and they focused on 'how irrigation caused the desert to bloom, and on how this formula attracted migrants from the American South' (Gale Group, 2016, p. 27). The New South is another remarkable place that could not be erased from the American mindset.

Shepard is proud of the positive transformation of the West from a wild area to a civilised continent. On the other hand, he laments over the turmoil of some postmodern Western American citizens, and he condemns them because of their attempts at erasing their roots. Accordingly, the next analytical part broaches a postmodern reading of erasure in Shepard's selected plays. Each part starts with a theoretical aspect of some postmodern notions and moves to the textual analysis of the relevant plays. The rationale behind choosing postmodernism is that it 'involves the erasure of the ethical or the substitution of ethics by aesthetics' (Ahmed 1998, 45). Put differently, the aesthetics of erasure can be understood through the absence of moral and cultural ethics. In a nutshell, postmodernism succeeds in blurring the boundaries between the past and the present as it erases all types of linearity inherent in modern thought. This dichotomy is the catalyst behind the dissolution of family bonds in some of Shepard's plays.

ERASURE AND IDENTITY CRISIS

The dichotomy between the old and the new West is traced through the structure of the play. "All nine scenes take place on the same set; a kitchen and adjoining alcove of an older home in a Southern California home" (3). "There is no wall division or door to the alcove" (3). This description alludes to the presence of a well-knit and warm family; however, the audience is misinformed about the dysfunctionality of the family and the split of its members. This misinformation reflects the Ambivalence of the American family and its oscillation between the fact of mobility and that of settlement. The traditional family has been dissolving since the late 1960s. In the sixties, the solid American family was affected by social transformations. The collapse of the family is made obvious through the presence of a nameless family whose members are called by their names.

Austin and Lee have an identity crisis as each character claims to possess a unique and true definition of the West. In this way, 'the relationship between history and representation in the American West [becomes] dramatically complicated and the distinction between them far less easy to maintain because our postmodern age places notions of truth in quotation marks' (Handley & Lewis 2011, 3). The long journey into a True West can be construed through the absence of centrality and of a transcendental signified. In his *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*, Derrida defines deconstruction as: 'A system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain of the play of signification infinitely' (Derrida 2005, 354). The absence of fixity in the play stems from the presence of two scenarios and the absence of a final transcendental signified. The first scenario is based on Lee's consideration of a True West as a type of paradise regained. He ideally delineates the West "like a paradise…a couple a' real nice [houses]… Kinda'place that sorta' kills ya' inside. Warm yellow lights. Mexican tile all around. Copper pots hangin' over the stove. Ya'know, like they got in the magazines. Blond people movin' in and outa' the rooms, talkin' to each other." (Act 1, 12). This depiction reflects Shepard's glorification of rustic happiness and the celebration of family integration before the presence of a capitalist machine in the garden.

The same idea of being torn between the present and the ghosts of the past is the main thematic concern in *Buried Child.* The identity crisis is made clear from the very opening stage directions. The stage is furnished with the presence of an 'old wooden suitcase down left with pale, frayed carpet laid down on the steps' (Act 1, 63). The semantic register of antiquity's 'old, pale' indicates the atmosphere of darkness. Also, the presence of tokens of the past could not be erased. The opening scene is also marked by the presence of "an old dark green sofa with the sufferings coming out in spots" (63). The interplay between the dark and the green colour shows the nostalgic tone towards the Green agrarian America and proves that the boundaries of the past cannot be erased. In the same context, the American historian Henry Nash argues that the agrarian past cannot be erased from the memory of the American Adam, as it is the epitome of American glory. In his *Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith states that:

> The image of this vast and constantly growing society in the interior of the continent became one of the dominant symbols of nineteenth-century American society- a collective representation, a poetic idea that defined the promise of American life...So powerful and vivid was the image that down to the very end of the nineteenth century it continued to seem a representation, in Whitman's words, of the core of the nation, 'the real genuine America (1957, 138-139)

The nineteenth century is engraved in the minds of some American citizens, and it cannot be erased from the collective memory because it is marked by positive reconstructions, moral perfection, and sacred values. In *Buried Child*, the protagonists are living dead and are isolated like monads because they are erasing the values of the past. For instance, Dodge has a dysfunctional family because its members are not embracing the Puritan values of individuality and hard work. They are rather passive creatures who want to achieve their dreams without any effort. They resort to alcohol as a means of oblivion and of erasing the dark present. The anxiety of the family is made obvious from the very opening stage directions when the space of the family is depicted as a barren place characterised by the absence of motion. The audience is invited to the house of Dodge, where passivity reigns supreme. 'The screen facing the sofa is a large, old-fashioned brown TV. A flickering blue light comes from the screen, but no image, no sound' (Act 1, 63). TV addiction suggests that the characters are passive spectators in the stage of life. Silence evokes the absence of any real communication and shows the erasure of the principles of family sanctity. This type of erasure is responsible for the failure of the American dream of reconstructing an ideal family.

The common point between the two plays lies in facing the failure of establishing well-knit families. The disrespect of the values of the past that are based on family harmony and integration leads to the tragic mood of the plays. In fact, "the erasure of a rooted past gives rise in Shepard's plays, as well as, to anxieties of an erased future" (Malkin 1999, 119). This anxiety is explored through the tragic dilemma of Dodge and Austin's families; tragedy stems from breaking away from the ideal values of the past. Erasing the roots of the golden past is responsible for the absurd dimension in the two plays. The theme of erasure in the two plays can also be analysed through the chasm between the mythical past and the postmodern present of absurdity.

ERASURE AND THE MYTH OF THE UTOPIAN WEST

In *True West*, Lee is situated at a dramatic centre between the mythical or utopian West and the postmodern reality of futility. Lee embodies a romanticised vision of the West, and he recalls Jefferson's utopian view of the West as 'the place where countless numbers of settlers could find free land, employing axe and plough to create a natural democracy' (De Matthew 2014, 10). 'Turner firmly established the West as the crucible where America's mission [has developed]' (De Matthew 2014, 11). At the beginning of the play, the audience is misinformed about Lee's fragmented self and his divided inner house, which is composed of an ideal and another real consideration of the West. This utopian view is made conspicuous through his insistence on watering the plants: 'You keepin' the plants watered?' (5). The myth of the Old West is further constructed through the image of the cowboy. In this respect, Lee informs the film producer: 'I haven't seen a good Western since Lonely are the Brave. You remember that movie… Kirk Douglas. Helluva's movie. You remember that movie, Austin' (18). This story is engraved in Lee's mind because it contains a true-to-life Western hero who is victimised by the development of suburbia.

The hero and his horse are killed while trying to cross the highway. 'In the elegiac Western, all things beautiful and noble are destroyed by the ugly and mundane devices of the modern world… Horse, like [the cowboy], represents freedom, honesty, constancy, and purity… the killing of horses represents the end of the frontier era' (Indick 2008, 18). Shepard puts an end to the frontier myth when he ironically highlights the business mentality of Lee. The reversal of roles and Lee's metamorphoses from being attached to the desert into being a materialistic screenwriter show the split between the lost agrarian myth and the present business rat race. The revision of Turner's frontier myth is manifested when Austin thinks that there are mountains in the Panhandle: "Now they're supposed to abandon their trucks, climb on their horses and chase each other into the mountains?" (22). Lee "there aren't any mountains in the Panhandle!" (22). The mountain has a symbolic dimension within the Western legend as it stands for "anarchic freedom" (Leonelli 2007,43). Freedom is a myth because the postmodern Adam is chained by mammon. In his commentary about the relationship between truth and reality, Shepard writes, "myth in its true form has now been demolished. It does not exist anymore. All we have are fantasies about it. Or ideas that don't speak to our inner self at all, they just speak to some lame notions about the past." (Rosen 1995, 5). We infer through this statement that truth remains a mere illusion in the play.

The close relationship between erasure and the myths of the past can be detected through the corn myth in *Buried Child*. What is specific about the narrative American myths is that they 'frequently associate corn with primal generative power' (Kabatchnick 2012, 87). In the play, the corn myth is paradoxically associated with sterility. This type of sterility is figurative as it stands for the postmodern vacuum where nothing grows. Even rain, which is supposed to be the symbol of regeneration, is associated with the barren land. In this respect, Dodge affirms that rain is not natural in the industrial zone where the postmodern Adam is suffocated by the foggy view. In one of his utterances, Dodge declares: 'It looks like rain to me!' (Act 1, 64). The use of 'like' shows the appearance of the artificial and the erasure of the natural. When Tilden collects corn after rain, Dodge asks him to put it back and not to have any trouble with the neighbours. In reality, 'Dodge pushes all the corn off his lap onto the floor… Tilden starts picking up the ears of corn one at a time and husking them. He throws the husks and silk in the centre of the stage and drops the ears into the pail each time he cleans one' (Act 1, 71). The act of rejecting the stolen corn proves the absence of fertility and highlights the differences between the agrarian past and the Industrial New West, where nothing blooms naturally. Dodge's advice to the young generation is not to forget about the past, and his lesson to the older generation is not to ignore the present. He reveals to his son: 'The world doesn't stop just because you're upstairs. Corn keeps growing. Rain keeps raining'

(Act 1, 75). He is implicitly delivering the message that the erasure of the past or the present is the main factor behind the dramatic case, the physical and spiritual disintegration.

ERASURE AND SIMULACRUM

The absence of truth and the impossibility of erasure can also be studied through the notion of *simulacrum*, which is based on the absence of originality and the presence of replicas. From Baudrillard's postmodern lens, "simulacrum is used to deny the possibility of anything being the singular source or origin of any idea or a thing" (Buchanan 2010, 434). In this context, Austin accuses Lee of being a stealer, and he pokes fun at his scenario and his consideration of the old Agrarian West as a true west. "It's the dumbest story I ever heard in my life… It's idiotic. Two lamebrains chasing each other across Texas! Are you kidding?" (30)? Austin can be criticised because he mocks Lee for sticking to the values of the old West, but his mental roadmap shows that he is still deeply attached to the motherland. In reality, "Austin sees his mother's neighbourhood as a simulacrum of something he vaguely remembers (Roudané 2002, 182). He is torn between different selves: the romantic self that keeps nostalgic for a lost golden age and another pragmatic self that struggles to survive the nightmarish reality. In this way, "Austin and Lee's old and new roles are all simulacra, and the search for the true self is, in fact, impossible" (6). The idea of simulacrum is conveyed through the similarity between the brothers and through Austin's romanticism. Although Austin and Lee are living like monads, they have many areas of convergence. The area of convergence between them appears when Austin depicts the new west using the following terms: "streets turn out to be replicas of streets I remember. Streets I misremember… Fields… I am looking at the smell of the night. The bushes. The orange blossoms. Dust in the driveways. Rainbird sprinklers. Lights in people's houses. You're right about the lights, Lee. Everybody else is living the life. Indoors. Safe. This is a paradise down here" (40-41). This description entails the presence of copies and shows that neither the old nor the new West can be considered a true West.

Simulacrum can be traced through the use of language and the presence of echoes. For instance, Austin's words are similar to Lee's utterances. When Lee addresses his brother: "You couldn't steal a toaster without losin' yer lunch" (40), Austin answers, "You really don't think I could steal a crumby toaster? How much you wanna' bet I can't steal a toaster! How much? Go ahead! You're a gambler aren't you?" (40). The remarkable use of the verb to steal shows that Lee's scenario is not original and that it is based on copying Douglas' movie. Austin plays with words and distinguishes films from movies: "In this business, we make movies, American movies. Leave the films to the French" (30). While movies have a business goal, French films seem to be based on the arts for the sake of the arts. In this way, Shepard criticises the idea of trivialising some American movies during the 1980s, and he is attacking some movie makers who "sell movies on a mere synopsis or outline of the plot and demand 300,000 dollars upfront for a simple first draft" (Gale 1998, 21). This materialistic dimension has affected the quality of the Hollywood industry and has produced movies that misinform the audience about the reality of the American dream. Accordingly, Shepard becomes "a mythmaker because his subject is America and the dream betrayed" (*apud.* Smith 2005, 33). This betrayed dream appears through the industrial nightmare.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ERASURE IN BURIED CHILD

The presence of copies and the absence of originality can be examined through the idea of intertextuality in *Buried Child.* From a postmodern perspective, "postmodern intertextuality [is] a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (Hutcheon 2000, 118). Put differently, intertextuality shows that writers cannot remove the traces of the past. This postmodern idea is explained by Harold Bloom, who declares that writers face the anxiety of influence because the act of writing is based on influential readings. In this context, the critic raises the following problematic: 'how can they [authors] give pleasure, if no way they have received it! But how can they receive the deepest pleasure, the ecstasy of priority, of self-begetting, of an assured autonomy, if the way to the true subject and their true self lies through the precursor's subject and his self' (Bloom 1997, 116). Bloom argues that writers cannot produce a pleasurable piece of writing without going through the pleasure of reading. Accordingly, the true self is dissolved because the writer is unconsciously influenced by previous writings. The idea of intertextuality or the fact of being influenced by ancestors is traced through the affinities between Buried Child and other works belonging to the American Canon. For example, the atmosphere of sterility in *Buried Child* is a reminder of the barren land in Eliot's *The Waste Land,* where rebirth becomes an alien notion. Optimism appears in the final scenes of the two literary works. Like in the postmodern play where the sun illuminate*s* the final scene to show that the ghosts of the past cannot be buried, the dog in the modern poem is as a sign of survival 'oh keep the Dog far hence, that's a friend to men\ or with his nails he'll dig it up again' (Eliot 72, 74). The dog serves as a means of protecting the human being from external peril and functions as a sign of rehabilitation. In the same way, 'the buried child in the play serves to emphasise the male perspective force, functioning like the dog in T. S Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which also causes regeneration' (Roudane 2002, 85).

The buried child in the final scene is represented as a sign of erasing all the manifestations of mediocrity and opening a new chapter of prosperity. In the final scene, there is a remarkable use of a pun of the sun\son. A voice repeats the following lines: 'Maybe it's the sun. Maybe that's the sun' (Act 3, 132). The rays of the sun allude to the disappearance of the illegitimate son and the removal of the different sorts of moral and cultural sterility. This pun is another indication of Shepard's influence by the canon of modern drama. In fact, 'the curtain line on "sun/son" alludes directly to Ibsen's Ghosts, reminding audiences not only of a source for the realistic modern family drama structured around a secret that is only gradually revealed but also of the earlier playwright's delineation of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children'. (Adler 2005, 119). Shepard is influenced by the father of realism, and he inherits Ibsen's idea of fate as a major marker of cultural identity. The image of the buried child shows that this child is the scapegoat for the sins and the illegitimate marriage of the mother and her son. In short, the technique of intertextuality proves that cultural heritage cannot be denied and shows that Shepard cannot erase the remarkable influence of writers like Eliot and Ibsen.

