

**ISSN 2069 – 4008 (online: ISSN 2069 – 4016)**

**Annals of Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava**

**PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL AND HUMAN  
DISCIPLINES SERIES**

**2024**

**VOLUME I**

**Editors:**  
**Bogdan POPOVENIUC**  
**Marius CUCU**

**Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava Press**

**Annals of Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava  
Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines Series**

Bogdan Popoveniuc; Marius Cucu; © Suceava : Ștefan cel  
Mare University Press, 2024

ISSN 2069 – 4008 (online: ISSN 2069 – 4016)

**Analele Universității “Ștefan cel Mare” din Suceava  
Seria Filosofie și Discipline Socio-umane**

Bogdan Popoveniuc; Marius Cucu; © Suceava : Editura  
Universității “Ștefan cel Mare”, 2024

ISSN 2069 – 4008 (online: ISSN 2069 – 4016)

ANNALS  
of  
*Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines*

PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL AND HUMAN DISCIPLINES SERIES

**Advisory Board:**

Professor Anton **Adămuț**, *Al. I. Cuza University of Iași*

Professor Alexander **Baumgarten**, *Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca*

Associate Professor Gheorghe **Clitan**, *West University of Timișoara*

Professor Onoriu **Colăcel**, *Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava*

Associate Professor Aurelian **Crăiuțu**, *Indiana University, USA*

Lecturer Carmen **Dominte**, *National University of Music Bucharest*

Professor Marius **Dumitrescu**, *Al. I. Cuza University of Iași*

Professor Adel **Fartakh**, *University Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco*

Professor Luciano **Floridi**, *University of Hertfordshire, St. Cross College, University of Oxford*

Senior researcher Ionuț **Isac**, *Institute of History “G. Barițiu” of the Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca branch*

Researcher Ruxandra **Mărginean Kohno**, *Waseda University, Japan*

Professor Vladimir **Petercă**, *Sfânta Tereza Roman Catholic Theological Institute of Bucharest and Roman Catholic Theological Institute of Chișinău, Republic of Moldova*

Lecturer Diana Christine **Zelter**, *Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca*

## **Editorial Board:**

### **Executive Editors:**

*Professor Ph.D.* Bogdan **Popoveniuc**, Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava

*Professor Ph.D.* Marius **Cucu**, Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava

### **Editors:**

*Professor Ph.D.* Colin T. A. **Schmidt**, Le Mans University & ENSAM-ParisTECH, France

*Professor Ph.D.* Kuruvilla Joseph SJ **Pandikattu**, *Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth*, Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune, India

*Professor Ph.D.* Ana **Pascaru**, University of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova

*Associate Professor Ph.D.* Cristina Emanuela **Dascălu**, *Apollonia*, Iași and “Free International University” of Moldova

*Lecturer Ph.D.* Cătălina-Iuliana **Pînzariu**, Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava

### **English Language Assistant:**

Marian **Rebei**

### **Book Review Editor:**

*Lecturer Ph.D.* Marius **Cucu**

### **Copy Editor:**

Laura Nicoleta **Niță**

ANNALS

ANNALS

of  
University Ștefan cel Mare of Suceava  
University Ștefan cel Mare of Suceava

Nexus of Knowledge:

Interdisciplinary Explorations of Society, Culture, and the Human Condition

PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL AND HUMAN DISCIPLINES SERIES

2024

Volume I



# Contents

## RESEARCH PAPERS

Nostalgia Vindicated: Psychological, Emotional, Social, Biological, and Even Political .....	1
Outbreak Without Actualization? Notes on Martin Delany’s Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America .....	31
Søren Kierkegaard existentialism: an ethical path towards resolving religious intolerance and incessant killings in Nigeria.....	53
Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg’s Land to the Tiller Policy.....	67
A critical analysis of the reductive physicalist functionalist perspective on the nature of consciousness.....	85
Rhetorisation of Philosophy .....	101
The perception of the Romanian Minority in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian War .....	109
“Save Romania Union” and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020.....	125
Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education: Practical advices for teachers .....	139
The Language of the Web: Mechanisms of Korean Internet Slang .....	147

## ESSAYS, PRESENTATIONS, REVIEWS

Autonomous Discourse. Strategies of Communication. Review.....	167
--	-----

# RESEARCH PAPERS



# Nostalgia Vindicated: Psychological, Emotional, Social, Biological, and Even Political

Lantz Fleming MILLER  
Visiting Professor, Ashoka University  
lantz.miller@ashoka.edu.in

*“Then we can’t go back”.*  
*She looked at him. “Back? To where?”*  
*“Then”.*

*Elizabeth Bowen, To the North (1932, p. 253)*

## Abstract

*Long viewed as something between a malady and self-indulgence, nostalgia has recently come to be more disinterestedly explored in human sciences and philosophy. The term itself dates to a 17th Century medical doctor’s investigation into the quite serious debility for soldiers in battles far from home. Currently researchers have widely assumed the phenomenon to be an emotion or mediated via emotions. Another view contends nostalgia is a social or political construct, and another suggests a biological basis. At least one observer has enjoined us to clarify the term and begin a more rigorous definition and study of nostalgia. This article takes up that challenge, approaching nostalgia from the many different (and seemingly not always consistent) facets of it. A pivot in the analysis consists in exploring two theories of what nostalgia consists in, for a sharper, more workable understanding of the phenomenon. We may thence more effectively inquire into its nature, whether indeed it is largely a socially or biologically derived phenomenon and even whether has a normative side. The article concludes that biological influences that appear to have moulded nostalgia as a phenomenon point to potential answers to normative criticisms of it as harmful and removed from reality.*

**Keywords:** *defining nostalgia, homesickness, longing, nostalgic fads, Proust, self-indulgence, valuing past over present, volitional vs. involuntary nostalgia.*

## *Introduction*

Nostalgia is one of those conceptual terms that beguiles philosophy, along with “love”, “feeling”, “truth”, and “consciousness”. Nostalgia, while having a growing literature, has drawn less attention than these other four terms. Perhaps it is *too* ephemeral, and it may seem less pertinent to philosophy. In the political-

theory arena, nostalgia gains some significance as a topic. Psychology has given it notable attention, perhaps more than has philosophy. The fact that nostalgia has a sure place in psychology should help cement its respectability as a matter meriting further philosophical study. One issue meriting attention is simply what kind of phenomenon nostalgia is (Casey, 1987; Hirsch, 1992; Batcho, 1995; Fuentenebro & Valiente, 2014) It is often considered as an emotion (Batcho, 2020a; Malpas, 2011; Sedikides, *et al.* 2016; Wijnand *et al.*, 2018), while some have treated it is a social construct (Davis, 1979; Illbruck, 2012). Nostalgia seems to require consciousness but possibly may be experienced in a dream. Most observers would concur it concerns the past, not the present or future. The tern just does not make sense of “I miss next year”. “Missing” implies no-longer present, hence present only at some earlier time. (See below § Missing, longing.) An agent may miss thinking about the future, but such is not longing for the future. The nostalgia episode may be described as lending the past a patina of favorability, whatever exactly happened during that past experience. Thus, an emotion of wistfulness, or a cloying, implacable longing for the period in question, is sometimes considered to be integral to nostalgia (Malpas, 2011). By other accounts, there may be a naivete requirement for nostalgic experiences, whereby the past incident cannot be known at the time as an experience that will indeed later become nostalgic (Moran, 1994). Some commentators have viewed nostalgia as involuntary; others, as volitional (Howard, 2012). Often it is deemed, normatively, to be a state not to dwell in because an agent may use it to drown out pertinent matters, distort what one can expect of nostalgia, and render the agent living dangerously out of touch with personal realities (Illbruck, 2012).

Like “feeling” or “consciousness”, “nostalgia” evidently depends upon a heavily subjective basis, diminishing the prospect for verifying a definition or theory of it. Such slipperiness ratchets up the philosophical challenge. The 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Swiss medical researcher Johannes Hofer, coined the term from the Greek νόστος, *nostos*, “return home”, and ἄλγος, *álgos* “pain, grief, suffering.” (Atia & Davies, 2010; Burton, 2020) Hence, nostalgia is suffering to return home, or homesickness. Hofer found that Swiss soldiers sent to far-off battles suffered what appeared to be actual, physical disease. Yet, nostalgia also has an ongoing stigma of ridicule and derision; deliberately evoking nostalgia is veritably a moral issue. As Malpas (2011) asks rhetorically,

*What is wrong with nostalgia? How and why has it come to be the case, as it surely has, that to say of a philosophical position that it is ‘nostalgic’ is already to indicate its inadequacy? (p. 87)*

It seems “indulging” in nostalgia is derided as veritably a kind of sin, at best a waste of time. However, it has been subject of philosophical investigation that leaves such negative assessment in doubt. In the course of this article, such philosophical challenge, along with other questions, start to shine through. In Nietzsche, one can find some favorability for nostalgia, as in his passage from *Zarathustra*, “O solitude! O my *home*, solitude! Too long have I lived in wild strange places not to return home to you in tears”. (1954, p. 295) A tinge of nostalgia may be seen in his longing for the presocratic philosophers. Phenomenological authors such as Ricœur (2006) exhibit some concern about the phenomenon for both the individual and society.

Psychological inquiry into nostalgia, growing out of medical research since Hofer’s time, has increased notably since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this descriptive and experimental-psychological study has been positive about nostalgia and its therapeutic potential. (Zhou *et al.*, 2008; Wilson, 2011; Routledge *et al.*, 2011; Vess *et al.*, 2012; Batcho, 2020b; Ludden, 2020.). What may be philosophically interesting is not only nostalgia’s moral facet – which hardly deplores nostalgia universally – but also its ontology. A common view is that nostalgia is a socially molded emotional phenomenon, and possibly even socially originated in the first place (Illsbruck, 2012). Much of nostalgia research so far has pointed in this direction. The political uses of nostalgia (Boym, 2010; Atia & Davies, 2010; Earle, 2021), especially in populist rhetoric, has both a social constructivist facet and a personal emotional one, of which politicians reputedly take advantage. (See below § Political nostalgia.) Here the political, like the commercial, aims to activate and appeal to the personal. A further interesting facet of nostalgia’s ontology is whether a biological or evolutionary understanding of it plays a part in the phenomenon, as Burton (2020) mentions. Did humans evolve with the capacity or tendency for nostalgia?

This article contends that a unique, partially biological explanation of nostalgia may not only aid general understanding of the phenomenon but also reflect on the emotional, social, and political facets. Furthermore, if nostalgia has a viable biological component among the emotional, social, and political, it may in turn reflect on the neurophysiological nature of mind and emotions. Towards these ends, the article urges two empirical perspectives on nostalgia: It might have been evolutionarily adaptive; and it has arisen as an obsession with the past because of particularities of brain processing. At any time-slice, the brain/mind has too many processes at work to unify all immediate processed data at once. Instead, it must assimilate data over long periods. These two empirical proposals form the article’s core. To step back a moment before pursuing that goal, the preliminary goal herein

is to put the inquiry into its historical position (into its conceptual and literature context) and thereby add rigor to nostalgia's definition, before moving to the core empirical arguments.<sup>1</sup>

### *Sources of Nostalgia*

Hofer's 1638 coinage of the term, of course, did not create the phenomenon but represented a mental or emotional state that, since ancient times, history and literature have described. With the new term in hand, Hofer noted the syndrome in Swiss mercenary soldiers camped in the northern flatlands who longed for their Alpine landscapes. They exhibited such homesickness signs as fever, fainting, and sometimes death. In ancient times, such nostalgic longing appears in Odysseus and Aeneas in their struggles to come home. Captive Jews in Babylon lamented their loss of their homeland, weeping massively. Indeed, wars through the ages, often in inhuman environments, are understandably sources of nostalgia to the point of physical illness. Given these early stains on nostalgia and its presumed malady, not surprisingly it has long not been commonly condoned.

Nostalgia as a term has broadened since Hofer's day. There appears to be on ongoing, even universal, human phenomena consisting partly in longing for not merely lost places but lost times. This broadening of the term coincides with difficulty in pinpointing the term's represented phenomena. One challenge for understanding nostalgia is that it is often a subjective, experienced phenomenon, whether an emotion (Wijnand *et al.*, 2018; Howard, 2012) or sociopolitical construct (Boym, 2012; Ricœur, 2006; Reynolds, 2011). While Howard (2012) often speaks of it as an emotion, his view can also be seen as treating it as a mental phenomenon. After all, the "nostalgist's" (Howard's word) experience involves memory, whether adulterated or not, whether one's own or another's; and memory is primarily a cerebral/mental phenomenon. In some corners, nostalgia has a doubtful reputation (Trigg, 2006; Illbruck, 2012; Stern, 2013), seemingly a self-indulgent escape, a weakness that predator merchants take advantage of (Boym,

---

<sup>1</sup> At this juncture, we should at least mention terms related to nostalgia, as well as types of nostalgia. Similar terms include *Reminiscence*, say savoring a whole period at will so one can bring it to fore. It seems odd that one would reminisce about a wholly bad period except for rare exceptions in that period, say a kind jail guard during a period of torture. *Recall* is merely the act of bringing up memories, with no particular value attached. *Memorializing* is a deliberate act, usually social, of evoking memories of a person, period, or act that has some significance for that person or persons. Types of nostalgia, besides those four angles for understanding it as given in the title – emotional, social, biological, and political – include longing for an autobiographical period, say age 14; for a flash ("Proustian", or pointillistic); for missing a friendship; and for regretting a period or an action taken or not taken. All of these will be brought up in the article.

2010; Earl, 2021). Nostalgia can also be viewed as positive, with aesthetic value beyond any therapeutic. (Proust, 1932a; Moran, 1994; Eske, 2005). But also the value can be curative, even healing. (Sedikides *et al.* 2004, 2008, 2016) or offer existential solace (Hirsch, 1992, Routledge *et al.*, 2011; Vess *et al.*, 2012; Newman *et al.*, 2020; Tierney 2013 sums many such positive values.) The supposition that nostalgia is merely an individual's being prodded by social (not merely individual) pining for the past readily reviles nostalgia for its promoting self-indulgence. A subculture conscripted into a fad for 1990's music or 1960s fashion-and-symbol fad is seen as victim of market exploitation. Even as a subject of scientific or philosophical study, nostalgia receives insufficient serious attention. Fortunately, research has increased in the past two or three decades. Despite this work, nostalgia remains a problematic social and moral concern.

To help illuminate nostalgia's both more positive or more negative aspects, a common distinction between "restorative" vs. "reflective" nostalgia has arisen. The former attempts (bootlessly, it seems) to recuperate something from the "nostalgiaized" past, in what could be a desperate attempt to live that past anew. The described reflective nostalgia instead considers that favored past more disinterestedly, appreciating what was good about the past but without the hopeless wistful aspiration to recuperate that past now.

Before proceeding with these views of nostalgia and its ontology in general, it is pertinent to mention some ways that the concept of "nostalgia" is commonly understood. These often coincide with common uses of the term. Mentioning them allows at least an initial handle on the term and phenomenon so ze may proceed with deeper investigation of nostalgia. The root concept is, as described, that of homesickness, commonly under dreadful conditions. The expats in Andrei Tarkovsky's 1983 film *Nostalghia* experience it intensively. A derivative construal of the term is that of the individual's – whether at home or abroad – longing for the past, whether the individual's own past or the agent's projected broader historical past. This sense of the term has arguably become the most widespread, in popular construal. A third common understanding is the socially oriented nostalgia of people longing for a period in the group's past. Well-known examples of this third sense include mass nostalgia for a society's earlier decades (see Reynolds, 2011; Grainge, 2012, about this phenomenon), such as "Eighties Nostalgia" with music and fashion of that period, often as a party theme, such as Halloween.

Given this preliminary basis of "nostalgia", inquiry into the ontology of nostalgia is prepared to continue. While the view of nostalgia as an emotion is widely assumed, I suggest it may form only a part of the story. The verb "feel" may help exemplify why nostalgia is often considered an emotion: In the senses of

the term given in the previous paragraph, nostalgia involves how a person feels about a memory or a past period (whether one's autobiographical past or a past that others presumably experienced). Now that more empirical work has been done on memory, as well as emotions (Prinz, 2008, 2012; Atia & Davies, 2010), brief mention of these phenomena is warranted. As for emotions, if nostalgia is an emotion, what kind is it (simple/basic or complex/secondary), and how does it fit in with other emotions? One needs then to consider whether nostalgia is a basic emotion such as fear, anger, joy, or disgust; or secondary (combining the basic), such as contempt, exhilaration, or indignation, or even higher-level. (Prinz, 2008) The challenge here is that nostalgia involves memory in a relation to the particular emotion experiences. Somehow, these two phenomena; memory and emotion, interact in a nostalgic episode.

One possibility is that memory often comes first, provoking an emotional response. Inversely, an emotion may arise, provoking a memory. Both of these views have appeared in the literature. (Tulving, 1972; Howard, 2012; Proust, 1932a) The challenge for the assumption that nostalgia is an emotion needs to meet these challenges, including empirical problems of whether there are bodily responses in emotional experience that are *de rigueur* for distinguishing the emotions from other phenomena.

Another ontological view mentioned is that nostalgia is a social construct. For some reason, social forces are exerted upon citizens or culture members to lead them to believe the past was better than the present. One very evident social construct of nostalgia is that promulgated by authoritarian regimes. Mussolini's propaganda harked back to the ancient Roman period as the height of Italy's achievement, hence a model for present Italy. The German National Socialist Third Reich exhibited a similar nostalgia in its program for a reinvigorated present. Less extreme examples of socially constructed nostalgia may be found at home, as when Ronald Reagan evoked the United States' nineteen-fifties as a paradigm for reconstructing the country after its shameful nineteen-sixties' antiwar movements. Thus, Reagan's "It's morning in America": Even the perfection of Genesis's Garden can be understood as a social construct longing for a humanity in an ideal past, which post-Fall worship of the Creator can only approximate. Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and even some Buddhism may rest upon the presumed excellence of the human past. Economy-driven forces may construct a past for consumers to help bolster sales. (Yet, appealing to an ever-receding future, as via projected happiness upon owning a product. seems a more powerful inducement to increase sales.) In all, social constructs of nostalgia may be ultimately political, partly private in many a religion, and even economic.

## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

For the most part, the social construct view of nostalgia remains unclear about the provenance of nostalgia per se. That is, does the socially nostalgia-constructing force establish the very possibility of nostalgia itself? Alternatively, the human agent already possesses the capacity to long for the past, and the social force enters to put that capacity to work. The social-construction approach seems to tend toward the former explanation. The latter view looks to biological factors that may influence nostalgia. These factors include the longing for past events as evolutionarily adaptive. Furthermore, the possibility that because of the way the mind assimilates events and the person's responses to them can take a notable amount of time, the events are only increasingly assimilated as time passes.

A later section elaborates on these biological facets of nostalgia. These facets are hardly decipherable as they now stand, isolated in this preliminary sketch of them. But it is worthwhile to mention them in advance, to indicate they form a contrast with the other ontologies of nostalgia mentioned in this section.

### *First Steps Toward a More Rigorous Definition*

So far, I have used the term “nostalgia” non-rigorously, so as to put legs on the discussion and help indicate what it is about and how and where its dissection is to proceed. The next goal, then, is to develop a comprehensive, more refined definition of nostalgia that is acceptable to most readers. Pursuing this goal requires the next several subsections to follow. Howard (2012) observes such a need for a more rigorous definition than the miscellany of definitions in common use and attempts a more refined understanding of the term. He suggests that nostalgia need not involve comparisons between present and past, the latter the more desirable, nor must it be in such control by the agent. Rather, very brief, involuntary “Proustian” moments (sometimes abbreviated P when context allows), in which the past may or may not be good or bad are better typifying of what nostalgia involves.<sup>2</sup> But further discussion reveals that the Proustian may not be the most typifying of the phenomenon as Howard considers it.

I suggest that the best way to continue refining the definition would be to examine a number of different usages of the term and examine how or whether these resonate with closely related terms such as “fond memory”, “recall”, “memorialize”, “reminisce”, and “ruminate”. I thence provide some situations that an agent *X* experiences and, to modify Dennett's phrase (2013), pump the intuition for whether the situation is indeed a bona fide state of nostalgia or actually a related concept.

---

<sup>2</sup> More on Proustian moments, as Howard describes, is to come.

The overall assumption in the following exercise is that nostalgia as a purported emotion most basically is homesickness. From that understanding stems nostalgia as most commonly assumed today – as a longing not merely a remoteness in space but also, more importantly, in time. With either of these, we should consider, “Is the experience in question one of nostalgia or of something else, according to the three common, preliminary notions of nostalgia”?

*Examples and candidate cases of nostalgia considered*

This section considers several candidate notions of nostalgia experienced by agent X, followed by assessments of whether these are *bona fide* nostalgia.

1. Many years into adulthood, X finds that the first year in high school – eYear-1 Magic’, she dubs it – was the best year of life so far. She had discovered music, practicing piano hours a day, and outdoor sports such as weeklong hiking. An inexplicable development in a romantic relationship ended that excellent year. But she can readily bring up scenes from it, which can often soothe her, suggesting life is not always bad. Among all the dozens of music pieces she learned during that year, hearing or playing them in her head evokes bliss.

2. At university, X made a friend, among many others, to whom she was particularly drawn. But inexplicably they drifted apart and lost contact. She often recalls scenes experienced with this friend. Does she long to see this person? Not obviously. She does often regret the loss (regret serving as a kind of counter-nostalgia).

3. X readily admits that many events and time periods after graduating were unpleasant, to the point of emotional pain – even physical, if she includes illness resulting from stresses. But memories that arose during this period, sometimes by her deliberate recall, included some pleasurable. One such instance was the travelling Impressionist exhibit at the local museum. These were often so poignant, she can hold onto them only as a bittersweet.

4. X, a journalist, was once assigned to a war-torn zone. One force caught her and tortured her. Anytime this memory is spurred, she does not quite experience the physical pain. She strives all she can to turn off the memory. Even flashes of the experience are painful.

5. When first imprisoned, in the smelly dark room, not yet knowing she would be tortured, she so desired to be home she experienced severe abdominal pain.

6. The torturers sometimes played a certain song; and during the process of her release, this music had been playing. The music seems liberating when it occurs to her or she hears it.



7. X likes to turn off the lights, close the window blinds and play recordings of music from the decade of the 2000's. During that period, Obama was elected and, she imagines, what with Occupy Wall Street and such social and political causes, those years were exhilarating. At the time, she had been too caught up in personal turmoil to participate.

8. Music comes up in X's head so often she cannot control it but wishes she could. Particularly annoying are songs that she never liked but that seep into her brain because so often heard in the street. The sad songs' intrusions are especially unappreciated when they flash uninvited in her ear's deepest parts and sometimes return all day.

These few examples should suffice for initial determining which are cases of nostalgia and which are not. To start with (1): It is not at all evident that X *must* devalue all the years except eYear-1 Magice in order to nourish fond memories of that year. That is, the alleged time-comparison character of nostalgia is not a necessary trait thereof but is incidental, depending on the case. Nostalgia is certainly not required in this case. X could consider Year-1 Magic as a favorite year without having to judge the others. Say she took the Eternal Sunshine pill and memories of all the other years disappeared. She could still be as strongly attached to Year-1 Magic as ever. By contrast, her fond memory of Year-1 Magic need not all be confined to an involuntary Proustian flash of a past experience that is good in itself whether or not that experience was good. In X's case of Year-1 Magic, she can readily call it up at will and linger on it for much, much more than a flash. (She does have some regret about that year, as she abandoned music for a more secure job future in journalism, but this regret does not alter her particular relation to that year.)

Example (2) concerns an experience many of us may have, explaining in part the appeal of social-media platforms: missing long-estranged friends. At least two questions arise: Does "missing" mean "desiring to see again"? And does one have nostalgia for a person, in contrast with a place and time period? Thus, one may reminisce favorably about a person in one's life but currently absent, yet not want that person to reenter one's life, for any of various reasons: These may include embarrassment for letting the time lapse or fear the person has flourished but one has not oneself. Reminiscence of this sort may be at work here, not nostalgia.

Number (3) brings in the apparent fact that past experiences are of potentially mixed quality, even when synchronic. Synchronic manifold experiences are common throughout a day. One may be strolling, appreciating a colorful sky, while worrying about how to pay a bill. X may long replay the memory of the sky and the stroll that day, while the desperate worry about bill-

paying gets rolled into a mush of bad memories. Diachronic experiences are those that follow, perhaps with other experiences, but at least through time. Thus, X may experience and later recall a series of events that followed one after the other. This example candidate case does seem to qualify as nostalgia, in that, by the process of extruding the favorable part of the memory and leaving the unfavorable to the dregs, there comes to be a seamless past for which to long.

The fourth example invokes a challenge to the notion that good or bad experiences can, after time, be recalled for the pleasure of the recall (as in a Proustian moment). X's experience in this torture was so horrid that even a Proustian flash of it cannot direct and influence the process of the flash. Simply, the terrible experience itself is beyond redemption.

Example (5) is of X in the prison before torture, so tormented by the prospect that she experiences classic homesickness. It is not merely missing or longing for home but has become physical illness. It is hard to accept that, given such dire conditions, even a pointillistic Proustian moment involving it would bring pleasure.

X's experience with the recall of the song with multiple associations, in Example (6), is a more plausible case where recall of a bad circumstance may elicit some pleasure. The song was played not only when she was in prison but as she was liberated from it. X may readily find the music upon leave-taking triumphed over her experience of it while in jail. (Compare snake venom which, when applied medicinally, may triumph over the poison.) More broadly one may find that multiply associated experiences, such as upon parting jail, may more likely be pleasing upon recall, if some of the associations are not as harsh as the experiences in Example 4.

Example (7), with X immersing herself in the culture particular to an earlier decade, is a case of classic contemporary, non-homesickness nostalgia. Still, it is appropriate to ask whether this example is indeed such a case. Here are some possible interpretations of Example (7): It is merely of an act of imagination. Or, X does not actually long to go back somehow to the era or long for it to reach forward out of the past to enter present time, so her recalling just may not be nostalgia. Or, nostalgia need not always require longing. Yet, the case does look much like social (or individual) occasions of nostalgia. While it does involve imagination, like such alleged nostalgia it involves too much immersion in that past culture to be mere imagination. There then remains a suggestion that, despite common understandings, nostalgia just may not necessitate longing.

Example (8) brings into question whether flash, pointillistic, Proustian memories can be good even if the experience remembered is not good at all. X

## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

finds that the bad memories do not improve just because they appeared in a Proustian flash memory.

This final example could be followed by more, but limiting them to eight simplifies the discussion.

### *Discussion of the eight examples of memory experiences*

A number of issues and questions start to arise from these examples, if in no particular order, as they draw on the example set.

- A. How does nostalgia differ, if it does, from calling up a fond memory?
- B. Is “longing” or “missing” necessary for nostalgia, and is “missing” the same as “desiring to see again”?
- C. Considering it is nigh apodictic that nostalgia concerns the past, how, when, or where does an experience fall from the present and into the past (so to allow nostalgia)?
- D. Must nostalgia be spontaneous, involuntary flash “P” memories, or may it be voluntary and extended?
- E. Must nostalgia require a normative “time comparison” (as Howard 2012 names it) (or “TC”) although he contends it is not necessary to nostalgia between present and past?
- F. P flashes allow that we could enjoy looking back on exceedingly bad times; but can we really savor a dreadful experience merely because its flashing into consciousness per se is enjoyable – i.e., is the flashing surprise what is enjoyed, not the past experience?
- G. Is it possible we have a nostalgia for a person, or is it events associated with a person that actually pertain?
- H. If events during a period can be strands of good and bad tangled diachronically, when one has nostalgia for that time, is the bad really longed for?
- J. (I skip from “I” to “J” so as to avoid confusion with the personal pronoun “I”.) What about regret, especially for an action one chose not to pursue/ Is regret a type of longing for the past (which one would want to change) thus possibly nostalgic?

Other pertinent questions can be brought up, but again a limited number suffices in working toward a workable definition of nostalgia.

Start with the issue raised in A. above: How does nostalgia differ from recalling fond memories? Many people would probably answer that nostalgia involves longing or pining for the past experience, as to return to it literally. The agent desires to ‘relive’ the past somehow. Recalling fond memories, by contrast,

may involve longing and time comparison but need not. Indeed, recalling fond memories while longing may just be nostalgia, whereas recalling fond memories without longing is not, is something else.

However, by the issue raised in B, nostalgia just may need not involve desire to relive the past. Time-comparison (TC) views of nostalgia, in which the past is better than the present involve this desire to relive the past. But the Proustian (P) view, as Howard (2012) describes, may not require such longing. Similarly for “missing”: Does missing someone entail desire to see the person again? I believe a Proustian would say “No” and time-comparison would say “Yes”. The question then is, which of these views of nostalgia best represents it?

D, then, directly asks which of these two views is more accurate. Toward that answer, E inquires whether nostalgia must have a normative component or standard, specifically a TC by which one assesses the earlier time as better. A challenge for TC is that it remains unclear just *what* is better in the past. Every single thing that was involved in the world in, say, 1995? Or only a few specific matters pertinent to the agent, such as the value of the dollar, the available chocolate, the amount of love people gave one another in the past? This problem does not preempt time-comparison views. Like many emotions, the emotion involved in longing just may not be susceptible to attack on its veracity or feasibility. Thus, doubting that nostalgia can be normative does not undermine the time-comparison view.

In further trying to answer D, F asks how well the Proustian view holds up to investigation into which of the two views more closely describes nostalgia. The Proustian view maintains that bona fide nostalgia consists in unexpected, involuntary, veritably instantaneous recalls to a past event or situation. In the well-known opening scene of Proust’s *Swann’s Way* (1932b), the narrator upon eating a tea cake has a flashback to a particular occasion of sitting in a drawing room as a child. Howard (2012) has contended that it is this spontaneous, involuntary act of the recall that constitutes the nostalgia and its pleasure, not the pleasure or displeasure experienced at the time recalled. Thus, even bad times can be recalled with the agent’s responding positively because it is *that act of recall* (not the subject – the past experience – of the act) that is pleasurable.

However, for one matter, it is not convincing that solely the act of recall is what is pleasurable, regardless of the quality of the earlier experiences involved. Surely, some bad experiences may seem, on hindsight, not as bad as when they occurred. A phenomenon similar to a “comedy effect” may be operative, whereby the moviegoer enjoys seeing events which are painful to experience for real while hilarious in the movie’s context. (Refer to the Keystone Cops, Charlie Chaplin, the

### *Nostalgia Vindicated*

Marx Brothers, or Woody Allen for examples.) But, as (4) above indicates, many experiences are just too awful to sustain this Proustian view for all nostalgia. A further matter is why exactly voluntary, long-savored memories should be discounted as bona fide nostalgia. Certainly, for cultural nostalgia, as in 1990's nostalgia parties, the experience seems to be more than a few, unprovoked emotional flashes but also a continued interpersonally triggered emotion commonly of longing. The nostalgia of homesickness, whether in unprovoked moments or in ongoing longing, seems hardly a matter of P flashes: If such homesick flashes did happen to the agent, it hardly seems that supposed pleasure of recall trumps the sickness or that a flurry of flashes of the long-away home would cure it. As a final matter, there is insufficient justification for dismissing out-of-hand the experiences, as well as emotions, people have upon deliberate recall, as in some nostalgia.

So far, it appears that neither the TC nor the P view convincingly captures the general understanding of nostalgia – whatever exactly that “general” understanding is. When one faces such an obscure, subjective, and primarily introspectively ascertained term, one can only proceed with vague assumptions, proffered hunches and approximations, searches for inconsistencies or other problems with current theoretical views, and learn as one can from dead-ends.

The issue G above, asking if a person per se can be an object of nostalgia, in contrast with events and experiences, may not be germane in this section but is worth a look. One general difference between people and past experienced events is the latter are irretrievable, whereas the person, if still alive, is at least theoretically, and in many cases actually, retrievable. Certainly, people over time change. Y now may differ from Y twenty years ago, and understandably X may be nostalgic for the Y of twenty years ago. Still, much of the originally known Y remains, much less irretrievable than, say, the high school farewell dance they attended back then. Now, if longing-for means “desiring to see again” and Y is still alive, then the nostalgic longing is superfluous. X can simply go visit Y. If X still longs for Y as they sit at the café, while Y retains all the characteristics that originally charmed X, I suggest it must be more of the events, the dance, the café, that X longs for rather than for Y. Y is retrievable, but the events are not.

Can this perspective on how nostalgia as pertains to past events be useful in assessing both the TC and the P? I conjecture that both views would have difficulty with the idea that past events or circumstances, not persons, are the object of nostalgia. By the P view, time comparison does not apply: What counts solely is the pointillistic involuntary act of a recall: That recall is good in itself, whatever the quality of the experience recalled. The flash may concern about any

type of object in memory, whether event, circumstance, or person. But if a person is involved, there need be no judgment on that person, such as assuming she or he has worsened according to some norm. By the TC view, a person may be involved as object of nostalgia, but because of the time-comparison, the past person would, by some norm, implicitly be worse now compared with before. So in the TC view there is an implicit judgment of the person as nostalgia-object. I am not contending that a normative standard must be evoked or implied in nostalgia, whether the P view may say “the normative issue is moot in defining nostalgia of any kind”, or the TC view would say, “the normative issue is pivotal in nostalgia for individuals”. Thus, the two views remain distinguished one from the other as to their perspective on persons as objects of nostalgia. Still we need a way of determining which of the two is the more faithful to “nostalgia”.

Issue H brings up the problem of whether experienced events evoked in presumed nostalgia can be of mixed quality – good and bad at once. On a moment’s reflection it is evident that experienced events are at times mixed in terms of the positive or negative emotional response. One may attend a joyous party at the same time one endures news of a loved one’s death. A single dance could be both celebratory and mournful. Later recall reinvokes some invigorating moments at the party that have no taint of the bad part. By the TC view, the act of (nostalgic) recall may indeed wash away much of that taint. But also, the bad aspect of the recalled event, such as the bad news, may be so persistent as to overwhelm and drown out the assumed comparison by which the past is better than the present. (In fact, by the time that event becomes the object of nostalgia, the person may have so coped with the death that the present is comparatively not all that worse than the past event.) The TC view does not hold well in accounting for mixed experiences. The P view, though, is unfettered by this problem: Whether the event experiences were good or bad or both, what counts is not that quality of experience but instead the involuntary act of flash recall.

The final issue here, J, concerning regret, may be only tangential to nostalgia. But regret concerns a longing *involving* the past: The agent desires the possibility of acting other than how one in fact did act. Yet, regret would mean that the past event was not good and so not better than the present. It may even mean that the past was worse because it started the chain of events that led to the present, damaged period. The P view would again be value-neutral to the past event, as what matters is its recall.

*Nostalgia Vindicated*

*Summation and synthesis of what is involved in nostalgia*

This section has explored several issues that arise in answering its questions about characterizing nostalgia. The primary focus has been whether major views of nostalgia, the time-comparative TC and the Proustian P, are sufficiently consistent with the common understanding of the phenomenon dubbed “nostalgia” – whatever exactly is that phenomenon – in the effort to narrow down what is involved in it, toward making a workable and widely acceptable definition. This subsection’s exploration can be summed with some extrapolation:

- Nostalgia differs from mere recall of fond memories. Fond memories are of events that, when they occurred, were experienced as good. While nostalgic recall may involve these, it need not.

- By TC, memories, fond or not, nostalgic or not, may involve longing – specifically the cloying, wistful desire to relive the past. Nostalgic episodes specifically involve longing and may concern past events that were generally not good at the time. By P, a nostalgic episode need not involve such longing and can be emotionally unattached from the recalled event.

- Consistently with TC and P, an agent may miss the past, that is, like to recall it, but need not long for its return.

- TC requires a standard by which the past is assessed as good or bad, while P requires no such standard, as the mere act of recall is a good.

- Consistently with TC and P, the past bad, from the present vantage, need not now be experienced as bad.<sup>13</sup>

It is useful to put this summary in a chart to note better how TC and P differ.

**Chart 1.**

*Comparison of nostalgia according to the time-comparison (TC) vs. the Proustian (P) theory of nostalgia.*

	TC	P
Nostalgia requires memory (the past) to be fond?	No, need not be; fond memories may induce longing, whereas nostalgic memories are longed-for.	Memory need not be longed- for, for it to be nostalgic.
A nostalgic agent may miss the past but not long for it?	Yes.	Yes.

<sup>3</sup> If events during a period can be strands of good and bad tangled diachronically, when one has nostalgia for that time, it is not apparent the bad is really longed for.

Nostalgia needs a standard to weigh good vs. bad past?	Yes.	No. Just the act of recall is good.
The nostalgic past need not now be bad?	Yes.	Yes.

---

A curious finding is that on two of the four matters, both TC and P agree. On the first issue about fond memory, the two theories differ as to whether a fond memory need be longed-for to count as nostalgia. The reason for this discrepancy can be accounted for by the third matter and why TC and P differ. They differ because P's central concern is that it is the act of recall that counts for nostalgia, whatever the quality of the content of the original experience concerned. Thus, the reason for P's and TC's difference about the longing-for in nostalgia (per first matter) is that, for P, the quality of that original experience does not matter, and so that memory need not be longed-for.

Thus, this difference between TC and P boils down to, *for P, the act of recalling is what is good about nostalgia*, whatever the quality of experience recalled; whereas *for TC, what counts is the quality that the nostalgia-experience applies to the experience recalled*.

Upon this analysis, it becomes conceivable to reconcile TC and P theories, at least to the extent provided so far. Can this one last matter, summed in the previous paragraph, also lead to further reconciliation? Perhaps one theory can entail the other on this matter. P looks to the spontaneous act of willing as the measure of nostalgia's content. TC looks to the quality (decreased in the present compared with past) of the presumably original experience as the measure of nostalgia's content. Here are two concerns in attempting to reconcile the two theories:

(1) Can we plausibly conjecture that a TC episode requires a P to the extent that that spontaneous flash is the necessary basis for all nostalgic episodes? The P is the short fuse leading to the explosion of associated memories for TC episodes, and that explosion is what the nostalgic agent nurtures via what has thence become voluntary recall. A critic of this outlook may say, "Perhaps some P episodes lead to TC, but a P episode need not have such entailment to be valid in itself". That P outcome would be the source of subsequent TC episodes, although a P episode need not lead to a TC.

(2) The converse may hold that P episodes require a TC episode to the extent that the TC circumscribes the area within which a P randomly appears. Thus, an



## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

agent may willfully invoke and savor old memories of serving in the army, and that area of memory-interest is what sets off the fuse to P nostalgia episodes.

I find the latter of these two concerns implausible. One point of the P theory is that these spontaneous memories generally come seemingly out of nowhere. Therein lies the strength of such recall. In Proust's story (1932b), Marcel's madeleine was especially powerful because he had not been savoring memories of the old drawing room where the tea cake landed him. The former conjecture that a TC requires a P is also problematic. Indeed, there may be occasions when a P nostalgia prompts an agent to explore through memories associated with the prompting P episode. Voluntariness in this realm of mental prompts is as messy as in other mental realms. But one could also generate a recall through one's own facts about oneself *that* a certain period of one's life is a good place to begin a lengthy nostalgic recall. A P episode would then not be serving as a prompt for the TC episode.

It does not appear, then, by this rapid analysis, that entailment, mutual or not, between TC theories and P theories, can serve as a means finally to reconcile these two into a single theory. Perhaps there are other potential means toward this reconciliation, but for now I have no further suggestions. However, having weighed these two sets of theories, we may have enough material with which to make an initial effort of describing nostalgia and what it consists in.

### *Beyond the Tale of Two Theories: A Working Definition*

This tale of two theories suggests at least one possibility: Perhaps there is more than one basic way that nostalgia manifests, neither merely as P nor as TC. One type of nostalgia manifests in an agent's consciously knowing which parts or period of life went quite favorably, and thereby ready to recall scenes from that period upon demand. These recalled memories need not entail that the present is worse than earlier. The present may be going just as well as the recalled period. Similarly may an agent, with a list of recorded favorite music, decide which piece to play. Another type of nostalgia manifests in the Proustian involuntary, spontaneous, pointillistic memory, like a snapshot. The agent is actually more of a patient, at the mercy of the brain, but the brief recall is in itself not bad, even if the recalled memory "snapshot's" period were bad. Yet another possible manifestation of nostalgia is based on standards which the agent uses to compare the present unfavorably with certain periods of the past and thereby vaguely longs for that past over the present as if it could be experienced now. Wistfulness to the point of cloying is essential to such nostalgia. At one point in medical history, such nostalgia was seen as a medical illness. (Boym, 2002; Illsbruck, 2012; Burton,

2020) Its relation to another manifestation of nostalgia, homesickness, is apparent on its impossible-to-please wistfulness. At least homesickness can conceivably be assuaged by the agent's returning home. But due to time's linearity, it is not possible to return to one's past in flesh and blood, as cloying comparative nostalgia seeks. A fifth type of nostalgic manifestation is public nostalgia, as in nostalgia parties. While this type may be the most widely known, typical or salient, it seems to be an amalgam of other types, insofar as it appears to be a matter of sharing with others one's private nostalgia.

If we can accept that these five types of manifestation of nostalgia are faithful to the phenomenon, then we may propose what runs through them all and unifies them as "nostalgia". Evidently, they all concern the past, primarily one's own but possibly that of others. Moreover, they ascribe a positive value to the recall of the past: The experience of the recall in the present is pleasurable or at least valued positively, whether or not the experience recalled were bad when experienced in the past. In some cases, the nostalgia may work as a paint-job prettifying the past experience; but to experience nostalgia, the paint-job need not be in order. The original experience recalled may be quite consistent with the good quality of the general present. Comparison of the general present to a supposedly rosier past is only optional in nostalgia.

