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Interwoven Identities: Language, Freedom, and Legacy

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RESEARCH PAPERS

Of Fathers and Sons: Filial Love in Shakespeare's Work

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Abstract

The present analysis tries to demonstrate that in William Shakespeare's plays the father and son relationship is significant beyond the perimeter of basic family ties. Following a pattern introduced by the young Gobbo / old Gobbo interplay in The Merchant of Venice, the son is constantly searching for his father's approval because of the bond that unites them. This bond, made of love, respect, and duty, comes to represent the vehicle through which the natural order reins in the world. The father and son relationship will be discussed in relation to two history plays, 1 Henry IV and King Lear. In addition, Hamlet will be used as a background where the analogy will explain how the father and son pattern is open to a double take, proving that paternity and heredity are two sides of the same coin.

Keywords: *Elizabethan theatre, King Lear, Hamlet, Henry IV, William Shakespeare.*

Introduction

"It is a wise father that knows his own child," says Lancelot Gobbo when he is about to meet Old Gobbo, his father, and leave one master, Shylock, for another, Bassanio, in William Shakespear's *The Merchant of Venice*. Lancelot's words and the masterful scene of situational comedy in which they are proclaimed provide a framework for Shakespeare's portrayal of the father-son / daughter relationships throughout his plays. Even though Lancelot begins by confusing his father, in the end he asks for and gets his blessing. Confused himself by the difficult choice of whether to leave his master, puzzled by the inner struggle between the fiend that commends his leaving and the conscience that reminds him of his duties to Shylock, Lancelot finally decides to leave Shylock and for this he needs his

father's approval. On the one hand, this strange and highly comical scene sets the stage for more famous and complex sons, who, in turn, seem to be torn by inner struggle and need paternal validation. On the other hand, old Gobbo's blindness, deception and doubt speak volumes for his final recognition of the son. In different contexts and at higher stakes, the father-son relationship envisaged by young and old Gobbo informs the special ties between young and old Hamlet, between Hal and Henry IV, or between Gloucester and Edgar. In the end, there are not just the fathers who are wise, but also their sons.

On a similar note, critics such as M. M. Mahood, the editor of the New Cambridge version of *The Merchant of Venice*, believe that with the scene in which old Gobbo gives blessing to his son,

> *Shakespeare may have hit upon the comic "business" that follows upon Lancelot kneeling for his father's blessing because he had made use, two scenes back, of Jacob tricking Isaac into giving him his blessing.* (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 85)

The scene mentioned in this quote refers to the one in which Shylock explains to Antonio and Bassanio the virtue of indirect interest. In his explanation, Shylock cites the biblical story of Jacob and Isaac. The crucial aspect of that story happens in Genesis 27 when, Jacob with the help of his mother Rebecca deceived the father about his real identity. Because he was blind, Isaac mistook Jacob's touch for that of Esau. Consequently, Isaac blessed Jacob and made him his heir. This *antic disposition* informs the facets of the father and son relationship discussed in this paper. At first, the fathers seem to be easily misled in the expectations they have towards their sons, suspecting them of not being worthy of their roles. That is the case with both Henry IV and Gloucester who seriously doubt, for different reasons, the quality of Hal and Edgar. Second, the good and worthy sons (Hal and Edgar) need to fight the bad and ruthless half-brothers (Edmund and Hotspur, who is not Hal's brother, but he is certainly his foe) for paternal recognition.