ERASURE AND LANGUAGE GAMES

In addition to the use of puns, Shepard is skilled at using language games, which indicate the impossibility of being limited to one signified or erasing meaning. The betrayal of truth is further indicated through the language games of the play. Before dealing with Saul's game about a true-to-life scenario in the true West, it is pertinent to define language games. In his *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*, Kein Elam declares that the world of theatre is characterized by the remarkable presence of language games because "dramatic discourse is always destined, if not on the page then at least potentially on the stage, to interact with its physical and behavioural surroundings, and especially with the body and its movements, in the production of meaning" (as cited in Larson 1991, 79). The linguistic games in some plays are thus characterised by the gap between verbal and the behavioural profile of the character, and on the dichotomy between reality and lies. In Saul's game about truth, Austin's scenario about the new West and Lee's outline about the old South are accepted as tokens of truth. Saul plays with words when he is teased by Austin, and answers in a diplomatic way, "I want to continue with your project too, Austin. I am ready to go all the way with your brother's story. It's not though we can't do both. We're big for that aren't we?" (34). The inclusive 'We' shows that Saul is not a committed film producer, as he is equipped with a business mentality and is preoccupied with collecting money. We infer from this situation that Saul is lying about the validity of Austin's scenario. He is flouting the maxim of quality as he provides Austin and the audience with a piece of false information about an authentic Western scenario. On the one hand, he informs Austin: "We have big studio money standing behind this thing. Just based on your outline" (33). This business orientation is meant to show the postmodern mixture between high and low culture (art vs business). On the other hand, the producer perceives Lee's scenario as a more authentic script: "It has the ring of truth, Austin… Something about the real West… Something about the land. Your brother is speaking from experience… But nobody's interested in love these days, Austin. Let's face it" (35). What is ironic about this utterance is that Saul defines Lee's scenario as a plausible script that encapsulates the roots of authenticity, yet his use of the expression "ring of truth" denotes the fake aspect of the old western script. In this respect, Austin attacks Lee, and he argues: "There's no such thing as the West anymore! It's a dead issue! It's dried up, Saul, and so are you" (35). The use of negation is another indication of the absence of a final signified and the failure to reach the truth.

ERASURE AND THE POSTMODERN CIRCULARITY OF THE PLAYS

The inability to attain the final truth about a true Western identity is also conveyed through the circularity of the play and its open-endedness. In reality, "there's no closure as there are no Telos or predetermined points of closure. The writer has no final authority over the sibling rivalry or the text as Austin and Lee continue fighting each other, and the stage becomes darkened" (Joodaki, 2013, 132). In the final scene, the mother decides to go back to Los Angeles: "It was the worst feeling being up there in Alaska. Starting a window. I never felt so desperate before… I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless" (63). The mother leaves California to recapture the dream of the old West, but she is disillusioned with the nightmarish reality in Alaska, where fraternal violence reigns supreme. The end is marked by the absence of any resolution as the brothers keep on fighting over 'the unattainable California ideal and become wanderers in an endless wasteland' (Varner 2013, 28).

The same circular shape of the play is noticed in *Buried Child,* which opens and ends with Halie's voice. At the beginning, his voice used to be tinged with a tone of bitterness, and he defined pain using the following words: 'pain is pain. Pure and simple. Suffering is a different matter' (Act 1, 65). The difference between pain and suffering is that pain is temporary, but suffering can affect the next generations. It is the case of the buried child who suffered from the effects of his parents' sins. The closure of the play is marked by the same scene of suffering and the solemn mood of burying the illegitimate child. However, the final scene is characterised by the presence of a glimmer of hope. The burial of the son can be interpreted as a sign for cleansing the roots of evil and of the act of erasing all the sins and unearthing the values of the past. Accordingly, an atmosphere of contagious regeneration dominates the final scene. Halie is surprised by the reappearance of a greenfield: 'It's a miracle, Dodge. I've never seen a crop like this in my whole life. Maybe it's the sun… Maybe the rain did something. Maybe it was the rain.' (Act 3, 132). The rain has a cathartic effect as it purifies the souls of protagonists, and it invites the audience to recognise the playwright's message about the necessity of creating a compromise between the virtuous values of the past and the present. In the end, 'the remains of the buried son have fertilised the earth in a grimly Gothic manner (perhaps appropriately calling to mind the line from T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* asking whether "that corpse you planted in your garden has begun… to sprout"). (Adler

2002, 119). Paradise is regained in the final act after the erasure of the sins of the ancestors. Halie's voice becomes balanced only when the dichotomies and the divisions are erased. The rebirth of natural order emerges after the erasure of all forms of superficiality and artificiality.

The significance of this part lies in showing Shepard's success in unearthing the organising values of the Old and the New West. Although there are some limitations, we revealed Shepard's success in creating a smooth compromise between the past and the present at the end of the two plays. The absence of resolution plays shows that Shepard is keen on changing the vision about the relationship between the past, the present, and the future. The tragic mothers in the two plays are blamed for sticking to the past (Old South) and erasing all the ties of the present. The playwright succeeds in the reversal of the traditional view about the true Western American citizen. The protagonists in the two plays leave the stage after becoming aware of the dangers of erasing the boundaries between the past and the present. Both Halie and Austin and Lee's mother go through moments of self-discovery in the final recognition scene. They find out that their tragic flaws consist of erasing the traditional values of family sanctity. The open closure of the two plays contains an optimistic tone, and it carries a new hope for a brighter future based on a reconciliation between the past and the present. However, Shepard was condemned by some critics because of the Beckettian absurd tone of his plays. It is argued that 'Shepard took the theatre of the absurd as his starting point to experiment with language, character and action' (Crank 2012, 27). This view can be discussed by referring to the optimistic tone at the end of the two plays under examination in this part. Optimism can be interpreted as a positive sign for the theoretical success of the playwright and his characters' success at achieving moments of psychological awakening. The aim is to invite the audience to recognise the dramatic consequences of temporal erasure and its role in bringing about psychological turmoil.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The theme of *erasure* in some modern and postmodern family plays is still open to different interpretations. The study can be further developed by dealing with a comparative study and analysis of erasure in other modern American plays. In addition to Shepard, some of Eugene O'Neill's plays can be studied to detect the dramatic aspects behind erasing the roots of the past or transgressing the limits of the present. Moreover, a postmodern feminist perspective can be applied to study the theme of erasure. Erasing the present and freezing the past in Eugene O'Neill's family play entitled *Long Days' Journey into Night* (1956) is one of the main arguments in the play. Mary Tyrone's oscillation between the sweet past and the bleak reality can be another route to detect the repercussions of coping with the present. Hence, her husband's attempts to erase the roots of the traumatic past can be examined to investigate the tragic effects of obliterating the past.

The aesthetics and the poetics of erasure can also be traced in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962). What is specific about this play is its parody of the traditional American myths (the myth of the cowboy, the corn myth of fertility and the myth of male virility). This family play is also concerned with dramatising the consequences of creating high barriers between the past and the present. Both O'Neill and Albee have influenced Sam Shepard in producing his family plays. The present section has focused on erasure in a Southern American context. The politics of erasure can also be studied in a Northern Irish American context. The comparative study is meant to deliver the messages of the playwrights about the impossibility of erasing the roots of the past and the inability to cope with the present. Delving into different American contexts aims at delivering a message about the necessity of solving the identity crisis by blurring the boundaries between the past and the present. Avoiding erasure and dismantling the temporal barriers may be read as the secret behind the psychic balance of some characters.

CONCLUSION

The examination of *erasure* from a postmodern perspective has shown that it is impossible to delete the roots of the past. Erasure encapsulates the key concepts of fixity, and it is in contradiction to the postmodern ideas of plurality and relativity. The final message of the playwright is to show that the true West does not exist and that there is no absolute truth. "The audience comes to a dead end, an aporia, because there are indefinite contradictory meanings or significations, and it is not easy to decide or choose the final signified. Any search for objective truth is a failure" (Joodaki 2013, 139). Henceforth, the old West remains a dream, and the new West is a mere illusion. Shepard raises his voice in resistance and calls for the erasure of the non-humanitarian capitalist project and, ultimately, for the rebirth of the utopian past. However, this nostalgic tone aims at eradicating the roots of vice and empowering those of human agency in an anti-humanist postmodern era.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Erasure: It presupposes the disappearance and obliteration of some entities. From a postmodern context, erasure is an impossible project because of the multiplicity of different selves. In Sam Shepard, erasure is associated with tragedy, and some protagonists go through depressive moments whenever they try to erase the past or the present.

Fragmented Self: It is a misbalanced self that is based on divisions. In Sam Shepard's *True West* and *Buried Child*, the dispersal is incurred by the gap between reality and illusion and between the past and the present.

Intertextuality: It is a literary device based on the mixture of different texts within the same piece of writing. This device shows that there is hybridity within the text and proves the influence of classical literature. For instance, the postmodern playwright, Sam Shepard, is influenced by his modernist forerunners like Ibsen or T.S. Eliot. Intertextuality shows the universality of the texts and makes the text valid for different ages.

Language Games: They are linguistic enigmas which are deciphered by specific characters of the play. They serve to create intimacy between some characters. They also create certain dramatic irony because the audience can better understand the hidden meaning of games than the characters themselves.

Old South: The Utopian American South is associated with the ideal American values and the possibility of achievement. Modern and postmodern American playwrights often lament the loss of the utopian Southern values. For example, Sam Shepard implicitly reveals that erasing the values of the Old South is responsible for the postmodern chaos.

Simulacrum: It entails the presence of copies and the absence of originality. From a postmodern perspective, the simulacrum is equated with imitating reality.

Suburbia: The development of suburbia marks another phase of American glory during the twentieth century. Levittown's suburbs are exemplifications of the reality of the American dream. The suburbs helped middle-class families who started from scratch to achieve their dreams of owning small houses and of being endowed with socio-economic stability.

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SELF AS PERFORMATIVE GESTURE: THE AUTHOR-CHARACTER'S ROLE IN AUTOFICTION

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Abstract. This research paper examines author-characters in autofiction, arguing that their liminal insertion between fact and fiction disrupts traditional perceptions of authorial authenticity. Through analysis of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade* and Ben Lerner's *10:04*, I establish how author-characters (distinct from self-inserts or authorial surrogates) function as multi-layered representations which both embody and fictionalise the author. Using Roland Barthes's interrogation of narrative voice and Jacques Derrida's theory of trace, I contend that author-characters expose the futility of accurate self-representation in literature. By intentionally blurring autobiography and fiction, author-characters in autofiction challenge genre boundaries while simultaneously foregrounding the instability of identity.

Keywords: author-character, autofiction, Slaughterhouse-Five, 10:04, trace, self-representation, Kurt Vonnegut, Ben Lerner

Author-characters in autofiction challenge literary norms surrounding self-representation in autobiography, questioning the authenticity of the autobiography and the role of first-person narration. Coined by Serge Doubrovsky while speaking about his 1977 novel *Fils*, he describes the genre's roots in "fiction, events, and facts which are strictly real: autofiction, if you will" [*fiction, d'événements et de faits strictement réels*] (Doubrovsky 1977, i), naming a form where, as Ava Dean notes, "created by Serge Doubrovsky in the late 1970s [autofiction] puts the paradoxical genres of 'autobiography' and 'fiction' into a unified form" (Dean 2017, 3). Unlike autobiography, which documents factual lived experiences, autofiction purposefully destabilises fact and fiction through their unification. Autobiography's claim to authenticity relies upon a foundational contradiction: it assumes memory and language accurately depict the self, where autofiction exposes the artifice. Phillippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact states that the impact relies on a reader's belief in the author's identity as narrator/protagonist. However, this pact depends on the gap between lived experience and representation. While autobiography obscures this gap, autofiction weaponises it. In "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon, or The Cockroach Crusade", Nathaniel's assertion that the novella is "the only place [he] expressed [himself] honestly" (Spencer-Cross 2024, 5) further exemplifies the paradox of authenticity in autofiction. The claim is simultaneously sincere and manipulative, highlighting autofiction's ability to depict real events through the lens of fiction.

Unlike autobiography, which attempts to reliably ground the author and protagonist's identity, autofiction interrogates the construction of that proposed stability. Nathaniel's narrative actively refuses to authenticate which memories or moments are real or interpreted, and this instability becomes a focal point of the narrative. Autofiction's authenticity lies in its admission of constructed fabrication. In contrast, autobiography can fail to acknowledge its own fictionalisation. Where autobiography's unnamed "I" can invite readers to conflate author and protagonist, the named author-character can be used as a tool to highlight this distinction. While both autobiography and autofiction share many similarities, both genres are able to achieve specific things that the other cannot. Autobiography is much more compatible with the illusion of unmediated truth, while autofiction is able to sacrifice its authority over authenticity in order to draw attention to the natural "constructedness" of autobiography's authenticity. One way autofiction achieves this destabilisation is through the use of author-characters: fictional representations of the novel's author who are, and are not, the writer. While autobiography validates itself through a seemingly verifiable narrative, autofiction focuses on the construction of identity and uses fictional narrative techniques to question self-representation. This separation between the two genres is imperative to understanding autofiction. Where autobiography operates under the guise of transparency, autofiction plays with the artificial nature of said transparency to question the authenticity of representing a factual self.

Autofiction, similar to autobiografiction[i], faction[ii], and the roman *à clef*[iii], distinguishes itself from comparably semi-fictitious literature by adhering to the conventions established in autobiographic literature, including author as protagonist, focusing on lived experience, and the exploration of memory. Siddharth Srikanth writes that,

> scholars of autofiction typically define the genre as marked by an uncertainty over truth-telling in nonfictional forms such as the memoir or autobiography… Autofiction is best conceptualised as a genre that deliberately troubles audience expectations regarding fiction and nonfiction for both autobiographical and novelistic ends. (Srikanth 2020, 344)

Besides blending fact and fiction, autofiction distinguishes itself through the malleability of constants through fictionalisation, playing with the reliability of memory and senses to question the authenticity and consistency of the created narrative world. While autobiography presumes memory, character, and setting reliability, autofiction treats them as narrative tools to be satirised or allegorised. The Tralfamadorians in *Slaughterhouse-Five* devalue memory as they traverse time non-linearly. Similarly, the ethereal basement's ability in "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon" to resurrect buried memories via the maneki-neko plays with the reliability of Nathaniel's narration. Author-characters serve as fictionalised representations of a novel's author. I have closely examined the role of the author-characters, Billy Pilgrim and the nameless author-character of chapter one in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five,* and the author-characters Ben and The Author in Ben Lerner's *10:04*.

The author-character, distinct from an authorial surrogate, or self-insert, is a fictionalised representation of the novel's author, generally serving as protagonist while sharing ideological, physical, or historical similarities with the text's author. Dating back to the 4th century BCE, authorial surrogates enabled authors to express philosophical and/or moral positions without claiming direct ownership. Kendal Sharp writes of Socrates' role in the Platonic dialogues that, "Some scholars see in the character Socrates a mouthpiece inside the dialogues for the author's own views" (Sharp 2016, 1). Plato enlisted the character of Socrates as a surrogate for his own ideological rhetoric, offering a layer of separation between the character Socrates' dialogue and the author Plato's writing. The surrogate serves as a fictionalised rendition of a (factual or fictional) character through whom the author expresses their own ideals, while inhabiting an accountably separate representation.

Self-inserts gained popularity in the 19th and 20th centuries as characters in metafictional and autofictional novels such as Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel*. Self-insert characters are often direct representations of their authors, and occasionally romanticised in the aim of wish fulfilment or personal exploration, as found in the recent resurgence of the self-insert in fanfiction.[iv] While the author surrogate serves as a detached mouthpiece for the author, a self-insert more closely resembles a 1:1 representation of the author. Melody Streml writes that "self-insertion fanfictions occur when authors insert themselves into the universe of a pre-established story, either directly, or through an author avatar", writing as an example, that "Kurt Vonnegut's alter ego, Kilgore Trout, appears in many of his novels" (Streml 2020, 16-17). Streml contradicts her definition of the self-insert, altering the reader's perception of the Kilgore Trout character's role as author-character. *Self-insertion fanfictions occur when authors insert themselves into the universe of a pre-established story.* Kilgore Trout, as I will later examine, functions as an author-character, not a self-insert. Kilgore Trout is not Kurt Vonnegut. Rather, Trout is a fictionalised representation of Vonnegut and not a factual self-insert. The distinction between author-character and self-insert relies on the fictionalisation of the self-representation of the author. Kilgore Trout has not been *inserted* into a pre-existing universe; rather, he appears in literary settings written by Vonnegut. At the point of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s publication, Trout had only appeared in one earlier Vonnegut novel. Like any fictional character created by Vonnegut, Trout inhabits Vonnegut's unique narrative and setting independent of his function as authorial representation. For Kilgore Trout to qualify as a self-insert, he would need to be inserted into a pre-established universe[v] and not a new literary setting. The separation between author-character and self-insert is one of faithful/fictional authorial representation. This fictionalisation of Trout contradicts the role of self-insert, while his role as factual authorial representation similarly distances the character from the role of author surrogate, at which point I argue Kilgore Trout takes on the characteristics of an author-character.