From these considerations, we may define nostalgia as follows:

*Nostalgia is an agent's present recall of past experiences, which experience upon the recalling is favorably valued, whatever the quality of the original experience recalled.*

I believe that this definition is consistent with the five types of manifestation of nostalgia given above. I also anticipate that in all sectors among those investigating nostalgia this definition will not be unanimously favored. Particularly, the role of positive comparison of the past with the present is here shifted to optional, not essential, and those who maintain that nostalgia must favor past over present may object to this definition.

*One alternative expansion of the definition*

*Nostalgia is an emotional phenomenon involving a subject's recalled past directly, either as first-hand experienced circumstances or derivative second-hand experiences usually, perhaps not necessarily, compared with the present circumstances, such that:*

- *The subject fondly experiences those past experiences;*
- *The longing irretrievability of the past is necessary to the nostalgia (a mere fond memory's irretrievability is of neutral affect);*

## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

- *The past may be “recaptured” as Proust (1932a) put it, but (re-)capturing that past – spontaneously for Proust – is not reexperiencing it, in that;*

- *The nostalgia may be either deliberately or spontaneously evoked.*

This alternative, if lengthy, is not inconsistent with the brief definition. Given that brief definition, other alternatives are possible.

### *Persistent criticism of nostalgia qua nostalgia*

Nostalgia often faces a presumably well-deserved bad reputation, so bad that many observers would maintain it is not worth discussing, certainly not seriously. At the very best, in such a view, nostalgia can be seen as having one practical advantage: entrepreneurs can use it to turn a profit and possibly boost the economy. Otherwise, nostalgia is a mood or emotion that only involves or leads to cloying wistfulness and impossible yearning that can damage character and undermine virtue. A few writers (Davis, 1979; Hart, Jameson, 1991) have examined nostalgia, prominently from a phenomenological perspective. A common perspective is, indeed as mentioned above; that nostalgia is socially constructed. Capitalism and its presumed manipulation of the consumer’s personality and its development, is often seen as a source of nostalgia and its unsavory nature and prevalence. I aim to step back from the social-constructive and economically manipulated aspect to nostalgia and inquire whether, instead, nostalgia is more basic in humans, seen across cultures, and more individually effected. From this perspective, nostalgia may indeed descend into market-manipulated, political, even sickly longing for a past that never existed in the manner presumed.

Nevertheless, even granted that sharp criticism, nostalgia may have a positive side, if finely tweezed from squeamish nostalgic overgrowth, compensating for the near impossibility of anyone’s living in any “present”. It may even more deeply aid agents in piecing together and appreciating the fragments of life-experience as these pass into past tense, provide a more realized and coherent view of one’s life narrative, and with it agents may better grasp the ever-elusive, fleeting “present” for all the goodness it may carry.

### *Justifying Nostalgia as a Reasonably Derived, Even Positive Facet of Human Experience*

The argument herein is based on two contentions. One is that nostalgia is a result of human consciousness’ running “multiple drafts” of perceptual phenomena simultaneously, similarly to, if varying from, what Dennett (1991) has described

for consciousness. The second contention is that nostalgia may have derived from action of evolutionary selective forces.

To explore the first component: Consider how the senses steadily process information, which takes time, from microseconds to longer. Other brain processes, including visceral, cerebral, and emotional, are also digesting information. Each of these pathways are working at their own speed. Likely, no single overseer is timing these processes and insisting that visual information *V* must be processed and decoded as it occurs – and *seems* to occur – precisely simultaneously with aural information *A*. In fact, there seems to be no precise “simultaneity” of sensory phenomena. Furthermore, some of the sensory processes are so complex, operating unconsciously, that an agent may not become conscious of the phenomena until moments later. Thus, a noise may reach a listener, who does not piece together until much later that it was due to a trumpet played in a nearby cave. Other processes may take much longer, even days to be clarified, such as piecing together just whose face it was that one saw in a passing car. The brain’s processes have no single “present”. I propose that these sorts of time lapses are the sources of nostalgia: It arises from the manifold processes of piecing together information about what, among the sense perceptions, emotions, thoughts, hopes, and other phenomena, was happening in and to the agent during some time-interval.

This position needs further explanation. I do not deny we can construe and make sense of phenomena within milliseconds of the stimulations as they occur. Rather, over time, we may – given some memory loss in the intervals – better construe and make sense of past phenomena, among the ever-growing contexts for information. Nostalgia is then a result of a gradual, continuous development of individual’s processing information. This fact points to the multi-tasked nature of individuals’ experience. Rarely does nostalgia develop after extremely brief intervals such as seconds or even minutes. Nostalgia commonly starts to creep in only after a sufficient level of information processing slowly drifts from an overall “present” mode to a “past”. Perhaps early on – at least several days’ lapse after particularly poignant events – one may start longing for that past.<sup>4</sup> In general, it seems that nostalgia grows over years, even getting stronger as years pass.

My second proposal is that nostalgia may actually be beneficial, if it is not overly indulged in, and possibly have selective advantages. If the past, often despite its travails, colors itself in our minds as actually quite good, then there is

---

<sup>4</sup> If events during a period can be strands of good and bad tangled diachronically, when one has nostalgia for that time, it is not apparent the bad is really longed for.

## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

generally something good about one's life. Consider hypothetical groups of people who had no favorable moods concerning the past. They could well, upon trying times, fall into such despair as to be dysfunctional. By contrast, a group with a strong, favorable connection with and fond memory of the past could be more fortified during trying times, with greater hope. Nostalgia could then be adaptive, with strong naturally selective advantages for those who have a positive view on the unfolding of their lives, leaving these individuals a greater likelihood of arriving at adulthood and providing for viable offspring.

Burton (2020) offers another angle on the adaptiveness of nostalgia:

*Our everyday is humdrum, often even absurd. Nostalgia can lend us much-needed context, perspective, and direction, reminding and reassuring us that [in] our life... there have been, and will once again be, meaningful moments and experiences... The hauntings of times gone by, and the imaginings of times to come, strengthen us in lesser times. (n/p)*

This discussion of nostalgia's positive adaptive nature has a normative element. Criticisms of nostalgia or at least of its self-indulgent aspect hold that, whether or not nostalgia can have any good, it can certainly have some bad – morally bad. (Similarly with, say, opium, the problem is not the drug but its misuse.) The normative element is thereby invoked, but the possible adaptive potential for nostalgia makes a case that nostalgia need not be normatively reprehensible, at least when experienced in moderate doses. Such a naturalistic apology for nostalgia can seem to fall into the drawbacks of naturalistic morality, by which anything that was once adaptive and naturally selected for in human evolution could be ammunition for justifying war, even murder or rape if these acts ended up increasing adaptivity. However, the adaptation argument defending experience of nostalgia from normative attacks hardly compares with justifying what are commonly considered heinous crimes. If at worst nostalgia were induced by a type of bodily produced drug, such as endorphins, that can be abused, the normative issue is about how to use nostalgia, not whether any experiencing of nostalgia is bad across the board. Furthermore, the Dennett-like “multiple drafts” theory of nostalgia's ontology in the need to process vital information over long time periods implies: Nostalgia is a regular, possibly even inexorable, effect of the way human neural-processing works. Even if nostalgia can be abused, fighting it as if any taint of it will morally ruin an agent may be as damaging as indulging in it to point of losing touch with reality.

To sum this section and this part of the article's argument: Justifying Nostalgia as a Reasonably Derived, Even Positive Facet of Human Experience.

Nostalgia can be reasonably, cogently justified as an empirical fact about human beings' mental and emotional processes, with possible adaptive benefits and positive experiences for agents. Without deriving an "ought" from a "good", one can plausibly claim that it is incumbent upon normative arguments against (indulging in) nostalgia to provide an account of why nostalgia in general is not morally commendable.

*Summation up to This Point and Remaining Problems, Questions Concerning Nostalgia*

The discussion so far has striven to offer at the least a coherent perspective on nostalgia as an emotional, social, political, and political phenomenon and to begin to unify these perspectives. Many matters remain to challenge this effort, and among these I offer the following as closing meditations.

WE WERE ALWAYS MORE INNOCENT...

There is a less empirical, more phenomenal account for how the ontology of nostalgia arises: via our loss of a sense of innocence as our individual lives proceed. I allude to William Blake's two matching sets of poems: the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*. Humans are born into a state of absolute innocence, completely dependent upon others to sustain them and unable to do harmful acts. They, though, can be harmed. As they grow older over the weeks, months, years, they slowly lose that vulnerability and innocence. They gradually pass from Blake's suggested state of innocence into the that of experience. They become capable of hurting both others and themselves. We discern, as we go on, that with the more experience we gain, the less innocent we are. Looking on the past, from this perspective, we were always more innocent than now. The past takes on the patina of time's earlier innocence.

This human characteristic does not morally justify an agent's dwelling excessively in the past but further explains why we may have a tendency to nostalgia – an explanation that may indicate how we may find the golden mean between indulgence and callousness. On the one hand, the callous approach to our ever-receding innocence would hold that taking the fact of that ever-receding innocence too seriously can only lead to self-pity and pampering. Humans long to be innocent. That state-of-living is more carefree, less burdened with fret, fear, and worry (even if experience is needed, at a practical level, for sustaining a life). But to evade the cloying sentiment, one must be very strict, to overcome and quash these emotional responses, to not feel them because if allowed they are detrimental. On the other hand, agents who prefer to give full rein to the emotional responses readily fall into the trap of mollifying these emotions, pitying oneself

## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

because the world, life itself, has stolen one's innocence. The middle route may allow the sentimental desire for innocence but without giving it free rein or hardening oneself emotionally. The middle route of hardening oneself just enough not to indulge in innocence-nostalgia while allowing oneself just enough innocence-nostalgia not to be wholly hardened, is an extremely fine thread, if at all realizable.

### THE ASYMMETRY OF PAST AND PRESENT, AS IT PERTAINS TO NOSTALGIA

One cannot "hold onto" the present as one can the past, such as through memories. In the present too much is happening at once, distracting the ability to focus on the present as a singularity. (Again, consider the Dennett-like multiple drafts of active experiencing.) The past being done, much of (sensual, pictorial) memory is analogous to snapshots, which one can contemplate. But it is not clear that one can comparably contemplate such "snapshots" of the present (unless by some forms of meditation).

An emotion, once activated, continues until dissipation, as an ongoing present experience. To risk a truism: when an emotion is past, one no longer experiences it. Fear, for example, being an emotion, continues diachronically present until dissipating. An excessive emotional occurrence may be remembered *per se* but almost always without that same emotional experience of a present fear. A past emotional event may be "re-experienced" by remembrance without that fear. The remembered event then seems less menacing, and the other thoughts, sensations, sights and sounds can be "re-experienced" without fear's menace. Thus, the past sometimes seems more appealing than the more conflicted present. Moreover, a given object of nostalgia, such as a memory, need not always evoke nostalgia.

### MIXED EXPERIENCES OF GOOD AND BAD AT ONCE

It seems that nostalgias come in assortments, the past experienced rarely being all good or all bad (Wildschut *et al.*, 2008; Barcho, 2020a and 2020b). When one considers a nostalgia period N, it is often of mixed emotions. One may long for favorable parts of the experience while downplaying or ignoring the unfavorable parts. It seems these assorted periods can be partly explained like the Dennettian scenario for consciousness (as an illustration, with no intention to endorse his theory as valid for consciousness): Our nervous systems simply takes time to assimilate the many facets of experience.

Mixed experiences may well be common. Consider an interesting case of mixed experience, such as the agent X's challenge from "Year-1 Magic" (in § Examples of candidate cases). Recall, Year-1 Magic concerned the fact X found

one year in her past worthily deemed as by far the best, veritably perfect. X does not necessarily long to go back to that period but thinks back on it with a type of fondness, not really nostalgia. Peculiarly, X does not long to return to that excellent period. It is as if by being veritably perfect, the period was complete and needed no more work. It seems lesser periods were simply incomplete and kept striving to complete themselves, as via nostalgia.

Consider how issue J (of agent X's eight issues A, B; ... J in § Discussion of the eight examples), resolves or responds to the predicament: the possibility of regret. Regret concerns a longing *involving* the past, but the agent bootlessly longs for the possibility of acting other than how one in fact did act. Yet, regret would mean that the past event was not very good and so *not* better than the present. It may even mean that the past was worse because it started the chain of events that led to the present, far from perfect, period.

A more extreme kind of mixed experiences involves an agent who cannot bear to look back on the particular sort of pain experienced, with any fondness, as from torture, unjust incarceration, and other suffering.

#### MISSING, LONGING

“Missing” someone or something need not mean nostalgia. “Longing,” though, implies one desires the presence of a thing or person right now, in material reality, as to bring that person or object that has gone out of any timeframe and back into timeframe (i.e., the present) What is this longing, then? Does one really wish to fly back in time? Or is one simply imaging presumed scenes, tastes, smells, sounds? This question may be the core, hard nut surrounding nostalgia and what about it frustrates so many people, especially those who deride it or readily deplore its hold on a person as if it is nigh immoral. But cannot one be content with the imaginational result, knowing full well it is imagined?

The cloying sense of one's impossible reconciliation with the past may be another facet that frustrates many nostalgia commentators and critics. That cloying sense may constitute the core negative aspect and notoriety of nostalgia – *not* any dissatisfaction with the present. But the question remains whether the cloying is necessary to nostalgia.

To risk an analogy to love: An agent may love more than one person (of whatever sort of love, whether romantic, parental, platonic). Similarly an agent may be fond not only of the present but also many an imaged past.



## *Nostalgia Vindicated*

### *Further ramifications of nostalgia's definition*

Is simply enjoying the memory of an autobiographical period nostalgia? What seems to be crucial to nostalgia is that the experience is irretrievably in the past and is experienced as favorable or fond. The present experience with which it is contrasted need not be bad or worse than the “nostalgialized” experience. In fact, the experience may not require comparison with the past. And the experience may not need to be one’s own; One may feel nostalgic for an era before one was born, as via a film or an oral story. Yet this imagined era may be partly or wholly influenced by others, as in recordings of that era’s music or parties where the previous era’s customs such as clothes-wear and speech are imitated. Conceivably one can well be overall content with one’s own present situation but also have a longing for a past era distinct from mere fond memory. This is a core issue in positioning nostalgia among related phenomena. You may have nostalgia for the way, during a period, you had great conversations with friends at cafes (say, at the same time you were at a professional downturn). Is such an actual instance of nostalgia? or must nostalgia be broader-reaching than mere specific snippets of an era?

To dig deeper, can one make the present be as magical and wistful as nostalgia is about the past? Perhaps, if so, this prospect may promise to be one of the positive reasons for learning something from nostalgia.

Furthermore, as the Introduction broached, we should further consider whether one can have “nostalgia for the future”. It seems fondness must be about one’s experience – even if indirect experience as in an oral tale – and so arise from one’s experience or encounter with certain circumstances, not projections of how circumstances may turn out.

As a final note, taking a cue from the P perspective, one may be fond not merely for the imagined past but also for one’s own memories per se, whether of good or not-good periods of one’s life

### *Political nostalgia*

So far, this article has opened up ways for vindicating emotional, social, and biological nostalgia from charges of self-indulgence, removal from reality, waste of time, and weakening of moral fiber. Just getting to that point has taken most of the article. There remains the delicate issue of whether political nostalgia, which may be the most challenging type to vindicate; may be salvaged. Yet, political nostalgia may be the most important type of those covered here. It concerns a practical factor reaching far past mere (if intriguing) understanding. Instances of it

can markedly influence world history and world future. Routledge's 2017 article title, "Approach with Caution: Nostalgia Is a Potent Political Agent", is telling and represents a common worry. Similarly for Earle's 2019 "In Search of Lost Time: How Nostalgia Broke Politics".

As § below, Sources of Nostalgia, pointed out, many a political movement, notably in the past century, has drawn on political nostalgia – longing for a more glorious period of the nation's history. In stirring the citizenry's emotional outrage, the demagogue incites both national and international policies as culprits and seeks drastic changes to ameliorate the problem, especially by military aggression. Such has been seen under the rules of Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, and Putin, as well as lesser demagogues such as Reagan, Trump, Le Pen, and Modi. As Atia and Davies (2020) write, "If nostalgia is dangerous on an individual level, its political impact can be much more threatening: The politics of nostalgia are often reactionary at best" (p. 181). More ominously, the same authors quote Spitzer (1991):

*... nostalgia might not only be seen as a "betrayal of history" ... but a betrayal of memory itself – a debilitating imposition upon our consciousness of the past". (p. 181) Equally ominous is Cameron and Gatewood's (1994) diagnosis that nostalgia "sometimes [is] symptomatic of a more general crisis in cultural confidence. (quoted in Atia & Davies, 2010, p. 182).*

*Must* nostalgia; when political actors appeal to it, lead to nefarious results? Certainly, the past regained can readily lead to memory's distorting the past. Particularly when agents have not experienced the past appealed to, it can easily give way to rhetorical manipulation. No Italian citizen that Mussolini appealed had lived in ancient Rome.

Yet, there is possibly a source of emotions that would both rely partly on memory but also on a unifying spirit running through the nation which could help purge the dubious emotions of demagogues. Thus, Nussbaum in her 2013 *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. She asks readers to appreciate how pivotally emotions affect political life. Pointedly we should be aware how we may best gear our emotions for political liberalism. Politics depends upon our emotions; *we neglect them to our detriment* lest demagogues commandeer them over a populace who are, largely, dangerous: their emotions' servant.

For Nussbaum, political emotions per se are good, tempered by liberality; including patriotism and national affection, which includes the nation's history, and thereby admitting the nation's faults, comprising its current faults. Following such a program for political emotion, the rational and irrational temper one another. Nostalgia, then, should be largely out of its dangerous territory. Political

nostalgia, in this scenario, should then not be scorned nor allowed free rein. It could do as good for the nation and citizenry as biological, social, and general emotional nostalgia do for the individual, when tempered.

Of all the outstanding matters covered in this section, political nostalgia is the most important and urgent.

**References:**

1. Atia, N., & Davies J. (2010). Nostalgia and the shapes of history. *Memory Studies*, 3(3), 181-186.
2. Batcho, K. I. (1995). Nostalgia: A psychological perspective. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 80, 131-143.
3. Batcho, K. I. (2020a.) When nostalgia tilts to sad: Anticipatory and personal nostalgia. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11.
4. Batcho, K. I. (2020b). Nostalgia: The paradoxical bittersweet emotion. *Psychology*, 25 December. DOI: 10.4324/9780429287602-1.
5. Blake, W. (1972). Songs of innocence and of experience. In A. Kazin (Ed.), *The Portable Blake* (pp. 83-122). Viking.
6. Bowen, E. (1932). *To the north*. Avon.
7. Boym, S. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. Basic Books.
8. Burton, N. (2020). The meaning of nostalgia: The psychology and philosophy of nostalgia. *Psychology Today*, 24 March. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-see/201411/the-meaning-nostalgia>.
9. Cameron, C. M., & Gatewood, J. B. (1994). The authentic interior: Questing Geminschaft in post-industrial society. *Human Organization*, 53(1), 21-32.
10. Casey, E. S. (1987). The world of nostalgia. *Man and World*, 20, 36-38.
11. Davis, F. (1979). *Yearning for yesterday. A sociology of nostalgia*. The Free Press.
12. Dennett, D. C. (1991). *Consciousness explained*. Little, Brown.
13. Dennett, D. C. (2013). *Intuition pumps and other tools for thinking*. New York: W. W. Norton.
14. Earle, S. (2021). In search of lost time: How nostalgia broke politics. *The New Statesman* 7 June. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/06/search-lost-time-how-nostalgia-broke-politics>.
15. Eske, T. (2005). Presence of the past: Nostalgia as an aesthetic category. *Bigaku*, 56(2), 1-13.
16. Fuentenebro, de D. F., & Valiente, C. (2014). Nostalgia: A conceptual history. *History of Psychiatry*, 25(4), 404-411. DOI:10.1177/0957154X14545290.

17. Grainge, P. (2002). *Monochrome memories: Nostalgia and style in retro America*. Praeger.
18. Hart, James G. (1973). Towards a phenomenology of nostalgia. *Man and World*, 6(4), 397-420.
19. Hirsch, A. R. (1992). Nostalgia: A neuropsychiatric understanding. In J. F. Sherry Jr. & B. Sternthal (Eds.), *NA - Advances in Consumer Research* (Vol. 19, pp. 390-395). Association for Consumer Research.
20. Howard, S. A. (2012). Nostalgia. *Analysis*, 72(4), 641-650.
21. Illbruck, H. (2012). *Nostalgia: Origins and ends of an unenlightened disease*. Northwestern University Press.
22. Ludden, D. (2020). The psychology of nostalgia: New studies show why we reminisce about the past. *Psychology Today*, Posted March 2. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-apes/202003/the-psychology-nostalgia>.
23. Malpas J. (2011). Philosophy's nostalgia. In H. Kenaan & I. Ferber (Eds.), *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking. Contributions To Phenomenology* (vol. 63, pp. 87-101). Springer.
24. Moran, R. (1994). The expression of feeling in imagination. *Philosophical Review*, 103, 75-106.
25. Newman, D. B., Sachs, M. E., Stone, A. A., & Schwarz, N. (2020). Nostalgia and wellbeing in daily life: An ecological validity perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Personality, Processes and Individual Differences*, 118, 325-347.
26. Prinz, J. (2008). *The emotional construction of morals*. Oxford University Press.
27. Prinz, J. (2012). *Beyond human nature: How culture and experience shape the human mind*. Norton.
28. Proust, M. (1932a). *The past recaptured*. F. A. Blossom (Trans.). Random House.
29. Proust, M. (1932b). *Swann's way*. Scott-Moncrieff (Trans.). Random House.
30. Reynolds, S. (2011). *Retromania: Pop culture's addiction to its own past*. Faber & Faber.
31. Ricœur, P. (2006). *Memory, history, forgetting*. University of Chicago Press.
32. Routledge, C., Arndt, J., Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., & Hart, C. M. (2011). The past makes the present meaningful: Nostalgia as an existential resource. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(3), 638-652. doi:10.1037/a0024292. PMID 21787094.

33. Salazar, A. (2019). Nostalgia: What it is, why we feel it, and how to overcome it. *Your Brain. Health*, March 22. <https://yourbrain.health/nostalgia/>.
34. Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., Jamie, A., & Routledge, C. (2008). Nostalgia: past, present, and future. *Current Directions and Psychological Research*, 17(5), 304-307.
35. Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., Cheung, Y.-W., Routledge, C., Hepper, E. G., Arndt, J., Vail, K., Zhou, X., Brackstone, K., & Vingerhoets, J. J. M. (2016). Nostalgia fosters self-continuity: Uncovering the mechanism (social connectedness) and consequence (eudaimonic well-being). *Emotion*, 16(4), 524-539. <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/~crsi/Sedikides%20et%20al.%202016%20Emotion.pdf>.
36. Spitzer, L. (1999). Back through the future: Nostalgic memory and critical memory in a refuge from Nazism. In B. Mieke, J. Crewe & L. Spitzer (Eds.), *Acts of memory: Cultural recall in the present* (pp. 87-104). NH: University Press of New England.
37. Stern, B. B. (2013). Historical and personal nostalgia in advertising text: The fin de siècle effect. *Journal of Advertising*, 21(4), 11-22. DOI: 10.1080/00913367.1992.10673382.
38. Tarkovsky, A. (1983). Produced by RAI Rete 2, Opera Film. Distributed by Grange (U.S.).
39. Tierney, J. (2013). What Is nostalgia good for? Quite a bit, research shows. *The New York Times*. July 8. [nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research-shows.html](http://nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research-shows.html).
40. Trigg, D. (2006). *The aesthetics of decay: Nothingness, nostalgia, and the absence of reason*. Peter Lang.
41. Vess, M., Arndt, J., Routledge, C., Sedikides, C., & Wildschut, T. (2012). Nostalgia as a resource for the self. *Self and Identity*, 11(3), 273-284. doi:10.1080/15298868.2010.521452. S2CID 56018071.
42. Wilson, J. L. (2005). *Nostalgia, sanctuary of meaning*. Bucknell University Press.
43. Wijnand, A. P. van Tilburg, Wildschut, T., & Sedikides, C. (2018). Nostalgia's place among self-relevant emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 32(4), 742-759.
44. Wildschut, T., Stephan, E., Sedikides, C., Routledge, C., & Arndt, J. (2008). Feeling happy and sad at the same time: Nostalgia informs models of affect. Paper presented at the 9th Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, , February, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

45. Zhou, X., Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., & Gao, D. (2008). Counteracting loneliness: On the restorative function of nostalgia. *Psychological Science*, *19*(10), 1023-1029. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02194.x. PMID 19000213. S2CID 45398320.

# **Outbreak Without Actualization?**

## **Notes on Martin Delaney's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America**

Iuliu RAȚIU

*Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication  
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration  
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca  
iuliu.ratiu@econ.ubbcluj.ro*

*Whoever says that man is born to freedom utters a sentence that has no meaning.*  
(Joseph de Maistre)

### **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes Martin Delaney's novel Blake; or The Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba (1859, 1861-2) from the point of view of its main character whose quest for liberating black slaves in Antebellum America to form a diasporic African nation oscillates between his responsibility as a revolutionary hero and his duty as a husband. Deprived of his freedom and then of his wife, Blake seems to be finally ready to reclaim them both, and in doing so to reclaim the two physical bodies, his and his wife's, that define him as a revolutionary subject. Read this way, it seems that Delaney's idea of revolution is inscribed by the negation of the body, both personal and conjugal, negation that is perceived as an injury whose undoing can only be performed by a revolutionary move needed to restore the humanity of the personal body and the unity of the conjugal one. By conflating the three narratives of the novel, the slave narrative, the domestic narrative and the revolution narrative, Delaney shows a possible way that can sustain, move forward, and finally actualize a revolution. In the end, the family reunion narrative collapses into the revolution narrative to prove that the restoration of the domestic means the actualization of the revolution, thus placing marriage at the center of both private and public life.*

**Keywords:** *Martin Delaney, nineteenth century American literature, slave narrative, revolution.*

### *Preliminary Remarks*

Negotiating the place that Martin Delaney's novel *Blake; or The Huts of America* had, has or should have in the literary tradition of American culture resembles in a way both the editorial odyssey the novel has been through since selected chapters of it were published almost a century and a half ago and the

revolutionary model, present in the novel, whose analysis constitutes the main focus of this paper. Because, as one critic points out, in his novel “Delany brings rebellion to the *point of outbreak without actualizing it*” (emphasis added), I think that this seemingly failed move equally characterizes the novel’s supposed incompleteness and the constant negotiation of its value (Sundquist, 1993, p. 184).<sup>1</sup> Thus, “outbreak without actualization” becomes the critical device that will help advance a particular reading of the revolutionary model that Delany represents in his novel.

Two key materializations of the body, the personal and the conjugal, inextricably linked throughout the novel, constitute both the “outbreak” and the “actualization” of Delany’s idea of revolution in an effort to bring to literary fruition a political project that animated, to various degrees, *Blake’s* author from the 1850s onwards.<sup>2</sup> Given its negative denotation (“outbreak *without* actualization”) and its apparent impossibility, it might seem that it is a negative/impossible subject that performs Delany’s revolution. Even though Blake could be, and has been, easily read as “impossible”, I argue that his revolutionary subjectivity, far from being impossible, is indeed constituted “negatively”.<sup>3</sup> Blake lays a “scheme” and matures a “plan for a general insurrection” only at the end of “more than eighteen years [...] of injury done [to him] by degrading him as a slave,” when “this man Franks” sells his wife and tries to sell him too at an auction. Doubly attacked as a human being and as a man, deprived of his freedom and then of his wife, Blake seems to be finally ready to reclaim them both, and by doing so to reclaim the two physical bodies, his and his wife’s, that define him as a revolutionary subject. Read this way, it seems to me that Delany’s idea of revolution is inscribed by the negation of the body, both personal and conjugal, negation that is perceived as an injury whose undoing can only be performed by a

---

<sup>1</sup> Ironically enough, the “incompleteness of the novel” mirrors with an uncanny effect the supposedly deferred revolution once we factor in some editorial politics having to do with the fact that the novel’s title is never cited in full length (*Blake; or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*) or with the “Wanted” ad editors felt the need to post in hope of recovering the missing chapters (“Beacon Press would appreciate any information pertaining to their location”).!

<sup>2</sup> Even though there is an almost perfect synonymy between “conjugal”, “marital” or “familial”, I prefer to use the term “conjugal body” not only, as I will try to explain later, because Delany himself uses it in the combination “conjugal union”, but also because I believe, along with other critics, that this particular term designates better a crude reality of American slavery that stipulated that slaves, as chattels, were not entitled to any form of contract.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Intricate Knot*, Jean Fagan Yellin calls Blake an *enigma*: “It is not remarkable that he uses a series of names (Henry Holland, Gilbert Hopewell, Jacob) to confuse his enemies, or that when he meets whites he masks himself – although rarely engaging in role-playing, he often remains silent. But is a mystery even to his family and friends.” (p. 205)



*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

revolutionary move needed to restore the humanity of the personal body and the unity of the conjugal one.

Similarly, Delany's revolutionary project, both literary and political, again inextricably linked, seems to be constructed in negation, if not in contrast. As Robyn Wiegman points out, modern slavery was made possible by predicating the black and white binary upon the transformation of the "African" into "black" "according to the epistemologies attending vision and their logics of corporeal inscription." (Wiegman, 1995, p. 4) This particular understanding of race relations makes me argue that Delany's political project was nothing less than the transformation of the "black" into "African" and that *Blake; or the Huts of America* is an example of how this transformation might be actualized. Therefore, my reading of the novel will try to show the ways in which Delany imagined a revolution that would portray the black body as a vehicle for the creation of the African nation.

*The Imagined Revolution*

Martin Delany's life and work are both a consequence of and a cause for his political project, a project whose detailed analysis is beyond the purpose of this paper, but whose intentional gist, I argue, is clearly exposed in the constant intersection and separation of the three narratives that frame *Blake; or the Huts of America*. Unlike other critics who break down Delany's novel only into the slave narrative and the revolutionary narrative, each dedicated to one of the two parts of the novel, I think that these two narratives are each in turn reinforced by a third, the so-called family reconstruction narrative, traditionally conflated into the slave narrative. Therefore, I believe that a fresh look at the novel, purposely (re)configured to accommodate the three narratives is going to better reflect Delany's political project.<sup>4</sup>

When he examines the novel mainly as a narrative of familial reconstruction, Paul Gilroy points out the importance that nationality, citizenship and masculinity played in Delany's political project:

*He was probably the first black thinker to make the argument that the integrity of the race is primarily the integrity of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside. The model he proposed aligned the*

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that in a way all these narratives are or become interchangeable. By this I mean that the slave, familial or revolutionary narratives are in fact one and the same because running away or claiming marital rights in front of the master's property rights was always considered an act of rebellion.

*power of the male head of household in the private sphere with the noble status of the soldier-citizen which complemented it in the public realm. (Gilroy, 1993, p. 25)*

Even though Delany's patriarchal vision is condemnable and some might say he tried his best to provide, literally, room for action to figures like Madame Cordora, I think that Gilroy's reading approximates Delany's political thoughts. The distinction made between the private and the public sphere is, I believe, the distinction Delany makes between nationality and citizenship. Without getting into a detailed legal discussion that would usefully question both the employment and deployment of terms like nationality and citizenship, I would like to suggest that Delany locates nationality within the private and identifies the citizenship within the public. By doing so, he makes it transparently clear in his novel, the family, or, to use his own term, the conjugal union becomes the site of nationality. In the wake of harsh ideological debates about the modern nation-state and the configuration of nationalisms both in Europe and the Americas beginning with the eighteenth century, this is Delany's political response to a question that would align the African nation to all the other nations. Since the modern nation-state relies heavily on identitary fictions like common language, interest, history, geography and most importantly, at least in Europe, ethnicity, Delany's genius in imagining an African nation, which I will discuss in greater detail later, becomes evident not only when he opens up the institution of marriage to unite former slaves or people of different races and classes, but also when the author decides to make personal pain and loss the trigger to set in motion nation-building. Hence, Blake's ability in reconstructing his family becomes the supreme test of citizenship.

If Blake, as it seems, performs well his assigned role of husband, things are much more complicated when it comes for him to act like a citizen-soldier. Definitely, in Delany's description, Blake, even as a Commander in Chief of the Army of Emancipation, is not what might be called a soldier. But this does not mean that he cannot be a good tactician in setting up a guerrilla war. Moreover, either because Delany had a hard time making his characters fight for citizenship, or because he in fact did literally actualize the revolution in the last eight chapters of the novel that had never been recovered, I guess Blake's strength lies in what he intends to do, rather than in what he does not do. Thus, bringing power, war power, as the only means to achieve citizenship speaks volumes for Delany's political ideas. On the one hand, there is Fredrick Douglass's and other abolitionists' idea of integration; on the other hand, there is Delany's idea of separation from a racist political establishment. Whereas, in strict political terms, Douglass favors "peace talks", so to speak, Delany, even though he does not quite engage it, favors war.

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

In this bellicose context several questions arise. For instance, against whom should Delany, or Blake for that matter, be fighting? How and to what purpose? In some respects, critics believe the answers to these questions are fairly clear. Eric Sundquist and Gregg Crane argue that *Blake*, along with some of Delany's political writings and actions, reflects a political response to critical and questionable, in hindsight, decisions that immediately preceded the Civil War. (Sundquist, 1993, p. 184; Crane, 2002, pp. 148-157) Thus, the compromise laws, including the Fugitive Slave Law from 1850, and Judge Taney's *Dred Scott Decision* from 1857 spelled out a sinister truth that nobody dared to legally engage before, by saying that blacks were inferior, and therefore justly enslaved:

*Altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduce to slavery for his benefit. (Dred Scott v Sandford, 60 US 383 (1857), at 407 quoted in Williams, 1991, p. 162)*

The decision, quoted in the novel both by whites and blacks, made Delany react vehemently and literally want to disassociate from the white race both politically and socially, hence the choice of Cuba for the African nation and insurrection as the only means of getting it. As Sundquist points out, Cuba comes half way through between emigrationists' ideas of colonizing Africa and the setting of an all-black empire in the tropics. Moreover, at that time, Cuba seems to have become a symbolical territory that caught everybody's attention. In the wake of San Domingo, Cuba represented the epitome of any plantation: slaveholders from the South wanted its annexation for economical reasons and for fear of becoming "Africanized", while black intellectuals like Delany saw it as a possible place of resistance and nation-building given the frequent slave uprisings from the early 1840s.

Thus, with a memorable turn of the screw, Delany tries to fictionally implement his political project by replacing the not so tacit consent of Taney's decision with the not so democratic concept of power. As Crane points out, Delany's political move was rather positivistic in order to counteract the failed universalism of the American Constitution. It is only by willingly achieving power, Delany believes, that the African Americans will ever be capable of ending the injuries inflicted upon them by an unjust and racist system.

Seen in this way, Delany's political project can be subsumed to a model of bourgeois revolution. Both ideological and economic, a revolution of this type, would undermine the master / slave binary and would bring a capitalist cure to

black underdevelopment. (Peterson, 1992, p. 574) As Peterson points out, Delany's political agenda is a masculine capitalist plot,

*that preached slave insurrection in the South, a black takeover of Caribbean plantation economies, and the development of black commodity and capitalism on an international scale. The novel fictionalizes a political agenda that Delany had been working out in journalistic form throughout the 1840s and '50s: his call, in the event of a US attempt to annex Cuba, for African Americans to intervene and for enslaved Cubans to revolt; and his promotion of Niger Valley settlements by African-American men who would develop cotton production, capitalize Africa to compete with US cotton production, and encourage the emergence of the black man as capitalist. (Peterson, 1992, p. 575)*

Seen in capitalist terms, Delany's revolution makes perfect sense. For once, we can understand better Blake's double role in the first part of the novel, both as an insurgent and as a field anthropologist dedicated openly to the "inspection of affairs" ("Who owns this place?", "How many slaves has he?", "What allowances have you?", "How late do you work?" etc.). As some critics point out, the first part of the novel literally maps the situation of slavery in antebellum America not only to appeal to the readers' sympathy for the condition of African Americans, but to convince them that their underdevelopment, to use Peterson's word, calls for immediate action. In fact Delany's call foreshadows the uplifting efforts of the postbellum and Reconstruction era in which a degraded race needs to be uplifted. Thus, the capitalist plot becomes part of the social and political revolution that Delany imagines in order to save the race. As Gilroy points out Delany's idea of black survival

*Depends upon forging a new means to build alliances above and beyond petty issues like language, religion, skin color, and to a lesser extent gender. The best way to create the new metacultural identity which the new black citizenship demands was provided by the abject condition of the slaves and ironically facilitated by the transnational structure of the slave trade itself. (Gilroy, 1993, p. 28)*

Thus, since black survival is at stake, there is no wonder why Delany chooses to employ three concurrent narratives in order to make it work.<sup>5</sup> The slave narrative follows the classical pattern but with a particular, Delany-style, twist. Blake, a "decoyed" slave, runs away not only to become free, but also to set an example for other slaves of the ways in which liberation can be achieved and, most importantly, to reunite with his wife. The fact that Blake only becomes a runaway in an effort to reclaim matrimonial status and ends up doing other things in

---

<sup>5</sup> However, by the time Blake finds Maggie, arguably the real purpose of his coming to Cuba seems to be forgotten when faced with the "question in political arithmetic": "I have come to Cuba to help free my race." (p. 195)

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

between speaks volumes for the relationship that Delany envisions between marriage, freedom and political recognition. Similarly, the revolutionary narrative negotiates a metacultural identity all the way from grass-root insurrection to full-blown revolutionary war. Whether the insurrection and the revolution succeed or not becomes irrelevant since Blake, with his interchangeable roles and names, professes continuously what he knows best – he is a sailing master capable of both doing and undoing the slave trade. As he informs Placido, they “must have a vessel at [their] command before [they] make a strike.” (Delany, 1970, p. 198).<sup>6</sup> Finally, the family narrative, as corollary of the other two, is used by Delany to both set in motion and contain the revolution. Thus, the conjugal union upon which black survival literally depends becomes the bold political statement Delany wants to make. Moreover, the finality for which Delany uses these three narratives becomes obvious at the end of the first part of the novel, in the chapter “Happy Greeting.” (Delany, 1970, pp. 152-7). When the fugitives, Henry, Andy, Ambrose and Ali, arrive in Canada, “da lan’ where black folks is free,” as Andy exclaims, the narrator is quick in reminding us that even there, “by a systematic course of policy and artifice,” the blacks’ rights were denied. Still, Canada is better than slavery, so Blake’s first care is to purchase “fifty acres of land with improvements suitable, and provide for the schooling of the children until he should otherwise order.” For the first time in his narrative, Delany portrays Blake as the head of a real household by making sure that the newly freed slaves are economically secure.

More than that, before leaving them, Blake warns them “you must succeed, as nothing can separate you; your strength depending upon your remaining together.” And because this remaining together means matrimony, three couples are happily united in a ceremony that makes the young wives “to vent sobs of sympathy and joy.” Very much like the “outbreak without actualization,” the sobbing joy summarizes Delany’s idea of revolution. The conjugal unions thus performed hint toward a revolution that by the time it gets to be enacted, it has already taken place. By eluding the Provincial regulations (the gentleman mulatto turned clergymen can officiate the marriages exactly because, by not being white and free, but “panting runaway slaves,” Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, Eli and Ailcey do not have to require a license and wait for a congregation report in order to get married as the laws would call for) and by alluding to the “sorrowful

---

<sup>6</sup> Next to Paul Gilroy’s research on the Black Atlantic, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s work emphasizes the importance of ships in constituting proletarian revolutions across the Atlantic in their book *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

and hopeless union” of Mammy Judy and Daddy Joe and of Henry and Maggie, the three marriages symbolize the end of oppression:

*Daughters of Zion! Awake from thy sadness!  
Awake for they foes shall oppress thee no more.  
Bright o'er the hills shines the day star of gladness  
Arise! For the night of they sorrow is o'er.*

As if it were enough to get married or to claim the right of a husband in order to end oppression, Delany’s revolutionary move pertains to a strange mix of messianism and original interpretation of the law, in which a Moses-like Blake would lead his people out of bondage in an effort to reunite whit his wife and bring about an African nation as a guarantee of both marital and legal rights.

The fact that Blake cannot leave Canada before overlooking the marriage of the three couples is also relevant for Delany’s method of writing the revolution. If, arguably enough, the conjugal union needs to be broken just to be remade into a marriage, the African nation, after it is fully constituted, as I will show later, needs to be put under attack in order to engage the fight for political recognition. Conversely, for a marriage to be celebrated, it needs to subvert the law or at least to show that under given circumstances the law is not binding: because the law was made for white and free citizens, the “panting runaway slaves”, being neither white, nor free, can marry one another without having to go through a fully legal procedure. Paradoxically, though, their marriage symbolizes the end of oppression exactly because, by granting them their freedom, it puts them in a position in which their union is law binding. In other words, they do not run to Canada to become free so they could marry; rather, they marry there so they could become free and this represents the shift from the (runaway) body to the (married) citizen.