Fathers and Sons in Hamlet, Henry IV and King Lear

The father and son relationship will be discussed in relation to two of Shakespeare's history plays, *1 Henry IV* and *King Lear*. Additionally, *Hamlet* will be used as a background where the analogy will explain how the father and son pattern is opened to a double take. Paternity and heredity are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, fathers question their sons' capabilities of bearing their names; on the other, the sons fight for their fathers' inheritance, not exclusively in the name of the father, but more in the name of natural order. In this way, both

father and son become symbols of successive worlds. They are no longer, if they ever were, common people and they do not enact the regular family ties. For instance, in Elizabethan England the family was considered a version of the state, which in turn was considered a version of the universe. Hierarchy was everything as long as the father ruled, like a royal figure, over all of his subjects. The family bond was in itself more of a bondage. Rebellion was considered treason and heavily punished. In other words, the roles had been assigned long before the actors could get a grasp of the entire play. The only advantage fathers have in front of their sons is age, which is not always an asset. Moreover, even when the son is the worthy heir, his task does not become easier. As Peter Alexander points out in his book *Hamlet, Father and Son* (1955),

> *Hamlet has had time to study at Wittenberg; he belongs to a later world, but his task is not lighter than his father's. Where his father wrestled with flesh and blood, the son has now an adversary of a more metaphysical and spectral kind. He still carries the sword, but he knows it may well be a sword that will not save.* (p. 169)

It is obvious that father and son become the symbols of the worlds that created them or of the worlds, as the case may be with Hal and possible with Edgar, which they created. For instance, in *King Lear¸* the fathers' skepticism, directed toward their sons and the order they inhibit, as the case is with Gloucester's famous repartee to Edmund's machinations from I.ii. 96-108, can only be met by the (legitimate) sons' agency. Whether they make use of the sword or not becomes secondary in a trial that places the burden of restoring order on the sons' shoulders.

If the "sword will not save" Hamlet, in *1 Henry IV* the opposite is quite evident in Hal's case, but this does not mean that Hotspur is so metaphysical and spectral an adversary. Yet, Bolingbroke, King Henry IV, Hal's father, continually wrestles with flesh and blood. In a play about honor, which in Falstaff's strange speech in V.i. is the attribute of the dead, Henry's ungrateful comparison of Hal and Hotspur, in I.i., sets the stage for remorse and preemptive action. Guilty of deposing a king, Henry feels threatened by Hotspur's eagerness to claim honor and pursue justice. Because of that, Henry recognizes himself more in Northumberland's son than in his own. His envy, openly and publicly admitted as a sin, blinds him and makes him incapable of realizing that while Hotspur is about to replicate the old world, by deposing a king, Hal is set for inventing a new world. In I.i. and, later when father and son meet in III.ii., Henry is not questioning paternity, but rather heredity, thus legitimizing his own deed: he still wants Hal as a son, but needs Percy as his heir. When he wishes the fairies had changed the two sons in the cradle, and "Called mine Percy, his Plantagenet! / Then would I have

his Harry, and he mine" (I.i. 88-9) Henry both compares himself with Percy and Hal to Richard II. Even though he eagerly wants Hal to be like Percy, the idea is clear enough: honor should replace dishonor. That's what has happened, and that's what is going to happen, if Hal does not come to terms with his duties. Henry cannot be any clearer when he finally confronts his son in III.ii.: "I know not whether God will have it so / For some displeasing service I have done / That in his secret doom out of my blood / He'll breed revengement and a scourge for me." Flesh and blood here still rule the king's thoughts.

When it comes to Hal's metaphysical and spectral adversary, things change but not to the extent to which they do in Hamlet's case. The sword in *1 Henry IV* still has its dues, so in the end Hal can eliminate his and his father's main threat, represented by Percy, and get his father's recognition. But, as everywhere in Shakespeare's plays, things still pose unmanageable dilemmas. If we are to take Falstaff's mock meditations for granted, Hotspur, who is now twice killed, is a man of honor, leaving for Hal the difficult task, which is not lighter than his father's, to reinterpret the concept of honor and thus complete his fight with the metaphysical and the spectral. Hal's struggle becomes obvious from the end of I.ii., when he vows to imitate the sun, pay the debt he never promised, and reform, thus redeeming himself and his father. That is why when father and son eventually meet, Hal can and will be the much-needed heir to Henry's throne. In fact, Hal gets his father's blessing but in the form of a "charge and sovereign trust", meaning that he needs to prove it on the battlefield. And that is what Hal vows to do:

> *I will redeem all this on Percy's head,*
> *And in the closing of some glorious day*
> *Be bold to tell that I am your son,*
> *When I will wear a garment all of blood*
> *And stain my favors in a bloody mask,*
> *Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it.* (III. Ii. 132-7)

Literally, in *Hamlet*, Claudius' head and Hamlet's role as "scourge and minister" would arguably bring revenge and wash away the shame, but it will not bring redemption. If Henry wrongly believes Hal is his scourge, Claudius wrongly assumes that Hamlet is his father's avenger and wants to get rid of him.