While authorial surrogates can be too vaguely tied to authors, functioning as mouthpieces to echo an author's ideological and moral compass[vi], self-inserts can be too closely tied to authors and fail to exit the realm of autobiography[vii]. The author-character functions as a fictional representation designed to physically and mentally embody the text's author, while questioning cultural or aesthetic frameworks of self-representation. Unlike the author surrogate or self-insert, the dialectic author-character is both a product of lived experience and a critique of authorial creation. Lerner's author-character Ben not only echoes Lerner's life but also highlights the commodification of the authorial identity in literary markets. Lerner uses the liminal nature of the author-character to expose the "self" as both consumable product and self-representation. Lerner displays the commodifiable nature of authorship, writing,

> even if I wrote a book that didn't sell, these presses wanted a potential darling of the critics or someone who might win prizes; it was symbolic capital… 'Well, your first book was unconventional but really well received. What they're buying when they buy the proposal is, in part, the idea that your next book is going to be a little more… mainstream. (Lerner 2014, 154-155)

The commodification of Ben as author in the novel's literary world, and as author-character to Lerner in *10:04,* is both said and unsaid within the very novel Ben is referencing. The author-character achieves an interpretable form of self-representation while maintaining a level of fictional distance from the factual author. Ben is, and is not Lerner. Roland Barthes writes about Balzac's *Sarrasine*, questioning the separation of authorial representation and factual author, probing the separation between the textual Balzac and the factual author of Honoré de Balzac in order to focus on the indeterminacy of the authorial voice writing.

> Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac, the author professing "literary" ideas on femininity? (Barthes 1984, 142)

Barthes literalizes the authorial split between representation and textual construct. Following Barthes's logic, neither the "hero" nor Balzac as factual author could be correspondingly represented on the page. Instead, it is both. The author's voice is established through textual representation, and the "hero's" through authorial input and creation. This duality of identity allows author-characters to simultaneously portray factual author and fictionalised character. The interconnectedness of fact and fiction in autofiction through the depiction of the author as author-character allows for nuanced readings into both the ideologies of the author and the characteristics of the author-character. The author-character functions as a figure whose agency is defined by the narrative used to create them. This narrative agency is made evident in *10:04,* where Ben fluctuates between controlling his narrative as author and being controlled by it as a character. Barthes argues that biological and biographical identity are irrelevant when it comes to textual meaning, because writing is "the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (Barthes 1984, 142). While an excellent argument, in the realm of autofiction, I partially disagree. The author-character in autofiction reinterprets the author as character to stage the unravelling of autobiographical functions. Vonnegut, Lerner, and I use author-characters as performative gestures meant to highlight the construction of authorship. The death of the author here, while still applicable, is less a death of authorial biography and more akin to a reimagining of the author's role within a narrative. The author-character allows authors to switch between fictional and factual self-representation, which promotes a form of speculative autobiography where the "self" is numerous, temporary, and ever-changing. Ben can imagine dying of Marfan while writing about The Author's tumours, Vonnegut's nameless author-character of chapter one can lament his inability to write *Slaughterhouse-Five,* while Billy Pilgrim hopelessly embodies Tralfamadorians fatalism. These multiple and fictional iterations of the "self" within autofiction expose autobiography's inability to capture the multifaceted nature of being.

However, autofiction explores this multifaceted nature through the use of barely, partially, or fully fictionalised author-characters. Elleke Boehmer elaborates on Coetzee's own term for his unique form of semi-fictitious writing: "Coetzee has himself coined the term 'autre-biography' to describe this mode of third-person fictional-yet-part-autobiographical writing" (Boehmer 2016, 437-438). Autre-biography serves as another term upon which the autobiographical genre can be fictionalised, and while autre-biography fits within the larger umbrella term of autofiction, its reliance on the third person distinguishes the genre. David Attwell elaborates writing, "The initials J.C., together with many other clues, imply that the text is meant to be taken as autobiographical, though in a sharply qualified sense… arguably, this text falls into that category [autobiographical] while including explicitly fictional elements" (Attwell 2010, 214). Some writers use the terms autofiction and author-character loosely and interchangeably. What Coetzee calls "autre-biography",[viii] others call autofiction. My use of the terms author-character and autofiction fits the novels selected most closely, as these texts use author-characters' liminal natures to question the limits of genre. *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *10:04*'s use of multiple distinct author characters emphasises the destabilising nature of self-representation. Unlike the roman *à clef*, or fiction which aims to reconcile fact and fiction, autofiction thrives in the conflict between them.

Oliver Connolly and Bashshar Haydar define faction as,

> a hybrid genre, aiming at the factual accuracy of journalism on the one hand and the literary form of the novel on the other. There is a fundamental tension, however, between those two aims, given the constraints which factual accuracy places on characterisation, plot, and thematic exploration characteristic of the novel. (Connolly & Haydar, 2005, 347)

Connolly and Haydar's critique of faction emphasises a key distinction which further separates the genre from autofiction, being the impossibility of forgoing journalistic practices for novelistic freedom. Faction's necessary faithfulness to factual accuracy limits the genre's ability for imaginative exploration. Autofiction leverages its fictitious nature to question the process of self-representation and self-narration. In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* the nameless author-character of chapter one wants to write a book about his WW2 experiences, "but not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now" (Vonnegut 1969, 2). In *10:04,* Lerner explains, "say that… I decided to replace the book I'd proposed with the book you're reading now, a work that, like a poem, is neither fiction nor nonfiction, but a flickering between them" (Lerner 2014, 194). In "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon", Nathaniel struggles to write his "novella, the one [he] refused to write, the one in your hands, the only place [he] expressed [himself] honestly" (Spencer-Cross 2024, 5). In each instance, the novel(la)'s creation and potential failure in their formation serve a narrative function. While faction depicts factual, even journalistic events with fiction writing techniques such as rising action, climax, and resolution,[ix] autofiction is not constrained to this narrative structure as its foundation is not rooted in fiction, but rather the autobiography. This adjacency to autobiography allows for author-characters to further examine the authorial relation between finished product and work in progress. While the roman à clef depicts true stories *disguised* as fiction,[x] autofiction intersects fact and fiction, purposefully blending the two. Compared to the roman a clef, the need to disguise truth is less inherent in autofiction, as the genre itself is an *expression* of truth through fiction, not the *masking* of it.

Billy Pilgrim is neither autobiographical nor fictional; by writing a P.O.W. story linked to factual events surrounding Dresden, and pairing them with fictional absurdity such as time travel, Vonnegut tempts readers to question the entirety of the novel as truth or fiction. The distinction, however, lies in interpretive truth and factual truth. What is true from Billy Pilgrim's perspective may not be true for others. Blending the believable with the unbelievable ultimately leaves readers without the binary options of believing or not believing. Readers are instead encouraged through the blend of genres to actively come to their own conclusions about the factual nature of autofiction.

Blending fact and fiction, autofiction can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from autobiography. I argue that any author-character's identity is inherently unreliable through the narrative action of creating the self, as the self, through language. Jacques Derrida's theories of Différance and Trace in *Of Grammatology* distinguish language as a signifier which can never encapsulate the signified. According to Derrida, "the trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself" (Derrida 1976, 156). Using Derrida's notion of *trace*, once the author inhabits the page, they become nothing more than a suggestion of themselves, a representation that refers beyond itself. Derrida clarifies how the written self is continually diluted through multiple signifiers (author, to author-character, to reader) that can never fully encapsulate the original identity of the self being represented. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim is a representation of the nameless author-character, who himself is a representation of Vonnegut. In *10:04,* The Author is a representation of Ben, who himself is a representation of Lerner. Similarly, the author-character Nathaniel is a representation of me, which, like Lerner and Vonnegut's author-characters, is inherently fictionalised through language. Regardless of intent, the textual medium of written language diminishes the role of the author into representation via trace, and is inherently fictionalised via the author-character, and can never be a fully authentic representation even in "authentic" autobiographical literature. Every authorial representation, intended factually or fictionally, enters the realm of fictional author-character. The written self becomes an intentionally or accidentally fictionalised stand-in for the factual self. In autobiography, this separation of selves is obfuscated by the genre's inherent claim to authenticity; in autofiction, however, the author-character as a trace of the factual author is a key component of the genre. Vonnegut's nameless author-character is not Vonnegut, but a textual echo, a self-representation whose existence relies on the act of writing; the same goes for characters Ben and Nathaniel.

This instability between self and self-representation is a feature of autofiction, which targets the distinction between signifier and signified. However, in autofiction, this forced misrepresentation through language dilutes the authorial authenticity of the author-character. This dilution exposes the conceptual nature of autobiographical truth, even if the most factual self-representation is inherently fictional. I argue that autofiction's purposeful fictionalisation makes that self-representation more honest. By acknowledging its own artifice, autofiction challenges audiences to confront the inherently constructed nature of self-representation. The inherent fictionalisation purposefully implemented in autofiction, and accidentally in autobiography, broadens the unstable line between the genres through intentional, or accidental, misrepresentation of the depicted author using either author-characters or Derrida's notion of trace.

Vonnegut introduces *Slaughterhouse-Five* with a seemingly autofictional and documentative recount of the novel's nameless author-character's writing process and setting. While Vonnegut references factual events and locations, such as the bombing of Dresden, extraterrestrial plot points within the novel are clearly fictionalised. Vonnegut writes on the title page,

> *Slaughterhouse-Five*
> *or*
> *The Children's Crusade*
> *A Duty-Dance with Death*
>
> by
> Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.
>
> A fourth-generation German-American
> now living in easy circumstances
> on Cape Cod
> [and smoking too much],
> who, as an American infantry scout
> *hors de combat*,
> as a prisoner of war,
> witnessed the fire-bombing
> of Dresden, Germany,
> 'The Florence of Elbe,'
> a long time ago,
> and survived to tell the tale.
> This is a novel
> somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic
> manner of tales
> of the planet Tralfamadore,
> where the flying saucers
> come from.
> Peace.

The dichotomy of fact and fiction established through historical reference and alien invasion primes readers to question Vonnegut both as author and author-character within the narrative. By offering readers autonomy in deciphering the levels of factual recounting, the text establishes a separation between Vonnegut's authorial invention and autofictional representation. Vonnegut breaches the role of author, shifting into the part of author-character through the use of factual and fictional self-representation and narrative. Similar to Vonnegut, the nameless author-character of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an author, as are Ben and The Author in *10:04*, and Nathaniel in "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon." This authorial representation blends the author's role as both creator and character, simultaneously fulfilling two roles in the literary form and creation of the novel. Vonnegut's role as author and character is further mixed via *Slaughterhouse-Five's* title page's autobiographical framing. The liminal nature in which Vonnegut divides himself between author and author-character invites readers to conflate the two, only to undermine this conflation with Billy Pilgrim's science-fiction adventures to Tralfamadore.

Lerner situates *10:04* in an autofictitious narrative through the inclusion of factual events such as hurricanes Irene and Sandy, paired with a fictional plot, like mine and Vonnegut's, loosely centred around the creation of each respective novel(la). However, unlike Vonnegut's nameless narrator, and similar to the character Nathaniel, Lerner names his author-character after himself. Naming the novel's protagonist after the novel's author complicates the distinction between autobiographical and autofictional writing by blending factual name with fictional character through the shared name of author and author-character. In doing so, Lerner and I ask audiences to distinguish fact from fiction themselves. In naming our author-characters after ourselves, Lerner and I intensify Vonnegut's critique of authorship. Just as Vonnegut's nameless author-character laments the failure of his war novel, "I've finished my war book now… This one is a failure" (Vonnegut 1969, 19), Ben abandons his novel altogether, while Nathaniel is actively seen evading its creation, "The memories on the page difficult to write, so I left pages bare" (Spencer-Cross 2024, 6). All three author characters allude to Maurice Blanchot's notion of "the infinite conversation" where a dialogue takes place between the sayable, and the unsayable, "[Blanchot] forgets to say that the line is only beginning—does not allow him to include himself in it. It is an uninterrupted line that inscribes itself while interrupting itself" (Hanson 1969, xviii).

Conversations between Blanchot and other thinkers are interpreted through Blanchot, as he speaks to himself, as other thinkers. However, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *10:04*, and "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon", the act of writing becomes its own circular self-effacing line, situating the role of author-character both as representation of self, and critique of the very novel the author-characters inhabit. All three texts use author-characters both as tools for self-representation and as reflexive discourse in which the authors speak to themselves, about themselves, as someone else. In *10:04*, and "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon", this referential dialogue enacts a discourse between author and self, along with author and reader. This self-reflexive dialogue encourages readers to partake in both the construction of identity for the author-character and the factual author.

Kurt Vonnegut, the unnamed author-character of chapter one, and Billy Pilgrim all served in WW2. Billy Pilgrim serves as the author-character for the unnamed author-character of chapter one, who himself serves as the author-character for Vonnegut, "'Listen-' I said, 'I'm writing this book about Dresden. I'd like some help remembering stuff'" (Vonnegut 1969, 4), and, "I've finished my war book now… This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt. It begins like this: *Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time*" (Vonnegut 1969, 19). Vonnegut plays with his own authorial representation, as multiple separate author-characters are layered on top of one another. While Kurt Vonnegut stood 6'2, Billy Pilgrim "…was preposterous—six feet and three inches tall" (Vonnegut 1969, 28). Vonnegut first stepped behind German lines at the age of 22, while "It was a random, bristly beard and some of the bristles were white, even though Billy was only twenty-one years old" (Vonnegut 1969, 28). Blending the line between Vonnegut and the subsequent author-characters with mild fictionalisations further questions the amount of fact/fiction found in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Billy is one inch taller than Vonnegut and one year younger at the time of his deployment. These alterations are so minute that they tease readers into drawing parallels between Vonnegut, the nameless author-character, and Billy Pilgrim. In "No Beeps, No Alarms, No Bacon", Nathaniel works in a pawnshop and buys gold from customers, defrauding the store of its profits; I did these things. Nathaniel also lives in a cockroach-infested apartment with a broken stove; I did not. While easy to distinguish between fictional talking cats and previous factual jobs, it is the smaller details which call attention to the autofictitious form, and bring into question the work's level of authenticity.

Eliot Rosewater is a recurring character of Vonnegut's who first appears in his 1965 novel *God Bless You, Mr Rosewater, or Pearls Before Swine,* published four years before *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In *God Bless You, Mr Rosewater*, Eliot, a WW2 veteran, becomes infatuated with the writings of failed science fiction author Kilgore Trout, an author-character representing Vonnegut. Trout also appears in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, quickly becoming Billy Pilgrim's favourite author. Vonnegut writes in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, "It was Rosewater who introduced Billy to science fiction, and in particular to the writings of Kilgore Trout. Rosewater had a tremendous collection of science-fiction paper-backs under his bed" (Vonnegut 1969, 87) and "Kilgore Trout became Billy's favorite living author, and science fiction became the only sort of tales he could read" (Vonnegut 1969, 87). Vonnegut's use of multiple author-characters within the novel plays with his self-representation to the point that Billy, the representation of the nameless author-character's representation of Vonnegut, meets yet another author-character representing Vonnegut.