Therefore, it becomes obvious, I believe, that, as Sundquist points out, Delany’s interests do not go only towards revolution, but also towards the founding of a modern black state. (Sundquist, 1993, p. 204) The fact that the body in all its materiality is placed at the center of this project suggests that Delany’s idea of revolution envisions the transformation of the black body into the black citizen by way of providing an almost legal template in which the body needs to be saved and then protected by means of conjugal union, within the confines of the family, and by means of the nation, that is, within the family at large. The transformation of the slave into citizen seems to be the only way in which the survival of the race can be successfully achieved.

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*  
*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

*The Black Body*

Prior to his decoying into slavery, Blake was decoyed into producing slavery:

*When I left my father's house at the age of seventeen, I went to sea on what I believed to be a Spanish man-of-war. I was put as apprentice, stood before the mast, the ship standing east for the Western coast of Africa, as I thought for the Mediterranean. On arriving on the coast, she put into the Bight of Benin near Wydah; was freighted with slaves – her true character being but too well known – when she again put to sea, standing as I thought for Cuba, but instead, put into Key West, where she quickly disposed of her cargo to Americans. My expression of dissatisfaction at being deceived offended the commander, who immediately sold me to a noted trader on the spot – one Colonel Franks, of Mississippi, near Natchez. (Delany, 1970, p. 193)*

This is in a nutshell the summary of the novel, but *in reverse*, as Blake, “the lost boy of Cuba,” recounts his story to Placido before laying down the reason for his return, “I have come to Cuba to help free my race; and that which I desire here to do, I’ve done in another place.” (Delany, 1970, p. 195)<sup>7</sup>

It is surprising, to say the least, how convoluted the domestic plot and the revolution plot become in Delany’s account of Blake’s return to Cuba and, as if, this would not be enough, he needs to tie in the slavery plot as well! But, I argue, this seems to be the only way in which the author is capable of bringing the reclamation of the body, as a principle of his revolution, to the forefront because, in going all the way back from Natchez to Cuba, Blake performs a triple recovery, by reclaiming his personal freedom, restoring his family and “revolutionizing” those bodies he once helped to be enslaved. In this respect, even though one would expect him to move forward, Blake is actually going the other way, thus partially explaining the difficulties Delany had in actualizing the revolution.

But there is no doubt as far as its outbreak is concerned. When Maggie declines the sexual advances of Colonel Franks, in an act of revenge, “the noted trader” sells her, having no consideration for his wife’s opposition, nor for anybody else’s feelings. This action comes as a blow for Maggie’s husband who perceives it yet as another personal injury, after his enslavement, directed, this time at his conjugal body. Thus, injury, once revived and once removed in a vicarious position, inscribes the revolutionary subject determining Henry to pursue a threefold mission: his liberation, reunion with his wife and slave emancipation. The revolution that begins with the annihilation of the domestic lives of the

---

<sup>7</sup> If, in Foucauldian terms, racism is revolutionary discourse put *in reverse*, then Blake’s return to Cuba, as a return to freedom, can be read as Delany’s effort of undoing racism.

enslaved can only succeed with the restoration of the domestic at its highest level, that of the nation. In other words, to become sites of liberation both the body and the domestic need to be put in question first and literally destroyed. A look at the configuration and reconfiguration of the body and the domestic will show what it takes to undergo the transformation from a slave to a spouse and from the conjugal union to marriage.

Since as a slave the African American is always already constituted as a subject, when it comes to black subjectivity the majority of critics tend to agree that black subjectivity is a consequence of the body, not particularly because of its color, but, as Robyn Wiegman points out, because of its visibility. Even though in Delany's case visibility plays an important role, there is a shift from color to degradation as a signifier of the black body.<sup>8</sup> As Robert Reid-Pharr suggests, before becoming black and representative, the African American body had to be "'worked' and produced in private," therefore physically degraded and humanly downgraded. (Reid-Pharr, 1999, p. 117) Moreover, its repression can only be undone by repossession, thus making the body a site of privileged meaning:

*Delany[']s particular genius was his ability to narrativize the repression of (this) black body while continuing to privilege it as a site of meaning. [...] [This is] Delany's attempt to narrate the proper relation of body, community, and subjectivity – one in which the marriage relation is understood to bring together the individuals precisely through ministration to bodies. [...] Delany better than almost all his peers was able to imagine a world in which the emphasis was placed squarely on the body, in which a man might literally grab hold of his destiny, his subjectivity, and make something of them, something that could be touched. (Reid-Pharr, 1999, pp. 116-117)*

Seen in this way, the body as destiny brings meaning to Delany's idea of revolution centered on the survival of the body. Tortured, as it happens to Maggie turned Lotty in Cuba, and even killed, as is the case with the Rube, the young boy whipped to death by Captain Grason to test Judge Ballard Southern transformation, the black body can only survive if a man grabs hold of his destiny and understands that, no matter how personal, that destiny needs to have collective representation.

The logics of pain and Nietzschean resentment that Wendy Brown talks about in her essay "Wounded Attachments" referring to the current, post civil rights debates about the cultural aspects of identity politics are also relevant here to show how *Blake* can negotiate the predicament of a body that can only attain

---

<sup>8</sup> When Blake interrogates some young women if they would rather work in the gin or in the field, they "prefer" the field "Case den da wouldn't be so many wite plantehs come an' look at us, like we was a show!" (p. 77) To say the least, this answer represents an almost perfect combination of visibility, color, and degradation!



*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

political recognition through the ministrations of other bodies in marriage. Because “no state legislature ever seriously entertained the thought of encroaching upon the master’s rights by legalizing slave marriages,” Blake’s odyssey of recovering his wife becomes also a quest for a political system that would recognize their union. (Stampp, 1956, p. 198) As Reid-Pharr notes, Delany’s understanding that

*the black man must run in order to establish himself as a modern subject stems from a more basic belief that black subjectivity must not come at the expense of normative modes of black corporeality. One had always to drag one’s body along on any foray into civic life.* (Reid-Pharr, 1999, p. 115)

Delany makes Blake aware that his civic life depends on his marital life, so when he decides to run away in a typical slave narrative, Blake needs to break the normative modes of black corporeality. Canada or a Northern state are not enough for him since, wifeless, he is not yet free. The new reconfiguration of his subjectivity needs to incorporate his wife too, so after he overlooks the marriages of Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, Eli and Ailcey, he institutes himself as the head of the newfound household by giving orders of how to live and work and take care of each other.

Moreover, when he advises them to stay together he prefigures his efforts of bringing together, at a much larger scale, the bigger family of the African nation in Cuba. Hoping to find his wife there or to avenge her death, he transforms himself into a citizen-soldier, “By the instincts of husband, I’ll have her if living! If dead, by impulses of a Heaven-inspired soul, I’ll avenge her loss unto death!” (Delany, 1970, p. 157) Husband and warrior, the new black body mirrors, in all legitimacy, the interests and affairs of the whites, as critics point out, in an effort to reconstruct himself into a bourgeois subject. Like the slaveholders and the slave traders at the beginning of the novel, Blake knows that “self-interest” comes before the “general affairs of the government”:

*They were few in number, and appeared little concerned about the affairs of the general government. Though men of intelligence, their time and attention appeared to be entirely absorbed in an adventure of self-interest.* (Delany, 1970, p. 3)

Ironically, the refitting of the ship, that causes the first meeting of the American and Cuban interests, can be read also as the “refitting” of the black body. The name change and the refurbishing signal exactly the interests of the whites, the “Merchantman” turned “Vulture” symbolizes the shift from the understanding of the black body from object of trade to object of prey, consequently making the attacks and injuries on the bodies more powerful and thus forcing Blake to take action against annihilation.

Once again, Delany's radical political project is made clear. More than anything, Delany envisions a black capitalist state by promoting complete emancipation and economic independence. The foundation of such an African nation would be a three step process: slave insurgency in the Southern part of the United States, the undermining of the slave trade, and the establishing of a black state in Cuba able to compete economically and politically with other states. For this, in the novel, Delany made Blake, as a possible leader of the would be state, pursue his very personal interest of recovering his wife and gaining his freedom, while at the same time preparing him and other for the final endeavor, that of the creation of a general government that would overlook the transformation of Cuba from a plantation to an economically viable state.

Before tackling the political negotiation of the African nation, in which as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Delany proposed the transformation of the "black" into "African" in order to accommodate citizens of different classes, colors and religions, let me point out once again the importance that the black body and marriage played in the realization of Delany's political goals. As Reid-Pharr, often mentioned in this part of the paper, suggests

*Delany's aesthetic [is] drawn from two distinct philosophies of corporeal existence in which, on the one hand, violence stands against the body in order to enact a fantastic universe, a world outside the world, while on the other, it works to maintain prior social distinctions, particular distinctions between bodies. (Reid-Pharr, 1999, p. 114)*

In my reading of this quote, in aesthetic terms that hardly represent the crude and inhuman reality of the black body, Delany locates violence as the site that enacts a fantastic universe outside the world, but also helps bring this universe inside the world for political recognition. As a Moses-like figure, Blake outdoes the other Moses-like figures (like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner) and Moses himself by being allowed to finally step into the "Promised Land". Very much like Toussaint L'Ouverture knew, Blake knows better than "standing still and seeing the salvation." Once he realizes that his salvation depends on himself and on his ability in reuniting with his wife, Blake starts to spread the word around and fulfills his duty of husband and soldier citizen in order to bring an African nation to fruition.

Only in the end it becomes obvious that Delany's use of the black body to advance conjugal unity is representative for the author's intention of locating the family at the center of a bourgeois construction of black subjectivity. Disembodied, raped, tortured and killed, the black body is actualized inside marriage, only to become disembodied again within the larger construct of the

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

nation. If once found and recovered, the black body can disappear, as it happens with Lotty transformed Maggie again, only to be then summoned again, through violence, in order to fight for political recognition, as it happens to both Placido and Ambrocina Cordora when they are attacked on the street. But how is the national black subjectivity constructed?

*The African Nation*

I argue that marriage, as opposed to or as a consequence of conjugal union, a certain type of religion (“No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but he who owns us as his children will we serve” (Delany, 1970, pp. 258)) and African / Ethiopian, as opposed to “black”, are the main ingredients of Delany’s African nation and the main pillars of constructing the national black subjectivity whose main political purpose, in Blake’s words, was “war upon the whites.” But even though the war does not seem to go beyond its declarative intentions, its undertones reveal a clear economic stance. Although economics seems to be the whites’ main concern in the novel, Delany makes it clear that money, therefore capital, is the only factor that can bring freedom and political recognition. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Blake saved and “borrowed” enough money from Colonel Franks to be able to buy land for the fugitives, supposedly buy his wife from her masters or buy the ferryman’s horses and kill them so his followers can lose his trace. Moreover, “the unmistakable evidence of a shining gold eagle” seems to be as good as any pass that will allow him to move from state to state. It goes, then, without saying, that from the start Delany considers economic independence as a premise on which he can safely build his idea of the nation around marriage, religion and Africanism.

Similarly, marriage, like money, becomes a premise and a vehicle for nation building. After Delany dedicates almost forty chapters to Blake’s quest for his wife, once the couple is reunited, Maggie is disposed of in a matter of several pages. Careful to entrust his money to the safekeeping of his wife, before sailing to Africa, Blake also makes sure to place her in his father’s house, but introduces her “as the wife of an old friend.”<sup>9</sup> In a roundabout way, by constantly bringing

---

<sup>9</sup> Because the situation of Blake’s father, a tobacco manufacturer and member of the Grand Council, remains unclear throughout the novel, the fact that Blake entrusts his wife with his money and then takes her to his father’s house is full of irony and double entendres. On the one hand, I think this situation is representative for the interdependence between American slave traders and Cuban manufacturers in which, as from one father to the other, Franks is literally paying Blacus Senior for once enslaving his son; on the other hand, since Blake will never reveal his or his wife’s real identity to his father, the situation becomes important for Delany to show that, by uniting the

marriage to the forefront to then leaving it slip back, Delany is emphasizing the role that marriage should have in the political realm. As I mentioned earlier, for Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, Eli and Ailcey marriage was a legal way for freedom. But also, in the case of Gofer Gondolier and Abyssa Soudan and General Juan Montego and Madame Cordora, the unity of marriage becomes the warrant of their political ability:

*The consummation of conjugal union is the best security for political relations, and he who is incapable of negotiating to promote his own personal advancement might not be trustworthy as the agent of other's interest; and the fitness for individuals for positions of public import, may not be misjudged by their doings in the private affairs of life. (Delany, 1970, p. 274)*

At the intersection of personal advancement and collective interests, marriage collapses the distinction between private and public for the sake of citizenship. As Gilroy, quoted earlier, suggests the soldier-citizen proves his worth as head of the household. That is why, separated from his wife, Blake needs to recover her in order to engage political fight. Moreover, in Delany's understanding, marriage is the prerequisite of the "great and desirable end to be attained," which is the revolution that never comes. Or, perhaps, marriage is the revolution in which case Blake's need to find his wife and the possibility of both slave and aristocrat of marring at the same time become clear political statements for a national union in which language, religion, class and skin color should bear no relevance.

In addition to marriage, religion plays an equal role in the negotiation of the new nation. The shift from false preaching to revolutionary slogans and the transformation of the slave into Messiah characterizes the tension between the religion of the slave owners used to further oppress the slaves and the religion of the new black nation. In a way, the creation of a new marital paradigm through the transformation of the conjugal union into marriage mirrors the reconfiguration of a religious sentiment that favors action over contemplation. Blake's dissatisfaction with religion is never made clearer than in the arguments he has with his in laws over the action he should take to counter Franks's decision to sell his wife, "I once did believe in religion, but now I have no confidence in it. My faith has been wrecked on the stony hearts of such pretended Christians as Stephen Franks, while passing through the stormy sea of trouble and oppression." "Standing still and seeing the salvation" does not work for Blake anymore because

---

two households, Blake is capable of making a better one managing in the end to have husband, wife and child together.

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

*"Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation." So you see, Daddy Joe, that this is very different to standing still. [...] I tell you once and for all, Daddy Joe, that I'm not only "losing" but I have altogether lost my faith in the religion of my oppressors. (Delany, 1970, pp. 18, 21)*

Because the way in which ever since before Delany and long after James Baldwin critics and intellectuals have constantly discussed the relationship between the religion of the oppressors and the oppressed seems secondary for the purpose of this paper, I would like to concentrate in what follows on the specific touch that religion got when discussed in the Grand Council. By doing this, I am not overlooking Delany's travail in imagining a slave insurrection shaped in accordance with a messianic pattern in which, very much like Moses, Blake brings his people out of bondage and very much like Christ wants to have them reborn into respected citizens; rather, instead on concentrating on religion as it is perceived and modified on the way the "Promised Land", I am more interested in what happens once in the "Promised Land". Furthermore, I consider that Delany imagined the proceedings of the Grand Council in tone with the proceedings of the Continental Congress that declared the independence of the thirteen colonies in 1776. Without going into further details that might support a certain resemblance between the two bodies let me just point out a major difference: while the real body successfully managed in drafting and proclaiming a declaration of independence, the imagined constituent body only succeeded in declaring a war that did not get to be fought. Other than that, the itinerant council, meeting both in Madame Cordora's attic and drawing rooms as well as in Carolus Blacus's house, is a good example of representative democracy and helps us understand Delany's philosophy of the African nation.

But there's textual evidence to support the resemblance of the Grand Council to another historical political constituency much closer to Delany's political project. When the Council meets for the second time, its secretary Placido compares their assembly to that of Santo Domingo, "The like of tonight's gathering, save in a neighboring island years before any of us had an existence, in this region is without a parallel." (Delany, 1970, p. 257) By directly referencing Santo Domingo and indirectly referring to United States, as I argue, Delany portrays a political body that would outdo both and give representation to all, as it did not happen before. Thus, it comes as no surprise that religion is the first thing the members of the Grand Council get to discuss once they are constituted.

At Madame Cordora's asking got an explanation concerning the doctrines of the "Romish Church" and other formalities that might objectionable, Blake "set[s] the matter right:"

*I, first a Catholic, and my wife bred as such, are both Baptists; Abyssa Soudan, once a pagan, was in her own native land converted to the Methodist or Wesleyan belief; Madame Sabastina and family are Episcopalians; Camina, from long residence out of the colony, a Presbyterian, and Placido is a believer in the Swedenborgian doctrines. We have all agreed to know no sects, no denomination, and but one religion for the sake of our redemption from bondage and degradation, a faith in a common Savior as an intercessor for our sins; but one God, who is and must be our acknowledged common father. No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but He who owns us as his children will we serve. The whites accept of nothing but that which promotes their interests and happiness, socially, politically and religiously. They would discard a religion, tear down a church, overthrow a government, or desert a country, which did not enhance their freedom. (Delany, 1970, p. 258)*

Because every time they want to make an argument, the members of the Council tend to advance their points in speeches, it is revelatory to understand the pattern that Delany wants them to follow. There seems to always be a three steps paradigm. First, as the case is here, the speaker tries to give voice to everybody present, so that each constituent party (irrespective of color, of course except for whites, class, or gender) feels like they are represented. Baptists, Catholics, pagans, Methodists etc. are all summoned up only to be molded then into an all-encompassing common-sense denomination. Finally, in the third step, there is always a reference to whites, that would legitimize the newly formed body. The keyword, here like everywhere else, is self-interest, which once reclaimed from the whites is then employed as the moving forward principle of the new congregation. Thus, they feel empowered to "tear down a church, overthrow a government, or desert a country, which did not enhance their freedom." Moreover, because they are many and the whites are few, they are entitled to found a new church that would degrade them no more, as it happened when Henry was auctioned inside the church, to establish a new government that would represent them, and to desert a country and initiate a new one.

The same move is clearly distinct when yet again Madame Cordora questions Placido's assertion they are all Ethiopians and the answer comes as no surprise: "I hold that colored persons, whatever the complexion, can only obtain an equality with the whites by the descendants of Africa of unmixed blood." Still unconvinced, Madame Cordora asks further clarifications: "That is a positive admission that the mixed bloods are inferior to the pure-blooded descendants of

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

Africa.” To sort this dilemma and to accommodate a common ground between the white and black divide, Delany has Placido follow his argument:

*The whites assert the natural inferiority of the African as a race: upon this they premise their objections, not only to blacks, but all who have any affinity with them. You see this position taken by the high Court of America, which declares that persons having African blood in their veins have no rights that white men are bound to respect. Now how are the mixed bloods ever to rise? The thing is plain; it requires no explanation. The instant that an equality of the blacks with the whites is admitted, we being the descendants of the two, must be acknowledged the equals of both. Is not this clear? (Delany, 1970, p. 261)*

This explanation of a plain course of action, the blacks' emancipation, ironically turns the Taney's *Dred Scott* decision against itself. By fighting for equality, Delany considers that the political result, the African capitalist nation would eventually be capable of conferring every right to its citizens. As Blake argues, the black and those who have any affinity with them need to act for themselves to prove, as Placido suggests,

*Not only that the African race is now the principal producer of the greater part of the luxuries of enlightened countries, as various fruits, rice, sugar, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, spices, and tobacco; but that in Africa their native land, they are among the most industrious people in the world, highly cultivating the lands, and that ere long their country must hold the balance of commercial power by supplying as they now do as foreign bondmen in strange lands, the greatest staple commodities in demand, as rice, coffee, sugar, and especially cotton, from their own native shores, the most extensive native territory, climate soil, and greatest number of (almost the only natural produces) inhabitants in the universe; and that race and country will at once rise to the first magnitude in estimation of the greatest nations on earth, from their dependence upon them for the great staples from which is derived their national wealth. (Delany, 1970, pp. 261-2)*

Even though some critics read in passages like this long quote Delany's emigrationist policy, I tend to agree to Paul Gilroy that this Pan-African verve denotes more than that. In fact, Delany's novel is one of the first best-supported arguments favoring the black Atlantic, in which the author used preponderantly economic reasons for the creation of an African nation. Delany's capitalist nationalist discourse, thus, heavily relies on the wealth the African nation could have, had it not been for other nations to exploit this wealth by using its members as “bondmen in strange lands.”

This effort of engineering an African nation, across the Atlantic, a nation that would counteract the white dominance is Delany's effort of saving the black race. Because, in line with his political thinking, emancipation was not enough, Delany

tried his best in proving in his novel a possible way of achieving his goals. The new black nation would not only challenge the white domination from an economic point of view but would entirely shift the understanding of race in an almost essentialist endeavor of unmaking the “black” and reclaiming the “African”. As Robyn Wiegman points out the slaveholders managed to legitimize slavery by contrasting their whiteness to the blackness of the African bodies they smuggled and coerced into oppression. When all the African people, irrespective of their native language, social class, or land of origin, became “black”, mockingly referencing the United States’ base line “E Pluribus Unum”, they were already enslaved. In contrast, Delany envisions an African nation that would reclaim its diversity and reclaim its unity in a multicultural and transnational manner. One becomes many again exactly because, in places like Cuba, they are the many. This is also Blake’s feeling when he realizes that he needs his wife’s body in order to constitute himself inside a conjugal body that would guarantee his freedom and power of action. Similarly, he realizes that he cannot literally be free without the others who are degraded and enslaved. Consequently, Delany doubles the family narrative with a revolutionary narrative in order to present the importance that family, especially marriage, has in the configuration of the new nation. Matters of religion and political representation, then, become the best arguments that would legitimize a revolutionary war as the foundation of the new nation. The fact that the war is always deferred plays little importance here because, as it has been argued so far, the revolution, always imminent and contained inside the marital unit and political representation of the Grand Council, reaches its goals by mere evidence. It is as if, once they found it in their better self-interest to organize themselves, religiously, politically, and economically, the members of the Grand Council, as representatives of the African nation, already became a force that would have been hard to reckon with. Their sheer numerical power (“we’re many on this island and they are few”) puts the actualization of the revolution within reach!

### *Final Remarks*

If the actualization of revolution is within reach, then Sundquist’s phrase – “Delany brings rebellion to the point of outbreak without actualizing it” – quoted at the beginning of this paper seems to bear relevance to the saying that the road to victory is more important than the victory itself. Therefore, if Delany’s revolution succeeded or not, plays little importance for the conclusions of this paper. Borrowing some features from his character, whom many critics say is Delany’s literary self-portrait, the author of *Blake* resembles Moses who showed his people



*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

the way out of bondage, guided them through the desert, and accompanied them to the "Promised Land", whose entrance he was denied. Similarly, it can be argued that his revolution falls into the pattern of Exodus, by pulling slaves out of oppression, showing them how to fight, and then leaving them on their own to actualize it by entering the "Promised Land". Thus, I believe, that irrespective of its goals, the means of revolution and the ways in which they help its resolution are the best place to look for if we want to understand Delany's political project as this has been laid down in *Blake*. Using the black body, personal and conjugal, as the vehicle for actualizing revolution is Delany's most original idea.

Given the time and political conditions in which Delany wrote his novel and factoring in his emigrationist policy, the goals of Delany's revolution are easily discernible. On the one hand, he aims at the construction of a black subjectivity as much as possible disassociated with slavery, while on the other he literally envisions an African nation that would undo the harms and consequences of slave trade. A separationist, much unlike Fredrick Douglass with whom he worked at the beginning of their activism, Delany was the proponent of a black capitalist state that would equal and challenge the white state. A firm believer in self-interest and self-reliance, Delany called for an economic, legal and nationalist war that as Carla Peterson points out, would put an end to black underdevelopment. Others also argue for the understanding of Delany's politics as geared toward the survival and regeneration of the black race. Therefore, the foundation of a black state, in a three-step process, would accomplish all of these goals. As the novel suggest, a slave insurrection in the South would lead the way for the creation of a Pan African state in Cuba, thus transforming the plantation into a real wealth-producing bourgeois enterprise.

If the goals are clear, the means of achieving them are less so. On the one hand, either way one looks at it, Delany's novel seems almost strategic in showing the way, but never quite getting there; on the other hand, because the novel falls short of presenting the outcome of the revolution it portrays, various critics felt the need, like I just did laying down the goals Delany wants to achieve, to concentrate more on a probable outcome of the revolution, sacrificing the means for the ends. Being understood that the novel is complex, unevenly written, exposing the conditions of slavery in antebellum America, a capitalist black state would uplift the race, marriage and religion are important, most critics seem to have been more concerned with the *why*, and for good reason, the revolution was needed. While I do not disagree with any of the critical remarks mentioned in this paper, I was more interested in understanding if there is the *how*, an instrumental instance that

would incorporate the *whys*. Perhaps this is not the best terminology to refer to a literary work and this paper might not have found the proper way of dealing with such a subject matter, but what I tried me best to prove was the connection that I believe Delany made between the injured body and the possible actualization of the revolution. Whether or not Delany placed the black body, in all its materiality, at the center of the novel and, most importantly, constructed the revolution around this body, personal, conjugal, and political is not clear, but there is enough evidence to prove that marriage, which is one of the sites where the body is realized, is an important vehicle in advancing Delany's political project. Moreover, by conflating the three narratives of the novel, the slave narrative, the domestic narrative and the revolution narrative, Delany shows a possible way that can sustain, move forward, and finally actualize a revolution. In other words, I believe that bodily injury inscribes the revolutionary subject in the sense that Blake starts an insurrection only after his conjugal body was jeopardized. Equally important, the family reunion narrative collapses into the revolution narrative to prove that the restoration of the domestic means the actualization of the revolution, thus placing marriage at the center of both private and public life. In the end, the new private and public lives are reconfigured outside and against the white master's touch. And this black family and this black nation are the realization of Delany's idea of revolution.e.

### **References:**

1. Crane, G. D. (2002). *Race, Citizenship, and Law in America*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
2. Delany, M. R. (1970). *Blake; or The Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*. Floyd J. Miller (Ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.
3. Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
4. Peterson, C. L. (1992). Capitalism, Black (Under)development, and the Production of the African-American Novel in the 1850s. *American Literary History*, 4(4), Winter.
5. Reid-Pharr, R. (1999). *Conjugal Union, The Body, The House, and the Black American*. New York: Oxford UP.
6. Stampp, K. (1956). *The Peculiar Institution*. New York: Knopf.
7. Sundquist, E. J. (1993). *To Wake the Nations, Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

*Outbreak Without Actualization?*

*Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America*

8. Wiegman, R. (1995). *American Anatomies, Theorizing Race and Gender*. Durham: Duke UP.
9. Williams, P. (1991). *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
10. Yellin, J. F. (1972). *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863*. New York: New York UP.



# **Søren Kierkegaard existentialism: an ethical path towards resolving religious intolerance and incessant killings in Nigeria**

Peter Abiodun OJO  
Oluwatobi David ESAN  
*Department of Philosophy  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology  
Oyo State, Nigeria  
odesan@lautech.edu.ng*

## **Abstract**

*Aside from the leadership crisis that has plagued the Nigerian state post-independence, insecurity remains a major challenge in the country. This insecurity is fueled by several factors; however, religious crises are the leading cause of insecurity in the Nigerian state. The problem has snowballed from being just a conflict to becoming a crisis. Several lives and properties have been lost to this crisis. The reason behind these crises is not far-fetched. Religious intolerance has been a plague that has spurred religious crises, several killings, and the destruction of properties in the Nigerian State. While several measures put in place to address this issue have proven abortive, this paper sets out to see how the existential ethics of Søren Kierkegaard can be instrumental in addressing the issue. The Nigerian state, as well as Kierkegaard, has placed a premium on religion as pivotal in the making of good individuals. But this paper has rather chosen to place a premium on Kierkegaard's ethical phase of life as the path towards addressing the Nigerian religious quagmire. The paper contends that an immoral religious man is more dangerous to society than a moral non-religious man. The paper exposes how religion could be prone to brainwashing people into committing crimes against humanity. The paper concludes and contends that, until the Nigerian State places priority on moral standing in all spheres, even in the selection of religious leaders ahead of any religious consecration, the state might never be able to come out of the quagmire.*

**Keywords:** *religious intolerance, existentialism, ethics, Kierkegaard.*

## *Introduction*

Religious intolerance has been a recurring problem throughout human history. It is characterized by conflicts, discrimination, and violence founded on differences of faith. The need to address religious intolerance in the increasingly interconnected society cannot be overstated. This complex problem is affected by several factors, some of which include cultural, historical, and political influences,

and this often intersects with other forms of discrimination such as racism. “Religious intolerance not only threatens social cohesion but also undermines fundamental human rights, such as freedom of religion and belief”. (Hafner, 2018, p. 23) It has far-reaching consequences for individuals, communities, and nations, often leading to violence, displacement, and the violation of basic human dignity.

*The significance of addressing religious intolerance lies in its potential to foster positive change on multiple levels. Some of these levels are social harmony, respect for human rights, conflict mitigation, global diplomacy, economic posterity, and cultural enrichment.* (Reardon, 2019, p. 5)

The issue of religious intolerance is deeply rooted in history and continues to challenge the fabric of societies worldwide. Recognizing its significance is the first step towards addressing this issue and fostering positive change.

It is well known that religious intolerance is not exclusive to Nigeria; several other countries in the world have also experienced this challenge to varying degrees. The question that comes to mind is, “Why should people engage in such brutal missions all in the name of a religion or worship of the supreme being”? While the subject of this research is not focused on the effect of religious intolerance around the world, the research centers on religious intolerance in Nigeria, a West African state that has been marred not just by political divisions but also by religious divisions. (Nuzhat, 2014, p. 16) While the Nigerian state is a cosmopolitan state that houses people across different cultural divides, numbering over 250 ethnic groups, the Nigerian polarization and political divide have been characterized by religious affiliations. These affiliations were seen in the 2023 general election when many Nigerians overlooked competency and ethnicity for religious classification. A large number of Nigerians spoke against the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the ruling political party, the All Progressive Party. The challenge was not about the competencies of the candidates but rather because of the fear of religious marginalization and Islamization.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, having a religious belief is not wrong; in fact, it is one of the fundamental human rights that must be enacted by any democratic state. What is wrong is when adherents of different religious groups decide not to tolerate one another, thereby leading to conflicts and incessant killings. According to the April 2023 report from the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, a non-governmental organisation with its headquarters in Eastern Nigeria. It reported that “at least 52,250 people have been killed over the last 14 years in

---

<sup>1</sup> These are evident on the pages of various Nigerian dailies such as Punch newspaper, Vanguard newspaper, and Tribune newspaper on several days leading to the Nigerian February 23 presidential election.

Nigeria for being Christians.”<sup>2</sup> This statistic clearly shows that religious conflicts in Nigeria have evolved into a crisis. These statistics show that an average of 300 Nigerian Christians have been killed monthly in the last 14 years because of their religious belief. This is quite a huge figure. When religious intolerance breeds incessant killings, then snowballs into a crisis. However, it would be unjust to outline that the Christian faith is the only faith affected by religious intolerance, leading to incessant killing in Nigeria. The Nigerian state has continually witnessed inter- and intra-faith conflict. The Nigerian state has witnessed Muslim-Muslim conflict as well as Muslim-Christian conflict. Some of these conflicts are captured in Esan Oluwatobi’s 2018 work on the existential assessment of religious conflict in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> The incessant killings due to religious intolerance in Nigeria are alarming and call for urgent action if the nation is to navigate towards a safe state.

While so many people have adopted their various religious Polaris because they were either born into a religious family or someone convinced them into a particular religion in the hope of an eternal reward, very few people have thought of first becoming moral agents outside of religion. Many individuals have taken religion to be the fix to moral decadence and people left their children in the hands of religious leaders to fix their moral deficiencies without first teaching and compelling them to be good individuals. This has constantly become a problem that has plagued African society and, by extension, the Nigerian state today. It is believed that responsible individuals are responsible religious adherents. When individuals in society leave religion to fix moral decadence, the result is that people become dogmatic, fanatical, and filled with religious bigotry.

Without a doubt, existential philosophy is tailored towards advocating for individual freedom and taking responsibility. So many existentialists, like Albert Camus, Karl Jasper, Gabriel Marcel, and a lot of other existentialists, have contributed to solving human challenges by prescribing paths that can be taken towards living an authentic life and realizing the full human potential. While existentialists differ in their paths, they are all united on the fact that “humans have the autonomous power to make choices that shape their existence at any given time, and they must be ready to take responsibility for their choices”. (Earnshaw, 2006, p. 48). Existentialists are divided into the theist and the atheist. Scholars like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre represent the atheistic divide; Martin Buber

---

<sup>2</sup> See the official website of the international societies of civil liberties and rule of law. See <https://intersociety-ng.org>.

<sup>3</sup> See Esan Oluwatobi (2018, p. 268).

and Søren Kierkegaard represent the theist divide. For this research, Kierkegaard's work will be adopted in addressing the religious crises in Africa, first because he is a religious existentialist who tailored his existentialism around religious beliefs. While J.S Mbiti affirms that to be an African man is to be notoriously Religious. Kierkegaard philosophy resonates well with the religious fundamentalism of an average African man. Just as Kierkegaard see religion as a fix to humans' existential conditions, most Africans also adhere to similar pattern. However, the problem this research identifies is that, just as religion has been unable to solve many existential crises in Kierkegaard's days, reliance on religion has also not yielded any positive result in African society of today. Hence the need to make a U-turn towards seeing how ethics will be a better substitute. Second because his philosophy presents what could be tagged as the human stages of existential consciousness that encompass both the religious and ethical stages of existence. In Most African homes, as soon as a child is born, such child is baptized straight into a religion, it is believed that religion has the capacity to teach the child all the needed morals. This has not done to well in African states. Perhaps there is a need to place premium on ethical values, highlighting the ethical stage of Kierkegaard, then allowing people through the either/or option to choose if they want to be religious or not. So many atrocities in Africa are committed under the guise of religion. And it is on this basis that this research seeks to place premium on ethics and emphasis the need to ethical stage of existence to be at the apex. The implication is that, this research is using Kierkegaard ethical stage as the hallmark of having a better society while also critiquing Kierkegaard for picking religious stage of existence over and above ethical stage of existence. Meaning, ethics is the path to solving the problem created by religion and not religion capable of repairing unethical persons.

This research shall hence explore the root and dynamism of religious crises in Nigeria. The paper shall proceed to discuss Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. The paper shall conclude by seeing how Kierkegaard's existentialism can be an ethical framework that will help to resolve religious crises in Nigeria, which were birthed by religious intolerance and have led to incessant killings in Nigeria.

### *Religious Intolerance, the Trajectory of Religious Conflict, and Incessant Killings in Nigeria*

Religious intolerance, a pressing societal challenge, is deeply intertwined with killings. Discrimination and violence driven by religious differences have caused numerous conflicts and atrocities throughout history. Understanding the



roots of religious intolerance is imperative for its mitigation (Appleby, 2000, p. 25). Religious intolerance in Nigeria stems from a complex interplay of historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors. One key root lies in historical tensions among ethnic and religious groups, exacerbated by the colonial legacy of divide and rule. The competition for resources, including land and political power, has fueled religious conflicts, particularly in regions with diverse populations (Oyewole, 2013, p. 16). Socio-economic disparities also contribute significantly, as marginalized communities may perceive religious identity as a source of empowerment and cohesion. Political manipulation often exploits these divisions for electoral gains, deepening mistrust and hostility (Hafner, 2018, p. 42). Additionally, religious extremism and the global spread of radical ideologies have infiltrated Nigerian society, further escalating violence. Moreover, a lack of religious literacy and education perpetuates misunderstandings and stereotypes. To address religious intolerance effectively, a holistic approach must consider these root causes, promoting interfaith dialogue, inclusive governance, socio-economic development, and educational reforms to foster tolerance and unity (Appleby, 2000, p. 23). Nigeria is a multi-religious nation with lots of biases against one another. The political leaders have allowed marriage between politics and religions, and this is affecting the economic progress of the nation. Religious intolerance has caused wars among brothers and sisters from the same locality, and this is affecting all sectors ranging from education, finance, industries, ministries, and various governmental parastatals with political authorities.

Nigerians often hold the view that Islam and Christianity are alien or foreign religions. Islam originated in the Arab world and was subsequently extended globally. “Jihad began when Arab traders arrived in the nineteenth-century Kanem Borno Empire. As a result, jihad causes Islam to grow quickly, particularly in northern Nigeria.” (Esan Oluwatobi, 2018, p. 268). Subsequently, it began to spread gradually to the south of the nation, mostly to the east. Islam offers a comprehensive code of conduct for all people, and from its perspective, all Muslims are a part of the Islamic Ummah. Muslims, wherever they may be in the world, are connected as members of the Ummah. Esan claims that radical Islamists are ruining the beauty of the Islamic faith (Aderibigbe, 1988, p. 137). But Christianity entered Nigeria at various points in time.

The initial communication was most likely made by Tuaregs or Christian Berbers. The second arrived in the vicinity of Benin and Warri in 1488 through the Portuguese, but it had no permanent effect. Finally, with the arrival of the English-speaking Christian mission in Badagry in 1842, Christianity started to firmly

establish itself in Nigeria. A few freed slaves who chose to assist in the growth of Christianity after being converted to the faith made it easier for the religion to quickly spread throughout this area, particularly in Badagry and Abeokuta. Christianity was brought to the northern region of Nigeria after it had been established in the southern region (Gofwen, 2004, p. 59).

Conflict studies in Nigeria attribute the remote origins of religious strife in Northern Nigeria to the design of the colonial political system. This is said to be related to the pluralistic character of the various colonial administrative structures that eventually gave rise to the state of Nigeria, a phase established after the 1884 Berlin Conference (Akinola, 2014, p. 11). In the northern region, Islam had become well-established, whereas in the southern region, Christianity was the dominant religion. Because of these factors, the newly formed nation was split in half, with the two branches adhering to very different political and economic ideologies. Nigeria has been split between a Christian south and a Muslim north since colonial times. Following the nation's independence in 1960, this splitting gained significance (Takaya, 1992, p. 10).

*Thirty percent of Nigerians were neither Muslims nor Christians before that period. That percentage is now just 1%. Both religions have increased in number, although Christianity has increased significantly, accounting for over 48% of the population today compared to 21% in 1950. (Akinola, 2014, series 11)*

In the Catholic archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria's vicar general, Father Mathew Kukah, stated that the rise in numbers increased Christian involvement in Nigerian politics. Additionally, it made religious hostilities between Muslims and Christians worse.

According to research, it is oversimplified to assume that religious violence in Nigeria is exclusively caused by disputes between the two major religions – Muslims and Christians. According to this study,

The number of violent death incidents involving Islamic groups against other Islamic groups between June 2006 and May 2014 was 60, which is greater than the number of violent death incidents involving Islamic groups against Christian groups or churches during the same period, which was 57. Furthermore, there have been multiple instances of violent deaths among Christians; therefore, it is sufficient to state that when talking about violent deaths in religion, both intra- and interreligious incidents are included. However, 11,384 violent killings between June 2006 and May 2014 were related to religion (Nuzhat, 2014, p. 17).

It is crucial to understand that religious disputes with political overtones have contributed to Nigeria's rising violent mortality rate over time. Therefore, some people see the country's volatility as a success of the British colonialists,

*Søren Kierkegaard existentialism: an ethical path towards resolving religious intolerance and incessant killings in Nigeria*

who used religion to influence the political system and cause multiple political upheavals in the country.

One cannot deny the havoc done by religious intolerance to the Nigerian state, not just to lives but also to properties. The Nigerian state has witnessed many churches, religious buildings, and individual properties being destroyed on this course. Another noticeable issue with religious intolerance in Nigeria is that it has given birth to so many religious terrorist groups and sects, like the deadly Bokoharam sect, and so many extremist fundamentalist sects that have maimed individuals. One must, however, note that one sad thing about the destruction of lives and properties as a result of religious crises is that some individuals are brainwashed in the name of religion to end their own lives. The Nigerian state has witnessed several suicide bombers who have taken their own lives while trying to destroy adherents of other religions. So many evils have been done and carpeted under the cover of religion, and it appears that the worship of a supreme being is a misery set to put humans at loggerheads with each other.

From the foregoing, one could draw or infer that Nigerians have taken religion as a collective responsibility rather than an individual belief. If people see their religious beliefs as their private and personal choice, it will prevent them from hurting other people who choose not to belong to their religion. Religion, or the belief in a supreme being, has become a social collaboration and so many people have been lost in the crowd of life. According to Kierkegaard, so many religious adherents are only spectators in the field of life, doing the bidding of their clerics or religious leaders without having a deep thought as to the rationale behind their actions. This is because many people jumped from the aesthetic stage of life to the religious stage. Some did not have the opportunity to make the *either-or* choice; rather, they were mandated by higher authorities in their homes or communities. One could say they were not truly transformed in a religious language; hence, their behavioural decadence remained in them, and they only found religious extremism as a way of expressing the decadence inherent in them. At this stage, it becomes important to examine Kierkegaard's three stages of existence.

*Søren Kierkegaard's Three Phases of Existential Living*

Søren Kierkegaard, a known existentialist – a Christian existentialist, so to speak – was the first philosopher to use the word existentialism before Jean-Paul Sartre expounded on the theme. Kierkegaard, who is a theist and a Christian existentialist, is of the view that very few humans are only spectators in the field of

life, and very few people are actors. He equated life with a sporting field where we have participants and spectators. According to him, the spectators are not living an authentic life, and only the athletes who take an active part in the competition are living a true and authentic life (Watts, 2007, p. 189). He divided the life of humans into three existential phases, and humans are always at liberty to remain in a phase or move to another phase.

According to Kierkegaard, there are three main phases or domains of human existence: the ethical, the religious, and the aesthetic, which are connected by irony and humour.