As it follows, if there's no doubt about heredity, since Hamlet is the heir to the throne, then the issues brought forth by paternity crisscross the entire play. Very much like Hal, when he vows to imitate the sun, Hamlet, from the very first time he steps on the stage, quibbles on the very notion of "son" refusing to be considered Claudius's kin and kind, thus implying his usurper role. In this respect,

Claudius resembles Henry, but engulfed in more complicated matters: he not only murdered the king, but he also married the widowed queen. He is not only guilty of treason; he is also guilty of incest. Moreover, unlike Henry, he does not have a son to redeem his deeds through honorable reformation and wise reign. In the end, Claudius's crimes and, to a given extent, Gertrude's complicity make Hamlet's actions even more difficult to take. Thus, from the beginning, Hamlet seems the tragic figure par excellence. In the end, his actions redeem him, and his death carries out his story, told by Horatio, the way Hamlet's deeds remembered his father's memory as the Ghost wished. Unlike Hal or Edgar, Hamlet does not live to rule the kingdom, but he sees the order restored.

Much like Hal, Edgar in *King Lear* represents the trajectory of a character from a romance plot where the hero thrives because of surpassing given tests. He too needs his sword and wisdom to go through the trials that his brother, father and nature put in his way. He might not get the rewards that Hal finally gets, but in the end, Edgar proves beyond doubt that he is a worthy son. The questions raised by *King Lear* and by the unfolding of its secondary plot, that of the Gloucesters that constantly mirror the main plot, have also to do with paternity and heredity, but in a new fashion. Legitimacy, like never before, is at stake, since the "base" as Edmund calls himself is about to dispossess the legitimate son. Much like in the pattern set forth by the young and old Gobbo interlude, the father is completely blind and suffering, while the son does not have the time and the mood to play with his father's senselessness. In fact, Edgar needs to undo, if possible, what his half-brother did. In this respect, paternity and heredity intermingle in a play in which the whole world order is at stake and needs to be reinstated.

In his relationship with his father, Edgar must fight for recognition from the beginning of the play. When in the very first scene of the play Gloucester introduces Edmund to Kent, the father only briefly mentions his heir, by virtue of his legitimacy of the first born, and without naming him: "I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year older than this, who yet is no dearer in my account" (I.i.17-8). At the same time, it seems that Gloucester deals with the difficult problem of recognizing his illegitimate son even though he took the task of raising him: "His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to't" (I.i. 8-9). From the very start Gloucester, much like Lear, avoids responsibility and easily mistakes his faults with those of the universe. In other words, he can read the "machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders" in these late eclipses, but he cannot conceive that the "bond [that] cracked twixt father and son" might be a result of his flaws. And there is where Edmund plays his masterful trick by taking

advantage of his father's misunderstandings. And much to everybody's disadvantage, all must suffer.

As an absolute villain, Edmund plays his father's ideas against him and against his brother. His effort, in his father's words, is literally to "eclipse the sun", that is to dispossess his brother:

> *Well, then,*
> *Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.*
> *Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund*
> *As to th' legitimate. Fine word, "legitimate"!*
> *Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed*
> *And my invention thrive, Edmund the base*
> *Shall top th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper.*
> *Now, gods, stand up for bastards!* (I.ii. 15-22)

The gods' invocation, as hazardous as it appears, can only portend the outcome of the tragedy. The gods stand up for bastards, but only for a reason: the flaws would be purged through immense suffering and the order would be restored. Even when Edmund becomes the heir and Edgar loses his father's favors, the resolution still needs to be enacted, because the price paid is unaccountable for: Gloucester's blindness and eventual death can only be redeemed through the death of the usurper by the hand of the dispossessed. In a way, like in the first mock fight between the brothers, Edmund is the one inflicting his death. When he cuts himself as a proof of Edgar's attack, Edmund basically embarks on a suicidal ritual.