In doing so, Vonnegut fractures his authorial identity across multiple fictional author-characters who interact with one another. This division of self can present contradictory versions of the self, shifting the author-character from a single unified symbol into an unstable representation. Fictionalising the self can lead to a fragmented identity liminally trapped between fact and fiction, one which Vonnegut, Lerner, and I manipulate for narrative gain. Alexander Sarra-Davis elaborates on the split-self used for representation writing:

> Identity in novel writing is more than a name on a cover, used to sell books: it is also a delineation of authors and readers from the novel's subject, particularly those authors and readers who do not recognise their world reflected, catch the references made, or can critique the details included in the text. This divide between the identities ostensibly portrayed in a novel and those that are not, more so than the divide between the novel's author and its readers, is the one across which we risk misunderstanding what in a novel is real experience, or credible detail, and what is convenient fiction, or ignorant error. (Sarra-Davis 2024, 3)

These observations about misunderstood identities emphasise autofiction's ability to exploit ambiguity. Billy Pilgrim is both a credible war veteran and a sci-fi absurdity as displayed through his experiences on Tralfamadore. Similarly, Nathaniel's escalating shifts from mundanity to the hallucinatorily absurd leave readers questioning the authenticity of the mundane and the impossibility of the absurd. By refusing to resolve the tension between factual and fictional representation, Vonnegut and I place readers in the uncomfortable position of not knowing where the line between factual and interpretable truth lies.

Vonnegut does not distinguish between identities portrayed and not portrayed. Instead, he plays with the notion of multiple selves through the portrayal of multiple author-characters. It is not a question of which identities are omitted from the narrative; it is a question of which identities are included. There is Vonnegut the author, represented by the nameless author-character of the first chapter, and by Kilgore Trout. Then, there is Vonnegut the soldier, represented by Billy Pilgrim, and to an extent, Eliot Rosewater. While the author-character of chapter one is successful, Trout is a failed science fiction writer. While Billy Pilgrim is the naïve child experiencing war, Eliot Rosewater is the damaged man living in the shadows of WW2. Vonnegut fractures key components of his identity, sharing them among multiple author-characters who represent unique factors of the same identity-based umbrella (authorship and military service). Vonnegut not only fractures his self-representation but also similarly redistributes his personal identity across multiple iterations. Billy's child-like innocence, Rosewater's cynicism, and Trout's failure as an author juxtaposed with the nameless author-character's success interrogate the notion of a singular identity. The role of author-character here breaches past self-representation, entering the realm of critique, questioning if a singular self-representation can contain Vonnegut's independent interpersonal complexities.

Billy's role as an author-character is both mentioned and questioned by the nameless author-character of chapter one. Vonnegut writes, "an American near Billy wailed that he had excreted everything but his brains… That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book" (Vonnegut 1969, 109). Vonnegut plays with Billy's role as author-character by briefly reinserting the first chapter's nameless author-character into the novel's second section. Billy's role is not one of fictionalised representation; he is crafted just close and relatable enough to Vonnegut to entice interest while being different enough to maintain distance. Vonnegut intentionally inserts multiple forms of himself: multiple author-characters into a single narrative to obfuscate the line between author-character and factual author. This exposes the artificially constructed nature of authorial representation and identity, while confronting the autobiographical impossibility of self-representation.

The re-interpretation of Ben's life into The Author's novel is reminiscent of Lerner drawing from his life experiences living in New-York City as a professor, and accepting a writing residency in Marfa, Texas, where he conceived *10:04* and the author-character Ben. This relationship between factual author and authorial representation through author-character is disrupted when aspects of The Author's life permeate Ben's life. The Marfan syndrome[xi] diagnosis Ben struggles with, and the tumour which The Author finds in his nasal cavity, are sometimes ascribed to their author-character counterpart; on multiple occasions, Ben has a tumour, and The Author is afflicted with Marfan syndrome. When Ben learns that "a doctor had discovered incidentally an entirely asymptomatic and potentially aneurysmal dilation of my aortic root that required close monitoring and probable surgical intervention" (Lerner 2014, 4), Ben then fictionalises this health concern by altering its nature upon The Author:

> When Dr Walsh told him the findings, the author was looking at a print of a painting of a beach scene: two empty white wooden chairs facing the sea, a small sailboat in the middle distance. He had a 'mass,' what is called a meningioma, located in his cavernous sinus; it appeared benign. (Lerner 2014, 72)

Lerner writes The Author's sections in third-person, and Ben's in first-person to mimic autobiographical immediacy with Ben, while further removing and objectifying The Author through the more distant third-person. This distinction establishes differential layers of removal between the author-characters and Lerner. This separation signifies that Ben is more closely associated with Lerner than The Author. Ben is one layer of representation away from Lerner, while The Author is one layer away from Ben. Similar to Vonnegut's nameless author-character's relation to Billy Pilgrim, Lerner's Ben and The Author offer a layered mode of self-representation. Just as Vonnegut's readers must understand both the linking and separation of the author and author-characters, Lerner's audience must navigate the interrelation link between Ben and The Author. As the *stars* migrate from Ben to The Author, the representational self-leaks across narrative layers. The line dividing autofiction and autobiography is once again complicated through the use of the author-character and the symbolic representation it serves. As the distinction between author-characters fades, the distinction between author and author-character also weakens.

The author-character embodies a uniquely liminal figure in autofiction, inhabiting the divide between autobiography and fiction, destabilising authentic authorial identity. Through Vonnegut's nameless narrator, Lerner's blending of narratives, or a character divided through tense, the author-character complicates speculative autobiography. These characters are multi-layered representations that allow authors to explore identity at a distance from their fictional representations. This distance doesn't merely serve ontological critique; it also offers a reflection on the inherent limitations of language itself. By blurring fact and fiction, autofiction challenges readers to question the reliability of narrative voice and the authenticity of self-representation. The purpose of this destabilisation is to first undermine the author as a singular, all-knowing entity outside their own lives, and secondly, to involve readers in the construction of meaning. The power of author-characters lies not in their ability to factually represent an author, but in their capacity to toy with the impossibility of said representation.

NOTES

i Coined by Stephen Reynolds and later expanded upon by Max Saunders, autobiografiction fictionalizes autobiographical experiences through the introduction of fictionalized characters, altering the autobiographical events, or shifting the perception of these events. Autobiografiction is a "record of real spiritual experiences strung on a credible but more or less fictitious autobiographical narrative" (Reynolds, 28). Saunders later expanded on the definition adding autobiografiction is about "combining forms; fusing, blurring, or moving between the forms of autobiography, story, diary, preface, and so on" (Saunders 2009, 524).

ii A portmanteau of *fact* and *fiction*, the genre depicts factual events using fiction writing literary techniques and fictional conversations. The genre is a blending of factual events with literary techniques rooted in fictional story telling.

iii Established by Madelaine de Scudéry in the 17th C., the roman a clef was used for veiled commentary on political and public figures. The genre (novel with a key) depicts factual events with the pretense of fiction, the "key" is the relationship between the fictionalized and factual, either gleamed through epigraphs or literary hints, or can be a second publication in the form of a guide.

iv Examples include *Twilight Reimagined as a Self-Insert,* or Cassandra Cla(i)re's *The Draco Trilogy*, both of which contain characters named after their author's inhabiting a pre-existing universe.

v Referring to Vonnegut's loosely interconnected novels as a *literary universe* is both misrepresentational and misleading. Regardless of shared characters, these novels lack narrative continuity, and the reintroduction of past characters is often done with satirical or metafictional intent.

vi As is the character of Socrates in Plato's *Dialogues*.

vii Such as the character of Karl Ove Knausgård in Karl Ove Knausgård's *Min Kamp* (*My Struggle*) where the protagonist shares the same name, biography, same family, and is ultimately too factually tied to Knausgård to be classified as autofiction, even though the work is marketed as such by Knausgård. James Wood writes in the *New Yorker*, "'My Struggle' is not really a novel but the first book of a six-volume autobiography…" The work of autofiction is too closely tied to Knausgård's reality and factual identity to be classified as autofiction.

viii Translates from French to "other-biography", which is in itself a play on the French "auteur" teasing a new meaning of "author-biography."

ix In Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood,* for example, Capote interviews and assembles a shattered narrative into a cohesive piece of literature, while simultaneously bending the facts to fit a novel's literary standards. In a scene where recent murderers Dick and Perry stop in a diner for pancakes, Perry, wrought with guilt is unable to eat, while Dick calmly finishes his entire plate. While witness testimony corroborates the two men stopping in said diner, the nature of their conversation and demeanours towards one another remain unknown. Capote injects personalities into the characters to give the factual reporting a fictional edge.

x Neal Cassady's 16,000-word letter to Kerouac was the inspiration for the character of Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*. While the story remains largely unchanged, the names and "key" points of information were altered.

xi Marfan syndrome elongates the extremities, and is coincidentally similar to Marfa, Texas. The city where Lerner first conceived of *10:04*'s creation.

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NARRATION IN E.M. FORSTER'S "A PASSAGE TO INDIA"

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Abstract. The present paper explores E.M. Forster's peculiar, yet elusive style in disclosing the racial and imperial thought embedded in the text and maintained by non-native people. Despite its ambivalent attitude towards the native, the novel's discourse of benevolence and the rhetoric of the 'mission civilisatrice' could not hide the discourse of colonial domination. To unmask this view, Forster adopts a particular narratorial technique. Such an adoption, therefore, is to be explained through the study of the 'speech act' as one of the main angles to deal with narration in *A Passage to India*. Likewise, this paper attempts to study the 'reporting act' which requires analysing speech and thought representation in the novel.

Keywords: narration, speech act, reporting act, colonialism, homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, ambivalence

INTRODUCTION

Though it is meant to be a possible attempt to bridge the gap, through love and friendship, between two different cultures, *A Passage to India* remains, as claimed by Virginia Woolf, a novel presenting "a vision of a particular kind and a message of an elusive nature" (Jay 1998, 15). Indeed, as advanced by postcolonial theories, namely Edward Said, in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, the novel is misleading for it endorses an ambivalent attitude (Said 1994, 245). In line with this, the present paper aims to disclose the racial and imperial thinking, eminently embedded in the text, and basically enhanced for further colonial domination. Such thinking is to be demonstrated through a study of the reporting act as one angle to tackle narration.

I. Diagnosing Narrative Strategies and Definition

Since determining narration strategies is of paramount importance to discern the speaker's intended position and attitude, namely that of the narrator, an attempt to define this term is quite significant. As emphasised by Genette, narration is the "act and process of telling a story, and it is different from what is actually told (narrative)" (Wales 1989, 312). There is, in fact, a whole process of "communication" or "discourse" between author and reader, narrator and narratee. Yet, there are different "narratorial techniques", which result in "different kinds and levels of narration" (*Ibidem*, 312).

Pertinently enough, a story may be told by a "first-person/ homodiegetic narrator" who takes action in the story), or by an authorial/ heterodiegetic narrator" (who tells a story about other people) (Jhan 2001, 15). The latter is the type restored to in *A Passage*. He is referred to as "third person" or "omniscient narrator", and is supposed to know everything and slip into the thoughts of all characters. He is then identical to the "implied author" (Wales 1989, 328). As such, narration can be defined as follows:

> An act of mediation of reality through the auspices of someone postulating as a narrator. Mediation at the discourse level is bound to be translated in the form of different degrees of intervention of the narrator into the speech, thought, perception and feeling of the persona at the story level. (Triki 2002, 193)

Following these lines, interference on the part of the narrator results in an "experiential narration". What is important here is to consider this involvement as a guiding sphere to divulge the narratorial attitude and judgment about characters.

One way to unmask the narrator's point of view and evaluation is to study the framing/ reporting strategy. This study, which is based on "speech and thought presentation", is one of the recent trends in narratology (Linguist List 2002, 3). As maintained by Triki in his article "How to Professionalise Literary Translation", speech and thought presentation depend on the "concept of Self". This Self can be a "Deictic", a "perceptual or ideological centre" or "any combination of these centres". Therefore, the conception "point of view and narrative voice" (Triki 1998, 1).

Similarly, reporting involves a "confrontation of two selves: namely the reporting self and the reported self". That's to say, reporting, which highlights a confrontation between two selves, results in the involvement of the reporter. Intrinsically, reports are "inherently mediated by and subordinated to the will and illocutionary goals of the enframing discourse producer". For this reason, it is worthwhile mentioning that "no reporting is innocent or value-free" (Linguist List 2002, 4). Reporting remains an important field of investigation and one of the basic clues to show the narrator's point of view, judgment and emotions via the represented characters.

Studying the reporting act implies analysing speech and thought presentation, which requires a portrayal of the various modes/ techniques of narration. Hence, the author may use Direct Discourse (DD), Free Direct Discourse (FDD), Indirect Discourse (ID), Free Indirect Discourse (FID) and Narratorial Report Of Speech Acts (NRSA). Undeniably, each mode has its specific characteristics and impact. Thus, in order to reveal the narratorial point of view, it is better to study mainly and separately the use of DD, FD, and NRSA in the novel.

II. THE USE OF DIRECT DISCOURSE IN *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

The use of DD means essentially that the narrator is objective because he quotes the character's original speech with zero degree of intervention. However, this can be challenged when focusing on the "inquit" or "reporting locution", which may have distinct forms and impacts. As maintained by Triki and Bahloul, "the inquit could pass on an implicit comment on the quality of what is said […] and especially when it collocates with highly evaluative adverbs". In other words, the use of adverbs, for example, remains a crucial medium to get access to the narrator's attitude about characters, as illustrated by the following statement: "He said stiffly, 'I do not consider Mrs Moore my friend. I only met her accidentally in my mosque'" (Forster 1936, 56). The use of the adverb 'stiffly' shows the narrator's interference in what he reports: he is qualifying Dr Aziz's speech. Yet, since this adverb bears negative connotation (meaning that Aziz cannot breathe and control himself while speaking), we may infer that the narrator wants to "insinuate" a hostile attitude towards him. He sheds light on the lack of self-confidence in this character. The same attitude is further implied in the following statement: "'There'll be no muddle when you come to see me', said Aziz, never out of his depth" (*Ibidem*, 58). Here, the adverb 'never' together with the adjective 'out of his depth' mark the reporter's involvement. Both are used to reinforce a negative image of Dr Aziz, stressing his speaking without thinking. With higher harshness, this particular image is reproduced here too: "'poor criminal, give him another […] to go to prison and be corrupted.' His face grew very tender – the tenderness of one incapable of administration and unable to grasp […]" (*Ibidem*, 59). The depiction of the facial gesture and the way Dr Aziz reacts in this particular case is not innocent or value-free. The narrator wants to enhance the fact that Indians are sensitive because they cannot control their emotions. They are impulsive creatures who react without thinking and are unable to grasp serious matters.

Besides, narratorial attitude can be detected through the "semantic tenor" of the reporting locution or inquit (*i.e.* the focus is on the reporting verb itself). In this context, it is stated that "the inquit could contain a comment on the manner of saying" (Triki and Bahloul 2001, 11). In other words, clarifying the way the original speech is said remains a basic clue to divulge the reporter's views. We notice in the novel that whenever there is direct access to the native Indians' speeches, the reporting verb bears negative connotations. There is usually an excessive use of the verb 'cry' instead of the verb 'say' when reporting Dr Aziz's speeches, as in the following: "'Yes, all that is settled,' he cried" (Forster 1936, 63).

The same attitude is associated with the Nawab Bahadur, when saying, "Let me take you to the bungalow,' cried the old man" (*Ibidem*, 75). In brief, the verb 'cry' highlights the narrator's hostile attitude towards Indians.