### *The Aesthetic Stage*

According to Kierkegaard, an aesthetic life might be characterized by a variety of factors, such as intellectual fulfilment, sensual desire, or a propensity to see oneself as though one were “on stage” (Kierkegaard, 1971, p. 281). This aesthetic existence exists in multiple dimensions. It is possible to witness the purely unreflective lifestyle at the bottom. Those who lead thoughtful, autonomous, critical, and socially indifferent lifestyles may be found at the top. However, a lot of Kierkegaard interpreters think that most people lead the least contemplative kind of artistic stage, with daily worries and tasks directing their actions. Fewer contemplative individuals follow the aesthetic. Even pain can be artistically developed as a tragic, heroic, and self-sufficient drama of self-knowledge. Such people lead completely hopeless lives, whether they realize it or not. Their lives are devoted to preventing the ethical from invading their otherwise sensuous existence, as they are bored with the pursuit of the immediate and arbitrary. The irony is that the sarcastic individual perceives the flaws in the artistic life and its relativism and understands the necessity of leading an ethical life.

### *The Ethical Stage*

The ethical plane is the second plane of existence. At this point in their lives, a person starts to realize their true purpose, accept personal responsibility for both good and evil, and forge a relationship with others and themselves. The acts that one makes on this plane of existence are more coherent and consistent than on the plane of existence that precedes it (Kierkegaard, 1971, p. 280). Many of Kierkegaard’s readers place a high value on ethics. It challenges everyone to reflect on their lives and examine their deeds with a strict sense of accountability. Since it establishes the framework that allows for the extension of delight in committed long-term relationships, such as marriage, the ethical can be regarded

*Søren Kierkegaard existentialism: an ethical path towards resolving religious intolerance and incessant killings in Nigeria*

as fully absorbing the best of aesthetic living. However, the ethical domain is constrained in that it relies on itself and believes it is sufficient. The ethical person has the false belief that leading an ethical life is simple. Therefore, sin and repentance provide challenges for the ethical stage.

*The Religious Stage*

The religious and the ethical are closely related; one cannot be religious and ethically serious at the same time, but the religious stage encompasses the ethical. Living in the religious realm entails a relationship with God while living in the ethical realm entails a commitment to some moral absolute (Kierkegaard, 1971, p. 281). Religion, according to the Kierkegaardian pseudonyms who discuss stage theory, is the pinnacle of human development. One of Kierkegaard's pen names, Johannes Climacus, makes a distinction between two kinds of religious life within this stage, dubbed Religiousness A and Religiousness B. The first type of religiousness is that of Socrates, the Greek philosopher, in which an individual's conscience and fervent search for the truth clashed with society. It is found that ethics requires "the highest good." Acknowledging the divine's immanence in the earth is a prerequisite.

The second religious stage is understanding that one is a sinner and the purveyor of lies, which is another aspect of a religious mindset. The person gradually comes to understand that the basis of their everlasting salvation is a paradox: God, the transcendent, entered human history to save people. This paradox is revealed to them through revelation and their close relationship with the paradox, which is Jesus. Kierkegaard believed that the sheer idea that this could happen was scandalous to human reason. He believed that if this is not the case, then neither the incarnation nor the meaning of human sinfulness can be fully understood. According to Kierkegaard, "Religion is nothing more than the drive towards realizing there is a transcendent force in the cosmos. Not only is religion personal; it also includes societal and individual components" (Gardiner, 1988, p. 78). However, it starts with the person and their recognition of their sins. Having examined the existential phase of Kierkegaard, the need arises to see how this phase of life, particularly the ethical phase, can be instrumental in addressing issues of religious intolerance in Nigeria and, by extension, incessant killings.

*Kierkegaard Existential Ethics: A Guide to Religious Tolerance in Nigeria*

According to the hedonist, humans are pleasure-seeking beings, which implies that everyone desires pleasure and a level of self-satisfaction in life. However, it must be noted that humans must be aware that in the quest to seek pleasure, one must be conscious of individual limits in order not to infringe on others. There is a limit to human desires and pleasure. Kierkegaard advances the aesthetic stage of life as the first phase of all existence. At this phase, humans are not concerned with morality and religion; all they desire is self-survival, self-sustenance, and self-satisfaction. For Kierkegaard, the majority of existence is at this very stage. While it is not a crime to remain at this stage, it is a matter of choice to leave this stage. The aesthetic stage of Kierkegaard can be likened to the Hobbesian state of nature, where it was a war of all against all with no form of moral conscience. Many Nigerians are in the Kierkegaard aesthetic stage with no consciousness of human value; they seek what pleases them to the detriment of others. They want to enact their rules, wishes, and desires ahead of others. This is the root cause of intolerance in society. People do not realize that others have rights that must be respected. Many Nigerians are driven by self-will, impulses, and ego that characterize the aesthetic stage without due consideration for morality. The aesthetic stage does not have to deal with the level of literacy; one could have a very educated fellow with low consideration for human values and morality. Until many Nigerians surrender the desire for the aesthetic stage for the ethical stage, Nigerians might keep battling the problem of religious intolerance and incessant killings.

Ethics is considered the study of what ought to be done; if this is the case, then it implies that the ethical stage of life is the phase that synergizes desires, will, and pleasure towards rational consciousness. Humans will always crave self-actualization according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but ethics will allow humans to regulate their conduct and see the need for dialogue whenever there are differences. One might not be able to live without differences as humans, not just in the religious sphere, but irrespective of the differences, it is expected that humans adhere to strict moral grounds while dealing with others in the community. If one adheres to moral consciousness, then the issue of incessant killings will be seldom heard within the Nigerian state.

Inter-subjectivity was advocated by Kierkegaard as a part of resolving differences (Watts, 2007, p. 189). It is worth noting that Kierkegaard envisaged the fact that too many subjective views could create chaos in the human world; hence, inter-subjectivity will give room for dialogue, reconciliation, and the acceptance of

tolerating each other. However, what operates in the Nigerian state today is radical subjectivism. In the sense that an individual wants to impose their subjective view on others and make them accept it, whether it goes well with them or not. This is just the attitude of animals, not humans. Humans are expected to be governed by a sense of rationality and morality. Radical subjectivism births intolerance and desperation toward achieving individual goals. It must be noted that this spirit that has characterized Nigerians born into religious intolerance and incessant killings is antithetical to the communal African spirit, which used to be the African identity in the past. Inter-subjectivity is one way of resolving crises in indigenous African societies. The Yoruba adage that says “*omode gbon, agba gbon la fi da ile-ife*”,<sup>4</sup> meaning it is both the wisdom of the child and the adult that was annexed in the creation of Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba, is a pointer to the fact that the radical individualism that is creating problems in Nigeria today was never part of the African people in the past.

However, while Kierkegaard pitched the religious stage as the highest phase that all humans ought to get to, it could be contested because one of the problems facing the Nigerian state is religious intolerance. If a phase Kierkegaard believes should set humans free is one that is birthing human destruction, then there is a need to re-examine that phase. The events that are unfolding in Nigeria today have shown how religion can be a very viable tool for brainwashing people and making them commit crimes against humanity. People surrender to killing themselves in the name of religion; humans kill one another in the name of religion. Religious beliefs are prone to human manipulation. Hence, when humans are not morally grounded, they become a destructive tool for religious leaders and fanatics. Morality precedes religious beliefs; religious beliefs should not be anti-moral. The problem with the Nigerian state is that many have taken the ethical stage for granted. Hence, they jump from the aesthetic stage to the religious stage. Nigeria has so many religious people but few moral people. If this is not the case, one would not have to question the level of moral decadence in society despite the high level of people with various religious affinities. Religion does not necessarily birth morally upright people, but morally upright people will birth a good and just society.

It is upon the above submission that this paper affirms that for Nigeria to scale through the religious crisis that has plagued her, there is a need to place a

---

<sup>4</sup> See indigenous Yoruba people. It is a proverb that is passed orally from generation to generation. It is part of the Yoruba oral tradition.

premium on the ethics and morality of individuals ahead of religious beliefs. The premium must be placed on choice and responsibility as pivotal to human action rather than believing in a supreme being who will either judge or condemn humanity at some point. Ethical considerations must be inculcated into the Nigerian education curriculum from early stages and this should be made compulsory just as religious studies subjects are made compulsory. Priority must be placed on the moral stand of Nigerian leaders ahead of their religious affinities. When selecting religious leaders, priority must be placed on their moral soundness ahead of their religious consecration. Doing this will help to gradually re-orient Nigerians towards being morally upright, and by implication, the consciousness of human value will be instilled.

### *Conclusion*

Nigeria has prioritised religion as a major institution for producing good and responsible citizens. However, the aftermath of this has resulted in various crises, ranging from religious dogmatism to brainwashing, inter- and intra-religious conflicts, and incessant killings in the name of religion. While Kierkegaard's existential phase represents a good description of the phases of human existence towards self-actualization, this paper emphasizes the need to prioritise Kierkegaard's ethical stage above the religious phase. The paper has advanced the need to build morally upright citizens before building religious citizens. An immoral religious man poses a greater threat to the society than a morally non-religious man. Hence, the paper advocates for an ethical turn in resolving Nigerian religious crises that are hinged on religious intolerance and incessant killings. The paper sees the need for not just Nigeria alone, but for Kierkegaardian philosophy to be re-ordered in such a way that the ethical stage takes premium over other stages so as to be able to solve contemporary challenges, one of which is the problem created through religion as the case of Nigeria maybe.

### **References:**

1. Aderibigbe, I. S. (1988). Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria: History of Tolerance and Peaceful Coexistence. In C. S. Momoh et. al. (Eds.) *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance*, 111. Lagos: John West.
2. Akinola, E. O. (2014). *Muslims, Christians and religious violence in Nigeria: patterns and mapping (June 2006 –May 2014)*. IFRA-Nigeria epapers series.
3. Appleby, R. S. (2000). *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers,.



*Søren Kierkegaard existentialism: an ethical path towards resolving religious intolerance and incessant killings in Nigeria*

4. Earnshaw, S. (2006). *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Continuum International Publication Group.
5. Esan Oluwatobi. (2018). An Existential Assessment of religion: A Path to Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria. *Journal of Islam in Nigeria*, 3(2). Center for Ilorin Studies.
6. Gardiner, P. L. (1988). *Kierkegaard*. New York: Oxford University Press.
7. Gofwen, R. I. (2004). *Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria and Nation Building: The Throes of two Decades 1980-2000*. Human Rights Monitor (HRM).
8. Hafner, J. (2018). *Promoting Religious Literacy: A Compendium of Programs and Practices in Public Schools*. Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute.
9. Kierkegaard, S. (1971). *Either/or* (vol. 1). (Davis F. Swenson & Lillian Marvin Swenson, Trans.). Princeton University Press.
10. Nuzhat, F. (2014). Religious Conflicts in Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(4). European Centre for Research Training and Development.
11. Oyewole, S. O. (2013). Religious Education and Tolerance in Nigeria. *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 12(1).
12. Reardon, M. J. (2019). *Religion in Global Civil Society*. Research Encyclopedia of Communication.
13. Takaya, B. J. (1992). Religion, Politics and Peace: Resolving the Nigerian Dilemma. In J. K. Olupona (Ed.). *Religion, Peace and Multi-faith Nigeria*. O. A. U. Press.
14. Watts, M. (2007). *Kierkegaard*. One World Publications.

**Acknowledgment:** *The work was carried out within the grant Epistemological approach to personal development and education for society: from transdisciplinary strategies to the pragmatic purposes of the current society in the Republic of Moldova; digit 20.80009.1606.08.*



# Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg's Land to the Tiller Policy

Fasil MERAWI

*Department of Philosophy  
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia  
fasil.merawi@aau.edu.et*

## Abstract

*Being situated within the debates within intellectual histories of Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, the aim of this paper is to show why the land to the tiller policy of the Derg regime failed to realize its emancipatory intent of liberating landless and poor peasants. Through the usage of the method of ideology critique, the paper shows that the land to the tiller policy failed since it was used as an ideological instrument rather than as a reform that had the aim of replacing the feudal economy with small-scale farms.*

**Keywords:** *Derg, land to the tiller, emancipation, social fabric, ideology, Marxism.*

## *Introduction*

Marxist revolutionary movements of Africa were born out of the need to develop an anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic emancipatory struggle that can succeed in laying the foundations for social progress (Visentini, 2020). These revolutionary movements were heavily dictated by the idea of a class struggle and the need to mobilize the masses having the goal of introducing a new egalitarian order (Burawoy, 2000). The Marxist revolutionary movements were developed in a closer relationship with pan-Africanism and the attempt to introduce an African form of collective struggle that is rooted in local cultures and traditions (Armah, 1984). As part of such an undertaking, attempts were made by African revolutionaries to appropriate “socialism to their own national circumstances” (Hughes, 1992, p. 10). Marxism was seen as a paradigm of social liberation that can usher in the transformation from colonialism into the liberated African state (Visentini, 2020). In the current stage, the legacies of Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa are seen in African political systems, the usage of the thesis

of class struggle as an organizing principle in the body politic and the quest for social justice and equality.

One of the sites of experimentation where Marxist revolutionary ideals assumed the position of state ideology in Africa is the case of the Derg regime in Ethiopia. The Derg came to power in Ethiopia promising the introduction of a new political order that promised a radical break from the feudal past (Belluci, 2016). Having an aim of developing a socialist state, the Derg introduced major policies including agrarian reform, nationalization, land policy, educational reform, military mobilization and a command economy (Abbink & Hagmann, 2016). Ultimately, the policies of the Derg failed as they did not have popular support; there was weak governance, international isolation, internal factions and a disregard for the question of identity (Clapham, 2009). Being founded on the analysis of Marxist revolutionary movements in the African context, the aim of this paper is to identify the reasons why the Derg's new land policy that is expressed by the slogan of land to the tiller failed to materialize. Through the usage of ideology critique as a methodological tool, the hidden meanings behind such a policy, the emancipatory intent that the policy carries and the ways in which counter hegemonic approaches could be developed will be explored.

The land to the tiller policy will be situated as a state policy that had the emancipatory goal of ending the relations of exploitations between landlords and tenants in the imperial regime and in return setting the foundation for a new egalitarian economy. The policy was characterized by the redistribution of land, the reforming of tenancy and the introduction of cooperative farming and small-scale farms (Yemane-ab, 2016). The study of such a policy and its failures needs to be situated in the study of revolutionary Marxist movements in Africa. Like the different policies like nationalization and collectivization that were introduced by other Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, the land to the tiller policy was motivated by the need to develop a mode of revolutionary practice that is able to serve as a foundation for an egalitarian practice (Tibebu, 2008). Not just in Ethiopia but in other African nations, Marxism was seen as the ultimate foundation for an emancipatory practice since by its very essence it stood against the capitalistic mode of exploitation (Bracking & Harrison, 2003). It provides a path towards the realization of social justice through a collective struggle that is mounted by the alienated and the dehumanized.

Through the development of a broader discussion that situates the development of the Derg's land policy within the history of Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, the paper has the goal of understanding the ideological foundations of such a land policy, the emancipatory intent that it sought to realize,

*Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg's Land to the Tiller Policy*

its internal tensions and contradictions, the reasons why it ultimately failed and the ways in which an alternative approach could be pursued in. There is a need to develop an analysis that shows the reasons why the Marxist revolutionary practice failed to serve as a foundation of a social progress in the Ethiopian soil.

The paper starts out by situating the land to the tiller policy within Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa and this is followed by a discussion of the place that is occupied by this policy in Derg's state ideology. After this, a discussion of the ideological assumptions that are found behind the land to the tiller policy and the reasons why the policy failed will be made. This will set the foundation for a discussion that centres on the need to develop an alternative approach that is participatory and is situated in the lives of the people. Such an analysis will be made through the usage of the method of ideology critique. This is useful in terms of identifying the ideological foundations that are found behind this policy, the reasons why it failed and the spaces within which a counter hegemonic practice could be developed within.

*Land to the Tiller in the Context of Marxist Revolutionary Movements in Africa*

The land to the tiller policy is a radical policy of the Derg that was aimed at freeing peasants from the system of tenancy in which they were forced to share the largest percentage of their crops to the landlords and live a life of poverty (Stellmacher, 2007). The policy is part of an agrarian reform program that was aimed at the redistribution of land from the landlords into the tenants (Ottaway, 1977). The land to the tiller was motivated by the need to create a new egalitarian order where the formation of agricultural cooperatives and small-scale farms will lead into an increase in agricultural productivity. The policy is similar to other radical policies that were introduced by Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa like nationalization, redistribution of land, state control of the economy and the focus on trade unions (Samoff, 1982). Land to the tiller constituted a part of Derg's attempt to introduce a new political order that is defined by central planning, mass mobilization and grassroots development. In this section, the land to the tiller policy will be situated within the intellectual history of other Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa.

From the very beginning Marxism in the African soil was seen as an instrumentalist ideology that can be used to create a new society that is founded on social justice and equality. To such an extent "African Marxism began as a political and ideological instrument" (Copans, 1985, p. 27). It was introduced in the African soil as a philosophy of mass mobilization that promises not only the

dawn of a new era but also a collective practice that has the capacity of preserving the cultural values of the continent and developing a sense of a commonly shared identity (Markakis & Waller, 2013). Such a philosophy is founded on the assumption that in the world of capitalism, there is an antagonism between workers and those who own the means of production (Marx, 1959). It had the goal of showing that the capitalistic era leads into the fetishism commodities and elevates historically situated relations of exploitations into the position of universality (Marx, 2000). Such a process strips the individual of the capacity to create the world through one's labour (Marx & Engels, 1968). In such a context, what Marxism promised is the restoration of the creative power of labour against the processes of commoditization that characterises the world of capitalism (Comninel, 2019). In the African soil, Marxism was presented as a path towards modernity that defies the logic of western colonialism and the myth of unlimited progress.

Marxist revolutionary movements originated in the different parts of the African continent being guided by the need to emancipate the masses and also build a new society that is founded on relations of equality (Ishiyama, 2005). Among others, one can mention the Derg, ANC, MPLA, FRELIMO, SWAPO, PAIGC AND ZANU-PF. The Derg's rise to power in Ethiopia is situated within the context of a discontent with the imperial regime and the need to usher in a process of social progress that is founded on the empowerment of peasants and the working class (Keller, 1984). The Derg saw Marxism-Leninism as a way of introducing a process of state building that is centred on central planning (Legum, 1977). Such an effort expressed itself in different reforms like the introduction of a new land policy, and the nationalization of key industries and collectivization of agriculture.

As a regime that is founded on the need to lay the foundations for a social progress that is guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the Derg had the goal of dismantling the feudal regime and introduce a new order that is defined by the rule of the working class (Kebede, 2003). One of the aspects of such a revolutionary practice of the Derg constituted the introduction of a land policy that was expressed by the slogan land to the tiller (Abebe, 2016). This was a policy that was motivated by the need to liberate the peasants from serfdom and lay the foundations for social and economic progress through the increase in agricultural productivity and the reduction of rural poverty (Yemane-ab, 2016). It was not only the Derg that had an interest in using Marxism as a revolutionary philosophy of class struggle.

### *Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg's Land to the Tiller Policy*

In looking at other Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, one observes that in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) being inspired by Marxism in conjunction with pan-Africanism, introduced an anti-apartheid struggle that stood against racial segregation (Nash, 2014). The ANC experimented with different Marxist ideals like nationalization and the redistribution of property. Both the Derg and the ANC saw Marxism as a foundation of social justice and equality. In the case of Angola, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) introduced different Marxist modernization programs like land reforms and nationalization (Ishiyama, 2005), while the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) used Marxism in the struggle towards Portuguese colonialism. Its initiatives focused on the need to redistribute land and nationalize the main industries. The leadership of FRELIMO believed that “only revolutionary war can form the proper basis for a socialist society” (Henriksen, 1978, p. 444). The radical redistribution of land as a policy was also pursued by the Derg.

Marxist ideals also provided the foundations for emancipatory struggles that were introduced by SWAPO, PAIGC and ZANU-PF. In the case of South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), the focus was on the need to use armed struggle to dismantle the white rule (Vigne, 1987) while the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) introduced an agricultural collectivization with a focus on rural development and the nationalization of industries (Lyon, 1980). Lastly, the Zimbabwe African National Union-patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), introduced a Marxist revolutionary struggle that was focused on land redistribution and the need to nationalize industries (Shaw, 1986). All of these attempts to use Marxism as a foundation of a revolutionary movement in the African context are defined by the need to develop a critique that can identify ways of overcoming the colonial order (Moreira, 1989). Just like these radical measures that were taken by the Marxist revolutionary movements in other parts in Africa, the Derg also introduced radical policies and the land to the tiller was one of such policies.

### *Derg's Rise to Power and the Land Reform Agenda*

The Derg came to power in a context that is characterized by the autocratic rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, widespread poverty, famine, landlessness and rural unrest and a political climate of a radical student movement guided by the principles of Marxism (Assefa, 2022). The Ethiopian student movement headed the protests against the imperial regime and Marxism emerged as the guiding philosophy in the quest for social justice and equality (Zewde, 2014). The

revolution took place against an imperial order that is defined by the “unification and embodiment of the body politics in the person of the king” (Toggia, 2008, p. 110). It was an order that rests on divine authority and had a complete disregard for basic liberties. There was a widespread dissatisfaction against the rule of the Emperor who was “exercising undivided, absolute, single-handed rule” (Vestal, 2013, p. 40). In such a context, the Derg came to power as committee that is made up of military officers and made promises to introduce a new egalitarian social order (Ottaway, 1978). Once it came to power, the Derg tried to introduce a vision of a new socialist order that is defined by a command economy and a centralized process of planning.

The Derg had the goal of modernizing the nation and this was to be realized by making a transition from a feudal society into the establishment of a new egalitarian society (Gebeyehu, 2010). It promised to address the root causes of poverty and inequality although in reality what it managed to attain was a transition from an aristocratic feudal regime into a Marxist-Leninist totalitarian and autocratic regime that did not tolerate any dissent in the name of meeting the goals of the revolution (Tiruneh, 1993). The Derg saw the imperial regime as failing to create a broader political landscape and not having the strategies that are needed in order to modernize the nation in the face of the threat that has been posed by western powers (Ottaway, 1976). Seeing itself as a revolutionary regime that will introduce a new emancipatory practice that is guided by Marxism-Leninism introduced, the Derg sought to mobilize the masses and lay the foundation for a new society. At the very beginning, the Derg constituted “democratic movement within the armed and police forces” (Legum, 1977, p. 306). Such a movement had the goal of addressing the foundations of inequality within the Ethiopian state. One of the major aspects of the conception of modernization that the Derg tried to introduce in order to liberate the nation from the feudal order is characterized by the development of an agrarian reform that is seen as the foundation of social justice and equity. Such an urge involved the introduction of the land to the tiller policy (Chekol, 2017). It had the goal of empowering disenfranchised subjects.

The land to the tiller policy was introduced by the Derg as a policy that sought to liberate peasants from the system of feudalism and allow them to freely exercising their labour under agricultural cooperatives (Rahmato, 2009). The land policy of the Deg had the aim of addressing landlessness among peasants that were dwelling in the feudal system. Under the older land rights system, it is seen that “only those people with land use right or rist land were considered as a liberated or free” (Getahun, 2015). This subsequently resulted in the alienation and



impoverishment of the masses. Against such a background, the Derg introduced land to the tiller as an emancipatory project that situated the landless and the poor peasants as the subjects that have been marginalized so far within the feudal regime. In a nation that is defined by an agrarian economy and where most of the peasants are landless, the Derg tried to introduce a new political economy that is characterized by the nationalization of key industries, the redistribution of land and the introduction of a common economy (Keller, 1984). In 1975, it introduced the National Land Reform Program that was situated as the foundation of rural prosperity and a policy that will lead into the dawn of a new order through the abolishment of the feudal land tenure systems.

The land to the tiller was motivated by several goals. First of all, it had the goal of redistributing land, and this was to be met by taking away land from the landlords and then giving the land to peasants that assumed the role of small scale farms (Yemane-ab, 2016). This was seen as a crucial step that is needed in order to realize the communal ownership of land which is the foundation for the emancipation of peasants. Secondly, the policy focused on the need to reform the tenancy system. The peasants were deprived of their rights since they lived under a system of share cropping where they were made to give the vast majority of their harvests to the landowners (Abebe, 2016). This was a source of their alienation as they did not have control over the products that they have created and the land to the tiller had the goal of emancipating the peasants by making them landowners through the establishment of cooperatives (Rahmato, 2009). To such an extent, the emancipatory vision of the land to the tiller is found in the quest to make the transition from tenancy to cooperative framing (Benin & Pender, 2001). Still, from the very beginning, the policy faced a resistance from the “institutions and elites of the old order” (Harbeson, 1977, p. 3). The main goal in the introduction of this policy is the communal ownership of land and this was in return seen as the foundation of a higher level of agricultural productivity.

The idea of creating a new society that is defined by equity and social justice was the goal of the Derg's modernization programs. The replacement of the system of tenancy with cooperative farms and the redistribution of land were regarded as necessary steps that are needed in order to liberate peasants (Crewett *et al.*, 2008). The emancipatory vision that is found behind the land to the tiller expressed itself in terms of the class struggle that is found between landlords and tenants (Chala, 2016). It is the revolutionary practice of the peasants over the landlords that will lead into the creation of a new egalitarian society that is defined by the relations of equality (Freeman, 2003). The Derg developed images of cooperative farms that are inhabited by peasants that are working in unison for the

good of the nation. Still, rather than introducing a modernization program that is supported by technical experts and a properly functioning system of administration, the Derg was more interested in using its policies in order to disseminate its ideological visions.

*Ideological Assumptions Behind Land to the Tiller*

The land to the tiller is founded on a Marxist-Leninist philosophy that is motivated by the need to emancipate the masses. Setting itself against an autocratic feudal regime that subsumed all political power and authority, the Derg believed that it can introduce a new order that can empower peasants and the working class (Gebeyehu, 2010). There are several ideological assumptions that are found behind the land policy of the Derg that need to be taken into consideration. First of all, land to the tiller is grounded on a Marxist understanding of alienated labour. It is founded on the idea that human beings do not have a fixed essence and that it is through their creative capacity to labour that they get to mould and fashion the world that they are living in (Markakis & Waller, 2013). This analysis of labour was used in order to explain the relations of exploitations between landlords and tenants and to introduce the land to the tiller as an attempt to go beyond such a system of tenancy. Seen as an attempt to restore the creative value of the labour of landless peasants, land to the tiller was introduced as a “radical agrarian reform based on the distribution of land” (Deverux *et al.*, 2005). Within the system of feudalism that defines the imperial regime in Ethiopia, peasants were alienated and dehumanized. The land to the tiller in such a context constituted the revitalization of labour through the abolishing of relations of exploitations and the introduction of a system of cooperative farming.

Secondly, the land to the tiller was also grounded on the ideological assumption of a class antagonism that is found among different social classes. These social classes are represented by the tenements that are dwelling under a system of share cropping and the landlords who get to take the vast majority of the shares (Ottaway, 1976). There is an antagonism between the landlords and the tenants and what the land to the tiller constitutes is the empowering of the tenants through their emancipation from the position of tenancy and the reclaiming of their autonomy and personhood through collective engagements in collective agricultural practices. Under the imperial regime, the tenants were not producing for themselves but for the landlords and because of this, they did not have the creative capacity to create the world that they are living in (Tiruneh, 1993). The Derg in return tried to usher in a new era that is defined by communal ownership

### *Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg's Land to the Tiller Policy*

and where each and every member of the community was going to have a fair share.

Thirdly, the ideological construct of collective struggle also runs through the land to the tiller. The policy is permeated with the assumption that it is through collective struggle that the exploited will dismantle the relations of exploitations and in return lay the foundations for a new political order that is defined by relations of equality (Gebeyehu, 2010). Such a call for a collective struggle under land to the tiller expressed itself in the idea of a collectively owned land, the need to transfer land from the landlords into the hands of the tenants and the calls for justice, and an equitable distribution of resources (Ottaway, 1977). It is not the individual farmer but peasants that are seen as the main object of analysis in this practice. These excluded and marginalized farmers work in cooperation with one another in order to dismantle the system of feudalism and create a new socialist order.

Fourthly, an ideological vision of an agrarian revolution is also found within land to the tiller. This is a revolution that has the goal of significantly transforming the nature of the rural economy and social structures within the feudal order (Getahun, 2015). The hierarchical relations between the landlords and the tenants are replaced with the symmetrical power relations among farmers who work within cooperatives (Crewett *et al.*, 2008). The social order that sets the nobility and the landlords at the social ladder is now replaced by a system where farmers work in unison with one another in order to create the foundations of an egalitarian society. It is the emancipation of peasants that is situated as ultimate goal of the land to the tiller. The Derg thus introduced the land policy as a way of creating a new society that is grounded on the triumph of the labourer.

### *Failed Emancipation: Ideology and Societal Dynamics*

The land to the tiller had the goal of redistributing the land that was owned by the landlords into the hands of landless peasants. It was a land policy that formed part of the policy of the Derg that had an aim of dismantling the feudal regime and in return introducing a new order that will lead into the modernization of the nation in line with the ideological assumptions of Marxism-Leninism (Abebe, 2016). Such a land policy was not just developed in Ethiopia, and there were other experiments in nations like Kenya, Namibia and Tanzania. The goal within these experiments was the development of an emancipatory practice that has the goal of modernizing the nation (Armah, 1984). Unfortunately, the land to the tiller failed to realize its emancipatory intent and such a failure could be

attributed to the fact that it was primarily used as an ideological tool and thus it was not grounded on a proper understanding of the societal dynamics.

Although at a theoretical level, the land to the tiller was introduced as an emancipatory practice that had the aim of redistributing land, getting rid of the system of tenancy and realize agrarian revolution, still in practice; it was just like the other modernization programs of the Derg like nationalization of industries, being used as an ideological tool to control the masses (Tadesse, 2016). The policy was imposed from the above and as a result of this; there was no proper consultation that was made with the peasants. It was not grounded on the lives of Ethiopian peasants led into the decrease in agricultural productivity and it even resulted in the displacement of peasants. Peasants' associations and cooperatives failed to meet their objectives since they did not have the adequate resources and the proper manpower and the expertise that is needed in order to properly implement the policies (Nichola, 2006). Thus, the land policy resulted in the decline in agricultural productivity.

What the Derg tried to introduce was a state centred and a cadre-controlled form of land distribution (Adal, 1997). Although the ideological assumptions of the system of land redistribution emphasized the need to empower the masses, still, in reality, there was a system that was being run by cadres and military officials. The cadres confiscated lands and there was a highly corrupted system that is not founded on the background of a democratic culture that is able to meet the needs of the farmers (Tariku, 2020). The land to the tiller thus constituted one aspect of the leftist social reforms and policies that were introduced by the Derg and was not founded on the existing beliefs and practices of the people (Tadesse, 2016). Such policies were not run by expert personnel but by cadres that had the goal of inculcating ideological visions in the minds of the masses. These cadres and military officers did not have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the farming practices that are found in local communities.

The ideological commitments of the Derg made it completely oblivious to the local cultural values and practices that should have a huge role in the implementation of the land policy. As an ideological vision, the idea of a collective farming practice was imposed on the people and this run contrarily to the fact that in many Ethiopian rural communities, land is a property that is owned by the individual (Zerga, 2016). One also sees that the customary land tenure practices were being disregarded and as a result of this, there was a disruption of the social fabric of the rural communities. Socialist ideals dictated the land policy that the Derg introduced, and the aim was not gradually reforming the existing practices but ushering in a new order that is founded on the logic of social development that

### *Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg's Land to the Tiller Policy*

is reflective of the trajectories of modern European societies (Freeman, 2003). Not just in terms of its land policy, but in the other practices like the agricultural reforms that the Derg tried to introduce, there was the undermining of the existing practices and structures of the community, and this led into the failure of many of its policies.

The land to the tiller was not only imposed as a state ideology on the people but led into the disruption of the social fabric since it was not founded on a proper understanding of social dynamics and the nature of communal existence (Rahmato, 2009). When one looks at the impact of the land policy on the social life of the people and the nature of communal existence, it is seen that besides leading into a sharp decline in the levels of agricultural productivity, the most harmful impact of the land policy is seen in the loss of traditional knowledge as it pertains to the management of land (Chala, 2016). There was a complete disregard for the beliefs and the values of the community. Instead, a new theory of modernization that is founded on the need to control nature was introduced. Such an approach was not efficient and productive since it was not introduced in the background of a proper system of planning and the existence of technical experts.

In the end, the consequences of Derg's land policy which was motivated by the need to introduce an emancipatory practice but ended up being an ideological tool are seen in the existence of rural poverty, the decline in agricultural productivity and a process of social disruption. In reality, the radical distribution of land was grounded on the need to use land as a way of controlling the people (Zewde, 2004). Thus, it did not lead into the realization of economic equality. Rural communities and the nature of social life were disrupted as a result of the introduction of the land policy; the fabric of social life was disrupted and radically altered (Yemane-ab, 2016). This led into a lower level of social cohesion and the loss of a cultural identity. What was needed was an effective process of land planning that is situated in the beliefs of the people and has the capacity of distributing land in a manner that is able to meet the demands of equity and social justice.

### *Customizing Land Policies*

Considering the failure of Derg's land policy in terms of emancipating the masses and setting the foundation for the realization of social progress and modernization, there is a need to introduce an alternative approach that has the power of developing a mode of practice that is participatory in its nature and is grounded on the lives of the people. To develop an alternative paradigm that is attentive enough towards the needs of the people, there are several things that need

to be taken into consideration. First of all, there is a need to introduce a more participatory land policy. This is a policy that is not just imposed from the above but is grounded on the local community's knowledge, cultural values and social and historical facts. One of the main drawbacks of the Derg's land policy was that it was not founded on a theory of social progress that is attentive towards the lives of Ethiopians. It tried to forcefully impose reductionist Marxist categories like dialectics, social class and classless society on the lives of Ethiopian farmers without accounting for historical facts and existing needs (Mennasemay, 2005). Learning from this, there is a need to introduce a land reform that is founded on the lives of Ethiopians that are coming from different backgrounds.

Secondly, learning from the limitations of the Derg's land policy, there is a need to introduce a better approach that is grounded on the nature of communal existence and the lives of the people. Such an approach needs to strike a balance between collectivism on one hand and individual land rights on the other hand. There is a need to distribute land in a manner that appeals to the demands of social justice, and this is particularly relevant in a nation like Ethiopia where land has been the exclusive possession of the large landowners (Rahmato, 1984). One of the things that the Derg's land policy neglected was the psychological makeup of peasants and their perception towards land. Land is not just a physical object whose value is being determined in purely economic terms and it occupies a huge role in the individual's sense of patriotism and belongingness to the nation (Tsfahunegn *et al.*, 2016). Thus, rather than simply imposing a collectivist approach to land on the lives of Ethiopian farmers, there is a need to seek a middle path and develop an approach that recognizes the right to land as an individual right to property but also has the capacity of meeting the demands of equity by making sure that land is not only possessed by the rich and the powerful. Most importantly, there is a need to realize the engagement of the local community and their knowledge and beliefs needs to be incorporated into the land policies.

Land policies need to be customized into the local contexts. This could be realized through the carrying out of a comprehensive analysis of the local land tenure systems, the agricultural practices that are prevalent within a given community and also the social and the economic realities of a given society (Zerga, 2016). Hand in hand with this, there is also a need to address historical injustices and to make sure that all citizens have an equal access to land. There is a need to cultivate trust and a sense of ownership in the lives of farmers and one way of recognizing their land rights is through a process of certification (Bezabih *et al.* 2011). This is relevant in like Ethiopia as there is land fragmentation and the land rights of farmers are not secured through a legal and an institutional basis (Crewett

& Kurf, 2008). In the end, the Derg's land policy that was founded on the need to nationalize rural land and the development of collective farms led into the erosion of traditional land rights and management systems that are founded on the lives of the people. Taking this into consideration, there is a need to introduce a more inclusive approach that is able to learn from customary land management systems.

The development of a land policy will continue to occupy a special place in the emergence of an emancipatory discourse in Ethiopia since the issue is not just a matter of an economic possession but the attempt to address historical injustices and develop a new society that is founded on the principles of justice and equity. For such a practice to be realized there is a need to develop an approach that is inclusive and participatory in its nature. Furthermore, the approach needs to be founded on the beliefs, knowledge and also the practices of the people. The development of such a land policy could serve as a foundation of social progress and modernization.

### *Conclusion*

The Derg's land to the tiller policy was introduced out of the need to modernize the nation through a broader policy of nationalization, central planning and the introduction of a command economy. This land policy was dictated by the ideological aspirations of the Derg regime like the need to realize a classless society out of the relations of antagonisms that are found between landlords and tenants. The policy failed to materialize since as a form of modernization that was imposed from the above, it was not grounded on the lives of the farmers. The policy was run by cadres and military officers and there was the lack of a properly trained manpower that is needed to effectively implement the policy. It thus led into the erosion of the social fabric as it did not take into consideration the existing land tenure systems. Learning from this there is a need to introduce an alternative approach that is able to integrate local knowledge in the land management efforts.

### **References:**

1. Abebe, M. (2016). The March 1975 "Land to the Tiller" proclamation: Dream or reality. *American Research Journal of History and Culture*, 2, 1-5.
2. Abbink, J., & Hagmann, T. (2016). *Reconfiguring Ethiopia: The Politics of Authoritarian Reform*. Milton Park: Routledge.
3. Adal, Y. (1997). Rural Land Holding Readjustment in West Gojjam, Amhara Region. *Ethiopian Journal of Development Research*, 19(2), 57-87.

4. Armah, A. K. (1984). Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-à-vis African Revolutionary Theory and Praxis. *Présence Africaine*, 3, 35-65.
5. Assefa, T. (2022). The Imperial Regimes as a Root of Current Ethnic Based Conflicts in Ethiopia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 95-130.
6. Benin, S., & Pender, J. (2001). Impacts of Land Redistribution on Land Management and Productivity in the Ethiopian Highlands. *Land Degradation & Development*, 12(6), 555-568.
7. Bezabih, M., Kohlin, G., & Mannberg, A. (2011). Trust, Tenure Insecurity, and Land Certification in Rural Ethiopia. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 40(6), 833-843.
8. Bracking, S., & Harrison, G. (2003). Africa, Imperialism & New Forms of Accumulation. *Review of African Political Economy*, 30(95), 5-10.
9. Burawoy, M. (2000). Marxism After Communism. *Theory and Society*, 29(2), 151-174.
10. Campbell, H. (2015). Imperialism and Anti-imperialism in Africa. *Monthly Review*, 67(3), 98-113.
11. Chala, T. (2016). Analysis of Politics in the Land Tenure System: Experience of Successive Ethiopian Regimes since 1930. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 10(9), 111-118.
12. Chekol, B. (2017). Contending Views on Land Tenure System in Ethiopia: Historiographical Essay. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 9(1), 1-6.
13. Clapham, C. (2009). Post-war Ethiopia: The Trajectories of Crisis. *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(120), 181-192.
14. Comninel, G. C. (2019). *Alienation and Emancipation in the Work of Karl Marx*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
15. Copans, J. (1985). The Marxist Conception of Class: Political and Theoretical Elaboration in the African and Africanist Context. *Review of African Political Economy*, 12(32), 25-38.
16. Crewett, W., & Korf, B. (2008). Ethiopia: Reforming land tenure. *Review of African Political Economy*, 35(116), 203-220.
17. Devereux, S., Teshome, A., & Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2005). Too Much Inequality or too Little? Inequality and Stagnation in Ethiopian Agriculture. *IDS Bulletin*, 36, 121-126.
18. Freeman, D. (2003). Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9(2), 397-400.
19. Gebeyehu, T. (2010). The Genesis and Evolution of the Ethiopian Revolution and the Derg: A Note on Publications by Participants in Events1. *History in Africa*, 37, 321-327.



20. Getahun, B. T. (2015). Historiographical Review of the Current Debate on Ethiopian Land Tenure System. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 7(2), 044-051.
21. Harbeson, J. W. (1977). Perspectives on the Ethiopian Revolution. *Ethiopianist Notes*, 1(1), 1-8.
22. Henriksen, T. H. (1978). Marxism and Mozambique. *African Affairs*, 77(309), 441-462.
23. Hughes, A. (1992). The Appeal of Marxism to Africans. *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 8(2), 4-20.
24. Ishiyama, J. (2005). The Former Marxist Leninist Parties in Africa After the End of the Cold War. *Acta Politica*, 40, 459-479.
25. Kebede, M. (2003). From Marxism-Leninism to Ethnicity: The Sidelips of Ethiopian Elitism. *Northeast African Studies*, 10(2), 165-188.
26. Keller, E. J. (1984). The Ethiopian Revolution at the Crossroads. *Current History*, 83(491), 117-138.
27. Legum, C. (1977). Realities of the Ethiopian Revolution. *The World Today*, 33(8), 305-312.
28. Lyon, J. M. (1980). Marxism and ethno-nationalism in Guinea-Bissau, 1956–76. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 3(2), 156-168.
29. Markakis, J., & Waller, M. (2013). *Military Marxist Regimes in Africa*. Milton Park: Routledge.
30. Marx, K. (1959). *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
31. Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1968). *A Critique of The German Ideology*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
32. Marx, K. (2000). *Articles from the German – French Yearbooks*. Moscow: Progress publishers.
33. Mennasemay, M. (2005). Ethiopian Political Theory, Democracy, and Surplus History. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 2(1/2), 1-32.
34. Moreira, A. M. (1989). *The Role of Marxism in the Anti-colonial Revolution in Black Africa*. Boston: Boston College.
35. Nash, A. (2014). The Double Lives of South African Marxism. In P. Vale, L. Hamilton & E. Prinsloo (Eds.), *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions* (pp. 51-72). Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
36. Nichola, T. (2006). The Food Security Problem in Ethiopia – A Supply Side Analysis. *South African Journal of Economics*, 74(2), 315-322.