Edmund is guilty of treason. Even though he does not attempt the life of the king or that of his heirs, in the end, Edgar seems to be in the situation of becoming king from his newly reinstated position of Earl of Gloucester, therefore Edmund is accountable for attempted patricide, fratricide, and even regicide. In contrast, guiding his father to the Dover Cliff, protecting him after his "fall", and eventually watching him die, as well as fighting his brother, Edgar is passing the test which will make him a worthy ruler. As schematic as this may sound, Edgar is the instrument through which justice is administered. In this respect, Edgar represents the will of gods, while Edmund tries to confront them. In the subtleties of the play, Edmund represents a new age in which power is no longer based on the laws of the universe and on the divine order of things. Edmund, the bastard, becomes a symbol of free will in an effort to move the world "out of its joints". In his undertaking, Edmund resembles Henry IV and Claudius, being nothing more than a usurper, of both his brother's situation and of the divine rule.

If Edmund is the agent of Gloucester's fall, Edgar is the agent of his restoration. In fact, throughout the play Edgar himself undergoes restoration.

Debased by his brother, Edgar literally becomes the base, when forced to take the identity of Tom o' Bedlam. A beggar and a lunatic, Edgar as Tom needs to endure the vicissitudes of nature in order to be capable of restoring it. The fact that Lear himself tries to help and comfort him is representative of the power that Edgar as Tom has over the other characters. He becomes the mirror of others' debasement and in the end the agent of their redemption. Thus, he not only preserves the order of his family, but also the order of the kingdom, and of the universe.

Arguably, Edgar is the central figure of *King Lear* because he links the two separate plots together and, most importantly, he is the one who brings resolution. In this respect, Edgar undergoes willingly the biggest transformation. Following him through his terrible development will only shed some light on the important issues related to paternity and heredity the play raises. As stated before, from the beginning Edgar is on constant trial not only meant to prove his legitimacy as a first born and imminent heir, but also to define himself as a worthy son. There are at least four different and yet related identities that Edgar assumes throughout the play. First there is the nameless elder son introduced by Gloucester to Kent; second, there is Poor Tom; third, Edgar is disguised as a nameless knight; and last, there is Edgar as Earl of Gloucester. All these four 'masks' help bring something new to Edgar's characterization. The first time the audience makes his acquaintance, he seems without agency, being used by Edmund against their father. Critics have been ready to ascertain that by dispossessing Edgar Edmund has in fact become a "ventriloquist" only capable of using someone else's identity.

Thus, the fact that Edgar is not Edgar from the beginning comes to his own advantage. Being legitimate, but without having proven it yet, Edgar leaves Edmund to be swept by his own obsessions of power and rise. In "The Base Shall Top Th' Legitimate": The Bedlam Beggar and the Role of Edgar in *King Lear*, William C. Carroll (1987) points out that:

> Edmund's sudden hierarchical rise represents a triumph over his earlier obsession with merely biological reproduction; in forging Edgar's "character," Edmund forces his father to renounce what is natural and to engage in a kind of social reproduction instead – to name his (other) son as heir. Legitimacy has now been decoupled from the natural body, the "order of law" set aside as arbitrary. [Edmund] succeeds (in all senses of the term) only as Edgar. Moreover his accession to this particular form of power stems from a violent deviation from the very system that mediates this power. Edmund's project is doomed by self-annihilating contradictions from its inception. Edgar, on the other hand, falls from his status as the son "by order of law" to that of an outlaw exposed to "the winds and persecutions of the sky" (II.ii.12), from privilege to persecution. (p. 429)

Even if on a larger scale his fall mirrors both Lear's and Gloucester's falls, Edgar is the only one in the play that can guarantee redemption, but first, as an outlawed he needs to restore his recognition. For this he embarks in a most difficult identitary quest.