In contrast, this negative attitude and stereotyping thinking diminish when reporting the Anglo-Indians or English speeches. For example, in "'To drive them elsewhere', said Hassen, after painful thought" (*Ibidem,* 87), Hassen is given the quality of speaking and not crying. Also, he is given the value of speaking, though with difficulty. Accordingly, we can say that the narrator wants to focus on the difference between Native-Indians and Anglo-Indians. The construction of the hierarchy continues while reporting English characters' speeches. Actually, the inquit, used to bring the original speech of Miss Quested, Mrs Moore, Ronny or Fielding, reveals a friendly attitude towards them. For example, the adverb 'thoughtfully' in "'I suppose so,' said the girl thoughtfully" (*Ibidem*, 84) is used to comment implicitly on Miss Quested's speech. Selecting the inquit consequently shows the reporter's attitude towards English people. They are depicted as thoughtful, intelligent subjects. Likewise, this view is directed towards Fielding, while saying "'I guess they do; I got in first', said Fielding, smiling" (*Ibidem*, 98). 'Smiling' is used to emphasise the politeness and good manners of Fielding. It is done on purpose, particularly if we consider the content of this speech in the novel. Although 'Hamidullah' makes use of provocative language and harmful accusations while talking to Fielding, the latter reveals good manners and self-confidence. Thus, the English are represented as a moderate race.

Consequently, through the reporting locution, valuable information can be gathered on the narrator's attitudes about characters. However, in our study of DD, we can notice that here is the use of a wide variety of inquit which marks the narratorial ambivalence. For instance, the narrator sheds light on the emotional state of Dr Aziz, while saying, "'I see. Anything further to complain of? He was good-tempered and affectionate" (*Ibidem*, 225). Here, "good-tempered" and "affectionate" maintain the narrator's involvement and ambivalent attitude. Dr Aziz now becomes, like Fielding or Miss Quested, a civilised and moderate person. Toward the end of the novel, there is a less hostile attitude toward Indians. In fact, as advanced by Collins, using various inquits or tags remains part of the reporter's strategy:

> In using a wide variety of tags, authors are trying to narrow the reader's range of interpretive possibilities in order to further their communicative goals. Such use of nuanced vocabulary, which is especially, though not exclusively, typical of modern literary languages, is a 'speaker-based strategy'. (6)

In other words, the text shows an ambivalent attitude towards the represented characters, which remains a misleading strategy on the part of the narrator.

III. The use of Free Indirect Discourse

Similar to Direct Discourse, the narratorial attitude and message can be revealed through scrutinising Free Indirect Discourse (FID). In this mode, the speech of the character and the words of the narrator are "blended with no reporting clause" (Wales 1989, 191). Its main features are often "the presence of third-person pronouns and past tense" (Leech 1981, 325). However, this blend of the narrator's voice and the character's "focalization" leads to the narrator's interference. "Focalization" means also "perspective" or "point of view". It refers to 'the angle of vision' through which the story is focused, but in a sense which includes not only the angle of the physical perception […] but also cognitive orientation […] and emotive orientation" (Wales 1989, 179). In this context, Leech asserts that: "the ability to give the flavour of the character's words but also to keep the narrator in an intervening position between character and reader makes FID an extremely useful vehicle for casting on what the character says" (Forster 1936, 327). In this perspective, Triki assumes that "authors inevitably leave their mark on the discourse they relate. Their presence of evolution crops up in the story's past. Their modal belief or disbelief in what they relate is bound to affect the choice of tense, aspect and modality in the text" (*Foundation for a Course*, 122). Because the norm in FID is the use of the past tense, so any shift to the present will be taken as a guide to reveal the narratorial attitude. Indeed, the present tense can be used as an "indicator of the writer's modal belief in some elements of the story" (*Ibidem*, 125). In other words, any message or attitude on the part of the narrator is to be detected through the "temporal shift", namely from past tense (the story time) to the present tense (the discourse time). In fact, the following statement from *A Passage* may illustrate this idea:

> That an elephant should depend from so long and so slender a string filled Aziz with content, and with humorous appreciation of the East, where the friends of friends are a reality, where everything gets done sometime, and sooner or later everyone gets his share of happiness. (*Ibidem*, 123)

What is noticeable in this statement is the temporal shift from past to present tense. This implies the "mediation of the speaking subject", which influences the choice of time. In this context, Triki and Bahloul assume that "the reporter has to locate the temporal deictic information with respect to a given deictic centre measured against his / her own underlying past event, where the past tense would be expected, the narrator shifts explicitly to the present as in "are" and "gets". This temporal displacement explains the reporter's belief and involvement in what he relates. Consequently, it creates a sensational and persuasive effect" (*Ibidem*, 18). That's to say, the speaking voice undertakes to take part in the spread of the civilising mission or Enlightenment project. His discourse (speaking about a 'share of happiness') coincides with the discourse of benevolence upon which the empire was founded.

Yet, in this reported speech, it is quite significant to mention that there is a kind of ambiguity. It stems from our uncertainty whether the adjective "humorous" is part of the original speech or it is formulated by the narrator to depict Dr Aziz's appreciation of the East. Here, as advanced by Verdonk, we can say that "the use of free indirect discourse initially contributes to narrative ambiguity" (*Ibidem*, 98). This ambiguity implies that there is a violation of the maxim of manner. Following the philosopher Grice, "the maxim of manner means we should avoid obscurity, ambiguity and prolixity, and be orderly" (Wales 1989, 286). As a result, this obscurity has an ironic impact. We can understand through this obscurity that the narrator is satirical. Even without revealing his true position, he establishes a "high posh" tone towards Dr Aziz as he mocks this latter's reaction in this particular case. Therefore, irony becomes a major narratorial strategy that characterises FID, which remains a powerful tool of manipulation.

The present tense, as a marker of the speaker's belief of what is being reported, shows this latter's stereotypical thinking about India. The following statement obviously highlights this pejorative thinking about India: "In her ignorance, she regarded him as India and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method is accurate, and that no one is India" (Forster 1936, 61). Indeed, the shift to the present tense at the end of the statement reveals a deliberate involvement and belief in what is reported; that is to say, it postulates that "no one is India". Here, India is said to be in a state of negativity, with no identity. Similarly, in what follows, the same attitude and image about India is reinforced: "Nothing in India is identifiable, the more asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else" (*Ibidem*, 72). Through this temporal shift, the narrator marks his interference, which alludes to the same point of view: "India is neither the place nor the time […] for identity" (Said 1994, 242).

Essentially, interference on the part of the narrator can be traced not only through tense, but also through other clues such as exclamation and interrogative marks. To illustrate this point, consider the mediation of the speaking voice in the following passage:

> At the moment when he was throwing in his lot with India, he realised the profundity of the gulf that divided him from them. They always do something

> disappointing. Aziz had tried to run away from the police. Mohammed Latif had not checked the pilfering – and now Hammudallah! – Instead of ranging and denouncing, he temporised. Are Indians Cowards? No, but they are bad starters and occasionally Jib. (Forster 1936, 153-4)

The first noticeable remark in this passage is that the exclamation mark is kept, which indicates that the narrator is involved in what he reports. In other words, like Fielding, he is amazed at the Indians' behaviour. Second, the temporal displacement, as in "always do", serves the narrator's ends: to highlight the Indians' strange and stupid behaviours. Third, maintaining the interrogative marks cannot be innocent. In this respect, Leech and Short assert that "questions are used by novelists to make direct addresses to the reader, inviting judgements on the events they relate and the characters they describe, or giving us opinions on the world in general" (*Ibidem*, 267). Thus, representing the voice and thoughts of Fielding, the narrator cannot help but identify with the reported speech. He wants to imply and reinforce the same image about Indians. This attitude is maintained through the new shift to the "generic timeless present" (Leech 1981, 268) at the end of the passage: "[Indians] are bad starters and occasionally Jib" (*Ibidem*, 154). In the mind of the narrator, it is an absolute fact that Indians lack self-determination and intelligence.

Furthermore, the narratorial attitude towards the represented characters can be uncovered through examining the choice of the aspect. As advanced by Triki in his article "The Linguistics of Literary Pedagogy",

> [a]spect realises linguistically the speaker's perception of how a particular event takes place. It provides the topic, the point of view chosen with respect to reality […] the simple non-aspectualized forms indicate an objective point of view, whereas the spectralized forms indicate a subjective point of view on the part of the speaker. (Triki 1998, 58)

To illustrate this point, we need to consider the mediation of the narrator through the use of the perfect aspect: "There he sat […] since they last met, she had elevated him into a principal of evil, but now he seemed to be what he had always been – a slight acquaintance" (Forster 1936, 195). The use of the aspectualized form (past perfect) in "he had always been" highlights the reporter's belief in what he reports. Representing the thought of Adela, the narrator crops up, reinforcing the same attitude towards Dr Aziz. With the use of the adverb of high frequency 'always', the narrator marks his involvement. Dr Aziz represents, therefore, the image of the trivial Indian who lacks determination, power and attraction.

In addition, the speaker's belief and identification in what is being reported can be detected as well at the modal level. Triki and Bahloul reckon that:

> In terms of deontic modality […] keeping the modal auxiliary 'must' intact in a past tense report may signal the reporter's commitment to the tenor of the deontic power of the reported discourse or it may simply show the salience of the reported obligation in the reporter's mind and his / her attempt to draw the reader's attention to it through the process of foregrounding (for a variety effects, including irony). (Triki 2001, 9)

Taking into account the "subjectivity markers", such as the modal auxiliary 'must', helps to infer the hidden message. For instance, the narrator's attitude seems embedded in the following statement: "His heart was too full to draw back. He must slip out in the darkness, and do this one act of homage to Mrs Moor's son" (Forster 1936, 279). Here, 'must' indicates the interference of the narrator; mainly, it has an ironic effect. The narrator wants to reveal the good heart and will to help that Dr Aziz possesses. This quality, however, becomes his major flaw. Through the presentation of Aziz's thoughts, the narrator mocks the Indians' eagerness to help, which hides their desire to be colonised.

Like Direct Discourse (DD), Free Indirect Discourse (FID) incorporates the narrator's involvement and his strategic plan to hint at the Indians' subordinate position. Yet, still, FID reveals the ambivalence of narration. This indeterminacy is always revealed through the temporal displacement, among other markers. For instance, "Civilisation stays about like a ghost […] when the whirring of action ceases, it becomes visible, and reveals a civilisation which the west can disturb but will never acquire" (*Ibidem*, 223). Here, the use of the present tense shows the reporter's belief and engagement in what is reported. Mainly, the narrator seems to condemn colonialism, which destructs the civilisation and ethics of Indians. However, despite the ambivalent attitude and regardless of any ambiguity, FID remains a powerful tool and mode through which the author succeeds in insinuating his message.

IV. Reporting of Speech Act

Similarly, Narratorial Report of Speech Act (NRSA) stands as an effective technique and a clue to unmask the intended attitude and message. According to Leech and Short, in using NRSA, "the narrator does not have to commit himself entirely to giving a sense of what was said, let alone the form of words in which they were uttered" (323). Indeed, this mode shows "the highest degree" or the "furthest extreme of narratorial intervention" (Triki, "How to Professionalise", 8). As such, it stands as a heavy indicator of the end and goal of the reporter. Study NRSA leads narratologists to consider the "significance of sequencing". In other words, they find it valuable to focus on "the degree of matching or mismatching between the original and the represented sequences" (Triki 2002, 196). That's to say, they try to measure the extent to which the reporter is faithful to the original speech. When using NRSA, the reporter's speech becomes tightly under the guidance and ascendancy of the narrator.

In *A Passage*, this technique is used frequently and particularly when reporting Indian characters' speeches. For instance, the narrator opts for an NRSA when reporting a speech delivered by Dr Panna Lal and Ram Chand: "Their voices rose. They attacked one another with obscure allusions and had a silly quarrel" (*Ibidem*, 94). We find in this statement the use of euphemism when saying "they had a silly quarrel". This trope has a major function, which is to improve upon the original. Accordingly, the reporter's account is meant to be better than the initial speech. In this regard, Leech and Short argue that "euphemism is a natural result of the politeness principle […] used to avoid unpleasantness" (*qtd.* in Wales 1989, 158). However, the fact that the narrator avoids retelling the original speech means that he has a "haughty posh" (Forster 1936, 50), which widens the barrier between him and the represented characters. Accordingly, Indians are pushed into the periphery, holding a subordinate position, never in the centre. Similarly, in the following instance, the narrator chooses to stay aloof and detach himself from the Indians' discourses: "the Indians were bewildered. The line of thought was not alien to them, but the words were too definite and bleak" (*Ibidem*, 96). Here, he foregrounds their state of confusion, together with the lack of self-confidence and hopeless words they proclaim. In other words, the reporter wants to stress the fact that Indians are not yet ready to talk about politics.

Actually, the narrator's involvement and scheme appear everywhere, even in his choice of the mode. A scrutiny of the text reveals that the author does not stick to only one mode of narration. He goes from one to another, which is called "slippage" (Leech 1981, 323). Adopting one mode of presentation in particular instances and with particular characters, then moving to another one, can be taken as part of the narratorial misleading strategy. Yet, what is noteworthy here is that FID is the dominant mode of narration in the text. Because this technique is ambiguous by nature, its overuse in the text is meant to manipulate readers. Essentially, the writer wants implicitly to insinuate judgments towards Indians without revealing his real position.

Ignorant of the tricky process of telling the story, many critics assert that *A Passage* is a faithful mimetic text that reflects the reality and truth of Indians. Consequently, the reporting act is said to be an objective and value-free attempt. However, as it has previously demonstrated through illustrations from the text, the reporter cannot be objective. We have come to the conclusion that either through DD, FID or NRSA, the narrator leaves part of himself.

Indeed, because the act of reporting does not only "draw a profile" of the people being reported but also a profile of the reporter, we are liable to say that we are in front of a biased narrator. His choices (including the selection of the inquit, modes, the "lexicogrammatical" choices, etc.) corroborate the text's ideological complicity.

Though it is said to be liberalist, Forster's novel falls into the tendency of bearing a racial and colonial thinking. Indeed, by means of reporting, the narrator established the borderlines between Indian and English subjects. Our observation of the reporting strategy, which is similar to the Derridean method of "close reading", shows that a "set of binary oppositions can be found inscribed within the narrative. This thinking is based on binary opposition: rational versus irrational, moderate versus transgressive, polite versus rude, etc., where the first term is privileged" (Sarup 1998, 56). In this concern, we can say that *A Passage* belongs to the "popular fiction" which is influenced by "the racial model [that] had been laid down by Blumenback, de Gobineau and the anthropologists" (Street 1975, 98). In other words, in his insistence to inform us especially about the Indians' quality and way of speaking and reacting, the narrator is much influenced by these latter's ideas. A main claim set by these researchers says that "differences between races were not only external but also internal (mental and moral) (*Ibidem*, 97). That's to say, racial difference is biologically and genetically inherited and not culturally constructed. The Indian is thought to be like the "Negro […] inferior intellectually to the European and better off under his guidance" (*Ibidem*, 95). The Indian aggressiveness and lack of intelligence contrast with the English politeness and power. Pertinently enough, this coincides with Gobineau's claim:

> The white race originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, intelligence and strength. By its union with other various hybrids were created, which were beautiful without strength, strong intelligence, or if intelligent, both weak and ugly. (*Ibidem*, 100)

De Gobineau's emphasis on the "incompatibility" between races due to a genetically inherited difference is referred to in the novel. As an intelligent selector and reporter, the narrator informs us about Mr Harris' self-division: "for a little he was vexed by opposite currents in his blood, they blended, and he belonged to no one but himself" (Forster 1936, 78). Mr Harrison, who is an Anglo-Indian, cannot belong to either Indians nor to the English. He is superior to the Indian race because he has English blood. Then, Forster's text incorporates and perpetuates the same racial thinking which stresses the "myth of racial purity" (Street 1975, 97). Even though some do not totally agree due to the ambivalent narration adopted in the novel, we can still account for this claim.