37. Ottaway, M. (1976). Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 14(3), 469-486.
38. Ottaway, M. (1977). Land Reform in Ethiopia, 1974-1977. *African Studies Review*, 20(3), 79-90.
39. Ottaway, M. (1978). Democracy and New Democracy: The Ideological Debate in the Ethiopian Revolution. *African Studies Review*, 21(1), 19-31.
40. Rahmato, D. (1984). *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.
41. Rahmato, D. (2009). Peasants and Agrarian Reforms: The Unfinished Quest for Secure Land Rights in Ethiopia. In J. Ubink, A. Hoekema & W. Assies (Eds.), *Legalizing Land Rights. Local Practices, State Responses and Tenure Security in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (pp. 33-57). Leiden University Press.
42. Samoff, J. (1982). Class, Class Conflict, and the State in Africa. *Political Science Quarterly*, 97(1), 105-127.
43. Shaw, W. H. (1986). Towards the One-party State in Zimbabwe: A Study in African Political Thought. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24(3), 373-394.
44. Stellmacher, T. (2007). The Historical Development of Local Forest Governance in Ethiopia: From Imperial Times to the Military Regime of the Derg. *Africa Spectrum*, 42(3), 519-530.
45. Tadesse, K. (2016). Some Thoughts about the Ethiopian Left. *Northeast African Studies*, 16(1), 197-220.
46. Tariku, A. (2020). State and Society Relations from 1974 to 1991: A Case of Southwestern Ethiopia. *Social Identities*, 26(5), 624-641.
47. Tesfahunegn, G. B., Mekonen, K., & Tekle, A. (2016). Farmers' Perception on Causes, Indicators and Determinants of Climate Change in Northern Ethiopia: Implication for Developing Adaptation Strategies. *Applied Geography*, 73, 1-12.
48. Tibebu, T. (2008). Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Radical Politics in Ethiopia, 1961-1991. *African Identities*, 6(4), 345-371.
49. Tiruneh, A. (1993). *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
50. Toggia, P. S. (2008). The State of Emergency: Police and Carceral Regimes in Modern Ethiopia. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 24(2), 107-124.

51. Vestal, T. (2013). The Lost Opportunity for Ethiopia: The Failure to Move Toward Democratic Governance. *International Journal of African Development*, 1(1), 40-56.
52. Vigne, R. (1987). SWAPO of Namibia: a Movement in Exile. *Third World Quarterly*, 9(1), 85-107.
53. Visentini, P. F. (2020). African Marxist Military Regimes, Rise and Fall: Internal Conditioners and International Dimensions. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos= Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, 5(9), 33-52.
54. Yemane-ab, A. (2016). "Land to the Tiller": Unrealized Agenda of the Revolution. *Northeast African Studies*, 16(1), 39-64.
55. Zerga, B. (2016). Land Resource, Uses, and Ownership in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future. *International Journal of Scientific Research Engineering Technology*, 2(1), 17-24.
56. Zewde, B. (2004). What did we Dream? What did we Achieve? And Where are we Heading? *Africa Insight*, 34(1), 6-13.
57. Zewde, B. (2014). *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, c. 1960-1974*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd.



# **A critical analysis of the reductive physicalist functionalist perspective on the nature of consciousness**

Valerian Sergiu TOPALĂ  
Doctoral School of Humanities  
Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania  
sintrinity@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

*A perennial problem in philosophy concerns human nature and especially the nature of human consciousness. In the present article, we will critically analyze the physicalist-reductionist view of functionalism regarding the nature of consciousness. In this endeavor, we will provide a description of functionalism followed by a critical analysis. In the conclusion we will try to identify the features of consciousness as they logically follow from the criticisms brought against functionalism. The research will try to answer questions such as: Are consciousness or mental properties physical or irreducibly mental? Is consciousness identical to a brain state? Is consciousness a causal-functional brain state type or token? Does the reductive physicalist functionalist explanation provide a coherent picture of the existence of mental phenomena and qualitative, subjective, first-person experiences? Are the arguments of functionalism defining in the mind/body, consciousness/brain debate, or do they leave room for other non-physicalist and non-reductionist views? The critical apparatus used to answer these questions is grounded in the objections brought to reductionist physicalist perspectives by some of the main actors in the history of the mind-body debate.*

**Keywords:** *reductive physicalist functionalism, consciousness, mind-brain relation, causal functional relations, “qualia”.*

## *Introduction*

The critical analysis of reductive physicalist functionalism is imposed by one of the goals that this perspective claims to achieve, if correct, that is, “to show that there is nothing associated with conscious brains which lies irredeemably beyond the scope of scientific explanation” (Maxwell, 2011, p. 2). Indeed, if this statement and its consequences are understood, it is a huge statement about the nature of reality in general and consciousness in particular. This confidence of functionalism is grounded in its historical success in providing a solution to the counterarguments brought to two other physicalist conceptions that tried to answer if consciousness or mental properties can be reduced to physical states:

behaviorism and identity theory. The first view tried to understand the mind in terms of bodily behavior. In Skinner's words, "thinking has the dimensions of behavior, not of a fancied inner process which finds expression in behavior" (Skinner, 1974, pp. 117-118). The second view considered that

*the states of direct experience which conscious human beings "live through" and those which we confidently ascribe to some of the higher animals, are identical with certain (presumably configurational) aspects of neural processes in those organisms.* (Feigl, 1958, p. 446)

From the perspective of objections to these views, behaviorism has been shown to be bankrupt because it has been successfully argued that certain organisms can be in a certain mental state without exhibiting any specific behavior associated with that mental state (for example, we can experience pain without expressing some behavior often associated with it). The identity theory fared no better either, as it was shown that organisms can be in certain mental states without being in the brain states associated with those mental states (for example, we can be in the pain state without being in the C fiber<sup>1</sup> firing state). However, these two objections have been successfully countered by functionalism by regarding mental states as functional states. In the functionalist view, mental states are identified by the functional roles they play in the life of the organism (Kind, 2019, pp. 63-64).

### *1. Description of functionalism*

For the functionalist, a mental state can be exhaustively described as a state that has some kind of function, and the concept of function is defined in terms of causal relations to sensory inputs, behavioral outputs, and other "internal" states. In other words, each type of mental state has as its defining features a set of logical or causal relations in which a performer stands with the environmental inputs of the body, other types of "mental" states related to the state in question, and outputs understood as behaviors of the body (Moreland & Craig, 2017, p. 238). Defining functionalism, Jaegwon Kim states:

*According to functionalism, a mental kind is a functional kind, or a causal functional kind, since the "function" involved is to fill a certain causal role... Mental kinds are causal functional kinds, and what all instances of a given mental kind have in common is the fact that they serve a certain causal role distinctive of that kind... what makes a mental event the kind of mental event it is, is the way it is causally*

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the particular example of the C-fiber stimulation-pain identity is almost ubiquitous in philosophical discussions, it was only later promoted through the work of Putnam (See Putnam, 1975, pp. 362-385 and Rorty, 1965, pp. 24-54). It is also important to note that the phrase "C-fiber stimulation" in the mind-brain debate seems to be understood as a substitute terminology for any neural process that would be found to be in an identity relationship with pain.

*A critical analysis of the reductive physicalist functionalist perspective on the nature of consciousness*

*linked to other mental-event kinds and input/output conditions. (Kim, 1996, pp. 76-77, 79)*

To identify as precisely as possible the fact that mental states, such as beliefs, fit into these types of causal relations, identity theorists have introduced a technical device called “Ramsey’s proposition.” The British philosopher Frank Ramsey proposed that in a sentence we eliminate the expression “belief that it rains” and replace it with an “x”. Then to precede the entire sentence with an existential quantifier, which says “there is an x such that”. Therefore, using an example, we could say that “there is an x such that the perception that it is now raining causes x, and x together with the desire not to get wet determines the behavior of carrying an umbrella” (Searle, 2018, p. 85). So a belief is absolutely anything, any x that meets these causal relations.

A device such as a mouse trap can be multiple realized into different physical structures. The mouse trap is what it is by virtue of the function it performs, not the material it is made of. Therefore, the specificity of this notion must be obtained from the perspective of the object’s functionality and not its physical nature. This aspect differentiates mouse traps, for example, from gold nuggets. The latter are what they are by virtue of their specific physical constitution, which also involves the possession of atoms with atomic number 79. This is why gold is different from pyrite (fool’s gold). Although pyrite shares the same yellow color, from the perspective of its constitution, it is natural iron disulfide. In functionalist optics, mouse traps represent a more suitable model for understanding mental states than the gold nuggets model (Kind, 2019, p. 64).

There are many other artifact concepts or biological concepts that are functionally specified. In this regard, Kim states:

*What makes an organ a heart is the fact that it pumps blood. The human heart may be physically very unlike hearts in, say, reptiles or birds, but they all count as hearts because of the job they do in the organisms in which they are found, not on account of their similarity in shape, size, or material composition. (Kim, Philosophy of Mind, 2011, p. 131)*

Therefore mental states are defined by their causal relations, and these causal relations constitute their function. They are not defined by certain intrinsic features. Taking the mental state of pain as an example, we can say that it plays a certain role in the life of an organism.

*What all instances of pain have in common is not some single physical property or mechanism; it is the causal role they play in the psychologies of the organisms and*

*systems endowed with “tissue damage detectors”.* (Kim, „Mental Causation”, 2011, p. 47)

Anything that can fulfill this causal-functional role is a pain.

Another model used by functionalists is that of artificial intelligence. Functionalism drew on computational analogies to articulate its position, due to major developments in computational science that coincided with its emergence. In this sense, the mental dimension is portrayed by functionalism through the image of software and not hardware (Kind, 2019, p. 64). On the basis of these premises, computational functionalism took shape and states that the brain is a digital computer, and what we call “mind” is a computer program or set of programs. The mind is to the brain what the program is to the hardware (See Laird, 1983 and Laird, 1988). Proponents of the strong artificial intelligence view have gone so far as to assert that a properly programmed computer does not merely pretend to have a mind, it literally has a mind.

Before turning to the origins of this analogy, we should note that the computer analogy paints a clearer picture of some of the essential features of functionalism.

*For a computer to be able to “read mathematics and be able to add,” the computer must be able to receive certain input (“2”, “+”, “2”, “=”), produce certain outputs (“4” is displayed on a screen), and advance to certain other internal states (it is ready to display “8” if you input the command to multiply the new total by 2).* (Moreland & Craig, 2017, p. 238)

This model emphasizes that for functionalism the defining features of mental states are not the conscious, private qualities of the states themselves known through first-person introspective awareness, but, as noted above, the logical and causal relationships that are realized between certain bodily inputs, certain bodily outputs and other “mental” states. Therefore, the meaning of mental terms is given by the role they play in a third-person theory used to describe and explain behavior (*Ibidem*).

In opposition to behaviorism, functionalism asserts that mental states are internal to the organism, even though both positions define mental states in terms of relations between inputs and outputs. In this sense, for a functionalist someone’s claim that they are in pain is considered to be a genuine report and not just a pain-like behavior expressed through moans, twitches, etc. (as the behaviorist claims) (Kind, 2019, pp. 64-65). The functionalist perspective is based on two important general principles. First, mental states are interdefined. This principle strengthens the verticality of functionalism in the face of the objections that led to the bankruptcy of behaviorism. Second, mental states are multiply realizable. This



principle gives functionalism longevity in the face of the multiple realization objection to identity theories (*Ibidem*).

All the considerations mentioned so far are grounded in Putnam's original functionalist articulation. The researcher formulated his theory in terms of the Turing machine. This machine was a hypothetical device proposed in 1963 by the mathematician Alan Turing (hence the name "machinist functionalism" for Putnam's position). Essentially, all Turing machine operations can be characterized by a set of instructions given in the "machine table". "For each internal state of the computer, the instructions specify the output that will result from a given input" (Kind, 2019, p. 65). In this vein, if we conceive of the mind as such a machine, we can completely describe the operations of the mind along the path of a machine table.<sup>2</sup> A remark worth remembering is that the machine instruction table does not say anything about the physical constitution of the machine, but only provides a detailed specification of the operation of the machine. It can be made of any kind of material, even non-physical things. In this sense Fodor stated: "As far as functionalism is concerned, a machine with states S1 and S2 can be made of ectoplasm, if such a thing exists and if its states have the right causal properties" (Fodor, 1981, p. 129 *apud* Kind, 2019, p. 66). Putnam believed that the same could be true of the mind. Therefore, he considered his views to be compatible with dualism Putnam, 1975, p. 436). However, for functionalism to be compatible with dualism, the former would have to hold that the state that fulfills a particular causal role is a irreducible mental state (in the soul – for substance dualism or in the brain – for property dualism) and is internally characterized by essential conscious feeling, specific to that state (e.g. of the specific conscious sensation of pain). But most functionalists are physicalists and argue that states that happen to fulfill certain causal roles are neurophysiological states in the brain (Moreland & Craig, 2017, p. 239). For them, although it is possible for mental states to be realized in many different physical substances, they must all be realized in some physical substance. This physicalist version of functionalism is a version of token physicalism, not type physicalism.

*For the functionalist, any instantiation of pain is realized in some physical state, but these physical states may be instantiations of different physical types, perhaps C-fiber firings in humans, while in hydraulic Martians something quite different.*  
(Kind, 2019, p. 66)

---

<sup>2</sup> Although providing a machine table, a mechanical model for organisms, is a difficult project, it was considered by Putnam to be an "inevitable part of the program of psychology" (See Putnam, 1975, p. 435).

This physicalist-reductionist functionalist variant will be subjected to criticism in the next section.

## *2. Criticisms of reductionist physicalist functionalism*

Although there are many criticisms we can make of functionalism, we will limit our inquiry to just a few of them. Most of these objections will focus on the fact that functionalists miss one of the defining features of mental states, namely, the internal features of these states known through introspective awareness.

### 2. 1. THE INVERTED QUALIA ARGUMENT

In this sense, first, we will focus on one of the objections to behaviorism, namely the argument of the inverted spectrum or what is called the problem of inverted qualia. This objection was developed by philosophers Ned Block and Jerry Fodor (Block & Fodor, 1972, pp. 159-181). The argument supports the possibility that some people have inverted color experiences.

*Essentially, the problem posed by this argument is that two mental states different in terms of their intrinsic qualitative features can stand in exactly the same causal relations to the environment, to other mental states, and to behavior, which means that they appear to be functional equivalents. (Gheorghiu, 2015, p. 287)*

To understand this objection William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland gives us an illustration (Moreland & Craig, 2017, pp. 239-240). The authors invite us to think about two people, Jones and Smith, who entered a room together. As they visually scanned the room, they mentally selected the red objects from others there and stated, "The red ones are here." According to the functionalist understanding, both Jones and Smith are in exactly the same mental state, namely, the state of being aware of redness. However, it is metaphysically possible for Smith to see colors normally, but Jones to have inverted color awareness. Jones may have awareness of blue whenever Smith and anyone else see red, and vice versa. In this case, based on the specific mental state experienced, Smith will sort the red objects from all the others and Jones will do the same with the blue ones. From the perspective of functionalism, they are both in the same mental state, because that state is caused by certain inputs (scanning the room with gaze) which produces certain outputs (sorting the red objects from the others plus the belief that the term red applies to these objects). However, Jones and Smith are not in the same mental state if mental states are characterized by their inner nature: Jones is aware of bluishness and Smith is aware of redness. Jones and Smith operate in the same way but based on very different mental states. In conclusion, since it is possible to have two different mental states but the same unique functional state, the latter

*A critical analysis of the reductive physicalist functionalist perspective on the nature of consciousness*

cannot be identical to the former. In other words, mental states cannot be reduced to functional brain states.

## 2.2. THE ABSENT QUALIA ARGUMENT

A second objection, related to the first, is called the absent qualia problem (See Block, 1978, pp. 261-325). Conscious experiences have a qualitative aspect, a “what it is like to be in a state” (*qualia*). There is a qualitative sensation in the act of drinking orange juice that is quite different from the qualitative sensation in the act of listening to Handel’s music. “Each conscious state is a quale because there is a certain qualitative way of feeling for each state” (Searle, 2018, p. 85). Pain, for example, is essentially characterized by a certain kind of painful feeling that can be known directly through cognition, through direct contact with our first-person, inner and private subjective feeling state, but functional relations do not have these features, therefore they cannot be the same. The problem with functionalism is that it ignores this qualitative aspect of our conscious experiences, and thus qualia are absent from functionalist explanations. Therefore, can functionalism’s claim that the ability of unconscious machines to imitate consciousness, embodying the correct functional states, be evidence that these machines are actually in that mental state is true? Of course not!

*This seems wrong. Even if a robot could be set up to grimace, shout “Ouch!” and so forth after being stuck with a pin, the robot would still not be in the state of being in pain because the specific conscious property of painfulness would be absent. (Moreland & Craig, 2017, p. 240)*

However, qualia have real existence in our everyday experience, so any theory that denies their existence is either explicitly or implicitly false.

## 2.3. THE “CHINESE NATION” ARGUMENT

Along this line of thought, Ned Block developed a specific form of the absent qualia objection called the “Chinese nation” argument (Block, 1978, pp. 261-325). Block seeks to prove the falsity of functionalism’s claim that some systems that intuition tells us cannot have mental states actually do have mental states. Block elaborates his argument in what is known as the Chinese nation or Chinese brain argument. He invites us to portray the functionalist program, with its stages, carried out by the brain, as a great mass of people embodying this program. In this sense, we can imagine the number of neurons in the brain as the corresponding number of citizens in China. At this point, we can continue the scenario by imagining that the population of China fulfills its staged functionalist program in exactly the same way as the brain does. “But nevertheless, as a result, we know intuitively that the population of China does not have any mental states

as a whole, in the way that a single person actually has mental states” that include *qualia* (Searle, 2018, p. 109). So, the Chinese brain system is not mentally equivalent to ours. Therefore, if the Chinese brain system were a functional duplicate of any of us and yet could not have *qualia* like us, then functionalism would be false.

#### 2.4. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A BAT?

Along the same lines, we can recall Thomas Nagel’s criticism against physicalist reductionism in general, applicable to functionalism, which proved that this conception cannot provide a complete explanation of the ontology of consciousness from the perspective of the first person. In his article, “What is it Like to Be a Bat?” (Nagel, 1974, pp. 435-450), Nagel persuasively explained that being a bat is fundamentally a subjective phenomenon, understood only from the bat’s unique point of view. As a conscious mammal, he experiences *qualia*, but does so in a different manner than humans. For example, for spatial orientation, the bat uses echolocation, and we use the senses of sight, sound and touch. Therefore, we will never know what it is like for a bat to use its sonar. The objective observations of the functionalist theorist cannot encapsulate what it is like to be of the bat. This inability is a major collapse for functionalist theory because subjectivity is an essential fact of experience that it cannot capture. Moreover, this reality cannot be adequately penetrated even by an act of imagination. As Nagel noted:

*In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. I cannot perform it either by imagining additions to my present experience, or by imagining segments gradually subtracted from it, or by imagining some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications. (Nagel, 1974, p. 439)*

Therefore, from Nagel’s perspective, one could have a complete knowledge of the neurophysiology of a bat, a complete knowledge of all the functional mechanisms that enable bats to live and navigate, yet there could be something that escaped to the knowledge of this person: What it is like to be a bat? How I should feel. And this is the essence of consciousness, because for every conscious being there is a “what it is like” aspect of its existence. This characteristic is omitted and cannot be defined by an objective, third-person account of consciousness. From what has been said so far, it can be clearly seen that mental properties are not identical to the functional relations of a physical system. In none of the physical causal-functional relations is there a “what it is like” to be in that

physical state. There is no “what it is like” to be a synaptic firing pattern that serves a specific function.

#### 2.5. THE “CHINESE ROOM” ARGUMENT

The “Chinese room” argument refers to a famous example provided by John Searle to prove the inability of functionalist optics to explain thoughts and understand meanings by reducing mental states to functional states in a computer. Moreover, the example proves that causal-functional relations are not the same thing as intentionality. Searle states:

*Well, imagine that you are locked in a room, and in this room are several baskets full of Chinese symbols. Imagine that you (like me) do not understand a word of Chinese, but that you are given a rule book in English for manipulating these Chinese symbols. The rules specify the manipulations of the symbols purely formally, in terms of their syntax, not their semantics. So the rule might say: “Take a squiggle-squiggle sign out of basket number one and put it next to a squogglesquoggle sign from basket number two.” Now suppose that some other Chinese symbols are passed into the room, and that you are given further rules for passing back Chinese symbols out of the room. Suppose that unknown to you the symbols passed into the room are called “questions” by the people outside the room, and the symbols you pass back out of the room are called “answers to the questions”. Suppose, furthermore, that the programmers are so good at designing the programs and that you are so good at manipulating the symbols, that very soon your answers are indistinguishable from those of a native Chinese speaker. There you are locked in your room shuffling your Chinese symbols and passing out Chinese symbols in response to incoming Chinese symbols. On the basis of the situation as I have described it, there is no way you could learn any Chinese simply by manipulating these formal symbols. Now the point of the story is simply this: by virtue of implementing a formal computer program from the point of view of an outside observer, you behave exactly as if you understood Chinese, but all the same you don’t understand a word of Chinese. (Searle, 1984, pp. 32-33)*

According to this example, the person outside the room has a computer simulation in front of him (this simulation portrays functionalism). She notices that this room receives inputs and outputs in such a way that it seems to understand Chinese. However, the room does not possess mental understanding, it merely imitates it. In reality, like this room, computers cannot exemplify mental states, but only imitate them.

#### 2.6. THE MENTAL INTENTIONALITY ARGUMENT

Moreover, by his example, Searle showed, countering functionalism, the intentional nature of our mental states and proved that intentionality has nothing to do with intention, but means that a thought is “in relation to”, “about something”. Mental states have intentionality, but physical states do not. Mental states have

that “about,” “regarding,” “relating to,” “concerning” something beyond them (Searle, 2018, pp. 48-50; 160-161 and chapter 6). None of the brain states are characterized by such a thing. Therefore, mental states are not identical to brain states. In the case of mental intentionality there are no limits on the kind of object it can hold as a term. All things can be the target of a mental act. In contrast, physical relations can only be realized for a narrow range of objects (e.g., electric current only flows through certain things). Moreover, regardless of whether physical objects enter into certain relations or not, they always remain identifiable (a table and a chair would continue to exist and be detectable no matter how much I change the spatial arrangement) but intentional contents do not (e.g. one and the same belief cannot be about me and later about an article, the belief is what it is, at least in part, by virtue of “what” the belief is about). Finally, any physical object must exist in order to be able to enter into certain physical relationships (the book and the desk must exist before the first is above the second) but I can also manifest my intentionality towards non-existent things (I can think of Tolkien’s elves) (Moreland & Craig, 2017, p. 221).

#### 2.7. THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

This argument was proposed by Frank Jackson and focuses on a thought experiment involving Mary, a brilliant color researcher (Jackson, 1982, pp. 126-136 and Jackson, 1986, pp. 291-295). Through an exercise of imagination, we are called to visualize a life in which Mary initially lives in an environment where all the objects around her are black and white. The story of her life is consumed in a futuristic scenario marked by a complete elaboration of the science of color, a science that Mary acquired with the help of a black-and-white textbook. She knows all about the eye-brain relationship, what color processing entails and their similarity ratio. Later, Mary is exposed to a colorful environment that obviously produces a startling event in her. With the sight of a color other than white or black, she learns something new. She learns what it’s like to see that new color. Therefore, although she had been educated and possessed perfectly all the physical data regarding colors, she did not know the whole story. Therefore, in contrast to reductionist physicalism, not all facts about color perception in humans are physical facts.

By this argument Jackson showed that phenomenal properties are distinct from and irreducible to physical properties, since one can in principle know all the physical facts about a certain kind of conscious experience, on the basis of the materialist explanation, without knowing anything about what it is like to actually have that experience. For this reason, the physicalist version of functionalism

cannot provide an adequate description of our mental states. Any explanation of the mind that omits these qualitative experiences is inadequate.

2.8. ARGUMENT FROM THE CONCEIVABILITY OF PHYSICAL BODIES DEVOID OF “QUALIA”

I subscribe to David Chalmers’s position that we can conceive of beings that are physically identical to us but are devoid of qualia. Chalmers appeals to the idea of zombie, which in philosophy is a being twinned with man, molecule for molecule, function for function, but “it is just that none of this functioning will be accompanied by any real conscious experience. There will be no phenomenal feel. There is nothing it is like to be a zombie” (Chalmers, 1996, p. 95).

Based on this observation, we can construct, Chalmers-like and Cartesian-style, an anti-physicalist argument, proceeding from conceivable facts to possible facts. If we can conceive of a world of zombies in which qualia are entirely absent, then this world is metaphysically possible. If this world is metaphysically possible, then qualia transcend physical facts. Therefore, identity reductionist physicalism is false.

Building in a similar fashion, after acknowledging the strength of Descartes’s conceivability argument, Thomas Nagel states:

*Descartes’ argument also has the following inverted version, which, to my knowledge, he never used. The existence of the body without the mind is as conceivable as the existence of the mind without the body. That is, I can conceive that, internally and externally, my body is doing exactly what it is doing now with full physical causation of its behavior (including typical self-conscious behavior), but without any of the mental states I now experience, or otherwise, any others. If this is indeed conceivable, then mental states must be distinct from the physical state of the body. (Nagel, 1980, p. 205)*

Nagel’s argument holds that I can conceive of my body as existing and being exactly as it is, but without my mind. Therefore, the mind is not identical with the body and with any of its parts or operations.

Moreover, Descartes actually used this inverted version of the conceivability argument, although Nagel very frankly stated that, to the best of his knowledge, Descartes did not use it. In the fifth part of the Discourse on Method, Descartes states:

*I emphasized that if there were such machines, with the organs and external appearance of an ape or any animal devoid of reason, we would have no possibility of recognizing the difference between them and these animals. Whereas if there were machines that resembled our bodies and imitated our actions as far as was morally possible, we should always have two very sure means of recognizing that in spite of*

*appearances they are not in the least human: the first is that they could never make use of proper words, nor of other signs, as we do when we communicate our thoughts to others; for one can easily conceive a machine so constructed as to utter words, some even in connection with bodily actions which will produce changes in its organs, for example if we touch it at a certain point it will ask what we wanted it to do we say, if we touch her in another point she cries out that it hurts and other similar things; but she will not be able to combine words in such a way as to respond meaningfully to everything that is spoken in her presence, as even the most stupid people can do; the second means is, that, though they do many things as well, or perhaps even better, than we, they inevitably err in others, which proves that they do not act by knowledge, but only by virtue of their organs; for while reason is a universal instrument, which can serve in all circumstances, these organs need a particular arrangement for each particular action; hence it follows that it is morally impossible to have sufficient organs in a machine to make it act in all situations of life as our reason allows us to act. (Descartes, 1990, p. 143. emphasis is mine).*

In this paragraph and according to the previous context (see Descartes, 1990, pp. 139-143), Descartes points out that if we had machines, a kind of superlative of machines created by God, and they possessed the organs and external configuration of animals without reason, we would not be able to distinguish them from these animals. On the other hand, if the same machines had the external configuration and behavioral manifestations specific to humans, we could spot the difference by appealing to two means of recognition.

The first means has to do with the inability of these machines to make use of words, to combine them, to respond meaningfully to everything spoken in their presence. His argument is grounded in the idea that “one can easily conceive of a machine thus constructed...”, that is, the idea of such a machine is rationally conceivable. Certainly not referring to the fact that such a machine could easily be built in its day (especially with the technology of the time). This first means that he proposed in support of his thesis, to identify the difference between a man and a machine identical to man, in form and function, was constituted in an argument in favor of Cartesian substance dualism, namely, the argument of the conceivability of physical machines, identical to man in form and function, but devoid of reason.

Therefore, in this text, Descartes actually uses the inverted version of the mind-without-body conceivability argument. In the same way, he proceeds from conceivable facts to possible facts. If we can conceive of a world with machines identical to man in form and function, but devoid of reason, then this world is metaphysically possible. If this world is metaphysically possible, then reason transcends physical facts. Consequently, my reason is not identical with my physical body, or, applying what has been said to functionalism, my reason is not identical with causally functional physical relations.



### *Conclusions*

Our critical analysis has shown that functionalism denies the existence of ontologically subjective phenomena, despite the fact that the latter are experienced by each of us. However, because common sense, as Kant recommended, should not be used as an absolute argument in philosophical debates, philosophers have developed more complex arguments to reinforce the same truth by appealing to qualia, inverted spectra, Chinese nations, Chinese rooms, etc. All these arguments prove that conscious mental states cannot be defined only in causal-functional terms, even if they also fulfill a causal role. The complex of criticisms leveled against this physicalist version of functionalism portrays consciousness as possibly ontologically distinct from neural states, with phenomenal features that are characterized by a qualitative sense of “what it is like to be in a state”.

There is also an epistemic subjectivity of consciousness that involves direct access, epistemic authority, and private access. We have direct access to our conscious states without having to resort to secondary states. By focusing on our inner life, we are in a position to know what is going on in our own mental life with greater epistemic certainty than other people have in trying to know what is going on in our inner forum. Furthermore, we have a way of knowing our own conscious states that is not available to others through direct introspection.

By implication we could say that functionalism could regard epistemic subjectivity with its features as having no ontological but only epistemic implications, that specifically, epistemic subjectivity does not show that conscious states are irreducibly immaterial and that they are not identical to brain states. He might argue that all epistemic subjectivity shows is that there are two different ways of knowing consciousness, one through first-person introspection and one through third-person neuroscientific theory-finding. However, through the raised criticisms, I showed that it is far from clear that a way of knowledge by man is physical. Ways of knowing have intentionality (that “about”, “regarding” the object of knowledge), but mere physical states of the brain do not. Moreover, the characteristics of epistemic subjectivity mentioned above are directly ontological and not merely epistemic. If a person is just a physical object, say a brain, made up exclusively of physical states, then the characteristics of epistemic subjectivity might be open to doubt, because they do not apply to physical states. The authenticity of these three features is explained only by the immateriality of conscious states. They cannot be applied to ways of relating to physical states, but involve various ways of relating to a non-physical state.

The same critics have revealed that another feature of consciousness is the “subjectivity” of viewpoint, which involves at least two features of consciousness. First, any conscious state necessarily belongs to a subject of experience. Any conscious state, in the ideal sense, not possessed by a subject, somehow floating in the air, is ridiculous. It is probably impossible to make decisive arguments in favor of the necessity of physical states belonging to a subject because they can exist without it. Moreover, conscious states are always the defining features of a subjective point of view. That is, they portray the subject’s unique and distinctive position in the world, by virtue of which he is aware of the world and thinks about it.

This research has shown that the explanation offered by functionalism is limited in its attempt to explain the nature of consciousness. It is not definitive in the consciousness/brain debate, but leaves the door open to non-reductionist and non-physicalist positions, such as Christian forms of theistic substance dualism. To this last position, not analyzed here, but whose logical possibility is strengthened by the arguments against these theories of identity, I subscribe.

Finally, from the literature of the theorists of physicalist-reductionist functionalism, it can be observed that any form of radical physicalist reductionism reveals not an exclusivist uniqueness in explanation, of the type of absolute truth, but an inalienable commitment to the naturalistic metanarrative, regardless of whether the scientific data match or not with other non-physicalist and non-reductionist conceptions. In this last tone we will conclude this article with a statement from Howard Robinson:

*[William] James called materialism a tough-minded theory. We began this essay by wondering why, if this is so, materialists are so often on the defensive in philosophy. The explanation seems to be that though the materialist makes a show of being tough-minded he is in fact a dogmatist, obedient not to the authority of reason, but to a certain picture of the world. That picture is hypnotising but terrifying: the world as a machine of which we are all insignificant parts. Many people share Nagel’s fear of this world view, but, like Nagel, are cowed into believing that it must be true (1965: 340). But reason joins with every other constructive human instinct in telling us that it is false and that only a parochial and servile attitude towards physical science can mislead anyone into believing it. To opt for materialism is to choose to believe something obnoxious, against the guidance of reason. This is not tough-mindedness, but a willful preference for a certain form of soulless, false and destructive modernism. (Robinson, 1982, p. 125)*

### **References:**

1. Chalmers, D. J. (1996). *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2. Descartes, R. (1990). *Discurs despre metoda de a ne conduce bine rațiunea și a căuta adevărul în științe* (Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting one's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences). Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române.
3. Fodor, J. (1968). *Psychological Explanation*. New York: Random House.
4. Gheorghiu, D. (2015). *Introducere în filosofia minții*, Curs universitar (vol. 1) (Introduction to the philosophy of mind, University course). Bucharest: Editura Trei.
5. Johnson-Laird, P. (1988). *The Computer and the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
6. Johnson-Laird, P. (1983). *Mental Models, Toward a Cognitive Science of Language, Inference and Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
7. Kim, J. (1996). *Philosophy of Mind*. Boulder, CO, Westview Press.
8. Kim, J. (2011). *Philosophy of Mind* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
9. Millikan, R. (1993). *White Queen Psychology and Other Essays for Alice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
10. Moreland, J. P., & Craig, W. L. (2017). *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press.
11. Robinson, H. (1982). *Matter and Sense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
12. Searle, J. R. (2018). *Mintea, O scurtă introducere în filosofia minții* [Mind, A Brief Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind]. Bucharest: Herald.
13. Searle, J. R. (1984). *Minds, Brains, and Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
14. Skinner, B.F. (1974). *About Behaviorism*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
15. Block, N. (1978). Troubles with Functionalism. In C.W. Savage (Ed.), *Perception and Cognition: Issues in the Foundation of Psychology* (pp. 261-325) *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 9. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
16. Block, N., & Fodor, J. (1972). What Psychological States are not. *Philosophical Review*, 81, 159-181.
17. Feigl, H. (1958). The "Mental" and the "Physical". In H. Feigl, M. Scriven & G. Maxwell (Eds.) *Concepts, theories, and the mind-body problem. Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Vol. 2, pp. 370-497). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

18. Fodor, J. (1981). The Mind-Body Problem. *Scientific American*, 244, 114-25.
19. Kind, A. (2019). The Mind-Body Problem in 20-th Century Philosophy. In A. Kind (Ed.), *Philosophy of Mind in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (pp. 52-77). London and New York: Routledge.
20. Kim, J. (2011). Mental Causation. In B. P. McLaughlin, A. Beckermann & S. Walter (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Nagel, T. (1980). Armstrong on the Mind. In N. Block (Ed.), *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 200-206). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
22. Putnam, H. (1975). Minds and machines. In S. Hook (Ed.), *Dimensions of Mind* (pp. 362-385). New York: New York University Press, Reprinted.
23. Jackson, F. (1982). Epiphenomenal Qualia. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32(127), 127-136. <https://www.sfu.ca/~jillmc/JacksonfromJStore.pdf>.
24. Jackson, F. (1986). What Mary Didn't Know. *Journal of Philosophy*, 83, 291-295. <https://www.studocu.com/no/document/norges-arktiske-universitet/examen-philosophicum/jackson-what-mary-didnt-know/15524402>.
25. Maxwell, N. (2011). Three Philosophical Problems about Consciousness and Their Possible Resolution. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 1(1), 1-10. <https://philarchive.org/archive/MAXTPP-3>.
26. Nagel, T. (1974). What Is It Like To Be a Bat?. *Philosophical Review*, 83(4), 435-450. [https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Nagel\\_Bat.pdf](https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Nagel_Bat.pdf).
27. Rorty, R. (1965). Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories. *Review of Metaphysics*, 19(1), 24-54. <https://home.csulb.edu/~cwallis/382/readings/482/rorty.mind-body,identity.1965.pdf>.

# Rhetorisation of Philosophy

Raluca SOARE

Anca-Elena DAVID

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Romania

ralucasoare2003@yahoo.co.uk

anca.david@ulbsibiu.ro

## Abstract

*Philosophical discourses have their own different ways in which they approach the issues of knowledge and reality, by justifying their position by distinct means, adapted to distinct ends. Therefore, the way philosophy approaches reality is not necessarily resulting from the attitude with which it observes reality, but, on the contrary, this way yields a certain attitude, in that it represents a unique verdict on reality, which a priori comprises a certain worldview. Placing philosophy in close connection with rhetoric, which we may admit or not admit to be a means of knowledge, places its founding function, or the referent and the rational discourse amidst a confrontation with the contingency of philosophical languages, with the means of representation and the interpretive options. This opens up the possibility of rhetorical philosophy making, whereby language becomes the medium in which understanding reaches its fulfilment, based on agreement and difference.*

**Keywords:** *rhetoric, philosophy, language, text, speech, interpretation.*

In the context of separating linguistics from semiotics and problematizing the concepts of text and discourse, the twentieth century manifested a strong concern for ways of objectifying philosophical practices, as elements of legitimation and starting points for their analysis.

Emphasizing the importance of language as writing (scripture) or scripturality, Gadamer (2001) outlines the importance of philosophy as a text that does not refer to an original discourse or to the speaker's intention, since it is rather self-originating. For J.-L. Galay, philosophical meaning, that is, the system of ideas, interacts with its textual inscription, the measure of embedding philosophical meaning into the text being given by three axes: grammar, dialectics and rhetoric. Galay affirms to some extent “the constitutive interaction between textual signifier and signified, considering philosophy to comprise, as a constitutive condition, a behavior in the order of textual symbolism.” (Galay, 1977, p. 336)

The emphasis on the importance of rhetoric for philosophy has led to what N. Charbonnel calls “the rhetorisation of philosophy” (Charbonnel, 1991-1993), which marks a shift from things to words. This all-encompassing view on rhetoric engulfs philosophy within the net of language. Language now appears as a generalized pseudo-metaphor, denying philosophy’s role as an instrument of knowledge. Ernesto Grassi (2001) lays the foundations of meaning upon the rhetorical means and not on other possible dimensions such as content, reference, grammar or logic.

In contemporary thinking, that resides on a lack of foundation, the impossibility of having a principle for philosophy has become a principled position. We could conclude that priority is being given to form, to the detriment of content; yet this is the case only if we consider that rhetoric has a purely technical, external and practical purpose, and we do not regard it as discourse, the basis of rational thought. In this context, Grassi’s position becomes extremely relevant: “If philosophy aims at being a theoretical mode of thought and speech, can it have a rhetorical character and be expressed in rhetorical forms?” (Grassi, 2001, p. 18) Only the clarification of rhetoric in its relation to theoretical thought can allow us to delimit the function of rhetoric. Only this will allow us to decide whether rhetoric has a purely technical, exterior, and practical aim of persuading, or whether it has an essentially philosophical structure and function.” (Grassi, 2001, p. 19)

This tendency towards rapprochement between philosophy and rhetoric is largely due to a change in modern philosophy. Perelman wrote in the *Journal of Philosophy and Rhetoric* that rationalism, empiricism, and romanticism would not be able to consider rhetoric important or valid. However, “with philosophies of life, action, and value and leading up to pragmatism, philosophy had reacted against absolutism” (Perelman, 1965, p. 15), thus validating the idea that the mind engages in meaningful relationships with the environment through a process of symbolic transformations, and what we observe in the environment and how we react to it are both predetermined to some extent by how we are prepared to observe that type of object. Meaning thus does not come from a given symbolic pattern, but from the observer’s response. All these conceptions tend to give less importance to truth in the Platonic sense and more consideration to different interpretations of reality and different worldviews.

*Whether our interest is in making ethical judgments, articulating the preferability of a particular philosophical, scientific, or historical theory vis-à-vis another, or in gaining followers for a political, social, or religious cause, rhetoric abounds. Although the motive for engaging in these or other activities may not always*

*explicitly be to persuade, this fact cannot obfuscate the existence and importance of symbolic influence. (Cherwitz, 1990, p. 2)*

Considering knowledge as something being discovered or created through the machinery of using human symbols, we can say that the utilisation of symbols refers not only to communication, but also to knowledge, and a firm distinction between content and form no longer seems entirely plausible.

*Human symbolic influence (...) is pervasive and inescapably intertwined with the workings of all modes of inquiry” and “the differing arguments made about such notions as “truth,” “reality,” and “knowledge” do not automatically prohibit a positive and constructive conception of rhetoric. For regardless of whether truth is taken to be independent of humans and somehow discoverable, or conceived as humanly constructed, or seen perhaps as beyond human awareness, it is still the case that humans engage in rhetorical activity for the purpose of coming to grips with their world and behaving in it. (Cherwitz, 1990, p. 9)*

Thus, we can ask ourselves, along Cherwitz (1982) and Butchvarov (1970), whether rhetorical discourse has an epistemic function and whether we can consider it a way of describing reality through language, no matter if we define this description as social or empirical. Starting from the commonly accepted understanding that the term knowledge can be used for those elements that we can determine, that we consider true or for which we have sufficient evidence, we will necessarily define knowledge as composed of three elements: truth, faith and justification. Therefore, we can say that “to speak of knowledge is to speak of justified true belief.” (Cherwitz, 1982, p. 146), but not in order to provide guarantees or confirmations, but for

*wondering about the world, seeking truth, appraising one’s beliefs, and deciding how to act. No moments in our lives are more important than those when we consider whether certain propositions are true; when we seek, or try to determine that we possess knowledge of something, when we need, and make, distinctions between what we know, what we believe with reason though not knowledge, and what we merely believe. (Butchvarov, 1970, p. 43)*

Through the internal landmarks of grammatology, Derrida (1968) proposes a new report with written texts. In a radical way, Grammatology sends the problem of reference to the real, as well as the founding function of writing and interpreting texts, into a secondary realm. The referent becomes a fluctuating and unstable function of language and not a real entity or fact in the world. Deconstruction is not concerned with distillation of truth. The effect of translating thought into language is the imprinting of difference into the structure of meaning. It simultaneously embodies the intended meaning, as intended by the author, and the constraints imposed on this meaning by the act of interpreting the text.