Tom o' Bedlam or Poor Tom as he calls himself is a key figure in Edgar's transformation. For Shakespeare's audience, he would be a most disturbing figure, a lunatic and a beggar, the basest of the human condition. At the same time, he would be the stereotype of the con man, a person who would feign his miserable condition for material gain. Interestingly enough, such a person would inevitably put up a performance, proving minimal theatrical aptitudes. In this respect Edgar as Tom resembles Lancelot Gobbo and his double performance, interior – with the *fiends* and exterior – with his father. And yet another similarity connects Edgar's situation to the biblical story of Jacob and Isaac referred to in *The Merchant of Venice*. The first time he asks for his blessing, old Gobbo fails to recognize his son, as Isaac failed to recognize Esau, mistaking him for Jacob. Similarly, Gloucester fails to recognize Edgar because of Edmund. That is why Edgar willingly decides for his disguise:

> *Yet better thus, and known to be contemned,*
> *Than still contemned and flattered. To be worst,*
> *The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,*
> *Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.*
> *The lamentable change is from the best;*
> *The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,*
> *Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace!*
> *The wretch that hast blown unto the worst*
> *Owes nothing to thy blasts.* (IV.i. 1-8)

This soliloquy comes right before the blind Gloucester himself is banished from his domain. From now on, father and son remain inseparable until the end of Gloucester's life. For both, one blind and the other "the lowest and most dejected thing in nature," everything seems lost, but as Edgar points out "to be worst stands still in esperance," and "the worst returns to laughter," meaning that they have already reached the lowest point and there is nothing worse that can happen to them. All they need is to come to peace with themselves.

Edgar's pretense should be over by now, when son and father are reunited. Both Gloucester and Edgar see through Poor Tom's disguise, when the father recognizes the contradiction between a beggar and a madman, who "has some reason, else he could not beg" (IV.i. 31) and reminds him of his son who "Came then into my mind, and yet my mind / Was then scarce friends with him" (IV.i. 33-4), while the son admits that "[he] cannot daub it further" (IV.i. 51). But the trial is

not over yet; the father still needs to fall. It is in fact this fortunate fall off the supposedly Dover Cliff that makes Edgar get rid off the Poor Tom disguise and adopt a more fittingly identity of a "most poor man […] pregnant to good pity" (IV.vi. 221). Apart from all possible interpretations of the reasons that Edgar and Gloucester have in mistaking an unfortunate beggar with a fiendish figure and solid flat ground with a hill, one thing is certain: with the help of his son, the father can assume *felix culpa* and suffer all the consequences of his deeds and afflictions. What is for the son an attempt to cure his father from his despair, "Why I do trifle thus with his despair / Is done to cure it" (IV.vi. 32-3), for the father is repentance, "Henceforth I'll bear / Affliction till it do cry out itself / «Enough, enough,» and die" (IV.Vi. 75-7).

It seems that, by now, the lesson had been learnt and that part of the trials had been surpassed. Gloucester at least realizes his mistakes and sympathizes with Lear when the two meet for the last time. As Lear in the end recognizes Gloucester, so does Gloucester recognize and give blessing to the son. The order is about to be reinstated. By nursing the miseries of his father and by extension of his king, Edgar can bring resolution to the play. His disguise is no longer needed when he is armed and ready to fight his brother. When at last he is getting his name back, the summary of his evolution is quite compelling:

> *The bloody proclamation to escape*
> *[…] taught me to shift*
> *Into a madman's rags, t'assume a semblance*
> *That very dogs disdained; and in this habit*
> *Met I my father with his bleeding rings,*
> *Their precious stones new lost; became his guide,*
> *Led him, begged for him, saved him from despair;*
> *Never – oh, fault! – revealed myself unto him*
> *Until some half hour past, when I was armed.*
> *Not sure, though hoping, of this good success,*
> *I asked his blessing, and from first to last*
> *Told him our pilgrimage.* (V.iii. 183-96)