In our observation of the different modes adopted in the novel, we come to the conclusion that the narrator holds ambivalent attitudes towards the represented characters. This ambivalence characterises the "strategy of dubiety" (Tarchouna 1998, 189) adopted in the novel. In other words, the reader remains uncertain about the real position of the speaker. However, if we compare *A Passage* to a scientific racial theory, we will come to the conclusion that there is rather a newfangled but one point of view. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator expresses a less harsh opinion towards Indians. This coincides with the claim that "the friendship between races is difficult, and only possible if a native shows the qualities of an English gentleman" (Street 1975, 55). The narrator's ambivalent attitude may have two interpretations. First, Forster's hope to bridge the gap and create a possible friendship between the two nations necessitates the transformation of the narratorial attitude and the characters themselves. Thus, it is reluctantly that this opinion does not change, as assumed by Street. "In Forster's novel, moments of communication are achieved by accident […] and seldom last long" (*Ibidem*, 29). Second, his change incorporates itself a racial thinking. How? Well, after months of encounters with the English visitors (especially Miss Quested, Mrs Moore and Fielding), the Indians seem much influenced by them. For instance, Dr Aziz becomes more and more like Fielding by his cool and polite behaviour. This change means that the English presence in India is effective and legitimate.

Hence, despite its complexity, indeterminacy and ambivalence, the novel remains one of the canonical narratives which carries its colonial complicity. Here, Tarchouna claims that "ambivalent narration is a means of creating and consolidating domination" (Tarchouna 1998, 186). The non-frequent narrator's tendency to insinuate a friendly attitude towards Indians and a hostile one towards English cannot erase the colonial and imperial eye of the reporting voice. The ambivalent narration can be understood as a misleading strategy on the part of the narrator. Through the reporting act, Forster reproduces and maintains the racial and stereotypical thinking associated with the native Indian. This latter is portrayed as other who needs to be enlightened and educated by the English. In this regard, Edward Said succeeds in his *Orientalism* to unmask the workings of Western thought. He mainly asserts that the novel genre remains a powerful medium to maintain colonialism (Said 1994, 177). Likewise, he asserts in *Culture and Imperialism* that "the novel reinforces […] advances perceptions and attitudes about England and the world […] never in the novel is that world beyond seen except as subordinate and dominated" (*Ibidem*, 189). Forster's *A Passage*, like Kipling's *Kim* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* holds the same discourse of power which is hidden underneath a 'benevolence'. In other words, reproducing the same imperial stereotype, through the act of reporting, aims at legitimising the Christian and civilising mission. Because the other, *i.e.* Indian, is like a savage, so it is the responsibility of the self, *i.e.* English, to enlighten him. It is a Christian burden to let the other sink into barbarism. Actually, his very discourse is what constitutes and builds the long history of the Empire. In this respect, Tarchouna maintains that: "it is this structure of reference that nurtures the ideology of Empire" (Tarchouna 1998, 185).

What is undeniable in the novel is its legitimisation of the English everlasting presence in India. The British Empire should proceed with its colonial project because Indians are not yet ready 'to rule themselves by themselves'. Through the reporting strategy, the narrator succeeds in manipulating Indian characters so that they project their failure and weakness to carry on any liberating plan. The narrator's insistence on the lack of any mutual understanding between the different "creeds" in India is not innocent or value-free. It is meant to give a negative image of them. Not only that, but also it is meant to say that liberation and the Indians' undertaking for independence are mere myths. In this context, Said raises a fundamental question: "If present-day India is neither the peace nor the time […] for identity, convergence, merger, then for what?" (Said 1994, 242). If this question bears within itself its own answer, it will be better to shed light anew on it. Always, a unique answer is possible to this question: India at that time was ready to be colonised. It is within the mind of the coloniser that this answer has been settled. Even English people cannot imagine the Empire being dissolved. They cannot suppose that the other is equal to the self, since this self cannot exist only in the centre when the other is in the periphery.

CONCLUSION

In light of what has been illustrated and assessed throughout this paper, one may conclude that a study of narration in *A Passage* is quite significant. Undeniably foregrounding under scrutiny, the reporting act remains a possible angle to deal with narration among many others. Following the narratorial strategy necessitates fathoming the different choices the narrator makes. This includes the choice of multiple modes of narration. Within each mode, we need to grasp the other alternatives, such as the selection of the inquit, the temporal shifts, aspect and modality, etc. These choices disclose the message the author wants to insinuate through the dominating voice of authorial narration. *A Passage* remains, despite the ambivalence of narration, a canonical text bearing its colonial and imperial complicity.

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SHOULD ATROCIOUS SPEECH BE LEGALLY PROTECTED?

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Abstract. Some countries limit speech that is likely to incite hate-motivated violence upon a group or breach public peace. Internationally, political tension subsists between free speech advocates and those who want to regulate "hate speech". In countries without prohibitions against hate speech, efforts to limit harm from public speech acts falls to private actors, who feel pressure either to adopt policies to create safe spaces or to allow all speech. This paper refocuses the debate and argues that the current tension between legal regulations of hate speech and cancel culture antagonists misses an entire genre of speech acts that the law should protect its citizens against-- atrocious speech, which yields atrocious harm. The *Atrocity Paradigm*, the non-ideal ethical theory defended by Claudia Card and others, contends that ethics and legal theory should be dedicated to prevent the worst sorts of harms, atrocities. Speech acts which predictably lead to inexcusable, intolerable harm can be distinguished from those which predictably lead to ordinary, or even, hateful wrongdoing. Focusing on atrocious speech allows for legal protections cantered on transmutative harm and inexcusability, and preserves public good obligations to preserve the existence and dignity of oppressed people groups.

Keywords: atrocious speech, hate speech, atrocity Paradigm, dignity, dehumanisation

SHOULD ATROCIOUS SPEECH BE LEGALLY PROTECTED?

Some countries have sought to limit speech that is likely to incite targeted, hate-motivated violence and which can breach the public peace. Internationally, political tension subsists between free speech advocates and those who want to regulate "hate speech". In countries without prohibitions against hate speech, efforts to limit harm from public speech acts fall to private actors, whether persons, companies, universities, or social media platforms (McLoughlin 2022, 312). Private individuals then feel pressure either to adopt policies to create safe spaces (especially for those who identify with a marginalised group) or to allow all speech so as to protect the free speech enterprise. These passionate opposites are then frequently reduced in the media to bully groups who either 'virtue signal' or scoff at 'cancel culture'.

This paper refocuses the debate, away from definitions and instances of hate speech, and argues that the current tension between regulation of hate speech and cancel culture antagonists misses an entire genre of speech acts that the law should protect its citizens against-- *atrocious speech*, which yields *atrocious harm*. The Atrocity Paradigm, the non-ideal moral theory defended by Claudia Card (2002, 2010) and others[i], contends that ethics and legal theory should be dedicated to preventing the worst sorts of actions: atrocities. Distinct from other, even egregious wrongs, atrocities are intolerable, inexcusable, culpable wrongs that produce systemic, transmutative harm in those who suffer from them. Atrocious harms are not qualitatively worse than ordinary (or even terrible) wrong actions. They are a different genre of wrongdoing altogether, an effect of which is to obviate an agent's ability to experience a great good. Those who theorise about free speech would do well to distinguish between speech acts which predictably lead to inexcusable, intolerable harm and those which predictably lead to ordinary, or even hateful wrongdoing.

Atrocious speech is not a determinate legal category in international law, although Gregory Gordon's (2017) is the first treatment designed to carve out atrocity speech as legally separate from hate speech. He argues that an operationalised legal prohibition against 'atrocity speech' includes four categories: incitement, persecution, instigating, and ordering, and should be implemented through the International Criminal Court. The value of Gordon's work, in part, is that it motivates legal action against a category of speech that is most strongly associated with genocide (United Nations 2025). One challenge for Gordon's particular articulation of atrocity speech is that there are instances of hate speech which would fall under his categories but would not lead to atrocious harm. Atrocious speech, to avoid the difficulties faced by hate speech legislation, should instead be understood legally in the way Atrocity Paradigm ethicists cast it. Although atrocious speech and hate share the quality that harm results from their instance, atrocious harms are intolerable (they cannot be borne without transmutative harm to the agent) and inexcusable morally culpable wrongs (there is no instance in which they are permissible). The harm that is produced is *atrocious harm*: systemic, transmutative harm that denigrates human dignity and obviates a person's ability to experience a great good.

Focusing on atrocious speech through the Atrocity Paradigm framework, rather than hate speech, allows for legal protections of groups based on a variety of moral factors centred on transmutative harm and inexcusability, and ensures individual liberty for many instances of distasteful, even hateful, speech. Protections against atrocious speech preserve attacks against the existence and dignity of oppressed people groups, while avoiding virtue signalling and cancel culture bullies. The Atrocity Paradigm recognises that atrocious harms are culpable and inexcusable, but it relates both directly to the plight of those who suffer, what private and governmental actors alike should care about.

1. Refocusing on Atrocious Speech

Nature abhors a vacuum, and the same could be said of the law. In the void of legal regulations on speech, private actors and quasi-private agencies are facing escalating pressure to create norms to manage the current social dichotomy between the desire to protect individual free speech rights and a social good interest in facilitating public spaces that are free from the possibility of physical violence. This isn't to say that countries with liberal free speech protections do not regulate speech at all. In the United States, historical commitments to limiting speech include protecting public morality, restricting labour union speech, limiting the speech of noncitizens, and regulating certain forms of emerging media (Spackman 2021, 42). However, hate speech—an ill-defined concept with multifarious connotations (in fact, in the United States, "hate speech" is not defined in law at all)—can find exceptions in some policies as they relate to fighting words, true threats, and group libel (Gordon 2017, 74). Mostly, hate speech currently resides in the space left by the absence of legal norms.

Unsurprisingly, the extreme implications of what hate speech could connote define the contours of how the public manages hate speech, especially in countries which lack legal policies to do so. On one hand, worries persist that any speech could be deemed 'hate speech'. If beliefs aim at being true and entail commitment, all beliefs have the potential to offend. If any belief could offend, and is pronounced in a manner the listener perceives as maligning or attacking (and maligning or attacking is also perceived as hateful), then all pronounced beliefs risk being perceived as hateful. Maximally, if true, legislating hate speech potentially sets legal guidelines on all speech. Minimally, legislating hate speech sets legal guardrails on any speech except for popular (or in-group, majority-held) speech. On the other hand, proponents of limiting certain kinds of speech point to the inciting influence hate speech can have on agents who hear it—in fact, many argue that a key differentiating characteristic of hate speech is that it does incite violence in people who hear it, "Hate speech is now generally understood as messages intended to incite hatred and/or encourage violence toward a person on the basis of membership in a particular social group" (Hirose et al 2023, 101). There are multifarious historical examples of political hate speech that incited violence. Without regulation against speech that is incendiary, the argument goes, the government seems to formalise and support speech acts that motivate violence.

The United States, infamously, has "promulgated the world's most speech-protective legal regime for repugnant advocacy"

(Gordon 2017, 84), but that freedom has come with dire social and public consequences. In any country like the United States without (or with limited) hate speech prohibitions, the only sanctions that subsist on speech are cultural norms, and cultural norm standards tend to privilege the majority, in-groups. Private actors from minority groups (or groups who are already marginalised) can feel pressure to adopt policies to create public spaces that are free from hate. In contrast, in the interest of preserving individual free speech rights, many in those countries are left to shrug and allow any speech that is neither libellous nor represents a true threat. These passionate opposites are then frequently reduced in the media to bully groups who either 'virtue signal' or scoff at 'cancel culture'. In the United States, especially, the lack of legislation or policy to limit hate speech has resulted in fomentation about "cancel culture". The term first appeared (and became an internet meme) on Twitter in the early 2010s from a group dedicated to issues affecting the African-American community, in which "cancelling" someone connoted a social boycott, a "last-ditch effort designed to hold individuals responsible for hateful speech" (Clark 2020, 89). Proponents of this public boycott technique argue that, in countries in which free speech is a promoted public good, individual agents and private actors must use cancelling as a means to hold people accountable for their speech acts. Absent guiding laws, social justice requires it (Spackman 2021, 9).

One of the strongest proponents of centring legal prohibitions against inciting speech is Jeremy Waldron, who argues against full protection of hate speech based on the erosive impact hate speech has on human dignity. Waldron distinguishes between two harms that are generated from hate speech, "undermining dignity" and "causing offence". Like Joel Feinberg, Waldron argues that even deeply offensive speech typically does not rise to the level of legislative concern. Speech acts which undermine dignity, however, should receive additional legal censure. (Waldron's concept of dignity is "a person's basic entitlement to be regarded as a member of society in good standing") There are reasons to reject Waldron's view, but for our purposes, the most compelling may be that it falls prey to the problems facing any proponent of hate speech limitation: whether a speech act properly respects a person's basic entitlement to be a member of society in good standing is as subjective as a speech act that causes offensive (even deep offense)—and Waldron rejects offensive harm as a type to be regulated just because it is too subjective.

There may also be good reasons for countries that have regulated hate speech to continue to do so, and perhaps Waldron's "undermining dignity" principle is objective enough to serve as a sound limiting condition on certain types of speech acts. But, the debate can be refocused in a way that preserves our public good obligation to protect certain spaces from violence (and the worst kinds of harm), to preserve the rights of even vile people to express their views, and to legislate to protect minority and oppressed groups. To do so, we first must wrest the conversation away from individual examples of concrete harms (here, of hate speech) and towards a conversation about atrocities. Atrocious harms do not inhabit moral grey zones—they are always wrong and ought always to be prevented. In ethics, the Atrocity Paradigm is a non-ideal moral theory articulated first by Claudia Card, and has been built out to include guidance for how ethics and legal theory can prevent atrocities. By defining atrocities according to the structure from which they emerge (their systematicity) and the harm which marks their sufferers (their transmutativity), scholars and lawmakers can focus on actions which predictably lead to atrocities, and seek to eradicate harms which obviate a victim's ability to create meaning and experience a great good.

Gregory Gordon's excellent efforts to carve out what he calls 'atrocity speech' as a legal basis of limits on the exercise of free speech do not yet engage with the Atrocity Paradigm in ethics. So, prior to engaging with how the Atrocity Paradigm can strengthen Gordon's work, it is valuable to talk about Gordon's unique and significant contribution to the legal philosophy canon. He is addressing legal issues that have pained lawmakers and philosophers alike since the Holocaust. Gordon directly attempts to provide tools to combat speech that leads to the erasure of people groups and a frayed moral, social fabric. Gordon, a Canadian scholar, effectively draws from his own country's rocky (and often ineffectual) deployment of hate speech legislation to demonstrate a continued (and growing) need for legal clarity and jurisprudence to protect the public interest in safety. He argues that passing legal policies tied to 'atrocity speech' rather than hate speech can help countries that already regulate speech better address the kinds of speech that predictably bring about atrocious harm—and Gordon offers specific types of acts he is interested in prohibiting: genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes (2017, 24).