*For the same reason there is nowhere to begin to trace the sheaf of the graphics of différence. For what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility. (...) In the delineation of différence, everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a teleos or theme of domination. (Derrida, 1968, pp. 6-7)*

Everything revolves around the logos, the spoken word, even the written text. Logocentrism is therefore the privileged metaphysics, the prime act associated with the subject present, from which l'écriture (writing) is then derived. The referent is only the written tradition, which makes us interpreters. In this perspective, texts appear in their opaque materiality, as objects of interpretation, yet not in the Gadamerian sense that composes a tradition as a coherent and transparent whole, but rather deconstructing a tradition made of traces and texts, never fully intelligible, and in which we recognize ourselves partially or not at all. To consider "philosophy as a genre of writing/écriture" means, in Derrida's view, to establish the possibility of subjecting philosophy to criticism, of deconstructing it, thereby suspending its indisputable and unquestionable character. "La philosophie n'est, dans l'écriture, que ce mouvement de l'écriture comme effacement du signifiant et désir de la présence restituée, de l'être signifié dans sa brillance et son éclat." (Derrida, 1967, p. 405) [Within writing/écriture, philosophy is nothing but this movement of écriture as erasure of the significant and desire of its returned presence of the signified entity in its entire brilliance and glory].

Regarding Derrida, Richard Rorty (1982) points out that "philosophical writing, for Heidegger as for the Kantians, isn't really aimed at putting an end to writing. For Derrida, writing always leads to more writing, and more, and still more. (Rorty, 1982, p. 94) This inevitably leads to limitation of interpretation and a collapse of meaning, the limit being deconstruction - as a continuous process of questioning the accepted basis of meaning. The meaning is exclusively inscribed in the text, that is, in a signifier that signifies itself indirectly by its semiological function itself. The problem of meaning does not lead to the meaninglessness of a text, but to the idea of meaning as a question posed by the text itself. This loses sight of "the reflexivity of rhetoric that finally expresses and signifies itself at the outcome of its autonomization." (Meyer, 1994, p. 25) As Cherwitz notes,

*deconstruction reveals the absurdity of the modern project's quest for fully transparent truth, whether founded on romantic self-expression or on positivistic science. If you start with Bacon and Descartes, you must end with Derrida, who*



## *Rhetorisation of Philosophy*

*revealed that nihilism was the unacknowledged guest in the house of Western metaphysics all along. (Cherwitz, 1990, p. 267)*

No longer able to control or limit the structures of linguistic meaning, we are open to permanent confusion and interpretive decisions. The ability of philosophy to unfold as a discourse depends, under these conditions, on the ability to develop an appropriate aesthetic. In other words, the category of aesthetics is a rigorous way in which philosophy tries to base its discourse on principles internal to its system, and to build itself, through this, as a system.

*The relationship and the distinction between literature and philosophy cannot be made in terms of a distinction between aesthetic and epistemological categories. All philosophy is condemned, to the extent that it is dependent on figuration. (de Man, 1996, p. 50)*

Fallen prey to the error of considering that spirits are totally conditioned by the use, beyond their will and desire, of expressions and words that spring from the unconscious, the rhetoric of philosophy has caused confusion between what is imposed by language and what is consciously chosen through speech, thus failing to admit the discourse's character of conscious process acting on language, that alters reality through the mediation of thought and action.

*For de Man, language has a certain self-deconstructing character that is repressed in the tradition and from which emerge a variety of coping mechanisms, ranging from denying the philosophical importance of language altogether to allowing for its importance, but not realizing that there is no pre-interpretative link to be forged between language and extralinguistic reality. (Rush, 1997, p. 445)*

Both Derrida and Rorty place truth and rationality in the context of the ineluctable ethnocentrism or the awareness of inevitability and the conditioned value of language. Philosophy is thus inscribed in a post-epistemological space of equal and rhetorical discourses, in which knowledge represents "the ability to reach agreement by persuasion." (Rorty, 2000, p. 179) Language is a tool developed in and by certain cultures, shaping a certain contingent position within the particular culture that created it, and, at best, these fundamental differences between cultures can be overcome by concrete comparisons of particular alternatives.

The affirmation of ethnocentrism is for Rorty a means of weakening the strong understanding of philosophy, proposing a weak conception, which consists in treating philosophical discourse as a literary genre, closed in the metaphorical dimension and unable to offer universally valid explanations. In upholding the contextual and contingent character of truth, Rorty dismisses any essentialism of philosophical discourse as the result of its conditions of emergence. We discover,

therefore, what Foucault calls “discursive formations”, which are not based on the singularity of an object, but on a “space in which different objects are constantly looming and transforming” according to the “game of rules” that make possible over a given period, the appearance of these objects. (Foucault, 1999, p. 42) This view does not make clear the shift from the level at which institutional influences on language operate to the text itself. Only the consideration of philosophy as constitutive discourse, as proposed by Maingueneau, makes it possible to avoid a total assimilation of textual productions in the device of discursive communities. “Discourse can be defined neither as a representation of the object, nor as textual organization, nor as a communicative situation, but as the relating of these aspects, through enunciation.” (Maingueneau, 1999, p. 178) Thus, in Maingueneau’s conception, discourse is self-grounded and self-constituted, taking possession of or assuming what he calls *the archeion* (source, principle, or foundation) of discursive production from a given time and space.

### *Conclusions*

Finally, the rhetorisation of philosophy involves nothing more than sending the discourse -reality duality into a secondary plane, if not a sheer negation of it, from a position of prime category of thinking involved in the process of knowledge – since by knowledge is understood an act of positioning the object, followed by an act of its implicit or virtual operationalization. Along with the rhetorisation of philosophy, the implicit correspondence between discourse and reality is broken: discourse is neither a representative reflection of reality, nor a manner of rationalizing reality, but an event in a continuous eruption, a metadiscourse, marked, we could say, by its own ontology.

### **References:**

1. Butchvarov, P. (1970). *The Concept of Knowledge*. Northwestern University Press.
2. Charbonnel, N. (1991, 1993). *La tâche aveugle* [The Blind Task]. Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg.
3. Cherwitz, R. A. (Ed.). (1990). *Rhetoric and Philosophy*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., New Jersey.
4. Cherwitz, R. A., & Hikins, J. W. (1982). Toward a rhetorical epistemology. *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 47(2).
5. De Man, P. (Ed.) (1996). *Aesthetic Ideology*, intro by Andrzej Warminski. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

6. Derrida, J. (1967). *De la grammatologie* [A Bit of Grammatology]. Minuit.
7. Derrida, J. (1968). *Différence, Theorie d'ensemble* [Difference, The Theory of Togetherness ], coll. Tel Quel. Editions du Seuil.
8. Foucault, M. (1999). *Arheologia cunoaşterii* [The Archaeology of Knowledge]. Univers.
9. Gadamer, H.-G. (2001). *Adevăr şi metodă* [Truth and Method]. Teora.
10. Galay, J.-L. (1977). *Philosophie et invention textuelle: essai sur la poétique d'un text kantien* [Philosophy and Textual Invention: An Essay on the Poetics of a Kantian Text]. Klincksieck.
11. Grassi, E. (2001). *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*. Southern Illinois University Press.
12. Maingueneau, D. (1999). *Analysing Self-Constituting Discourses. Discourse Studies*. Sage Publications.
13. Meyer, M. (1994). *Rhetoric, Language, and Reason*. The Pennsylvania State University Press.
14. Perelman, G. (1968). *Rhetoric and Philosophy. Journal of Philosophy and Rhetorics I*.
15. Rorty, R. (2000). *Obiectivitate, relativism şi adevăr. Eseuri filosofice 1* [Objectivity, Relativism and Truth. Philosophical Essays]. Univers.
16. Rorty, R. (1982). *Consequences of pragmatism (essays: 1972-1980)*. University of Minnesota Press.
17. Rush, F. L. (1997). Book review: *Aesthetic Ideology* by Paul de Man, Andrzej Warminski, University of Minnesota Press (1997). *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55(4), 443-445.



# The perception of the Romanian Minority in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian War

Marin GHERMAN

*Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania*

*marin.gherman@usm.ro*

## Abstract

*This study sets out to examine the perception of Romanian minority groups and Romanian speakers in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian war right after Moscow launched the large-scale invasion (24 February 2022). The paper studies the impact Ukraine's policies addressing national minorities and their poor reception have had on community-wide perception on the war. Equally contributing are the crimes committed by Soviet authorities against the Romanian minority, for which part of the blame is projected onto present-day Russia. Data collected as part of field research (focus groups interviews, surveys, analyses of Romanian-language publications) is evidence in favor of the Romanian minority's support for Ukraine and for its condemnation of Russia's military actions. In the full-blown Russian-Ukrainian war, the Romanian national minority proved its political loyalty towards Kyiv due to its civic identity (as citizens of Ukraine), without abandoning its ethnic legacy. At the same time, support for Ukraine's war efforts is interpreted as a compelling reason in the future for Ukrainian authorities to change the national minority laws. The war and expectations linked to its outcome are seen through an "ethnic lens", a community-specific perspective developed as a consequence of overlapping identities.*

**Keywords:** *Ukraine, Russia, Romanian minority, war, ethnic identity.*

## *Introduction*

In the 2014-2022 period, relations between Ukrainian authorities and national minorities have become a topic of disinformation in the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war. On the one hand, Ukraine expressed its commitment to modernize the legislation in the field of national minorities so as to reflect European standards (Chervonenko, 2019). On the other hand, the Russian Federation repeatedly tried to use this topic in some of its campaigns designed to spread *fake news* (Gherman, 2022). Moscow sought to cause fractures at the level of Ukrainian society and use these divisions and the Soviet-era overlapping identities to serve its political agenda. Official narratives and media outlets in Russia paid special attention to the

Russian national minority, Russian speakers as well as other minority groups in Ukraine.

The juxtaposition of ethnic and civic identities was a major topic of cross-disciplinary research after the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of the war in Donbas (Zhurzhenko, 2014). Whereas Russia tried to prove through the media outlets at its disposal and official communications that Ukraine is a divided state in terms of national identity, Kyiv was striving to build a Ukrainian political nation at odds with the Russian one.

In this respect, starting 2017, Ukraine passed a number of laws that consolidated the status of the Ukrainian language in the fields of education, economy, culture and media. Unfortunately, these political decisions sparked disgruntlement among national minorities in Ukraine, including the Romanian one. While the Romanian national minority described the laws as an “assimilation” attempt, Ukrainian authorities argued they are promoting an “integration policy” (Varha *et al.*, 2020). According to Ukraine’s official standpoint, every item of legislation passed since 2017 must be interpreted in the context of Russia’s attempts at destabilizing Ukrainian society by means of manipulating public opinion over the rights of the Russian-speaking population. At the same time, Ukrainian authorities claimed the de-Russification and decommunization of Ukrainian society were key political priorities (Polovynko & Shcheglova, 2016).

Describing itself as a “collateral victim” of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Romanian national minority staged street protests against the legislative initiatives of Ukraine (Struț, 2017). Representatives of the Romanian minority submitted a number of official notifications to Ukrainian authorities, condemning Kyiv’s ethnic-linguistic policy and labeling it an “assimilation” campaign. Members of organizations representing the Romanian national minority expressed confusion regarding the authorities’ decision to revoke some of their historical rights. Their concerns were discussed in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and on the sidelines of other international meetings (Grejdeanu, 2017).

The status of the Romanian national minority started carrying more weight in Ukrainian-Romanian diplomatic ties. Although Ukrainian officials gave assurances they would comply with the recommendations of the European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (the Venice Commission) and that they would gradually implement whatever is stipulated under international law (Grămadă, 2020), the issue continued to weigh down on bilateral diplomatic ties and relations between Kyiv authorities and the Romanian national minority. Prior to 24 February 2022, no compromise solution had been identified that would reconcile Kyiv’s desire to consolidate the status of the

### *The perception of the Romanian Minority in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian War*

Ukrainian language in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war with the requests of the Romanian national minority of reverting to the previous legislation, which it considered to be more permissive.

At the same time, a number of painful memories linked to Soviet deportations, famine and repression remain deeply engrained in the collective mindset of the Romanian national minority in Ukraine, which associates these experiences with present-day Russia (Lavric, 2015). Romanian speakers in Ukraine claim Russia is the rightful heir to the USSR's political tradition, which is why part of the traumas they experienced in the past have been projected on the image of modern-day Russia.

Therefore, the perception of the Romanian minority on Ukraine is swayed by developments linked to the legislative initiatives of recent years. At the same time, the Romanian community's perception on Russia is closely tied to the history of trauma and abuse endured under the Soviet regime.

In that respect, the perspective on the Russian-Ukrainian war at the level of the Romanian national minority appears to be a unique social phenomenon in the broader post-communist context. This paper will examine this perspective starting from the outset of the war – Russia's launch of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The paper will employ sociological instruments (surveys, focus group interviews, press reviews). In terms of methodology, the study employs the "ethnic lens", an instrument used by researchers to study the social capital of ex-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe (Dowley & Silver, 2002).

The perception of the Romanian minority in Ukraine about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will be tackled also based on the teachings of constructivist theories, which interpret linguistic and ethnic identity transformations in connection to the political context (Chandra & Boulet, 2012). This study will also outline the findings of field research conducted in the Ukrainian regions of Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia and Odesa.

### *Demographic and linguistic features of the Romanian national minority in Ukraine*

The Romanian national minority in Ukraine is clustered in the Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia oblasts in western Ukraine as well as in the Odesa oblast, in the south. According to the latest census organized in 2001 in Ukraine (UKRCENSUS, 2003a), the Chernivtsi region is home to 698.1 thousand Ukrainian ethnics (75%), 114.6 thousand Romanian nationals (12.5%) and 67.2 thousand Moldovan ethnics (7.3%). The census also reveals that an insignificant

number of Romanians (under 0.2%) live in Odesa, although official data shows a large number of Moldovan citizens live here.

According to Ukrainian authorities, the Moldovan national minority differs from the Romanian one, although these two ethnic minorities are bound by the same language. Ukrainian legislation still uses the term “Moldovan” to refer to the national language of Moldova, although things might change after the Romanian language was declared the official language of the Republic of Moldova, replacing the Soviet-era Moldovan linguonym (RFE, 2023). In the context of Ukraine’s decommunization policy launched after the annexation of Crimea, Kyiv started to gradually discard a number of myths, historical interpretations and identities fashioned under the USSR (Hrytsenko, 2019). According to Ukrainian historian Oleksiy Mustafin (2023), the Moldovan language is identical to the Romanian one and is nothing but a fabrication of Soviet authorities. Ukrainian experts are analyzing Chişinău’s break with the Moldovan linguonym in the context of decommunization. Philologists (Cernov, 2020) as well as the Venice Commission (2017) have recommended Ukraine adopt the same approach to Romanian speakers in the three regions, irrespective of their publicly assumed identity as Romanian or Moldovan.

For these reasons, this study will work not just with the concept of Romanian national minority, but also with the idea of a Romanian linguistic minority, encompassing the Romanian-speaking population of Ukraine, regardless of whether they consider themselves Romanian or Moldovan ethnics. Based on the 2001 census (UKRCENSUS, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c), Ukraine is home to 409.6 thousand Romanian speakers, accounting for 0.8% of Ukraine’s total population. This number will be a point of reference when discussing the Romanian linguistic minorities of Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia and Odesa regions.

#### *Perceptions on the war, identified based on focus group interviews*

In October 2022, three focus group interviews were conducted in Chernivtsi (Chernivtsi region), Solotvyno (Zakarpattia region) and Izmail (Odesa region), with the participation of representatives of the cultural, political and confessional elites of the Romanian national minority in Ukraine. The interviews were broken down in three sections and consisted of both audio and video. Each focus group interview comprised 4 participants for each of the three regions, including teaching staff, journalists, clergymen, representatives of local authorities and volunteers. The list of interviewees included 7 women and 5 men aged 18-60.

In all of the three regions inhabited by Romanian ethnics or Romanian speakers, the Russian-Ukrainian war is seen as a Russian act of aggression against



Ukraine. 10 in 12 interviewees said they wanted Ukraine to defeat Russia because it is fighting a “fair” war to defend and liberate its territory.

Russia is accused of violating international law, destroying the peaceful life of Ukraine and displacing the local population in large numbers. Additionally, Russia’s military aggression is labeled as detrimental to the preservation of the ethnic and linguistic identity of Romanian national minorities: “Nearly 20% of Romanian pupils left Ukraine in the wake of Russia’s war” (Focus Group Interview, Chernivtsi, 6 October 2022).

Two thirds of interviewees see the possible defeat of Ukraine in the ongoing war as a genuine catastrophe for the Romanian national minority, as well as for neighboring states, including Romania. Ukraine’s cooperation with Western partners is described as “an axis of good”, targeted against “our enemy, Russia” (Focus Group Interview, Izmail, 7 October 2022). Ukraine’s victory in the war is not seen as a preference, but rather as the historical duty of every Ukrainian citizen, considering the suffering of the civilian population and the bravery of Ukrainian servicemen, regardless of their ethnic background: “We have already won. All we need now is time and patience” (Focus Group Interview, Solotyvno, 6 October 2022).

**Table 1**  
*The perception of Romanian minorities on the war in Ukraine*

Region	Who is responsible for the outbreak of the war?	Who will win the war?	Pro-Russian attitudes in the region	How does the war affect the Romanian minority?	The main consequence of the war	Ukraine’s number one partner
Chernivtsi	Russia	Ukraine	absent	indirect	depopulation	Romania
Zakarpattia	Russia	Ukraine	absent	indirect	poverty	Romania
Odesa	Russia	Ukraine	partially present	direct	insecurity	Romania

*Note. As per focus group interviews conducted in October 2022.*

Whereas the inhabitants of Ukraine’s western regions believe the Romanian national minority is indirectly affected by the war, those in the southern region of Odesa claim Russia’s aggression has a direct impact on their livelihood (Table 1). More often than not, the inhabitants of Odesa invoked air strikes on civilian infrastructure, servicemen killed on the frontline and the widespread feeling of insecurity as some of the issues they have to deal with. Romanian ethnics who claimed the war does not affect them directly believe depopulation and poverty are the biggest problems caused by the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict. The farther members of the Romanian minority are from the frontline, the more their

concerns refer to a plethora of social and economic difficulties. The farther one goes from military hot zones, the more ethnic discourse and concerns prevail over security-related issues.

Only residents of the Odesa region admitted they have noticed pro-Russian attitudes in their region, leaving out Romanians from Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia. Concurrently, Romanian speakers in Odesa region underscored an increase in the level of popular support for the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the context of ongoing hostilities. The war prompted a great deal of Ukrainian citizens to show more loyalty to the Ukrainian state, irrespective of their ethnicity, focus group interviewees have argued. “At the start of the war, some had positive opinions about Russia. Whereas a few months ago 30% were pro-European and 70% pro-Russian, now the tables have turned in the region of Odesa.” (Focus Group Interview, Izmail, 7 October 2022)

Romanian ethnics and Romanian speakers in the three regions regard the Romanian state as a major supporter of Ukraine’s defensive efforts. In the context of Romania’s support to Kyiv, members of the Romanian national minority say Ukrainian authorities will be compelled to modify the legislation in the fields of education, media and culture as a whole in recognition of Romania’s contribution. “Once the war is over, Ukraine will have to modify the laws that discriminate against us, as a sign of gratitude towards Romania and the Romanian ethnics who risked their lives fighting this war.” (Focus Group Interview, Chernivtsi, 6 October 2022)

Irrespective of the region we’re referring to, representatives of the Romanian national minority displayed solidarity with Ukraine and supported this country’s war effort. Support for Ukraine appears to be unconditional, despite disgruntlement over Ukraine’s previous policies and legislative initiatives addressing ethnic and linguistic minorities. The question of preserving the national and linguistic identity of this minority was not abandoned, despite Russia’s military campaign on the territory of Ukraine. Interpreting political developments through an “ethnic lens”, focus group participants don’t want Ukraine to lose the war. However, when it emerges victorious, Kyiv must modify the legislation guaranteeing the rights of national minorities. Support offered to Ukraine in this war is seen as a social capital provided in advance, which Kyiv is expected to pay back through legislative initiatives in times of peace.

Romanians in Ukraine claim they are not psychologically affected by bombings, air raid sirens, the suspension of classes in schools or the impoverishment of the population. “We are living in uncertainty, that’s the biggest problem. We worry because we don’t know what tomorrow will bring for Ukraine

*The perception of the Romanian Minority in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian War*

and, last but not least, for us, Romanians in Ukraine.” (Focus Group Interview, Chernivtsi, 6 October 2022)

The perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war stemming from the focus group interviews conducted in the Ukrainian regions of Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia and Odesa, confirms the natural overlay of civic and ethnic identities. As Romanian ethnics, but also as citizens of Ukraine, the members of the Romanian national minority want Ukraine to prevail in the ongoing war, arguing that a defeat for Ukraine would also cause the conflict to spill to neighboring states. Russia is seen as a threat both to Ukraine as well as to the Romanian national minority. When the war is over, Kyiv’s attitude towards the Romanian community needs to change, and the legislation addressing them should become more permissive, focus group interviewees have argued.

*Perceptions on the war, identified based on surveys*

Over 15-25 October 2022, I have conducted a mixed sociological survey using quotas (50% by telephone and 50% online) on a sample population of 740 people, representative for a small fraction of the Romanian linguistic minority in Ukraine. The rounding used to establish the sample parameters, while factoring in population ageing in comparison to the findings of the 2001 census and the drop in birth rates over 2012-2021 (UN, 2021) has helped set the margin error at 4%.

Whereas focus group interviews targeted the cultural and administrative elite of the Romanian minority, the findings of the survey are representative of the entire Romanian linguistic minority in Ukraine. The surveys only factored in participants’ demographic profile in terms of age/gender (UKRCENSUS, 2003d).

According to the findings of the survey, 65% of Romanian-language speakers consider Russia to be solely responsible for the outbreak of the war. Only 1% of respondents said the same is true of Ukraine. 14% of respondents claimed both countries are to blame for the military escalation started on 24 February 2022. The other Romanian speakers blame global actors or identified themselves as supporters of conspiracy theories that justify the war (IPSSC, 2022). Whereas the intellectual elite was unequivocal about blaming Russia for the start of the war, the survey identified other points of view.

8 in 10 Romanian speakers in Ukraine claim they have relatives, friends or acquaintances who have been fighting on the frontline over 2014 – October 2022. 57% of respondents say they know people who were killed in the war, which is indicative of the direct involvement of Romanian ethnics or Romanian speakers in Russian-Ukrainian military clashes. Asked if they have “family, friends of acquaintances who fight (or have fought) on the frontline as part of the Ukrainian

Armed Forces”, inhabitants of Chernivtsi and Odesa provided 2.5 more positive replies compared to the inhabitants of Zakarpattia.

Whereas focus group interviews confirmed that the war-related problems affecting the Romanian national minority differed across regions, surveys revealed a more homogenous reality. 73% of respondents said the most serious consequence of the war is insecurity. Given the possibility to choose between several responses, Romanian speakers mentioned poverty and economic issues (50.1%), the interdiction to leave Ukraine applied to conscription-aged men (32.3%), rising social unrest, intolerance and hatred at society level (27%), young people and children leaving Ukrainian settlements (25.4%). The inhabitants of the three regions displayed a tolerant attitude towards people who were internally displaced by military events.

Much like in the case of focus group interviews, Romanians believe Ukraine will win the war (60%). Only 4.2% of respondents said Russia has bigger chances of winning the war. 2 in 10 Romanian speakers provided less categorical responses, saying that “a temporary peace will follow, at the end of which the war will start with renewed vigor”.

Asked to outline the biggest problems facing by the Romanian national minority in the last 30 years, respondents mentioned “access to education in the mother tongue” (64%) and “the disappearance of Romanian-language TV and radio programmes” (52%). In spite of the war, Romanian speakers believe identity issues – preserving the language, culture, education and the media – are the most important of the last three decades. Additionally, they underscored “Romania’s low interest for the state of the Romanian community” (43%). Both states are seen as equally responsible for the unresolved problems of this national minority.

Romanian television and radio stations have partially contributed to shaping perceptions on the war in Ukraine, as they are followed by half of respondents. It’s also worth mentioning that Romanian speakers obtain their information about military and political developments in Ukraine from several sources at the same time. Given the possibility to choose between several responses, 64.3% of respondents identified Ukrainian-language television and radio stations as their primary source of information, 50.5% mentioned Romanian television and radio stations, 49.2% identified social media as their source, including the webpages of certain newspapers or news agencies, 45% Telegram channels, while 30.5% Romanian-language media in the regions of Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia and Odesa. It’s also worth highlighting the growing popularity of online media, social networks and Telegram channels amidst the Romanian community in Ukraine. Moreover, to most Romanians in Ukraine, the main source of information is represented by

### *The perception of the Romanian Minority in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian War*

Ukrainian-language TV and radio stations, in addition to media outlets in Romania.

Similar to the findings of focus group interviews, the survey also noted the disgruntlement of Romanian ethnics towards a number of Ukrainian policies in the last 30 years. Discontentment tied to the existence of legislative barriers hampering the preservation of ethnic and linguistic identity did not influence the Romanian minority's support for Ukraine in the context of the war. On the contrary, Romanian speakers feel hopeful about Ukraine's victory and expect a swift defeat of the Russian Federation.

#### *Perceptions on the war, identified in the Romanian-language media*

I have examined the main narratives promoted by Romanian-language media in Ukraine over 24 February – 24 October 2022. The research was conducted by applying a set of methods pertaining to political communication (Gosselin, 1995), as well as language analysis (Toolan, 2001), with a view to sorting through the narratives describing media perceptions on the war.

To that end, I monitored Romanian-language print (*Monitorul Bucovinean* - The Bukovina Monitor, *Gazeta de Herța* - The Herța Gazette) and online (*Zorile Bucovinei* - Dawns of Bukovina, *Libertatea Cuvântului* - Freedom of Speech, *Agenția BucPress* - BucPress Agency) media. All these publications are headquartered in Chernivtsi, while Romanian language periodicals are absent in the other regions.

Following the start of the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Romanian-language media criticized the war and the Russian Federation's aggression in strong terms. For instance, in an article published by *Zorile Bucovinei*, Romanian journalists referred to Russia's attack on Ukraine as "a monstrous aggression against a peaceful nation" (ZB, 2022).

Romanian journalists in Ukraine have condemned the actions of the Russian Federation, expressing solidarity with Ukraine despite past grievances regarding Kyiv's policies addressing national minorities. In recent months, dozens of official press releases and statements of government and non-government organizations in both Ukraine and Romania have been publicized. *Libertatea Cuvântului* wrote about the solidarity expressed by the Council of the Union of Ukrainians in Romania, which firmly condemned the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine. The publication reported on the blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, of international law, of regional, European and Euro-Atlantic security and stability (LC, 2022).

Romanian-language media outlets in Ukraine regularly quoted official press releases issued by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, Regional State Administrations or Enrollment and Social Welfare Centers. All publications delivered periodic updates about losses sustained by Ukraine and Russia on the battlefield. The topic reflected Kyiv's official standpoint. Romanian journalists in Chernivtsi reported on both Ukrainian and Romanian nationals who were killed in battle fighting for Ukraine.

*Agenția BucPress* and *Gazeta de Herța* published a series of articles in memory of the Romanian ethnics who went to war to defend Ukraine against the Russian Federation's acts of aggression. The Romanian-language publications drew attention to the decision of certain representatives of the Romanian language minority who returned home in order to enroll. "Victory will definitely belong to Ukraine, but for the time being the soul of our brave hero will make its way to the spiritual world", *Agenția BucPress* writes (Bulagarak, 2022). The participation of Romanian ethnics in the efforts to defend the Ukrainian state was represented in the articles carried by Romanian media as an act of heroism, a practice encouraged by all other publications.

Russia's official narratives were not just kept out of print, but also invalidated or criticized. In this respect, the Romanian-language media displayed solidarity with Kyiv's defensive war efforts. Romanian-language publications scrutinized a series of events, such as the attacks on critical infrastructure, the killing of civilians and the atrocities committed by the Russian army in various settlements across Ukraine (Namaca, 2022, p. 1). No pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian views were published on the pages of Romanian-language publications or on their social media profiles.

The Romanian-language media also reported on the support provided by Romania and Romanian ethnics in Ukraine to the Ukrainian Armed Forces and to the internally displaced population. *Gazeta de Herța* analyzed the contribution of leaders of Ukrainian settlements inhabited by Romanians to managing the flow of humanitarian aid delivered by the West. In the first months of the war, the Romanian national minority became a bridge between Ukrainian society and Western partners who sought to help the Ukrainian state (Platonov, 2022).

The Romanian-language media in Ukraine hailed the support provided by Romania and Romanian citizens, evidence of which were the words of gratitude published on the websites of these publications and conveyed to Bucharest for its support. "Romanians have always been good, merciful and helpful in times of need – they would share their last crust to help their neighbors in times of hardship. A friend in need is a friend indeed, one who helps Ukraine", *Zorile*

### *The perception of the Romanian Minority in Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian War*

*Bucovinei* writes (Nichita-Toma, 2022a). Romanian-born journalists also underscored the creation and activity of humanitarian hubs and refugee centers, the collaboration between Ukrainian and Romanian volunteers, as well as blood donation campaigns. At the same time, media outlets also reported on the political support offered by the Romanian government, as well as the gratitude expressed by Ukrainian authorities for all the assistance received.

Arguing strongly in favor of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Romanian journalists did not abandon topics of interest to the Romanian minority. In spite of the war, the Romanian-language media continued to express concern over the possible loss of linguistic and ethnic identity. Media outlets continue to tackle such topics as the shortcomings of Romanian-language teaching, the preservation of national identity, the shutdown of Romanian-language publications or the disappearance of Romanian-language TV and radio programmes. In the context of Romania's support for Ukraine, Romanian-speaking journalists' expectations from Kyiv authorities went up. "Why should Romanians abandon their language, their history, their ancestors, only to die for Ukraine? And all this time, Romania remains one of Ukraine's staunchest supporters", *Zorile Bucovinei* writes (Nichita-Toma, 2022b).

Concurrently, *Monitorul Bucovinean* points out that Romania's support for Ukraine should serve as an incentive for Ukrainian decision-makers to change legislation in the field of national minority rights (Șapcă, 2022). Referring to the support offered to Ukraine and the Ukrainian army as a gesture of unconditional help, the Romanian-language media did not discard topics of usual interest to Romanian speakers. The tone of discontentment permeating some of the media articles with respect to the state of the Romanian minority in Ukraine did not generate anti-Ukrainian attitudes. The two issues – the rights of national minorities and the war in Ukraine – were tackled separately and very rarely intertwined. Most publications and news agencies voiced very high expectations from Ukrainian lawmakers once hostilities have ended.

### *Conclusions*

The perception of the Romanian national minority on the war in Ukraine is dominated by Kyiv's public policies in recent years, as well as by recent trauma generated by the crimes of the Soviet regime. Data collected in the wake of field research has confirmed community-wide support for Ukraine from the Romanian national minority and strong criticism of Russia's military actions. With the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in full swing, the Romanian minority displayed political loyalty towards Kyiv due to its Ukrainian political identity, built over the

last 30 years, without however relinquishing its ethnic identity. At the same time, support for Ukraine in the context of the war is interpreted as a compelling reason for Ukrainian authorities to improve legislation on national minorities in the future.

According to focus group interviews, conducted in the regions of Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia and Odesa, Ukraine's defeat in the ongoing war could spell a genuine catastrophe. Russia is regarded as an existential threat. The farther representatives of the Romanian national minority are from military hot zones, the more Romanian ethnic discourse prevails over Ukrainian political rhetoric.

The survey conducted amidst Romanian speakers, regardless of their ethnic (Romanian or Moldovan) makeup, proves their unconditional support for Ukraine's war efforts. Russia is seen as the aggressor. War-generated instability induces a sense of frustration caused by insecurity in Romanian communities. At the same time, this linguistic minority preserves its current demands with respect to Ukrainian legislation, which it regards as restrictive towards Romanian-language education and media.

An analysis of Romanian-language media in Chernivtsi revealed a maximum degree of solidarity with Ukraine. Media narratives about the war are basically identical with the official discourse of Ukrainian authorities. No pro-Russian attitudes were detected on the webpages of Romanian-language publications. Similar to the findings of focus group interviews and surveys, the Romanian media voiced very high expectations from Ukraine at the end of the war.

Perception on the war and expectations with respect to its outcome are seen through "the ethnic lens" emerged as a consequence of overlapping identities. Loyalty and support for Ukraine are perceived by Romanian national minority groups as a form of social capital provided in advance to Ukrainian authorities in exchange for their efforts to change the legislation at the end of the war. The overlapping ethnic and civic identities generate specific expectations at the level of the Romanian national minority. Field data shows this minority will feel more threatened should Ukraine lose the war. At the same time, fear of ethnic assimilation is just as high a threat as the possibility of Russia emerging victorious in its war on Ukraine.

### ***Acknowledgements***

*My heartfelt gratitude goes to the specialists of the Institute for Political Studies and Social Capital of Chernivtsi (Ukraine), with whom I worked closely as part of the research scholarship titled "The Romanian Community in Ukraine during the War: Needs, Expectations, Challenges (Social Barometer)", funded by the Department for*



*Romanians Abroad (DRP) within the Romanian Government (DRP/C/174/10.10.2022): Sergiu Barbuța, Mariana Belciuc, Vasile Barbuța and Serghei Hakman, who helped ensure the smooth progress of field research. Additionally, I want to thank the tenured professors of the Department for Humanities and Political Sciences of Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava.*

### **References:**

1. Bulagarak, N. (2022). În memoria eroului Dumitru Ignatescu – basarabean care s-a întors din Italia pentru a apăra Ucraina. *Agenția BucPress* (18 August). <https://bucpress.eu/in-memoria-eroului-dumitru-ignatesco-italianul>.
2. Cernov, A. (2020) Limba română și capcanele politice din Ucraina.  *Glasul Bucovinei*, 26(1-2), 43-56.
3. Chandra, K., & Boulet, C. (2012). A Combinatorial Language for Thinking about Ethnic Identity Change. In K. Chandra (Ed.), *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* (pp. 179-228). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199893157.003.0005>.
4. Chervonenko, V. (2019). Venetsianska komisiia rekomenduvala Ukraini zakhystyty rosiisku i zminyty movnyi zakon. *BBC News* (6 December). <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-50686995>.
5. Dowley, K., & Silver, B. (2002). Social Capital, Ethnicity and Support for Democracy in the Post-Communist States. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54(4), 505-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130220139145>.
6. Gherman, M. (2022). Narațiuni ale dezinformării și fake news utilizate de Rusia până la invadarea Ucrainei. *Polis. Journal of Political Science*, 10(2), 99-110. <https://revistapolis.ro/236-mgherman>.
7. Gosselin, A. (1995). La communication politique. Cartographie d'un champ de recherche et d'activités. *Hermès*, 3(17-18), 17-33.
8. Grămadă, A. (2020). Dialogul dintre România și Ucraina în era diplomației de whatsapp. *ESGA*. <https://www.esga.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Vizita-Kuleba-Bucuresti-septembrie-2020.pdf>.
9. Grejdeanu, T. (2017). Aurica Bojescu: “Și noi ne-am opus, și ungurii s-au opus, și s-au opus și alte minorități din Ucraina”. *Radio Europa Liberă Moldova*. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/interviu-aurica-bojescu-noua-lege-a-educatiei-ucraina/28759564.html>.
10. Hrytsenko, O. (2019). Dekomunizatsiia v Ukraini yak derzhavna polityka i yak sotsiokulturne yavyshe. IPED I.F. Kurasa NAN Ukrainy; IK NAM Ukrainy. [https://ipiend.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/grytsenko\\_dekomunizatsia.pdf](https://ipiend.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/grytsenko_dekomunizatsia.pdf).

11. IPSSC. (2022). Rezultatele sondajului, realizat în cadrul proiectului “Comunitatea românească din Ucraina: necesități, așteptări și provocări în perioada războiului.” *Institute of Political Studies and Social Capital*. <https://instituteeps.org/ro/2022/11/26/rezultatele-sondajului-realizat-in-cadrul-proiectului-comunitatea-romaneasca-din-ucraina-necesitati-asteptari-si-provocari-in-perioada-razboiului>.
12. Lavric, A. (2012). Politica de represiune a regimului sovietic în sudul Basarabiei și în nordul Bucovinei: 1940-1941, 1944-1945. *Studia Universitatis Moldaviae* (Seria Științe Umanistice), 4(54), 5-11. [https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare\\_articol/38960](https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare_articol/38960)
13. LC. (2022). Solidaritate cu poporul ucrainean. *Libertatea Cuvântului* (24 February). <http://lyberti.com/solidaritate-cu-poporul-ucrainean>.
14. Namaca, O. (2022). Pedagogii din fostul raion Hliboca: “Ne ținem tari! Credem în Dumnezeu, în Ucraina și în armata ei”. *Monitorul Bucovinean* (14 April), 12.
15. Nichita-Toma, F. (2022a). Românul bun, milostiv, și-ar da și cămașa de pe el să-și ajute vecinul în momente grele – sprijină și ajută Ucraina. *Zorile Bucovinei* (17 March). <http://zorilebucovinei.com/news/show/3651>.
16. Nichita-Toma, F. (2022b). La Cernăuți, oraș din rădăcină românesc, a fost dată la gunoi istoria – bannerul cu copia Hrisovului Domnitorului Alexandru cel Bun, în care e atestat pentru prima dată Cernăuțiul, fiind înlocuit cu bicolorul ucrainean. *Zorile Bucovinei* (27 April). <http://zorilebucovinei.com/news/show/3799>.
17. Platonov, A. (2022). Ajutoare din Europa ajung în Ținutul Herța. *Gazeta de Herța* (3 April). <https://gazetadeherta.com/2022/04/03/ajutoare-din-europa-ajung-in-tinutul-herta>.
18. Polovynko, O., & Shcheglova, T. (2016). The place of Russian in the linguistic identity structure of a modern Ukrainian. In *Current issues of the Russian language teaching XII*. Masarykova univerzita nakladatelství.
19. RFE (2023). Moldovan Parliament Approves Final Reading of Romanian Language. *RFE/RL's Moldovan Service*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-parliament-approves-final-reading-romanian-language-bill/32321571.html>
20. Șapcă, N. (2022). Trei zile în familia românilor nord-bucovineni. *Monitorul Bucovinean* (12 May). 17.
21. Struț, M. (2017). Românii din Cernăuți au ieșit în stradă pentru a-și apăra limba. *Agenția BucPress* (17 October). <https://bucpress.eu/romanii-din-cernauti-au-iesit-in-strada-pentru-a-si-apara-limba>.

22. Toolan, M. (2001). *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203714706>.
23. UKRCENSUS. (2003a). Pro kilkist ta sklad naseleennia Chernivetskoi oblasti za pidsumkamy Vseukrainskoho perepysu naseleennia 2001 roku. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/chernivtsi>.
24. UKRCENSUS. (2003b). Pro kilkist ta sklad naseleennia Odeskoi oblasti za pidsumkamy Vseukrainskoho perepysu naseleennia 2001 roku. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/odesa>.
25. UKRCENSUS. (2003c). Pro kilkist ta sklad naseleennia Zakarpatskoi oblasti za pidsumkamy Vseukrainskoho perepysu naseleennia 2001 roku. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/zakarpatia>.
26. UKRCENSUS. (2003d). Pro kilkist ta sklad naseleennia Ukrainy za pidsumkamy Vseukrainskoho perepysu naseleennia 2001 roku. [http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/sex\\_region/](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/sex_region/).
27. UN. (2021). UN Policy Paper on Population Dynamics. United Nations Ukraine. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/159271-un-policy-paper-population-dynamics>.
28. Varha, N., Gherman, M., Medina, T., Zabolotna, O., Shchudlo, S. & Fatula, R. (2020). Na osvitnikh perekhrestiaxh: dialoh iz natsionalnymy menshynamy u Chernivetskii i Zakarpatskii oblastiakh. UADO, Trek-LTB. <https://dspace.uzhnu.edu.ua/jspui/handle/lib/35380>.
29. Venice Commission. (2017). Opinion on the provisions of the Law on Education of 5 September 2017 which concern the use of the state language and minority and other languages in education. *European Commission for Democracy through Law*. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2017\)030-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2017)030-e).
30. ZB. (2022). Putin a atacat Ucraina la ora 5 dimineata cu bombe si rachete – a fost instaurata legea marziala pe intreg teritoriul țării. *Zorile Bucovinei* (24 February). <http://zorilebucovinei.com/news/show/3574>.
31. Zhurzhenko, T. (2014). A Divided Nation? Reconsidering the Role of Identity Politics in the Ukraine Crisis. *Die Friedens-Warte*, 89(2/3), 249-267. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24868495>.