As Edmund bluntly puts it, "The wheel is come full circle" (V.iii. 174). Edgar's pilgrimage is over and even if he wishes his heart would burst like his father's did, he needs to stay alive and literally save the order of things. The four identities Edgar assumed helped him and the people around him understand and restore the lost justice. In the end, but presumably from the very beginning, "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to plague us" (V.iii.170-1). In fact, all Shakespeare's characters seem instruments and players of both their destinies and of their gods. Simple and normal family relationships

between father and son become patterns that reinforce the tragic truth: human nature and divine justice cannot be conceived outside the intricate hierarchy of the universe. Even if blind, the father must recognize and bless the son, while the son, no matter how astray, must appreciate and avenge the father.

Conclusion

Even though limited, both in scope and in perspective, the present analysis tries to demonstrate that in Shakespeare's plays the father and son relationship is significant beyond the perimeter of basic family ties. Following a pattern introduced by the young Gobbo / old Gobbo interplay, the son is on constant search for his father's approval as a consequence of the bond that unites them. This bond, made out of love, respect, and duty, comes to represent the vehicle through which the natural order reins in the world. Whenever the father disowns the son, as Gloucester is prompted to do, or doubts him, as Henry doubts Hal, it is the son's duty to affirm himself as a worthy heir. The father's blindness can only be removed by the son's boldness in asserting his heritage, as Hal professes, "Be Bold to tell that I am your son." The father's blessing that eventually comes is thus wholly dedicated to the continuation or restoration of the natural bond that holds the world together.

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The Status of Reason in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd

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Abstract

This study titled "The status of Reason in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd" reveals the truth that his philosophy is deeply and authentically rational in which reason is importantly present. It provides the key of knowledge and the beginning of every truth and certainty. Ibn Rushd's rationalism, in spite of its foundation on the ideas of early Greek rationalist philosophers like Socrates and Plato, is marked by distinguishing religious features. This really made him a creator and innovator, allowing creating a unique rational philosophical framework that reflected his distinctive genius, which prominently influenced the European philosophical thought.

Keywords: *Reason, Philosophy, Ibn Rushd.*

Introduction

The study of the philosophical thought history throughout the ages and civilizations encounters several philosophical milestones authored by philosophers and thinkers who raised the banner of philosophy, believing in its capacity of shaping the individual, building society, and establishing a civilization. The most prominent is the Islamic philosophy which stands remarkably among them, distinguished in theme, methodology, and dimensions, and articulated by many Muslim philosophers' ideas, notably Abu al-Walid Ibn Rushd. His heyday was marked by intellectual and philosophical thought, making it a turning point in Islamic philosophy. This is because his ideas advocated for convergence between wisdom and Sharia (Islamic Law), and his trust in proof (reason) as the pillar of truth surpassing religion, as he criticized the Sufi Illuminationist philosophy constructed by Al-Ghazali. He rejected it and advocated for the adoption of reason and rationalism to construct a philosophical framework through which a cognitive system capable of achieving the renaissance of the nation can be outlined. He is a profound rational philosopher who raised the status of reason, and made it the starting point of various truths in an era when Sufi religious philosophy was prevalent, and which only restricted itself to thinking within the religious framework and premade moulds. Ibn Rushd rationality has entered European

philosophical thought and affected many Christian and Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages, and its impact moved on to the Renaissance and the modern era. Hence, our article emphasizes the status of reason in Ibn Rushd's philosophy, and confirms the authenticity of his rationality which he constructed from the content of his philosophy. Therefore, we bring up the following inquiries: What is the status of reason in Ibn Rushd's philosophy? Is his rationalism genuinely authentic? What is its impact on European philosophical thought?

1. Conceptual Definitions

1.1. REASON

Reason is an innate faculty which Allah Almighty bestowed upon humans, distinguishing them from other creatures, and through which, thinking is processed and knowledge is gained, thereby surpassing other beings. Reason is one of the topics of the philosophical metaphysics discussed by ancient and modern philosophers. Therefore, diverse opinions and perspectives concerning its meaning came into being.