Gordon's legal basis for articulating a framework to prevent atrocious speech begins with the UN's work from 1946-1948, especially the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide's treaty to establish genocide as a crime that carries individual accountability under international law (2017, 7-9). This UN work was expanded through the 1993 and 1994 Statutes of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (at Article 4(3)(c)) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) (at Article 2(3)(c)). Relevant to Gordon's purposes, the ICTY and ICTR Statutes expanded the Convention's international concerns to crimes against humanity and war crimes. Four legal criteria for prosecutable actions under the Genocide Convention include: incitement[ii], persecution[iii], instigating[iv], and ordering[v]. Gordon supports national and international prohibitions against speech acts which cause genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, and he argues that actions which incite, persecute, instigate, and order these atrocities should be the subject of law. The main difficulty he sees is that the intervening decades since the Genocide Convention have led to a largely fragmented global understanding of what kinds of speech incite, persecute, instigate, and order. (Although Gordon focuses almost entirely on "incitement" in his book-length treatment, the fragmentation problem he dedicates a third of his attention to is applicable to all four domains of international law on atrocious speech.) Some of the fragmentation problem is a failure of subsequent jurisprudence to normatively develop the ICTR's elemental doctrinal base (as it was intended to do), and some is a result of national courts ignoring the frameworks ICTR and ICTY established for incitement, persecution, instigating, and ordering (Gordon, 2017, 200).

Fragmentation for these frameworks can be generally categorised by the (mainly) epistemic gaps that legal bodies face when applying the ICTR and ICTY guidelines. What does it mean for a speech act to directly incite a crime? (Some courts, for example, have focused on pre-genocidal speech.) Do we have a universally applicable account of what the "public" good is to protect against? Can we determine what it means for speech acts to directly incite genocide? Can contextually dependent aspects of a particular case be considered in legal determinations of guilt? Could we consistently and coherently define and apply a causal clause that sufficiently protects the public? (Gordon, 2017, 186, 207).

It should be noted here that, despite fragmentation and epistemic limitations, it is reasonable to expect some countries to have various motivating reasons to limit certain kinds of speech. Gordon's home country, Canada, has used positive principles in weighing free speech cases, typically by relating expression to three core values: (1) seeking and attaining the truth; (2) participating in democratic institutions; and (3) promoting diversity in forms of individual self-fulfilment (Hutchinson 2023, 687). The efficacy of these principles is limited because these values can conflict, and other values can emerge from social discourse and emerging legal cases. The law, after all, is a living, breathing thing. *R. v. Keegstra* (1990), for example, was a historic Canadian case which upheld reasonable limits on free speech when the willful promotion of hatred would erode the social fabric and threaten shared values. In *Keegstra,* a high school teacher was charged under the Canadian Criminal Code for willfully promoting violence by communicating anti-Semitic statements to his students. The teacher's conviction was upheld by a majority of the Canadian Supreme Court, which ruled that, "The harm caused by this message run directly counter to the values central to a free and democratic society, and in restricting the promotion of hatred Parliament is therefore seeking to bolster the notion of mutual respect necessary in a nation which venerates the equality of all persons" (Kuhn 2019, 130). The 1990 *Keegstra* Court seemed to presage the cancel culture debate messaging when they urged that jurisprudential limits on some speech were necessary to serve the public good, even when coupled with non-jurisprudential (public) censure.

> Finally, while other non-criminal modes of combating hate propaganda exist, it is eminently reasonable to utilise more than one type of legislative tool in working to prevent the spread of racist expression and its resultant harm. To send out a strong message of condemnation, both reinforcing the values underlying s.319(2) and deterring the few individuals who would harm target group members and the larger community by communicating hate propaganda, will occasionally require use of the criminal law.

Fragmentation and epistemic questions are overcomeable hurdles to an international approach to legislating speech that can lead to three types of atrocities: genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, according to Gordon. The goal of any well-conceived and well-calibrated law with such enormous social impact as that relating to limits on speech should be to reconcile free expression, mass violence prevention, and doctrinal coherence (2017, 24), and Gordon believes that his atrocity speech framework allows him to do so. An issue with Gordon's methodology, however, is that he does not define an atrocity, yet believes his three categories are self-evidently atrocious. In doing so, he treats atrocity like individual concrete harms—but treating atrocious speech as we would individual wrongs makes a category mistake that threatens his framework from suffering the same fate as fragmented hate speech policies. "Atrocious harms" is a separate class of secular evil.

An additional hurdle for Gordon's particular articulation of atrocity speech is that there are instances of hate speech which would fall under his categories but would not lead to atrocious harm.

Atrocious speech, to avoid the tangles of hate speech legislation, should instead be understood legally in the way Atrocity Paradigm ethicists cast it. Although atrocious speech and hate speech share the quality that harm results from their instance, atrocious harms are intolerable and inexcusable morally culpable wrongs, and the harm that is produced is *atrocious harm*: systemic, transmutative harm that denigrates human dignity and obviates a person's ability to experience a great good.

Rather than address the problem of individual concrete harms, the Atrocity Paradigm treats atrocious evils as a class—intolerable, immoral harms that stem from systems of oppression. "Atrocious harms" refers to the category of evils that are culpable, preventable, create intolerable harm, and threaten the great good of someone's life. (Card 2002, 9, 12-13). Card contends these harms typically stem from systems or institutions of domestic, religious, political, and social power. (She has in mind, for example, genocidal rape and dismemberment, psycho-physical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas, etc.). Card's list contrasts a bit with that of the International Law Commission, which considers the following to be categories of crimes which constitute either severe human rights violations or inhumane acts (Murphy 2015, 270[vi]). Atrocious harms are a narrower category (even if the intent is the same in drawing up the list) than that given by the ILC.

"Atrocious harms" indicates a genre or class of secular evil that has two main components: its systematicity and its transmutability.[vii] Atrocious harms result from systems of oppression or violence that deprive a person of having access to what is necessary to live a tolerable and decent life, in a way that could never be justified, even by some later good. (The systematicity condition differs from some concrete, individual harms that are on the ILC's list, which need not—and frequently do not-- result from a system of oppression or harm. Murder, for example, is nearly always wrong, but many states reserve capital punishment as a unique form of state-sanctioned murder for instances in which it is deemed an appropriate punishment. Serious injury to the body causes suffering but might result from legally and morally non-culpable events, such as a natural disaster, or, more commonly, automobile accidents.) Systems or institutions of harm are those which, "in their normal or correct operation will lead to or facilitate intolerably harmful injustices" (Card 2002, 140). Systems of harm aggravate suffering by narrowing possibilities for victims to flourish, and assault human dignity in ways that are specific to the in-groups that are being violated. (Card cites the treatment of Africans during apartheid and racial segregation that resulted in terror, poverty, and degradation as examples, 2002, 103.) What makes a system a *system of harm* is whether it creates the conditions under which there is a predictable, preventable erasure of human dignity through its effects. Although the public often feels powerless to change or bring down powerful structures, Card implores us to evaluate the ways we are personally complicit in facilitating these evil frameworks, and to take responsibility at least for not doing what we can when we can to prevent them and come to the aid of those who suffer from them. Legal regulation (whether at the local or national level) is a fundamental step in changing structures that cause atrocity. Atrocities demand legal recourse; expressions of hate may not.

Whereas the systematicity condition explains the structure from which atrocities occur, transmutativity distinguishes atrocities from lesser harm -- an atrocity, by its nature, transforms people into something wholly distinct from who they were prior to suffering the harm. What makes an atrocity *an atrocity* just is this transmutative property—it erases a person's dignity and divorces a person from what was significantly and uniquely hers. Atrocities "actually disfigure" those who suffer them (2002, 103), at least in the sense that a person's identity (which is built around the ability to interact in social relationships) is altered by the atrocity. "Major historical examples come readily to mind," Card continues, "ghettos and expulsions of the Jews in late medieval Western Europe" (103). Atrocities differ from unjust inequalities (including particular instances of hate speech), "which would not be evils if they were merely sporadic or isolated incidents in a life otherwise flourishing [that] become evils when they are systematic and come to pervade one's life" (2002, 103). Rather than adjudicate among concrete, specific wrong acts, then, the Atrocity Paradigm contends that the priority for ethics—and the law--should be to eradicate unjust or imbalanced power structures (both locally and globally) that produce atrocious harm or create the conditions under which atrocious harm is produced.

2. Severing Atrocious Speech from Hate Speech for a Jurisprudential Aim

Given the relative newness of the legal and ethical atrocity speech lexicon, it may not be obvious how hate speech acts are distinguishable from atrocious speech, so it takes some unpacking. In hate speech, an undercurrent of fear in the speech act could suggest impending violence, but implicit or explicit threats of violence are not required for an utterance to be hate speech. Rather, an underlying harm of hate speech is that it seeks to 'other' (or delegitimise) the out-group, whereas what makes the consequences of atrocious speech atrocious is its attempt to dehumanise (transmute) the out-group. Consider two different, real-world cases:[viii]

> [A] In post-9/11 New Jersey, an Islamic Mosque is vandalised with a sign that reads, "Jihad Central".
>
> [B] In WWII Germany, a poster depicts a Nazi boot stepping on a cockroach, which is wearing a yellow star of David. The poster (when translated) reads, "Stamp out the infestation."

The two are similar in that they pick out a particular out-group to ostracise—and they do so in a public, shared space in a manner meant to draw attention to the fact that the out-group is being ostracised. The messages are also meant to motivate shared sentiment based on fear of the out-group. Important differences subsist. [A] describes and [B] prescribes action. The message in [B] is much clearer than in [A]-- so clear that children can understand what [B] connotes. (Indeed, when I visited the Documentation Centre in Munich with my then 10-year-old daughter in 2018, she read the poster and asked if the poster was what Trump meant when he talked about Mexicans in the United States.) [A] suggests people fear the out-group such that reasonable people could be justified in believing [A] could lead to future violence if other contextual features were in place. [B] demands genocidal action, because it includes not only a threat, but an invocation to eradicate.[ix] [A] could be easily deployed in the cancel culture vernacular, whereas [B] couldn't. [A] is an example of hate speech; [B] is an example of atrocious speech.

Hate speech and atrocious speech differ, as well, in the organising principles behind the speech acts. In hate speech, rivalry and antagonism of others take centre stage as a communicative strategy to attack, but in atrocious speech, the leitmotif binding the legal features of the atrocity is a systematic attempt to persecute and dehumanise members of an out-group (Murphy 2018, 1480). For countries that regulate hate speech, the aim of prosecutions tends to be to thwart speech acts which motivate broader group action against a minority population.[x] A challenge posed to hate speech prohibitions comes directly from the cancel culture/virtue signalling bullies: addressing hate speech through the law may promote cancel culture and censorship, while redressing cancel culture may virtue signal and lead to a perception that the government or municipality supports hate speech (McLoughlin 2022, 356). A perverse cycle can ensue. Yet, if we take the Atrocity Paradigm contributions to be relevant, a more proscribed sense of "atrocity" as related to speech acts ensures that neither cancel culture nor advocates against hate speech unnecessarily limit free speech. Atrocities result from systems of oppression, but the systems need not directly be political, nor perpetrated by organised political groups. Any single agent's speech can be identified and limited as atrocious speech if it is produced from the systematics of atrocity, and the harm produced is transmutative to an individual's ability to create meaning-making.

An example of the systematicity that can produce atrocious speech (and can inform nations as they navigate and legislate between hate and atrocity speech) is organised propaganda. Propaganda itself, of course, is not necessarily either hate speech or atrocity speech. Yet, when propaganda is hate speech, it is common to see the speech devolve from hate speech into atrocious speech as a result of continued and escalating propaganda messaging. Consider the rollout of Facebook/Meta as the only social media platform in Myanmar, following Myanmar's tumultuous shift out of military rule in 2011 (Stecklow 2018). At that time, Facebook was the sole social media platform in the country. Reuters reports that Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, posed on the platform as followers of celebrities and other cultural icons to create troll accounts that would be readily followed by the masses (who saw Facebook accounts as an elevated status symbol). The Tatmadaw then used the platform to begin a steady, though successful, propaganda campaign against the country's minority Muslim population, the Rohingya. Facebook, which did not have a single employee within the country, also lacked employees and software that could read Burmese[xi], so the escalating speech went undetected until users outside of the country reported posts and translated the posts into English for Facebook. In a single week, Reuters and the Human Rights Centre at UC Berkeley School of Law collected over 1,000 new posts, videos or comments in the Burmese language that called the Rohingya "non-human kalar dogs" and "maggots" who must be "exterminated" and "fed to pigs". The result of the propaganda was genocide-- 24,000 Rohingya deaths and the largest human exodus in Asia since the Vietnam War, with over 700,000 people fleeing the tiny country in 2017 (Bakali 2021, 54).

To simply say conditions for atrocity include systematicity and transmutativity is not to say that it is simple to identify acts which predictably, in their normal occurrence, lead to atrocity. The Tatmadaw exacted genocide (and were embraced by many in their country for their atrocities) in part because they strategically took advantage of weak governmental, political, and social structures, while they also capitalised on the rise of a tech platform that had no infrastructure to prevent their speech from becoming atrocious. But utilising the Atrocity Paradigm tools can aid governments and municipalities who want to preserve individual liberties with a tool to identify and curb speech which leads to the worst harms.

There is a jurisprudential aim to the imperative to protect civil liberties and preserve the public good by guiding policy and law with the Atrocity Paradigms' systematicity and transmutativity conditions. It is insufficient to enable prosecutions; the purpose of the Atrocity Paradigm guidance on atrocious speech jurisprudence should be to motivate state action to take measures to prevent atrocious harms from occurring at all. That isn't to say that individual concrete harms are morally or legally insignificant, but the impact of an atrocious harm is that it leaves the sufferer unable to pursue a healthy, meaningful, or dignified existence. If jurisprudence can be directed to redressing the systems which produce transmutative harm and to holding human agents responsible for perpetrating that sort of evil, individuals would be freer to respond to individual concrete harms when they occur.

3. Modifying Gordon's Atrocious Speech with The Atrocity Paradigm

So far, we have been able to see how the cancel culture/virtue signalling bully pulpits have hindered some governments' abilities to legislate and prosecute hate speech in a way that also limits the ability to contravene speech that predictably leads to atrocities. Hate speech, as a broad umbrella concept, encapsulates speech that, while terrible, many would not regulate. Fragmentary and disjointed efforts to create public policy and jurisprudence have led to unsatisfying results even for countries which have enacted laws to limit public expressions of hate speech. Yet, hate speech as a category is separate from the genre of speech acts which result in the worst sort of harm. Focusing on atrocious speech through the Atrocity Paradigm framework, rather than hate speech, allows for legal protections of minority groups based on a variety of moral factors centred on intolerable harm and inexcusability. It also protects individual speech—even, in many instances, hate speech. Balancing individual speech protections and prohibitions against atrocious speech allows communities to prevent attacks against the existence and dignity of oppressed people groups, while avoiding virtue signalling and cancel culture bullies. The Atrocity Paradigm recognises that atrocious harms are culpable and inexcusable, but it relates both directly to the plight of those who suffer, what private and governmental actors alike should care about.

To date, Gregory Gordon has provided the singular treatment of atrocity speech law. As has been shown, his work is significant in carving out the contours of speech acts that incite atrocities. But his contribution would be improved by utilising the systematicity and transmuativity conditions of the Atrocity Paradigm in ethics. One obstacle for Gordon's particular articulation of atrocity speech is that there are instances of the speech he wants to limit which would fall under his categories of dehumanisation but would not lead to atrocious harms—the same harms he attempts to prevent or limit through his category of "atrocity speech".