# “Save Romania Union” and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020

Dumitru-Ștefan MAROSAN  
*Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*  
*stefann.marosan@gmail.com*

## Abstract

*In Bucovina, academic societies and cultural societies from Cernăuți played an In today’s society, social media plays a vital role in the communication power that people own. More and more, online social media is used for politics and election campaigns in order for politicians to be more in touch with their voters. In this paper, I aim to analyse the social media campaigns run on Facebook by Save Romania Union for two election periods: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020. To better understand this issue, I selected Facebook posts and used qualitative research methods to understand these two campaigns’ political aims fully. Overall, in the conclusion section of this paper, you can see how politicians use social media in political campaigns and how important it is for this political party to express their political vision and aspirations.*

**Keywords:** *Save Romania Union, Facebook, social media, electoral period.*

## *Introduction*

Social media has become a part of people’s lives and even a social force shaping communication, interactions, and social behaviour. In such dynamics, the political dimension has become an active presence like entertainment, e-commerce, or science. In the last decade, this online environment began to be increasingly approached by political parties. In the case of Romania, online political communication is increasingly intense during election campaigns (Gherghina & Lutai, 2023). In this article, I chose to analyse the behaviour of Save Romania Union (SRU) during the last two electoral campaigns: The presidential Elections in November 2019 and the Parliamentary Elections in December 2020.

According to Open Democracy (Can, 2016), the SRU is a party of “neoliberals, environmentalists, left-liberals, true social democrats, Christian democrats, NGO supporters and minority rights activists”. These characteristics are relevant for any researcher of this type because they can emphasise their own

type since they are not the main focuses of the political formation and, therefore, how it outlines and promotes the program of action.

In his article, McLaughlin (2016) claims that this party is one of a “diverse group of activists, academics and people from business and the arts, which is derived from a Save Bucharest move to protect the city’s historic buildings”.

The purpose of the present research is to examine and analyse the way in which the SRU political formation used social media in the current framework of Facebook, in the campaigns carried out in 2019 for the Presidential elections and in 2020 in the framework of the Parliamentary elections. In the following sections of this paper, the main existing research directions in the literature regarding the use of social media in political electoral campaigns, the research design for the selected case study, as well as the results of the analysis regarding the SRU’s online electoral communication in the last two rounds of elections in Romania will be presented.

### *Literature Review*

Existing literature has identified and analysed the advantages and disadvantages of using social media platforms in political communication. Somehow, naturally, the online environment has facilitated the level of personalisation of political messages. The use of social media algorithms, which were previously used in online advertising, allowed political parties to target their messages in a much more efficient way based on interests, personal search history on online platforms, regular views, etc. (Bode & Vraga, 2018). Using these algorithms for targeting political messages led to improved electoral results and the efficiency of campaign efforts (Hillygus & Shields, 2008).

Another advantage of online political communication is that online platforms provide political parties with the framework to build online communities of supporters. Such online social constructs offer three potential advantages for political parties: real-time communication with supporters, organising events such as election rallies and encouraging voter turnout (including using user data to identify undecided voters) (Bode & Vraga, 2018).

Online voter mobilisation is not an exclusive operation where only political parties have the initiative. Ordinary citizens can also use online platforms to express their own political views and promote specific candidates. This type of citizen electoral initiative in the online environment has the advantage of facilitating organic political participation that can be defined as a bottom-up democracy (Zúñiga *et al.*, 2014).

*Save Romania Union and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020*

However, social media is not a panacea in electoral mobilisation. Even though an increase in participation in electoral campaigns can be observed, an increase in voter participation has not been observed (Bond *et al.*, 2012). Ultimately, those who were already politically active traditionally are the same ones who tend to use social media for political purposes. However, this does not mean a broadening of the electoral pool.

On the list of disadvantages are the creation of “filter bubbles” and the spread of misinformation. In the first case, it is about the tendency to expose social media users only to information and opinions that reinforce their own beliefs and prejudices (Pariser, 2011). With this, voters cannot access different electoral programs or debates. Thus, political polarisation can be accentuated, a phenomenon that manifests in traditional political communication forms through the written press, radio, and television.

Regarding the second disadvantage, online networks are a source of misinformation during election campaigns (Guess *et al.*, 2020). The exposure of social media users to these campaigns is an issue that could have implications for a fundamental process of democracy. However, electoral manipulation through disinformation is not an invention of social media.

The relationship between the electorate and the party leaders is noted in several reference works from the specialised literature (Aarts *et al.*, 2013; Fernandez-Vazquez & Somer-Topcu, 2019; Garzia, 2017) support in their works the importance of the existence of a consensus between the electorate and the party leader and, at the same time the importance of identifying the voters with the values and beliefs of the political leaders in whose hands they offer political support.

The idea of marketing the leader using social media is not new but has been studied by several scholars. In their research, Sihi and Lawson (2018) claim that political leaders use social media to promote themselves and establish a better connection between themselves and future possible clients (voters in the present case). Also, the credibility of the leader was invoked, offering it as an example for others, the possibility of sharing expertise and knowledge with their followers and engaging them in interaction.

Regarding the loyalty between the voters and the political parties they support, in the existing literature, the emphasis is on the relationship between the leaders and the electorate, more precisely, the existence of continuous communication between the two groups, and the sure votes come precisely from

these voters whom they feel in contact with the leaders of the political formations they support (Andre *et al.*, 2012; Coleman, 2005; Hardin, 2008).

Also, Folke and Rickne (2020) claim that the leader's public appearances and the presentation of his own point of view on various topics are significant; thus, the electorate identifies more with the leaders. An unexpected thing is visible in the work of the two; namely, the elements from the personal lives of political leaders can lead to the increase of voters' trust in the political parties they represent; more precisely, the more voters know about the elected, the more likely they are more loyal and supportive, they are growing.

According to Kalsnes (2016), dialogue with voters represents a much-desired element in political interactions. A new dynamic in politics is being pursued, a more transparent connection between elected officials and voters, and in the present case, this interaction is not very successful.

Gilardi *et al.* (2022) claim that a political agenda is a main tool in any type of election, and how it is formulated and delivered to voters can be extremely important for the outcome of the election. In this whole process of communicating the political agenda, social media plays an essential role through the impact it can have on voters, adding extra complexity to the process of setting the agenda. Yang *et al.* (2016) also refer to the importance of social media in communicating the political agenda and training the masses to support and adopt those critical points on the party's political agenda.

### *Research Methods*

According to Agerpres (2019), in January 2019, the total number of people who had a Facebook account in Romania was 9.8 million, almost half of the total population at that time. At the same time, the number of people who had an Instagram account barely exceeded 700,000 users. Moreover, a report published by Statista (2023) in March 2023 shows that the total number of Facebook users reached 12.24 million. The data presented above can confirm that the Facebook platform represents an online space with a significant resonance in terms of online communication.

This paper selected the last two electoral campaigns in Romania: the elections for the President of Romania (December 2019) and the elections for the Parliament of Romania (November 2020). The motivation for choosing the two electoral campaigns is related to their impact at the national level. Both types of elections directly impact how the state is to be governed: the President appoints the future prime minister, and the Parliament validates the government team that the appointed prime minister presents together with a government program.



*Save Romania Union and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020*

In this research, I propose to answer the following research questions:

- What main themes are addressed in the two campaigns (comparison 2019-2020)?
- What kind of posts attract the public's attention the most?
- How is the interaction between the party and the voters manifested in the posts on Facebook, and how frequent is this?

To answer these research questions, I focus on how SRU built its strategy for the two campaigns and used Facebook as a communication tool, following what information their posts contained and how voters reported on them. For this purpose, the relevant data from SRU's Facebook page were selected.

The data used to answer these research questions were obtained after analysing the SRU Facebook page between October 2019-January 2020 and November 2020-February 2021. In my analysis, I wanted to see the number of likes, comments, and shares for each post from the abovementioned period. At the same time, I also looked at the number of posts depicting the party leader and, at the same time, at the number of posts where the party answers voters' comments.

The reason why I chose to analyse the posts over four months is a well-founded one: I wanted to observe the posts that were published one month before the elections, then the posts from the month that coincides with the presidential or parliamentary elections, then two more post-election months, to see if there is a difference between the posts before and during the elections.

Finally, I performed a content analysis on each post to determine the category in which they can be placed, as follows:

- Proposals – all posts that provide information about the political agenda of the party
- Campaign – all posts that provide information about the ongoing electoral campaign
- Opposition – all posts that provide information about opposition parties
- Supporters – all the posts that provide information about the people and personalities who declare themselves active voters of the party
- Actions – all the posts that provide information about the public actions in which party members took part and, at the same time, what the party managed to do, the political successes.

The categories mentioned above will, among others, be the subject of the analysis of this research, allowing the possibility of observing the impact of each category on the sympathisers.

*Results and Analysis:*

Following the collection of data from the posts on SRU's Facebook page in the two mentioned time intervals, the following results were obtained.

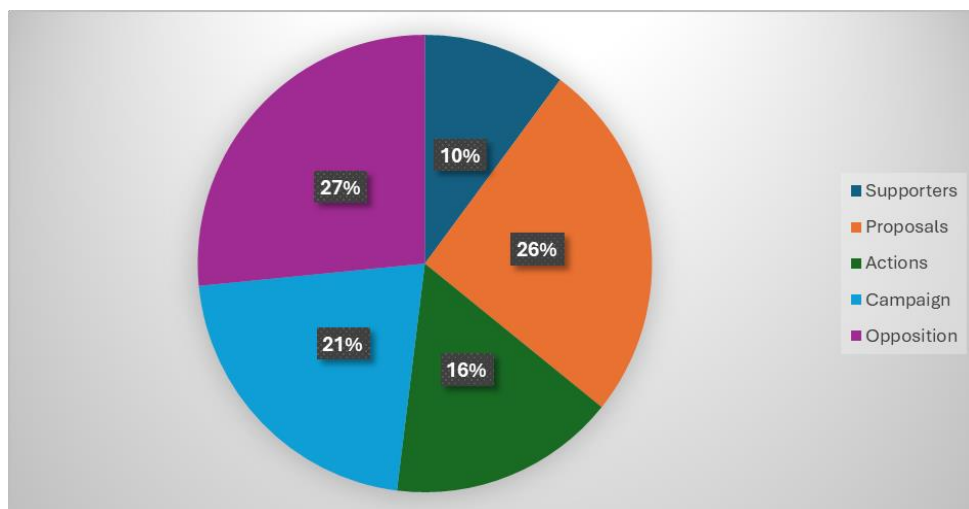
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS- NOVEMBER 2019:

Regarding the social media activity of the studied political group, for the Presidential Elections of November 2019, we used a series of data collected over four months from October 2019 to January 2020.

For the abovementioned period, we obtained a total of 433 posts in the 109 days analysed. From this total, the posts were categorised as follows:

**Figure 1:**

*Posts distribution per category- November 2019 elections*



In these elections, the largest number of posts include topics related to the opposition, 27% respectively, closely followed by the posts announcing the party's proposals, totalling 26%.

In November 2019, the SRU party was outside the governing coalition, composed of National Liberal Party ministers (plus two independent ministers). The parties outside the governing coalition aim to influence the voters to direct their interest and political attention to them; thus, there is the assumption that political parties always have an eye on the next elections (Tuttnauer & Wegmann, 2022). We can thus assume that the campaign carried out on social media by the SRU group had the same goal: presenting the opposition in an unfavourable light so that the voters notice the irregularities in the current governing coalition and not only.

*Save Romania Union and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020*

The party's political agenda was also a central tool in the campaign launched on Facebook, so 26% of the analysed posts contain information about the proposals the party would reject if it emerged victorious after the elections.

Also, another important aspect is worth mentioning in the present case. Of the 433 analysed posts, only 44 contain a dialogue between the party and the voters. Thus, only 19% of the posts refer to situations in which the political party offered one or more answers to voters' comments. There would have been expected to be a much more present dialogue in the current campaign, especially in light of the fact that the SRU party was a relatively new one established in the Romanian political landscape.

I also gave importance to those posts containing information or showing the party leader at that time, Dan Barna. Thus, out of the total of 433 analysed posts, in 84 of them, the political leader is surprised.

It is interesting for the current research to observe how the posts in which the party leader is mentioned are related to those in which he does not appear.

**Table 1**

*Reactions distribution according to the leader and non-leader posts- November 2019 elections*

<i>Post Type</i>	<i>Number of Posts</i>	<i>Likes</i>	<i>Comms</i>	<i>Shares</i>
Non-Leader-Post	349	255901	33486	49991
		733.24	95.95	143.24
Leader post	84	70379	10009	12840
		837.85	119.15	152.86

In Table 1, I captured how the leader/non-leader posts are presented due to the number of likes, comments and shares. Thus, I divided the number of reactions by the number of posts and obtained, as you can see:

- Regarding the number of likes, the posts featuring the political leader have a higher number of likes/posts, a difference of over 100 likes.
- Regarding the number of comments: also, in this case, the posts that contain the leader of the political group got more comments than the posts in which he is not present
- Regarding the number of shares, the number of shares is higher in the case of posts that depict the political leader.

The method used in the table above shows a trend but to the detriment of the nuances. I wanted to observe a global average per post regarding the posts that include the political leader and those that do not refer to him. It should be mentioned, however, that the difference between the number of likes, comments,

and shares between the two types of posts is not extremely large. Therefore, we can conclude that the leader remains an image vector of the party, there are slight differences between the two types of posts, and the non-leader messages are just as relevant to the electorate.

Moreover, the data presented above show that this party is not dependent on the leader but a party that asserts itself through its electoral program; this means that the electorate tends to remain loyal to the party regardless of the party's leadership changes.

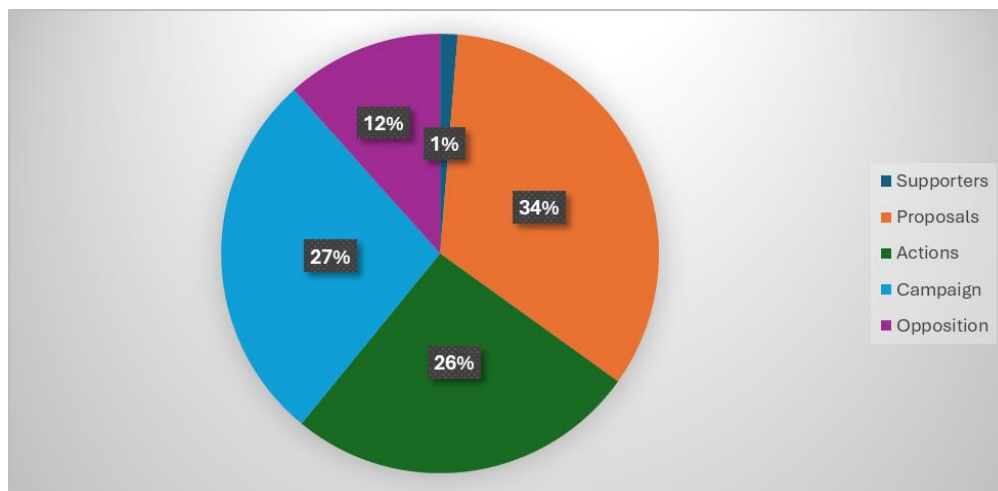
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: DECEMBER 2020

Regarding the Parliamentary elections in December 2020, I used a series of data collected over three months, November 2020-February 2021.

For the period mentioned above, we analysed a total of 619 posts; they are divided as follows:

**Figure 2**

*Posts distribution per category- December 2020 elections*



We can observe the following in the case of the figure above: the campaign from December 2020 focused on the transmission to the electorate, through the SRU Facebook page, of legislative proposals, projects, etc., which the party and the party leader thought, totalling 34% of the total posts for the studied period. In the same electoral logic, 27% of the posts are focused on the electoral campaign, urging voters to express their choice and to support the party in question, and 26% of the posts sum up those posts through which the party “brags” about its successes in governing.

*Save Romania Union and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020*

The presence of the leader in the posts on the SRU Facebook page was not very considerable but somewhat meaningful, considering that they obtained a vast number of likes, comments and shares, according to the table below

**Table 2**

*Reactions distribution according to the leader and non-leader posts- December 2020 elections*

<i>Post Type</i>	<i>Number of Posts</i>	<i>Likes</i>	<i>Comms</i>	<i>Shares</i>
Non-Leader-Post	587	325918	47903	51018
Leader Post	32	555.23 20010 625.31	81.61 7524 235.13	86.91 4274 133.56

I used the same logic in the current calculations, thus dividing the number of likes, comments and shares by the number of posts, thus obtaining a global average of each element per post. Just as in the case of the 2019 elections, one can easily observe a much higher number of reactions, comments and shares regarding the posts containing the image of the party leader.

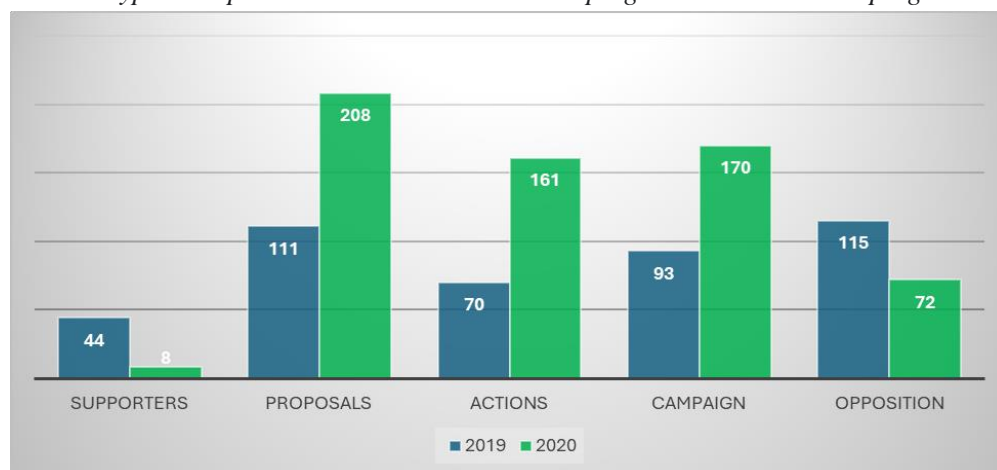
A considerable difference can be observed in the comments part; thus, posts containing information about the leader contain more than three times more comments than the other types of posts. In the present case, from my point of view, one of the limitations of the research is fixed on this element, namely the comments on the post. Indeed, an analysis of each comment text would be desirable in order to be able to determine in which category the people who comment on the posts of this Facebook page belong: either we are talking about supporters of the party – who publish positive comments, exhortations, cheers to the party; or we can have haters among those comments – those who publish negative comments about the party and, why not, make propaganda for other political formations.

Next, it can be easily observed what I mentioned in the case of Table 1, namely: the party’s supporters are generally attracted by the party’s ideology and political agenda, not necessarily by the party’s leader; it is not a party that the leader dominates and, therefore, of supporters who will support the party because of this leader.

To more easily visualise a comparative analysis between the two electoral periods, we can see the following graph:

**Figure 3**

*Post types comparison between the 2019 campaign and the 2020 campaign*

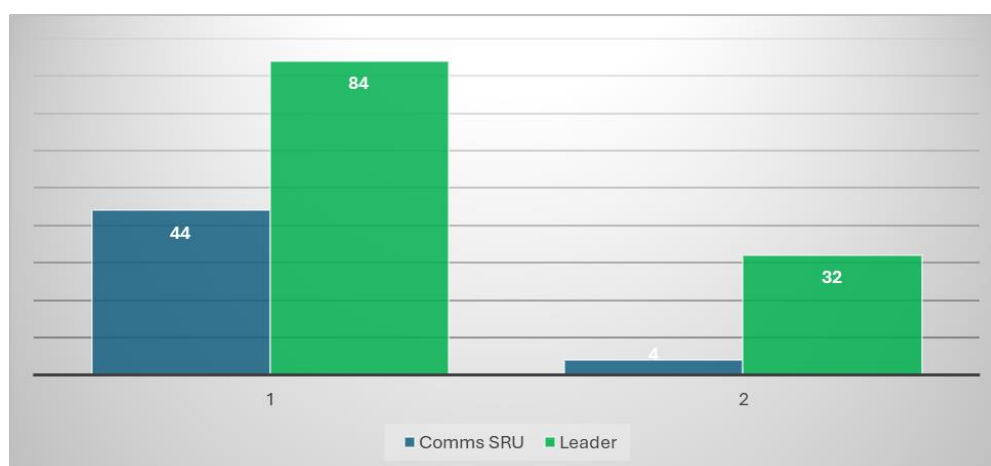


According to the figure above, we can observe two different political communication strategies within a distance of one year. If in 2019, SRU bet on posts that referred to the opposition and a series of posts regarding their political proposals and political agenda, in 2020, a considerable focus will be placed on the Facebook campaign and also the presentation of the political agenda, a critical element for any type of election.

We can also observe a significant difference due to the number of answers given to voters to the comments in the posts and the number of posts in which the political leader is present.

**Figure 4**

*Campaign posts comparison, which includes comments/leader*



As mentioned above, according to Kalsnes (2016), the dialogue between the voters and the party, be it indirectly by providing answers to the voters' comments,

*Save Romania Union and Social Media Campaigns: Presidential Elections 2019 and Parliamentary Elections 2020*

is an essential point to keep in mind for any campaign. In the absence of effective communication between the party and the electorate, the results may be undesirable. Also, the leader's non-involvement in the posts on the Facebook page is seen in Figure 4, although, according to Table 2, the posts that depict the leader get more likes, comments and shares than those posts in which the party leader is not present.

*Conclusions*

Social media represents an extreme communication tool to be used for various purposes, among which, in recent years, politicians have also decided to move part of their communication with the electorate to the online environment.

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to carry out an analysis of the posts on the SRU Facebook page in two electoral campaign periods: the elections for the President of Romania (December 2019) and the elections for the Parliament of Romania (November 2020); to observe which are the main themes addressed in the two campaigns, which are the posts that attract the most voters' attention, and last but not least, how the communication/dialogue between the party and the electorate manifests itself.

In the case of the 2019 presidential elections, the posts on the SRU Facebook page were aimed at the opposition regarding the illegalities they committed and, secondly, at the proposals that the party would fulfil if the election result were in favour of the party.

The 2020 Parliamentary elections marked a change in strategy on the part of the party from the perspective of communication with the electorate. Thus, the online campaign carried out by the party was focused on the presentation of the proposals, followed by posts that refer to the electoral campaign and not, finally, a significant number of posts that refer to the party's actions. In the case of these elections, the posts referring to the opposition were a tiny number, totalling only 12% of the total posts.

Voters tend to be interested in the hot topics at the time; thus, for the 2019 elections, the posts related to the party's campaign had the most significant interest, followed by the posts related to the opposition. Regarding the 2020 elections, the proposals represented the point of interest for visitors to the SRU Facebook page, followed by the party's actions.

Regarding political communication, in the present case, one-way communication persists; therefore, the political party is the one that transmits its information to the voters and makes its presence felt online, but the answer to the

voters is delayed. As can be seen in Figure 4, the number of comments and replies to their own posts, respectively, to Internet users' comments is much too small to conclude that, in this case, the communication between the party and the voters is active and, therefore, successful.

Therefore, political communication plays a significant role in the current global context in which, with the help of social media, politicians can transmit their messages, agendas, and thoughts straightforwardly to voters. There needs to be more than a constant online presence to make an electoral campaign successful. However, the interaction between the party and the electorate also plays a primary role in the success of any election.

### **References:**

1. Aarts, K., Blais, A., & Schmitt, H. (Eds.). (2013). *Political leaders and democratic elections*. OUP Oxford.
2. Agerpres. (2019). *Numărul utilizatorilor de Facebook a ajuns la 9,8 milioane, în România; 700.000 de români au cont de Instagram (analiză)* [The number of Facebook users reached 9.8 million in Romania; 700,000 Romanians have an Instagram account (analysis)]. <https://www.agerpres.ro/economic-intern/2019/01/29/numarul-utilizatorilor-de-facebook-a-ajuns-la-9-8-milioane-in-romania-700-000-de-romani-au-cont-de-instagram-analiza--248474>.
3. Andre, A., Wauters, B., & Pilet, J.-B. (2012). It's not only about lists: Explaining preference voting in Belgium. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 22, 293-313.
4. Bode, L., & Vraga, E. K. (2018). See something, say something: Correction of global health misinformation on social media. *Health Communication*, 33(9), 1131-1140.
5. Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, 489(7415), 295-298.
6. Coleman, S. (2005). The lonely citizen: Indirect representation in an age of networks. *Political Communication*, 22(2), 197-214.
7. Hardin, R. (2008). *Trust*. Polity Press.
8. Fernandez-Vazquez, P., & Somer-Topcu, Z. (2019). The informational role of party leader changes on voter perceptions of party positions. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 977-996.



9. Folke, O., & Rickne, J. (2020). Who wins preference votes? An analysis of party loyalty, ideology, and accountability to voters. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 32(1), 11-35.
10. Garzia, D. (2017). Voter evaluation of candidates and party leaders. In *The SAGE Handbook of Electoral Behaviour*, 2, 633-653.
11. Gherghina, S., & Lutai, R. (2023). More than users: How political parties shape the acceptance of electoral clientelism. *Party Politics*, 13540688231151655.
12. Gilardi, F., Gessler, T., Kubli, M., & Müller, S. (2022). Social media and political agenda setting. *Political Communication*, 39(1), 39-60.
13. Guess, A. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2020). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4, 472-480.
14. Hillygus, D. S., & Shields, T. G. (2008). *The persuadable voter: Wedge issues in presidential campaigns*. Princeton University Press.
15. McLaughlin, D. (2016). Romania goes to polls in shadow of corruption and fatal fire. *Irish Times*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/romania-goes-to-polls-in-shadow-of-corruption-and-fatal-fire-1.2899832>.
16. Kalsnes, B. (2016). The social media paradox explained: Comparing political parties' Facebook strategy versus practice. *Social Media+ Society*, 2(2).
17. Can, C. (2016). Romania: a social democratic anomaly in Eastern Europe? *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/romania-social-democratic-anomaly-in-eastern-europe/>.
18. Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. Penguin UK.
19. Sihi, D., & Lawson, K. (2018). Marketing leaders and social media: Blending personal and professional identities. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 26(1-2), 38-54.
20. Statista. (2023). *Number of Facebook users in Romania from August 2020 to March 2023*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1178634/romania-number-of-facebook-users/>
21. Tuttnauer, O., & Wegmann, S. (2022). Voting for votes: Opposition parties' legislative activity and electoral outcomes. *American Political Science Review*, 116(4), 1357-1374.
22. Yang, X., Chen, B. C., Maity, M., & Ferrara, E. (2016). Social politics: Agenda setting and political communication on social media. In *Social Informatics: 8th International Conference, SocInfo 2016, Bellevue, WA, USA, Proceedings, Part I* (pp. 330-344). Springer International Publishing.

23. Zúñiga, H. G., Copeland, L., & Bimber, B. (2014). Political Involvement in the Digital Age: The Impact on New and Traditional Political Activities. *New Media & Society, 16*(5), 799-819.

# Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education: Practical advices for teachers

Aida ZOTO  
University of Tirana  
Faculty of Foreign Languages  
Greek Language Department  
aida.zoto@unitir.edu.al

## Abstract

*Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education reflects the diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of students, enriching the academic environment while posing challenges for educators. This paper explores the role of teachers in recognizing and promoting linguistic diversity through adaptive teaching methods and practices that foster mutual understanding, communication, and community building. Emphasizing differentiated instruction and interactive activities, the study highlights the importance of adaptive approaches in creating an inclusive educational framework. The role of technology and personalized learning paths are also examined as essential tools in addressing linguistic diversity. By integrating these strategies, educators can enhance the learning experience, ensuring no student is disadvantaged due to language barriers.*

**Keywords:** *Linguistic heterogeneity, Adaptive teaching methods, Inclusive education, Multilingualism, Differentiated instruction.*

Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education reflects the rich variety of cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of students (Garcia, 2008). While it adds richness to the university environment, teachers face the challenge of creating an educational context that supports all students.

In the multicultural environment of higher education, teachers must recognize linguistic diversity and develop practices that promote learning and social inclusion (Cummins, 2000). Establishing conventional learning requires an understanding of students' different language concerns.

In order to meet these challenges, teachers can adopt practices that enhance mutual understanding. The dialogue between teacher and student can be enhanced, allowing the exchange of cultural elements (Canagarajah, 2013). In addition, adaptive teaching methods ensure that every student can understand and acquire knowledge, regardless of language background.

Encouraging open communication and community helps recognize and capitalize on students' language in the course. In this way, the teacher forms a shared educational journey where linguistic coherence is crucial (Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, 2018).

#### *The role of the teacher*

The role of the teacher in highlighting linguistic diversity is essential. Depending on the need for diverse practices, the teacher can incorporate activities that promote the use of diverse languages in the classroom. For example, it can encourage students to share myths or stories from their languages, thus offering a glimpse into the diverse linguistic aspects of the classroom.

In addition, he can use languages subtly during lessons in order to highlight linguistic diversity. For example, by encouraging students to exchange ideas in their mother tongue during discussions, the teacher contributes to highlighting and strengthening linguistic diversity.

At the same time, it can promote projects that highlight linguistic diversity, such as poetry collections or publications in multiple languages (Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, 2018). Through these practices, students realize the value of linguistic diversity and the power it brings to the educational area.

The teacher forms a conscious approach that fosters tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for linguistic diversity in higher education.

#### *Adaptive teaching methods for everyone*

The development of adaptive teaching methods is an important factor in dealing with linguistic heterogeneity in higher education. The central idea behind the use of these methods is the recognition that "one size does not fit all" and therefore tailoring education to the individual needs and skills of each student. This approach seeks to create an educational environment that encourages learning for all, regardless of their language abilities.

Adaptation of content and presentation reflects an important aspect of this approach. In courses such as linguistics, where diversity in language skills is strong, the use of alternative learning methods is suggested. According to Tomlinson, 2014, differentiated teaching practices are vital to meeting the needs of all students.

For example, offering alternative methods widens the range of students who can benefit from the course, ensuring that no one is "left behind" due to language challenges. According to Gardner's, 1993, Theory of Multiple Intelligences,

### *Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education*

adapting to the different preferences of students enhances the effectiveness of education.

Also, incorporating interactive activities such as language games and group discussions is a key element of adaptive practices. According to the research of Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2003), cooperation and mutual exchange of language experiences is enhanced through activities that promote active participation.

In addition, the application of technology, as mentioned in the work of Rose and Meye (2002), through electronic platforms for online courses, offers students additional flexibility. This allows them to choose the way of learning that best suits their individual preferences, as also supported by the work of Tomlinson (2014), enhancing self-management and ease of access.

### *Communication and community: the role of the teacher*

In terms of communication and community building in the educational area, the role of the teacher emerges as a critical mediator. Communication plays a key role in developing an environment that promotes linguistic heterogeneity. The teacher is responsible for creating an open and encouraging environment that allows students to freely express their ideas (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Active communication, the exchange of ideas, opinions and knowledge, enhances mutual understanding (Ganratchakan, 2015). The teacher, as the facilitator of this interaction, has the task of creating an open and encouraging climate where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. Creating such an environment allows the educational process to be rich and varied, reflecting knowledge as complex and multidimensional (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this context, the organization of language events and workshops emerges as an effective practice (Tomlinson, 2014). An example of effective practice is organizing a language event, where students have the opportunity to present their creative works on a diverse language platform. It can include poetry readings, theatrical performances, or even presentations in different languages. This type of event promotes multilingualism and artistic expression, while also creating a space where students can interact and share personal language experiences. Another example of effective practice is the fun and interactive language workshop. Students may participate in activities such as language games, role plays or communicative language exercises. These events encourage collaboration and active participation, creating an environment where students exchange ideas, work together to solve language problems and enhance their language skills (Papadopoulos, 2023).

In addition, the formation of open communication spaces and support for activities that promote interaction are necessary practices for the teacher (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2003). These processes help create a rich learning environment that promotes interaction and collaboration among students.

The adaptation of teaching methods, combined with the teacher's role as mediator, form a rich educational environment that recognizes and exploits linguistic heterogeneity. By supporting communication and community building, cohesion and mutual engagement are promoted, thereby enhancing the educational experience for all.

### *Practical advices*

In summary, here are some suggestions regarding the adaptation of teaching methods that will provide students with the opportunity to develop their language skills in the most effective and adaptive way:

- *Adapting assessments:* An example of adaptive practice is adapting assessments. Depending on the language abilities of each student, assessments may include various forms, such as oral exams, written assignments, or even alternative forms of assessment that allow students to choose how they express themselves best (OECD, 2013). Below we present two examples of student evaluations: (*example 1*) Oral exams - for a language or literature course, the assessment can be adapted to take into account the different language abilities of the students; course assessment stages: all students present a written coursework on a literary paper; adaptation of course assessment - oral examinations: depending on language abilities or level, some students will be asked to present their coursework orally instead of a written submission; alternative forms of course assessment: students who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally can submit personal video feedback on their coursework - students can choose between an oral presentation, podcast recording or video creation. In this way, students have the opportunity to choose the way they feel most comfortable and demonstrate their language skills. This promotes the development of their skills in an adaptive and encouraging way, and (*example 2*) Portfolio of language coursework - as part of a language course, students have the opportunity to create a portfolio of language coursework that will be assessed at the end of the semester. This portfolio will include various forms of coursework, thus enabling students to choose the way they express themselves best. Oral exam (20% of the total grade): students will choose a topic and present their opinion orally before the teacher. The oral exam allows direct assessment of oral communication and language expression; written coursework (30% of the total grade): students will choose a topic of interest and submit a written coursework. Written work allows students to express their thoughts in

### *Linguistic heterogeneity in higher education*

more detail; alternative forms of course assessment (e.g., podcast or video) (15% of total grade): students have the option to present their ideas via podcast or video. This alternative format allows for creative expression and the use of different skills. With this approach, students have the opportunity to choose the mode of assessment that best suits their own language abilities and preferences.

- *Adapting the learning pace:* During a series of lectures, students can adapt their learning pace according to their individual needs. Some may need more time to understand topics, while others may be able to move faster. Through registration or online materials, students can adjust their learning pace (Murphy, 2014). Below we present two examples that can be applied to the idea of adjusting the pace of learning in a language course: (*example 1*) personalized listening activities: during the week, the teacher offers various listening activities to the students, such as audio files with interviews, radio programs, and various listening materials; students have the freedom to choose which activities to attend, adjusting their pace of understanding to their level or each lecture of the language course is accompanied by an audio and video recording. Students, depending on their level of understanding, can choose to attend the entire lecture or view specific sections that interest them most. In addition, providing extra notes with explanations on difficult topics helps students who need more time to understand, and (*example 2*) interactive exercises and online text library: During lectures, the lecturer encourages students to progress to different levels of learning. On the online platform, interactive exercises with different levels of difficulty are available. Students choose the exercises that suit their needs, enhancing their learning step by step. At the same time, an online text library offers material for translation and comprehension, allowing students to explore texts of interest and progress at their own pace.
- *Group work:* Within adaptive methods, students can participate in group work that allows for mutual support. Groups can be formed based on language skills so that students of a similar level can work together and exchange ideas in their own language (King, 2017). Below we present two more concrete examples of group work in a language course: (*example 1*) students are divided into groups based on their level of language learning. Each group receives an online article in the target language and a dictionary for the corresponding language. Their task is to translate the article into the language they are learning, taking into account the content, the overall goal of the article, and the intended audience. After the translation, they must explain their language choices in a short report, and (*example 2*) creating a digital book for children: students are tasked with creating a digital book in the language they are learning, designed for primary school children. Groups choose a theme such as nature, friendship or adventure. Each team member contributes a page of the book that includes text, images, and audio. The team uses interactive elements to make the book interesting and educational.

The books are then shared throughout the class for students to share with each other and peer-review. These activities promote collaboration, creativity and the development of language skills through practice and mutual support.

- *Personalized learning paths*: Using learning platforms that provide personalized learning paths is another example of adaptive teaching. Each student can follow a customized learning program that meets their individual needs and is adjusted according to their progress (Laakkonen, 2011). Below we present two examples of using personalized learning paths: (*example 1*) *customized lesson chapters*: in a language course, the learning platform can provide different chapters and topics with different levels of difficulty. Each student starts with an initial level and can only move on to the next chapter when they are ready. Thus, the learning path is fully personalized, and (*example 2*) *self-assessment and adjustment*: students start with an initial diagnostic test that analyzes their abilities and weaknesses in the language. Based on the results, each student receives a personalized learning plan, which includes exercises and activities to strengthen the specific areas that need more attention. As they progress, the program automatically adjusts based on their progress.

These examples are just a small introduction to how adaptive methods can be integrated into environments with linguistic heterogeneity, thus promoting full and effective education for all.

### *Conclusion*

The adaptation of teaching methods in the context of linguistic heterogeneity in higher education is emerging as a vital factor in promoting effective learning. Recognizing the diversity in students' language abilities leads to the need to create adaptive methods, which ensure that no student is left behind because of language challenges.

Adaptation of content and presentation is critical, with the use of alternative learning methods responding to the diversity of language skills. Incorporating interactive activities such as language games and group discussions encourages active participation and mutual exchange of language experiences. The use of technology, such as online platforms, offers flexibility in education, allowing students to choose the way of learning that best suits their individual preferences.

The proposed teaching practices are closely linked to basic principles of the educational process, focusing on differentiating instruction and supporting individual students' progress. Differentiation allows methods to be adapted to each student's needs and skills, while the emphasis on individual progress encourages each student to develop at their own pace.



The key point is the integrated approach to adaptation, which highlights knowledge as complex and multidimensional. This approach enables students to develop their language skills in a way that is both effective and adaptive. In this way, an educational framework is created that reflects the diversity of students and encourages their continuous development and involvement in the learning process. Overall, the adaptation of teaching methods creates an interesting, interactive and stimulating environment that enhances language skills and promotes cooperation between students.

### **References:**

1. Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*. London / New York: Routledge.
2. Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. *Multilingual Matters*.
3. Ganratchakan, N. (2015). Factors which Affect Teachers' Professional Development in Teaching Innovation and Educational Technology in the 21st Century under the Bureau of Special Education, Office of the Basic Education Commission. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 197, 1732-1735.
4. Garcia, O. (2008). *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
5. Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice*. Basic Books/Hachette Book Group.
6. Hall, M. C., Sharples, L., Mitchell, R., Macionis, N., & Cambourne, B. (2003). *Food tourism around the world: development, management and markets*. Butterworth-Heinemann: Elsevier.
7. Hall, T., Strangman, N., & Meyer, A. (2003). Differentiated Instruction and Implications for UDL Implementation Effective Classroom Practices.
8. King, L. (2017). *The Impact of Multilingualism on Global Education and Language Learning*. Cambridge English Assessment, Cambridge.
9. Laakkonen, I. (2011). Personal learning environments in higher education language courses: an informal and learner- centred approach. In S. Thouwsny & L. Bradley (Eds.), *Second language teaching and learning with technology: views of emergent researchers*. Dublin: Researchpublishing.net.
10. Murphy, V. (2014). *Second Language Learning in the Early School Years: Trends and Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. OECD. (2013). Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment. *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

12. Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2002). Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 55(5), 521-525.
13. Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*.
14. Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). *21 St. Century Skills Learning for Life in Our Times*. San Francisco: Wiley.
15. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
16. Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, N. (2018). *Language and modern (primary) school education: current challenges and perspectives*. Gutenberg Publications.
17. Papadopoulos, N. (2023). Communication and community: the role of the teacher. *Educational Research*, 45(2), 112-130.

# The Language of the Web: Mechanisms of Korean Internet Slang

Alexandra BÎJA<sup>1</sup>

*Doctoral School of Linguistics and Literary Studies  
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca  
alexandra.bija@ubbcluj.ro*

## Abstract

*The Internet has undeniably brought over time very many changes, including linguistic ones, leading to the appearance of a new linguistic variety called Netspeak. Even though there are numerous studies regarding the emergence of this linguistic variety within the English speaking world, or deriving from lingua francas, not much has been discussed about its emergence in Asian linguistic communities. This paper will cover the following aspects: the development of the Internet linguistic variety used in South Korea, focusing on the linguistic mechanisms employed in its making. Therefore, it will be revealed that, beside more common ways of forming new words, which are not necessarily particular to just one language, such as abbreviation of a word to component letters, abbreviation to initials, corruption, syncope, apocope, and so on, we will also encounter mechanisms that are particular to the Korean language. This is due to the uniqueness of the Korean writing system. The paper will also explore different restrictions and changes that occur at a syntactic level, and which have become normative for this linguistic variety, as well as changes in grammar and orthography that are particular to the Korean Netspeak.*

**Keywords:** *Internet linguistics, language change, phonological representation, orthographic features, normativit.*

We can certainly say that, in modern times, the Internet has become one of the most, if not the most, influential means of communication. And when we say Internet, we, of course, refer to social media or SNS in all its forms, from websites and forums to mobile applications. Throughout this media of communication's development, different types of social interactions, as well as a new linguistic variety particular to it has developed. Very many studies have dealt with the issue of Internet linguistics, academics having analyzed the changes that appear in very

---

1. This work was supported by the Seed Program for Korean Studies of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2023-INC-225001).

many languages over time. Our endeavor in this paper is to bring a newer perspective on language change, regarding the Korean linguistic variety. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to exemplify and describe some of the means of building new words that are prevalent on the Korean Internet.

Previous studies that have dealt with word-formation patterns in Korean Internet Slang have focused mainly on morphological variation and morphological formation by semantic change and neologisms (Shi, 2006, p. 215). In this paper, we will try to list and analyze other word-formation patterns of Korean on the Internet, patterns that can substantiate the popular claim among Internet linguists that Netspeak is spoken language but in written form (Cotoc, 2017; Crystal, 2004). As in a previous study we have discussed the particularities of language used on the Internet, and it being a new linguistic variety, one that blends written and spoken language (Bija, 2019, p. 1036), in this paper we will try to highlight new and unique word-forming mechanisms particular to Korean, along common ones that can be generally encountered in other languages as well, and to highlight other patterns that target spelling and orthography.