Dehumanisation as a basis for hate speech assessments is particularly problematic, for example, in the age of AI and Chatbot-generated content. Whereas numerous studies since Turing have shown that adding a human voice can have an anthropomorphising effect on how humans feel about cars, vacuums, navigational devices, or—more directly—robots, a recent project looked at the dehumanising impact of removing voice from actual humans and replacing it with text (Schroeder and Epley 2016, 1427). The results are fascinating. Absent paralinguistic cues, humans who communicated solely through text were viewed by respondents as "relatively dead or dull, more like a mindless machine than like a mindful human being" (1428). Even if it is true that not all dehumanising speech is hate speech[xii], imagine the implications of these findings on hate speech jurisprudence. Consider the frequent phenomenon of political advertisements during campaigns, in which still images of out-group members are superimposed with text. In the most heated campaigns, it is common to see ads that superimpose text over a political opponent (or their constituents) to depict them with lower intelligence, moral standing, or (even) citizenship status. Although many would be comfortable labelling such speech "hate speech", those advertisements do not predictably lead to atrocities. Yet, Schroeder and Epley show that such images have a dehumanising impact—similar to hate speech. The out-group pictured is perceived by subjects in the experiment as less than human, or with less desirable human traits, than the in-group. Couple these findings with AI's ability to rapidly produce hate speech content and deep fakes, and speech emerges in which Gordon's categories (i.e., those acts which incite, persecute, instigate, or order) are met without an atrocious speech act being committed. Yet, Gordon's categories only work from a public policy perspective if they differentiate atrocious speech (which should be limited) from hate speech (which should not).

Some might argue that speech akin to that of deep fakes and AI hate speech should be socially limited in non-jurisprudential ways, whether by imploring others to stay off social media or by demanding accountability in limited policy ways, such as holding social media and tech companies financially liable for bot-generated or promulgated content. All of that *could be true*, and still misses the point. Some speech has the form and content of speech that Gordon would like to prevent or limit as atrocious speech, but does not predictably lead to atrocities. Rather, by augmenting Gordon with the systematicity and transmutativity conditions of the Atrocity Paradigm, the difficulty is ameliorated, and Gordon's categories are preserved.

A result of subjecting legal atrocity speech to the Atrocity Paradigm in ethics is that most forms of private speech would not meet both the systematicity and transmutativity conditions of an atrocity. Descriptive hate speech, even in a public forum, probably does not meet the conditions of an atrocity, either. Many would argue that the Atrocity Paradigm's conditions would not limit enough speech because it would leave many instances of hate speech as legally permissible, and most proponents of restricting hate speech would want deeper restrictions on public speech, especially. The purpose of this project, however, is to motivate action against speech that predictably yields the worst sort of harms, and hate speech, as a category, does not produce transmutative harm. Applying the Atrocity Paradigm's conditions for atrocity establishes atrocities as specifically different speech acts from hate speech. Doing so preserves a country's ability to limit speech that has a deleterious impact on human dignity (and gives them a better tool to protect oppressed groups) while sidestepping altogether the distracting and stultifying debate between the cancel culture and virtue signalling bully pulpits. Focusing on atrocious speech through the Atrocity Paradigm framework, rather than hate speech or an incitement-based atrocious speech framework without the Paradigm, allows for legal protections of groups based on a variety of moral factors centred on intolerable harm and inexcusability. The Atrocity Paradigm should be thought of as an ethical tool available to legal minds to eradicate what is culpable and inexcusable, and support efforts to meet the needs of people groups who suffer, a result that individuals, political groups, municipalities, and private actors should want to ensure.

NOTES

i See, especially, Miller (2009) and Bar On (2007).

ii In the end, when these additional criteria are tacked on, the existing framework for determining whether hate speech constitutes incitement should consist of seven elements: (1) purpose; (2) text; (3) context (bifurcated into internal— related to the speaker— and external— related to facts surrounding the speech); (4) relationship between speaker and subject; (5) channel of communication; (6) temporality; and (7) instrumentality. Moreover, these criteria can be organised within the larger conceptual categories of "content" (purpose and text), "circumstances" (context and speaker-subject relationship), and "medium" (communications channel, temporality, and instrumentality). In turn, these categories can help us answer the what/ why (content), who/ where (context), and when/ how (medium) questions related to the speech for determining whether it legally qualifies as incitement. (Gordon 2017, 17)

iii Article 7 of the Rome Statute defines crimes against humanity as a series of acts, including persecution, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack. 42 Article 7(h) specifies that persecution must be against "any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender… or other grounds that are universally recognised as impermissible under international law." Article 7(2)(g) then defines "persecution" as "the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity …." (Gordon 2017, 10)

iv It consists of "prompting another to commit an offence." In other words, the prosecution must demonstrate a causal connection between the instigation and the perpetrated offence. This entails proving that the instigation "contributed" to the prompted person's commission of the crime. (Gordon 2017, 11)

v That crime requires a superior/subordinate relationship, issuance of a command to commit an international crime, an awareness that the order would likely lead to commission of an international crime, and a causal link between the order and the commission of the crime. (Gordon 2017, 11)

vi The full list includes: (a) murder; (b) extermination; (c) enslavement; (d) deportation or forcible transfer of population; (e) imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) torture; (g) rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; (h) persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph; (i) enforced disappearance of persons; (j) the crime of apartheid; (k) other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

vii In physics, transmutation is the phenomenon in which one element changes into another, typically through a cataclysmic or nuclear event.

viii [A] is adapted from an example in Waldron (2012). [B] depicts an actual

WWII poster, on display for educational purposes at the NS-Dokumentationszentrum München.

ix Maoz and McCauley (2008) demonstrate the distinct, though connected, relationship between threats and dehumanising factors in hate speech.

x Prosecution has mostly been of individuals who have publicly incited hostility towards armed groups or other organisations. See, for example, *Zana v. Turkey*, 1997, in which the European Court of Human Rights upheld the Turkish conviction of Mehdi Zana, and that Zana's free speech rights were subordinate to a social need to keep peace with the Kurdish regions of Turkey.)

xi By 2015, the company had four total employees who spoke Burmese, and none of them lived in Myanmar, whose population was 7.5 million at the time.

xii It might be, especially if timeless scholarship like Susan Opotow's (1990) is right.

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CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON DYSLEXIA: EXPLORING CHINESE-ENGLISH DIFFERENCES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MAINLAND CHINA

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Abstract. Dyslexia is a disorder/condition characterised by challenges in learning to read. It is usually considered to have a universal biological basis. However, this view was challenged by comparing areas of brain activity in Chinese and English dyslexia through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (Siok et al. 2004, 71). This paper explores the differences in dyslexia performance between different language systems. The findings suggest that, in addition to biological factors, sociocultural and economic factors significantly influence dyslexia. Furthermore, this paper reviews the current methods used to identify dyslexia and the interventions being implemented across different regions of China. At present, research in Mainland China remains in the developmental stage. Hence, this paper offers some recommendations for language policy and educational practice with the aim of creating a more inclusive education system that can effectively support every learner.

Keywords: dyslexia, cross-linguistic differences, neurocognitive disorder, inclusive education, special educational needs

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential part of modern life. However, there are some people who have difficulties in reading with conventional education, average intelligence and sociocultural circumstances (Chan 2002, 3). This is because they suffer from a disorder called *dyslexia*, which was defined by the World Federation of Neurology in 1968 (Chan 2002, 3). Although definitions of the disease have varied among researchers and organisations, there is general agreement that dyslexia has a universal biological basis. However, this idea has been challenged, as new research continues to emerge. A study conducted by Siok's group indicates that dyslexia in Chinese and dyslexia in English have different origins (Siok et al. 2004, 71). As a result, this paper proposes to examine the following research questions. Firstly, what is the biological basis of the difference between Chinese and English dyslexia? In addition, does dyslexia reflect a biological deficit, a cultural difference in the respective language system, or an interaction of both?

Although significant progress has been made in current research on dyslexia, most of this is based entirely on the investigation of the English language system. This may well limit understanding and intervention in the case of non-English contexts. A comparative cross-linguistic study of two different language systems, Chinese (a logographic system) and English (an alphabetic system), indicates that the biological deficits of dyslexia differ markedly between the two language systems. This paper suggests that dyslexia should be acknowledged as a neurocognitive disorder influenced by culture and dependent on language, rather than being regarded solely as a 'disease' with origins in a universal biological basis. Moreover, when compared to Taiwan and Hong Kong, there is a lack of systematic awareness and understanding of dyslexia in Mainland China (Cai 2018). For this reason, the third research question has been raised: Is it possible to propose more effective intervention strategies for Mainland Chinese dyslexia based on current research? This report aims to develop a Chinese model of linguistic and cultural adaptation to fill the gap in the early identification and intervention of dyslexia in Mainland China.

2. Literature Review

Dyslexia is closely related to the written language and is especially tied to the language's writing system. Therefore, this paper will start from the two different writing systems corresponding to English and Chinese. Chinese adopts a logographic system, where the fundamental unit of script is the character. At the same time, based on the work of Li and Kang, about eighty per cent of Chinese characters are composite characters, in which different parts provide semantic and phonological cues to the whole (Han and Bi 2009, 24). Current research has shown that Chinese dyslexia is related to functional deficits in the left middle frontal gyrus (LMFG), because the LMFG mediates the conversion of graphic form (orthography) to syllable and orthography-to-semantics mapping (Siok et al. 2004, 71).

In contrast, English is part of the alphabetic system. In the alphabetic system, people need to relate speech to writing, which is based on the phonemic analysis of the word (Carraher and Rego 1983, 163). It means that grapheme-to-phoneme conversion is usually involved in the reading process. For this reason, English dyslexia is associated with dysfunction in left temporoparietal regions, as these regions are responsible for phonemic analysis and conversion of written symbols to phonological units of speech (Siok et al. 2004, 71).

The above findings suggest that the characteristics of different languages should correspond to the involvement of different functional areas in the human brain. Therefore, the research of Siok's group challenges the traditional view that dyslexia has a universal biological basis and suggests that dyslexia is culture-dependent (Siok et al. 2004, 71). Additionally, Chinese dyslexia is characterised by the coexistence of visuospatial and phonological disorders, but these two disorders are independent of each other (Siok et al. 2009, R890). This further explains the lower rate of dyslexia in China when compared to native English-speaking countries.

In recent years, research on Chinese has started to progress, but a comprehensive survey is still lacking (Sun et al. 2013, 9). By contrast, research on dyslexia in general remains English-centred. It thus leads to both dyslexia identification and intervention, but chiefly in the realm of English language studies. Moreover, there is a shortage of standardised and accessible tools for diagnosing dyslexia among the Chinese population, and many existing tests are inconsistent with contemporary research theories (Hou et al. 2018, 1-2). From both theoretical and practical perspectives, dyslexia is still not widely understood in Mainland Chinese society. Therefore, the level of detection and intervention for dyslexia lags significantly behind Western countries.

3. A Cross-Linguistic and Sociocultural Perspective on Dyslexia

The difference in language systems can lead to differences in varying cognitive demands for reading in Chinese compared to English. English is considered a deep orthography that requires readers to have good phonological awareness and processing skills because the spelling of words does not consistently correspond to their pronunciation, necessitating strong phonological awareness and processing skills for effective reading (Schmalz et al. 2015, 1614-1615). However, Chinese, as a robust ideographic language system, leads readers to depend more on visualisation for semantic mapping and character recognition. These differences are reflected in the brain variations observed in dyslexics across different languages. Therefore, it is essential to study dyslexia from a cross-linguistic perspective. Because of social and cultural factors, different language systems correspond to different reading styles and learning processes. As a result, various regions of the brain are activated depending on the language. Therefore, research based on dyslexia in English cannot be directly applied to an understanding of dyslexia in Chinese. This is why the findings of Siok's team are significant for raising public awareness about Chinese dyslexia (Siok et al. 2004, 71).

Cross-linguistic studies have further confirmed the impact of language systems on dyslexia performance. A case study of an English-Japanese bilingual boy shows that his dyslexia is restricted to English, with a notable difference in his reading abilities between English and Japanese (Wydell and Butterworth 1999, 273). Although the study does not focus on Chinese-English bilingualism, it should be noted that Japanese and English also come from entirely different writing systems. The findings of this case study further support the significance of recognising the influence of the language system on dyslexia performance. Moreover, brain imaging studies have shown that various writing systems activate distinct brain networks (Siok et al. 2004, 71). This suggests that cultural and linguistic contexts significantly influence the development of dyslexia. In fact, these findings call into question the conventional belief that dyslexia is primarily rooted in universal biological factors.

Alongside biological mechanisms, the socio-cultural context plays a significant role in the identification and intervention of dyslexia. Comparative studies of Chinese-English bilingual dyslexia involving the same individual are extremely rare, on account of the education system in Mainland China. The impact of dyslexia on the learning process is not widely recognised in Mainland China, so there is a lack of support measures, such as extended time for examinations. Currently, there is a significant variation across regions in identifying Chinese dyslexia. There are no standardised criteria for identifying dyslexia in Mainland China, while in Hong Kong and Taiwan, dyslexic children are identified through the use of standardised tests (Cheah et al. 2024, 1-3). A lack of awareness about dyslexia often leads to misconceptions that it is linked to lower IQ, resulting in children being unfairly labelled as “stupid” or “lazy” (Cai 2018). These misunderstandings often have a direct effect on children’s academic development. In turn, the stigma associated with dyslexia may lead to mental health problems such as impaired self-esteem, anxiety and even depression—all of which may seriously affect children’s social adaptation and psychological growth.

4. Implications for Language Education and Policy

Based on the previous analysis and discussion, this report suggests that Mainland China needs to establish a systematic identification and intervention mechanism for dyslexia. In comparison to Taiwan and Hong Kong, Mainland China has significant gaps in the understanding and management of dyslexia in Chinese. These challenges encompass a lack of public awareness about dyslexia, a limited capacity among schools and parents to recognise the condition, and the absence of a social intervention system. Dyslexia continues to be heavily stigmatised in Mainland China, leading to labelling and discrimination against those affected. This not only hinders the personal development of children with dyslexia but also fosters unwarranted fear within society.

Real-life examples demonstrate that dyslexia does not determine a person's fate or failure; in fact, many individuals with dyslexia thrive and achieve success in a variety of fields (Institute for Multi-Sensory Education, 2017). For example, the scientist Albert Einstein, the actress Keira Knightley, and the painter Picasso all suffered from dyslexia, but this did not prevent them from becoming outstanding in their respective fields of science, performance, and art. Consequently, raising social awareness of dyslexia will foster more opportunities for children with the condition. At the same time, early identification and intervention can minimise the adverse effects of dyslexia on their learning and overall life experiences.

Mainland China can draw valuable lessons from the effective language policies and educational practices of Taiwan and Hong Kong. The key point is that standardised testing criteria can enhance the identification rates of dyslexia. In Hong Kong, students with dyslexia are typically categorised as part of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) group. They are often enrolled in mainstream schools, where teachers undergo relevant training to better support their students' development (Hue 2012, 143-145). Consequently, education authorities in Mainland China can implement systematic professional training for teachers. This initiative will enhance their capacity to identify and support students with dyslexia, while also promoting equity and diversity in education.

5. Conclusion

This report contends, from a cross-linguistic standpoint, that dyslexia does not possess a universal biological foundation. Due to the variation in language systems, dyslexia in Chinese is linked to deficits in the left middle frontal gyrus (LMFG), while dyslexia in English is associated with impairments in the left temporoparietal regions. As a result, dyslexia is shaped not only by biological factors but also by linguistic systems and cultural contexts. At present, Mainland China is still in the early stages of development. There is a notable disparity between Hong Kong and Taiwan regarding the identification and intervention of Chinese dyslexia. Furthermore, studies indicate that the educational and economic status of parents is linked to the prevalence of dyslexia in their children in Mainland China (Sun et al. 2013, 3-9). Nevertheless, significant disparities in wealth exist across various regions of China, highlighting that the influence of economic factors on dyslexia should not be overlooked. Considering both biological and cultural perspectives, developing a more inclusive education system that genuinely supports all learners would be beneficial.

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