Korean is presenting us with a unique writing system, which is called featural, even though it does have a phonologic orthography, and which leads to the use of word-forming devices particular to this language. Geoffrey Sampson analyzes Hangŭl script in “Writing Systems. A Linguistic Introduction” (1990) and “Writing Systems: methods of recording language” (2014). He notices that the symbols do not represent whole phonemes, but rather the features that make up the phonemes, such as voicing or its place of articulation. In Hangŭl, the featural symbols are combined into alphabetic letters, and then the letters are joined into syllabic blocks, so that the system combines three levels of phonological representation.

*Korean has a three-way “manner” contrast in stop consonants, between lax, tense, and aspirated stops. For a given place of articulation, a simple graphic form represents a continuant made at that place, and stops are written by adding one horizontal and two horizontals for the lax and aspirated stops, respectively, and by doubling the lax symbol for the tense counterpart. Thus .../n t t<sup>h</sup> t\*/ are respectively ㄴ ㄷ ㅌ; /s ts ts<sup>h</sup> ts\*/ are ㅅ ㅆ ㅈ ㅊ... Among the vowels, front vowels are written by combining the corresponding back vowel symbol with the symbol for /i/.* (Sampson, 2014, p. 8)

The relation between written text and phonological rendition will be in fact one of the biggest influences on word formation, or sentence formation, on the Internet, further supporting, as we will be able to see, the fact that Internet linguistic varieties are spoken language rendered in writing.

Before continuing listing and exemplifying changes in language that appear in Korean Netspeak, we must mention that the corpus used for this study was built through observing and collecting different types of interaction on the Korean Internet, starting from personal messages sent on SNS platforms, to conversations on forums, online games, and so on. As the paper is intended to be an informative and descriptive one, and not an in-depth analysis, the examples presented here are just a small portion of the corpus.

### *Lexical changes*

The following are changes that appear at the level of vocabulary in the case of the Korean Internet linguistic variety. These changes are influenced by the online medium and support the need for speakers, or better said, communicators, since the exchange that takes place on the Internet is mostly in written form, to simplify and make the act of communication quicker.

To form new words, structures, phrases or meanings, languages usually go through a set of changes, which take place in order to shorten words, or to slightly modify their meaning.

The following are phenomena encountered in Korean Netspeak that aid in forming new words and meanings:

#### 1. ABBREVIATION

i. *of a word to component letters*. As Korean forms words by combining syllabic blocks, abbreviation of a word to component letters mostly appears as an abbreviation of a word to the first letter of each syllabic block. This is one of the first particularities of word formation in Korean, one that is worth being noted. We mention that this process is particular to the Internet linguistic variety only.

- 스 러 흥 < 사랑해 *saranghae*<sup>2</sup>, (I love you). The same initials can be used for 싫어해 *sirhōhae* which means “I hate you”
- ㄱ 스 ㄱ < 개새끼 *kaesaekki*, (Son of a gun)
- ㅇ ㅇ < 응 *ūng* - very informal way of saying “yes”.
- ㅇ ㅋ < 오케이 *ok'ei* (OK)
- ㄱ 스 < 감사합니다 *kamsahamnida*, (Thank you)
- ㄱ ㅈ < 팬찮아 < 팬찮다 *kwaench'anha* < *kwaench'ant'a*, (It's ok)
- ㅈ ㅋ < 축하해 < 축하하다 *ch'ukhahae* < *ch'ukhahada*, (Congratulations)
- 흥 ㅇ < 하이 *hai*, (Hi)

---

<sup>2</sup> The Romanization system used throughout this paper McCune–Reischauers.

- ㄷ ㅌ < 닥쳐 *takch'yŏ* (Shut up!)
- ㅈ ㄹ < 지랄 *chiral*, (Damn)
- ㅂ ㅅ < 병신 *pyŏngsin*, (Jerk)
- ㅇ ㅈ < 인정 *injŏng* (I admit)
- ㄱ ㄷ < 기다려주세요 *kidaryŏjuseyo* (Please wait)
- ㅍ, ㅍㅂ < 아깝다 *akkapta* (Pitty)
- ㅍㅈ < 꺼져 *kkŏjyŏ* (Get lost)
- ㅁ ㅌ < 미친 *mich'in* (crazy)
- ㅅ ㄱ < 수고하다 *sugohada* (To work hard)
- ㅇ ㄷ < 어디/ 어디 있냐 *ŏdi / ŏdi innya* which means “where”. Is used as in the example: “니 ㅇ ㄷ?” “나 저 뒤편에” *ni ㅇ ㄷ?* “*na chŏ twip'yŏne* (Where are you? I’m behind.)
- ㅈ ㅅ < 죄송합니다 *choesonghamnida* (I’m sorry)

ii. *of a word to initials*. As stated in a previous study, in Korean, most of the words that undergo abbreviation to initials are words that have been borrowed, mostly from English (Bija, 2019), as anglicisms are a big part of Korean Internet vocabulary.

- ㅂㅂ < 바이 바이 *pa-i pa-i*, (Bye bye). 바이 바이 is an English word written using the Korean writing system, that has the same pronunciation and has undergone abbreviation to its initials, namely the first letter of the first syllable in Korean.
- ㄱㄱ < 고고 *gogo*, (go go). Idem ㅂㅂ
- ㄴㄴ < 노노 *nono*, (No no). Idem ㅂㅂ
- CC < campus couple. This is an example of a word that has been borrowed and then reduced to its initials as it is written in its original language.
- ㅇ ㄴ < Oh, No! This too is a word that has been borrowed from English and has undergone abbreviation to its initials – the first letters of its syllables (어, 노! *Eoh no*)

iii. *Abbreviation to the first syllable*, a process that is particular to Korean language. Due to the properties of its writing system, we can distinguish this new means of word formation, which is the abbreviation of a word to its first cluster of letters/ to its first syllable. This happens in the case of longer phrases that need to be shortened in order to satisfy the demands of communication via the Internet.

- 금사빠 < 금방 사랑에 빠지다 - *kŭmsappa < kŭmbang sarange ppajida* (Falling in love with someone very easily). This structure has undergone

abbreviation to the first syllables of the words that form the phase. In this way a whole phrase was reduced to just 3 syllables.

- ▶ 년씨눈 < '년 씨<sub>x</sub> 눈치도 없냐? - *nönssinun* < 'nön ssi *xx nunch'ido ömnya?* (Are you XX slow-witted?). In this case too, the words have also been reduced to their first syllables, the only difference is that the verb at the end has been completely omitted.
- ▶ 알못 < 알지 못하다 - *almot* < *alji mot'ada* (Not knowing something)
- ▶ 엄친아 < 엄마 친구 아들 - *ömch'ina* < *ömma ch'in'gu adül* (The son of my mother's friend) – used to denote a son or daughter who is versatile in everything, who is not only good looking, but also very smart.
- ▶ 안몰 < 안 물어보다 - *anmul* < *an muröboda* (I did not ask for your opinion)
- ▶ 생축 < 생일 축하 - *saeng ch'uk* < *saengil ch'ukha* (“Happy Birthday” in intimate style<sup>3</sup>)
- ▶ 넘사벽 < 넘을 수 없는 사차원의 벽 - *nömsabyök* < *nömül su ömnün sach'awöñüi pyök* (four-dimensions wall impossible to climb) used to denote something far superior to anything else. In this case, unlike a previously mentioned example, the verb is mentioned (넘다 *nömda* = to climb, pass), but not the inflection, the construction that denotes impossibility (-수 없다 *su öpta*).
- ▶ 강추 < 강력 추천 - *kangch'u* < *kangnyök ch'uch'ön* (Highly recommended)
- ▶ 광클 < 빛의 속력으로 클릭하다 - *kwangk'ül* < *pich'üi songnyögüro k'üllikhada* (Clicking at the speed of light). This structure is formed by fusing the Hanja word 광 *kwang* (光), a word of Chinese origin whose meaning is “light” and stands for the whole structure “빛의 속력” *pich'üi songnyög* (Speed of light) and 클 *k'ül* which is the first syllable of the word 클릭하다 – *k'üllikhada* (To click). It is used when people click on things on the Internet very fast (for example, when they want to buy something they really need or when they play computer games).
- ▶ 키베 < 키보드 베틀 - *k'ibodü pet'ül* (keyboard battle).
- ▶ 몸짱 < 몸매 짱 – *momtchang* < *ommaetchang* (A great body). 몸매 *ommae* goes through the same process and is left with only its first syllable, to which the word 짱 *tchang* is added, which is used to denote something great, awesome. There are many words in Korean that have

<sup>3</sup> One of the six speech styles encountered in Korean.



formed this way, for example 얼짱 < 얼굴 짱 *öltchang* < *ölgultchang* (Great face) – used for someone with a pretty face, 맛짱 *matchang* (Great taste) – used for food.

- 배사 < 배경 사진 - *paesa* < *paegyöng sajin* (Profile picture)
- 웃프다 < 웃기면서 슬프다 *utp'üda* < *utkimyönsö sülp'üda*: A combination of the words '웃기다' *utkida* and '아프다' *ap'üda*, meaning “Funny and sad at the same time.”
- 짝남 < 짝사랑하는 남자 *tchangnam* < *tchaksaranghanün namja* (The first man I loved/ first love)
- 짝녀 < 짝사랑하는 여 *tchangnyö* < *tchaksaranghanün yö* (First love).
- 프사 < 프로필 사진 *p'üsa* < *p'ürop'il sajin* (Profile picture). In this case, unlike 배사 < 배경 사진, the word “profile” was borrowed from English, and not translated.
- 병머금, 병먹금, 브ㄱㄱ < 병신에게 먹이를 주지 마시오 *pyöngmögüm*, *pyöngmökküm*, 브ㄱㄱ < *pyöngsinege mögirül chuji masio* (Do no feed the XX). Its basic meaning is “don't give that person any attention”. In this case, however, the last syllable of the abbreviated word is a Sino-Korean character 禁 which means “interdiction”, and which has substituted the verb 마시오 (Do not).
- 귀척 < 귀여운 척 *kwich'ök*: < *kwiyöun ch'ök* (To pretend to be cute)
- 겨털 < 겨드랑이 털 *kyöt'öl* < *kyödürangi t'öl* (armpit hair). It is used online as well as offline as a shortened form of the phrase.
- 깜놀 < 깜짝 놀랐다 *kkamnol* < *kkamtchak nollatta* (I was surprised, a was scared for a second)
- 남친 < 남자 친구 *namch'in* < *namja ch'in'gu* (Boyfriend). This structure is not only used on the Internet, but also in day-to-day speech. It has in fact first appeared in day-to-day speech and has been transferred on to Internet also.
- 여친 < 여자 친구 *yöch'in* < *yöja ch'in'gu* (Girlfriend)
- 내로남불: <내가 하면 로맨스 남이 하면 불륜 *naeronambul*: < '*naega hamyön romaensü nami hamyön pullyun* . The interpretation of this is “if I do something, it's right, if you do something, it's wrong”
- 미드 < 미국 드라마 *midü* < *miguk tŭrama* (American drama)
- 밀당 < 밀고 당기기 *mildang* < *milgo tanggigi*. (push and pull – play hard to get)



- 반반무, 반반무마니 < '후라이드 치킨 반 마리, 양념 치킨 반 마리, 무 많이' *panbanmu, panbanmumani* < 'huraidŭ ch'ik'in pan mari, yangnyŏm ch'ik'in pan mari, mu manhi (Half fried chicken, half seasoned chicken and a lot of raddish.)
- 버정 < 버스 정류장 *pŏjŏng* < *pŏsŭ chŏngnyujang* (Bus stop)
- 볼매 < 볼수록 매력 *polmae* < *polssurok maeryŏk*. It basically means “the more I see her, the more attractive she gets”.
- 불금 < 불타는 금요일 *pulgŭm* < *pult'anŭn kŭmyoil* (Burning Friday), it refers to an exciting day.
- 비매 < 비 매너 *pimae* < *pimaenŏ* (No manners). It's a fusion between the hanja word 비 *pi* -非 – which means “not to be, not to have “and the first syllable of the borrowed word “manner”. It is used when referring to someone with no etiquette
- 새등 < 새벽 등교 *saedŭng* < *saebyŏk tŭnggyo*, which means to study until daybreak
- 생선 < 생일 선물 *saengsŏn* < *saengil sŏnmul* (Birthday gift)
- 생파 < 생일 파티 *saengp'a* < *saengil p'at'i* (Birthday party)
- 생얼/썰얼 < '생 얼굴/썰 얼굴'의 줄임말. 민낯, 맨 얼굴 *saengŏl/ssaengŏl* < *saeng ŏlgul/ssaeng ŏlgul'ui churimmal. minnach', maen ŏlgul* (face without any makeup – *seng* = raw)
- 셀카 < 셀프 카메라 *selk'a* < *selp'ŭ k'amera* (Selfie).
- 열공 < 열심히 공부하다 *yŏlgong* < *yŏlssimhi kongbuhada* (To study hard)
- 오유 < 오늘의 유머 *oyu* < *onŭrŭi yumŏ* (Joke of the day).
- 존예 < 존나예쁜 사람 *chonye* < *chonna yeppŭn saram* (a very pretty person)
- 직찍 < 직접찍은 사진 *chiktchik* < *chikchŏptchigŭn sajin* (Picture taken personally). Can also be abbreviated 직찍사 *chiktchiksa*
- 차도남 < 차가운 도시 남자 *ch'adonam* < *ch'agaun tosi namja* – refers to a man who looks cool/ cold/ sharp/ urban
- 채금 < 채팅 금지 *ch'aegŭm* < *ch'aet'ing kŭmji* (Banned from chatting/ banned from the chat group).
- 캐: < 캐릭터 *k'ae:* < *k'aerikt'ŏ* (Character). Borrowed word used in online games.
- 케마케 < 케이스 바이 케이스 *k'ebak'e* < *k'eisŭ pai k'eisŭ* (Case by case). Entered the language via English that has been abbreviated

- 흠줍무: < 흠, 이게 사실이라면 줍 무섭군요 *hŭmjommu*: < *hŭm, ige sasiramyŏn chom musŏpkunyo* (Hm, if this is true, that it's a bit scary)
- 랩업 < 레벨 업 *rebŏp* < *rebel ŏp* (level up): Used in online gaming.

We must specify that, although our list of samples is limited on this occasion, the most common means of forming new words on the Internet is this one. Sometimes abbreviation to syllables could be mistaken with portmanteaux. The difference between them is that in the case of abbreviating words to syllables, the words in a phrase are simply reduced to one syllable, and the phrase to just a few syllables instead of a few words, without changing the meaning. Even though the phrase is reduced, the meaning of the whole structure stays the same. In the case of portmanteaux, the fusion of different morphemes is made with the purpose of creating new meanings. This method of forming new words has been well documented in other studies as well, under the name of “clipping”, many studies highlighting the fact that Korean clippings are different in pattern than those in other languages (Kim, 2012, p. 16; Song, 2019, p. 219).

iv. *Alphanumerics* – a mechanism normally based on homophony, but not only. In Korean, numbers that have the same or similar pronunciation as component syllables of other words can replace said syllables altogether.

- 고3 < *고등학교 3학년* *ko3* < *kodŭnghakkyo 3 hangnyŏn* (junior year in high school /eleventh grade). This particular alphanumeric word was formed by fusing the previously contracted word *고등학교* *kodŭnghakkyo* with the number 3 which shows the year of study.
- 8282 < *빨리 빨리* *ppalli ppalli* (quick, quick). This construction is based on the principle of homophony and is composed of the numbers 8 *팔* *pal* (not *빨* *ppal*, but with a similar pronunciation) and 2 (으) *i*, which put together are pronounced in a similar fashion as the word *빨리* *ppalli* (quick, fast)
- 친9 < *친구* *ch'in9* < *ch'in'gu* (Friend). In this case too, based on the principle of homophony, the word “friend” was written using its first syllable in Korean *친*, and the number nine, which has the same spelling and pronunciation as the second syllable of the word.
- 1004 < *천사* *ch'ŏnsa* (Angel). Another example of homophony. In Korean, the word “angel” has the same spelling and pronunciation as the number 1004.

2. CONTRACTION

i. *Syncope*, which consists in the elimination of the middle part of the word (Tataru, 2002, p. 93). In the case of English, in most instances, the missing part of the word is marked by an apostrophe. In Korean, when syncope takes place, the middle part of the word is just erased, there's nothing there to take its place or mark it. In some cases some changes in spelling occur, and that is only to apply the principle of writing a word the way it is pronounced.

- 강 < 그냥 *kyang* < *kŭnyang* (just)
- 어케 < 어떻게 *ök'e* < *öttök'e* (how)
- 널 < 내일 *nael* < *naeil* (tomorrow)
- 땀에 < 때문에 *ttaem-e* < *ttaemun-e* (because of)
- 셜 < 시험 *syöm* < *sihöm* (exam)
- 쉐 < 서울 *söl* < *söl* (Seoul – the capital of South Korea)
- 방가 < 반가워요 < 반갑다 *pangga* < *pan'gawöyo* < *pan'gapta* (Nice to meet you)
- 맥날 < 맥도날드 *maengnal* < *maektonaldü* (McDonald's). This is a special case in which both a syllable from the middle of the word, as well as its last part, are eliminated.
- 강쥐 < 강아지 *kangjwi* < *kangaji* (Puppy)
- 격력 < 기억력 *kyöngnyök* < *kiöngnyök* (Memory)
- 드더 < 드디어 *tüdyö* < *tüdiö* (Finally)

ii. *Apocope*, or the elimination of the last part of the word

- 념 < 너무 *nöm* < *nömu* (very)
- 사생 < 사생활 (private life) + 팬 (fan) *sasaeng* < *sasaengwal p'aen*. It refers to the die-hard fans of Korean K-pop singers or actors, who are particularly interested in the private lives of their idols
- 스포 < 스포일러 *süp'o* < *süp'oillö* (spoiler)
- 어쩔 < 어쩔래? *Ötchöl* < *ötchöllae* (what should I do?)

3. *Corruption*, or words that come from other languages and have had their meaning distorted. Even though, in the case of corruption, most of the words are borrowed from other languages, they cannot be called true borrowings because they are used with a different meaning, and one example of this is the very first word in our list. In German, “Arbeit” means full time work, and in Korean, its meaning has been corrupted, in the sense that it is used in order to denote any type of part-time work.

- 알바 *alba* - A term used to denote temporary, part-time work. It has entered the language via the Japanese term *Arubaito*, which in itself is a loanword of German origin, meaning work.
- 캐미 *k'aemi* for “chemical” or “chemistry”. Used when two people get along well. 두 사람 캐미 좋다 *tu saram k'aemi chot'a* (They have good chemistry)
- 레알 *real*, the English word “really”
- 뉴비 *nyubi*, the English word “newbie”, beginner, novice
- 루저 *rujō*, the English word “loser”. This word might also refer to a man who is below 180 cm high
- 귀차니즘 *kwich'anijūm*, a combination between the Korean word 귀찮다 *kwich'ant'a* which means to be lazy, or not feel like doing something, and the English suffix *-nism*, which is an abstract noun forming suffix, denoting doctrine, trend of thought (Tataru, 2002)
- 노답 < No답 = 답이 없다 *nodap <notap = tabi ōpta* (No reply). It's the combination of the English word “no” and the Korean word 답 *dab* which means “reply/ answer”
- 노잼 < No재미 = 재미가 없다 *nojaem <nochaemi = chaemiga ōpta* (No fun). Underwent the same process as 노답 *no tab*, in this case the Korean word used being the contracted word 재미있다 *chaemiitta* which means “to have fun”
- 마초맨 *mach'omaen* Macho man. Originally used to describe a manly man, in Korean is used to refer to a man who consumes illegal substances, and it has surfaced after a highly mediated scandal in which a very known Korean pop-star was caught smoking cannabis.
- 올드비 *oldūbi* – the opposite of the English newbie; used in gaming to refer to a very good gamer, someone who has played for a long time.
- 후새드 < '후, 슬프다.' *husaedŭ < hu, sŭlp'ŭda* (Uh, I'm sad) This structure is made of the Korean onomatopoeic word 후 *hu* and the English word “sad” written in Hangŭl<sup>4</sup>.

This is a type of idiomatic variation that appears in conversation as well, and not only on the Internet. It is usually used when we consider that a word or phrase

---

<sup>4</sup> The Korean writing system.

from another language can better express what we want to say, and that the words in our own language don't quite have the same nuance.

4. *Portmanteaux / fusion* of morphemes of different words. Portmanteaux are formed by blending 2 words, the first one having undergone apocope and the second one aphaeresis (Tataru, 2002, p. 97).

This phenomenon appears in Korean as a fusion of morphemes of different words. The following are a few examples we have encountered:

- 몽파여 < 몽 + 뱀파여 *mongp'ayǒ* < *mong* + *pemp'ayǒ* = foolish vampire. 몽 *mong* (蒙 -어두울 몽) is hanja for 어리석다 *ǒrisǒkta* (to be foolish). In this case the morpheme 몽 *mong* and the word 뱀파여 *pemp'ayǒ*, which has undergone aphaeresis, have been fused.
- 메신 *Me.sin*, is a blended word that combines 메시(Messi) with 신 *sin* (God),
- 악플 *akp'ul* - Combination of the words 악 *ak* (evil) and 리플 *rip'ul* (reply). Literally “evil reply,” or malicious comment.
- 멘붕 *menbung* - A compound word that joins 멘탈 *mental* (“mental”) and 붕괴 *bunggoe* (“collapse”, “implosion”) referring to a psychological shock one experiences when encountering an unexpected and shocking event.
- 눈팅 < 눈으로 채팅 *nunt'ing* < *nunŭro ch'aet'ing*. Not typing, just being in a chatroom
- 딸마보 < 딸 밖에 모르는 바보 *ttalbabo* < *ttal pakke morŭnŭn pabo* (The idiot who only knows his daughter). Used when referring to a dad who is loves his daughter the most.
- 아몰랑 *amollang* (Whatever, I don't care but I'm right) – used in a dispute. This new word has formed by combining a onomatopoeic word with the Korean word for “I don't know”.

#### *Changes in spelling and orthography*

Other very frequent phenomena that appear on Korean Internet are perverse spellings, simple spellings and typographical errors. The perverse spellings are deliberate, and they presume spelling of different phrases in a simpler manner. A few examples in English would be: “outta” instead of “out of”, “gotta” instead of “got to”, “seeya” instead of “see you” and so on. This phenomenon takes place again due to the fact that people need to convey information in a fast way, and expect others to do the same, so they just simply eliminate spaces and even certain letters. This is a good example that holds the idea that Internet language is a

combination between spoken and written language. In spoken language we don't see the pauses between words, therefore in written language, in order to make communication more fluid, we could just elide the spaces.

*Non-standard spelling, heavily penalized in traditional writing (at least, since the eighteenth century), is used without sanction in conversational settings. Spelling errors in an e-mail would not be assumed to be an indication of lack of education (though they may be) but purely a function of typing inaccuracy. (Crystal, 2004, p. 88)*

Crystal makes reference to the instances in which grammar or spelling mistakes that would appear in an email or in chatrooms had been overlooked and considered merely a slip of key or a typo. Nowadays, however, we could say that non-standard spelling has become, or are is the verge of becoming standard, of becoming the norm, as far as Korean internet communication is concerned, as it is so widespread and widely used. Korean used on the internet puts emphasis on omission of certain consonants, thus making a spelling of a word simpler and basically writing it based on its phonetic construction.

1. *Simplified verb endings*: □ instead of (으)면:

- 일찍 끝남 전화할게 → 일찍 끝나면 전화할게  
*iltchik kkūnnam chōnhwahalge → iltchik kkūnnamyōnjōnhwahalge*
- 시간 있음 만나자 → 시간 있으면 만나자  
*sigan issūm mannaja → sigan issūmyōn mannaja 36*

Through this type of intentional perverse spelling users fail to write the whole particle 면, only using its first letter □.

2. *Eliding consonants or vowels*:

- 맞아 → 마자 *maj-a → maja*
- 싫어 → 시러 *sirhō → sirō*
- 뭐해? → 머해? *mwōhae? → mōhae?*

This is also a type of intentional perverse spelling, which also stands for the principle of writing words the way we are hearing them. Thus Internet users find it pointless to use certain letters which might not be voiced, depending on their position in a word. For example, the Korean letter ㅇ is never voiced when it is placed at the beginning of a syllable, therefore 마자 instead of 맞아, as both are pronounced the same. The letter ㅎ is not pronounced in the consonant cluster ㅅㅎ, therefore 시러 instead of 싫어, as, again, both are pronounced in the same manner.

Other such examples are:

- 갔어 → 가씨 *kassō → kassō*

- 좋아 → 조아 *choha* → *choa*
- 아니야 → 아냐 *aniya* → *anya*
- 싫어 → 시러 *sirhō* → *sirō*
- 했잖아 → 했자나 *haetchanha* → *haetchana*
- 착해 → 차캐 *ch'akhae* → *ch'ak'ae*
- 그렇지 → 그리치 *küröch'i* → *küröch'i*

In the last 4 examples the consonant ㅎ is ignored, because, due to its placing in the word, it is voiceless.

3. Using simple vowels instead of double vowels.

This is based on the same phonetic principles that have been mentioned in this paper, writing a word in a similar way as it is phonologically rendered. All double vowels in Korean have the potential to be reduced to a simple vowel when they are used in certain words, the reason being the fact that the pronunciation of the word written with a double vowel can be similar to the pronunciation of the word written with a simple vowel. In this respect, the following transitions can appear: 와→아 *wa/a*, 왜→애 *wae/ae*, 외→애 *oe/ae*, 워→어 / 오 *wō/ō, o*, 위→이 *wi/i*, 의→이 *üi/i*.

- 가 봐 → 가 마 *ka pwa* → *ka pa* (봐 *pwa* gets simplified into 마 *pa*)
- 먹어야돼 → 먹어야대 *mögöyadwae* → *mögöyadae* (돼 *dwae* becomes 대 *dae*)
- 팬찮아 → 갠찮아 *kwaench'anha* → *kaench'anha* (괘 *gwa* becomes 개 *gae*)
- 귀찮아 → 기차나 *kwich'anha* → *kich'ana* (귀 *gui* becomes 기 *gi*)

4. Interchangeable vowels

Interchangeable use between 어 *ō* and 오 *o*; and 에 *e* and 애 *ae* is quite a common phenomenon in Korean Netspeak. This type of perverse spelling can be intentional, but it can be unintentional also.

- 어디야? → 오디야? *ōdiya?* → *odiya?*
- 이빠 → 이뽀 *ippō* → *ippo*
- 며 해? → 모 해? *mō hae?* → *mo hae?* (며 *mō* is originally 뭐 *mwō*)
- 시러 → 시로 *sirō* → *siro* (시러 *sirō* is originally 싫어 *sirhō*)
- 가적 → 가죽 *kajōk* → *kajok*

5. Using simple consonants instead of double consonants, for example ㄱ instead of ㄲ, ㄷ instead of ㄸ, ㅈ instead of ㅉ, ㅊ instead of ㅃ and ㅌ instead of ㅎ.



- 했어 → 헛어 *haessö* → *haesö*
- 먹었어 → 먹엇어 *mögössö* → *mögösö*

Apart from these situations of non-standard spelling, there is a trend that has appeared on the Korean Internet, and it is based on an aesthetic principle of making writing cuter. This has appeared as a result of the influence of Korean youth culture, in which *aegyo*, or acting cute, plays quite a big role. Therefore young people in Korea try to rend this in writing as well, using different techniques to decorate the conversation.

#### 6. ◦ng ending.

A way of decorating the text in Korean (both when speaking, or writing) is adding ◦ to a word that does not end in it. This typically is not added directly to nouns (although it could sometimes, it is up to the speaker), and is more commonly attached after conjugating a verb or adjective. For example:

- 먹었어 ~ 먹엇엉 *mögössö* ~ *mögössöng*
- 배고파 ~ 배고팡 *paegop'a* ~ *paegop'ang*
- 왜? ~ 왜? wae? ~ *waeng?*
- 맞아요 ~ 맞아용 *majayo* ~ *majayong*

~◦ can also be added after formal structures such as 요 *yo* or ~습니다 *sŭmnida* when conjugating a polite verb particle. However, in most situations, using ~◦ with formal conjugations would sound ridiculous and the only time this could be done is when using polite speech with friends as a joke.

- 내일 맛있는 걸 사 줘용! *naeil masinnŭn köl sa chwöyong!*
- 감사합니당! *kamsahamnidang!*

Similarly to this, people add ㅁ *m* or ㅞ *eum*. This is usually added to the final syllable of a word.

- 아니야 ~ 아니얌 *aniya* ~ *aniyam*
- 괜찮다 ~ 괜찮암 *kwaench'ant'a* ~ *kwaench'anham*
- 알았다 ~ 알앗엄 *aratta* ~ *arassȫm*
- 먹었어요 ~ 먹엇어음 *mögössöyo* ~ *mögössöyom*

#### 7. Changing the letter — eu to 우 *u*

- 이쁘다 → 이뿌다 *ippŭda* → *ippuda*
- 그냥 → 구냥 *kŭnyang* → *kunyan*
- 그래 → 구래 *kŭrae* → *kurae*

#### 8. Changing 지 *chi* to 쥐 *chwi*

- 먹어야지 → 먹어야쥐 *mögöyaji* → *mögöyajwi*



9. *Substituting simple vowels with their iotized counterparts.* We know that in Korean we have 8 simple vowels, 7 compound vowels and 6 iotized vowels<sup>5</sup>, so 6 of the simple vowels have iotized counterparts: 아→야 *a* →*ya*, 에→예 *e* →*ye*, 애→얘 *ae* →*yae*, 오→요 *o* →*yo*, 우→유 *u* →*yu*, 어→여 *ǒ* →*yǒ*.

- 떡자 → 떡쟈 *mökcha* → *mökchya*
- 나중애 → 나중예 *najunge* → *najyunge*
- 미안 → 미얀 *mian* → *miyan*

10. *Modification of the consonants* – this technique can also be called baby talk:

- 감따<감사 *kamtta*<*kamsa* (Thank you)
- 고양이<고양이 *konyangi*<*koyangi* (Cat)
- 공디<공지 *kongdi*<*kongji* (Notice)
- 궁대<군대 *kungdae*<*kundae* (tr.military)
- 망두<만두 *mangdu*<*mandu* (tr.dumpling)

Substitutions can also take place:

11. using 영 *ǒng*, 움 *ung*, 앙 *ang*, 잉 *ing* instead of 응 *ǔng* (yes). These forms too are supposed to be more pleasant.

12. using 여 *yǒ*, 용 *yong*, 염 *yeom*, 효 *hyo* as substitutes for 요 *yo* at the end of a sentence.

### *Concluding remarks*

We often tend to think that textual delivery in digital media takes place only within the category of written language, and it would not be wrong to say that since communication via the Internet is based on text. In many cases, however, colloquial considerations differ considerably from written language. The method of conveying tone and mood, that are usually conveyed in spoken conversation to the other person using abbreviations or emoticons, has now become daily occurrence in online communication. So new rules for colloquial text have inevitably appeared. Even though, from a quick glance, online communication seems hectic, we believe that a new linguistic norm is on the way.

The Internet, nowadays, has become an extension of our lives and our environment, a space in which we interact with others in a similar way to real face-to-face interaction, and in this respect, there is always a colloquial aspect to the behavior of Internet language. Thus, communication via social media has laid the

---

<sup>5</sup> An iotized vowel is a vowel that is preceded by the palatal glide /j/, thus becoming palatized.

foundation for a new variety of language to appear, one that bears the characteristics of both written and spoken language. And this is not a process that has appeared only as far as Korean language is concerned. However, Korea is one of the best and most connected countries to the Internet, with a large Netizen community, and with possibilities of unraveling new and interesting language forming/ language change mechanisms, as the community continues to grow.

The linguistic mechanisms employed in Korean internet slang, such as abbreviations, contractions, borrowed terms, and alphanumeric expressions, serve to enhance the functional efficiency of online communication in several key ways: 1. Conciseness: by shortening words and phrases to their essential syllables or initials, Korean internet slang allows users to convey ideas more concisely. 2. Expressiveness: the creative use of abbreviations, contractions, and borrowed terms imbues Korean internet slang with a vivid, expressive quality. This enables users to communicate nuanced emotions and attitudes that would be cumbersome to express in formal language. 3. Informality: The pervasive use of simplified spellings, elided consonants and vowels contributes to an informal, casual tone that is well-suited for the social contexts in which internet slang thrives, such as chatrooms, forums and social media. We can say that the linguistic innovations in Korean internet slang, while unconventional from the perspective of formal language, serve important communicative functions by making online interactions more concise, expressive, informal and enjoyable. This underscores the adaptive nature of language in the face of new technological and social contexts.

What we would like to highlight in this paper is the fact that Korean Netspeak, as a newly emerging linguistic variety, does not only presuppose the use of a new vocabulary derived from that of the literary language, but also involves changes in spelling and orthography. Our purpose was to examine some of the characteristics of Korean Cyber language which, due to their uniqueness, we believe are worthy of being researched in more depth. However, since our scope is limited in this paper, this study is intended as an informative and descriptive one.

### **References:**

1. Bija, A. (2019). Perspectives on the Influence of Internet on Language Change. *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, (18), 1031-1037.
2. Cotoc, A. (2017). *Language and Identity in Cyberspace. A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitara Clujeana.
3. Crystal, D. (2004). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4. Kim, E.-Y. J. (2012, June). Creative adoption: trends in Anglicisms in Korea. *English Today*, 28(2), 15-17.
5. Sampson, G. (1990). *Writing Systems. A Linguistic Introduction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
6. Sampson, G. (2014). Writing Systems. Methods of Recording Language. In K. Allan, *Routledge Handbook of Linguistics* (pp. 47-62). Oxon, New York: Routledge.
7. Shi, C. K. (2006). A Study on Word-formation Patterns in Cyber Language. *Korean Linguistics*, 31, 215-243. <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/journal/articleDetail?nodeId=NODE06568593>
8. Song, H. (2019). Discussion about Word Formation Processes in of English and Korean. *The New Korean Journal of English Language and Literature*, 213-230.
9. Tataru, C. (2002). *An Outline of English Lexicology*. Cluj-Napoca: Limes.



ESSAYS

PRESENTATIONS

REVIEWS



# Autonomous Discourse. Strategies of Communication

## Review

*Arthur Suciu,*

*Autonomous Discourse. Strategies of Communication*  
(2024), Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 260 p.

Lecturer Ioan FĂRMUȘ

“Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, Romania  
farmusioan@yahoo.com

Coherent and problematizing, constructed on investigative principles, Arthur Suciu's second edition of *Autonomous Discourse. Strategies of Communication* (2024), published by Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași, represents a real contribution to the field of Communication Sciences. Its aim, to lay the foundations for a theory of autonomous discourse, reveals from the researcher not only a penchant for grand theoretical constructions but also mastery of an (original) method of analysis that attests to a solidly grounded, carefully conceptualized, and above all, interrogative endeavor. Without claiming to be a metanarrative, his study, beyond its initial projection as a research thesis, constitutes an explanatory construct – the product of a series of exercises in lucidity behind which one can read a long-practiced research experience – born from the need of man (whether intellectual or not), as an integral being, (1) to build, through writing, a space that allows for the unconstrained existence of the self and (2) to resist the pressure of homogenization from an ideological discourse that aspires to reduce him to a mere consumer. This aspect greatly broadens the investigative scope of his work, making it a book that addresses not only specialists but all those who choose to live lucidly:

*This research no longer targets the effects on the private individual, effects that are ensured through institutionalization at the societal level, but the effects on the individual in his capacity as part of the public and as a consumer. Quantitative research aims to gather information regarding the individual's consumer status: his preferences, desires, and needs concerning one or another area of life. In this*

way, man in his capacity as man, man in his entirety remains unexamined. (Suciu, 2024, p. 21)

The approach, surprising by the very dialogue it involves, reveals a work written at the intersection of three research directions: one, the result of initial training, on which are laid the logic of demonstration, conceptual clarity, and interrogative appetite (*Philosophy*), the second, the result of a professional choice, from which part of the conceptual apparatus and integrative vision are born (*Communication Sciences*), and a third, stemming from a passion, which, long and lucidly practiced, has transformed into a semantic pool from which the author recovers, reinterprets, and recirculates cultural tropes (*Literature*).

The aim of the argumentative architecture, as I mentioned, is the construction of a theory of autonomous discourse, conceived as an analytical tool capable of making visible the strategy behind certain if not every discourse. Even though today the concept of discourse, through repeated use or through a detrimental conceptual expansion, seems to have lost its precision and, along with it, its meaning, Arthur Suciu's recuperative effort, coupled with the science of conceptual delimitation, shows that the term has not yet lost its analytical validity. Clearly defined and used restrictively, discourse means for the author “a part of a language, of a whole, as an actualized system,” “the current expression of a language and, at the same time, [...] a taking of a position” (Suciu, 2024, p. 18). Exercising such a perspective, what we call “reality” becomes a construct articulated discursively, and its function, referentiality, an illusion, the product of a dominant ideology that mediates man's encounter with the world in which he lives. This is demonstrated by the distinction his work operates with, that between “heteronomous discourse” (or discourses with integrative purpose) and “autonomous discourse” (or discourses aimed at ironic distancing, essentially scriptural practices with an artistic stake, expressions of an individuality existentially engaged in the effort to dislocate the joints of the social order discourse).

Starting from the observation that autonomous discourse has lost much of its subversive value, and thus its autonomy, in contemporary society, Arthur Suciu launches the following hypothesis: if discourse considered as a whole possesses an ironic characteristic, then irony, not a trope, but a macro textual strategy, which attests to a taking of a position, an exercise in existential engagement, a vision articulated on broad spaces, becomes a mark of autonomy. By clearly delineating between the main types of discourse of the era, the concept proposed by the author becomes not only a tool for reading autonomous discourses but implicitly for reading the discourses of power, which the autonomous author, through



fictionalization, rewrites with the express intention of exposing them. He does this in a subversive manner, by distanced reference to a heteronomous discourse whose referentiality is dislocated, that is, questioned and exposed as a construct oriented towards transforming man into a subject of ideology. Hence the entire functionality attributed to the concept: the power to interrupt the coherence of heteronomous discourse (and to expose its incongruities, the reductive perspective under which man is viewed, despite the complex apparatus that contemporary society places in the service of analyzing his needs) and to create an alternative to it (a space inhabited by the problematic being of the author who forces his reader to enter into dialogue with himself and with the world), the ability to draw attention to the transmitted content, an existential, engaged content, expression of a creative individuality (in a communicational context characterized by the preeminence of media) and its inconsistency as a being subjected to time (when the fear of death pushes man to try various types of positioning).

However, the surprise comes from elsewhere. The validity of the concept proposed by Arthur Suciú is also verified in the related field of literature, in his book, one of the forms of autonomous discourse, an expression of modernity (which, not coincidentally, finds its optimal medium of communication in the novel, a literary genre that makes engagement with the real, i.e., actualization, presentification its distinctive note). What does literature become in the reading exercise proposed by Arthur Suciú? An expression of creative individuality, of anxiety pushed towards madness, of existential engagement in a scriptural exercise that, although relying on what the author calls projective assumption (a phenomenon known in literary sciences as objectification), does not cut off, but paradoxically increases the text's subversive value, by offering the writer the freedom to talk about anything. A practice that allows the autonomous author to exercise one of his creeds, the search for freedom of expression, to dismantle the illusion of referentiality and to re-establish the encounter with the real, to problematize by broadening the meanings of life, by provoking and maintaining throughout the reading a dialogue with the world, a dialogue that places man at the center.

The strength of autonomous discourse thus stems from the rupture it causes with ideology (which is why it will always be perceived as a threat to social order), from its ability to reinterpret heteronomous discourse (which it exposes), from the possibility of taking distance (irony can even be directed at itself), from being in a constant state of legitimization crisis (which forces it to reinvent itself and thus maintain a perpetual dialogue with heteronomous discourse), from the fact that it gives expression to individuality and man's need for freedom, from the discursive

alternative it offers (as a response to a heteronomous discourse that makes man a prisoner of a closed fiction). All these make autonomous discourse the testimony of an individual's response to the world he inhabits, to time, and to himself.

In conclusion, the theory (practically a reading grid) proposed by Arthur Suciu helps the contemporary reader, whether specialized or not, to better understand the difference between dominant discourses (which make man a subject of ideology) and dominated ones (which give man, through problematization, the opportunity to live his existence in the proximity of lucidity), between the ironic (or intentionally subversive) and the ideological (or unconsciously servile) nature of discourses, finally between existentially engaged literature (through the very exercise of its autonomous discourse) and consumer literature (a systemic alternative to the autonomous one, meant to dissipate its dislocating force). In this sense, the second part of the work, the applied one, makes the analysis of the discursive strategies behind the autonomous discourse exercised in a few exemplary chosen texts a true spectacle. A thesis, therefore, rigorously articulated, conceived as a hermeneutic exercise, both clarifying and sophisticated, presupposing intelligence, pride, honesty, and boldness, which constitutes a contribution, with an indubitable social impact, to the assumed field of research and to the understanding of the contemporary world. A work that once again proves how important it is for man to build, over time, starting from serious formative readings, a pattern of reading what we call the social. A study that makes challenges the key to a re-encounter with the world, in which the author teaches us to read the social and its (programming) codes as a book.

### **References:**

1. Suciu, A. (2024). *Autonomous Discourse. Strategies of Communication*. Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”.