The early Greek philosophers saw reason as an absolute universal essence that represents goodness and virtue. Only because it is cosmic, knowledge is attained. Heraclitus referred to it as "Logos", the cosmic reason that organizes and controls all natural phenomena and processes and directs their upshot in a permanent and eternal manner. Anaxagoras considered reason as "Nous", the universal reason, different from the cosmic reason. It is the first principle which initiated motion all over the universe. Plato viewed reason as a superior natural faculty capable of thinking and perception. He refers to the cosmic reason as an epitome of goodness and virtue in his famous book "The Republic" (Wahba, 2007, p. 423).

Plato asserted reason's capacity to get to the truth and self-perception, whether epistemic, ethical, political, or artistic… etc.

Ibn Sina considered reason as the rational power. It represents a neutral essence beyond all creations, phenomena, and substances. It is the speaking soul that everyone refers to as "I" (Saliba, 1982, p. 85).

As for Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, he sees that the significance of "reason" varies between the masses and the philosophers and theologians. He states:

> As for "reason," it is a common term which the masses, philosophers, and theologians use with various meanings and connotations. The commonality requires a unified significance. The masses use it in three ways: firstly, as natural disposition; secondly, as general principles acquired through experience; thirdly, as human veneration and demeanour... (Al-Ghazali, p. 286).

Ibn Rushd viewed reason as an essential pillar in human knowledge through which knowledge and truth can be attained, affirming through his theory that converges the theory of epistemology with the study of metaphysics that reason is neither the soul nor a part of it but a separate type of spirit like the eternal essence. (Aquinas, 1994, p. 91).

The material mind links up with the human reason via images or flowing reasoned insights which makes the active mind a repository for the human reason. (Bloch, 2008, pp. 28-29).

Ibn Rushd also confirmed that reason is one of the gifts of the soul. His brilliance lies in that he separates reason from the body, elevating its value and making it the pillar of all truths. He also highlighted the existence of different levels of the mind, most prominently the hylic mind as a concept derived from Aristotle but with elaboration and new interpretations.

Reason has also indicated causality and sufficient reasons according to Leibniz, who categorized reason into theoretical revolves around perception and acquiring knowledge, and practical centered on ethics and behavior (Arabic Language Academy, 1983, p. 120).

Descartes considered reason as a powerful natural disposition assisting humans to acquire knowledge as the source of thinking, analyzing, interpretation, doubt, and the various intellectual functions. Furthermore, it is the starting point of every science and knowledge. It is absolute, unique and the best common thing among people (Descartes, 1985, p. 126).

André Lalande sees the mind as a natural disposition and principle with functions and manifestations that embodies in the activity of thought in two significant domains: the domain of intellectual activity, which coordinates knowledge and organizes it, and the practical domain, which undertakes the task of organizing behavior (Lalande, 2001, p. 1160).

Additionally, philosophers addressed the types of reason, including Aristotle, who saw four types: potential reason, active reason, effective reason, and absolute reason. Al-Farabi asserted that reason varies in meaning from the masses to philosophers to theologians, emphasizing four levels of reason which are: potential reason, active reason, effective reason, and beneficiary reason.

According to the aforementioned, it can be said that defining the concept of reason and determining its levels is challenging because of the differing starting points of each philosopher and the postulates on which they base their philosophical frameworks, and through which they attempt to define the meaning of reason.

1.2. IBN RUSHD

Ibn Rushd was an Arab Muslim philosopher born in Cordoba in 1126 CE. First, he studied Religious and Linguistic Sciences. Then, he focused on rational and empirical sciences such as Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine, and Philosophy. He conducted deep research on philosophical issues and problems, presenting many ideas reflecting his innate genius. Despite being influenced by early Greek philosophers, he neither was a follower nor imitator but rather an explainer, interpreter, critic, and innovator.

Ibn Rushd was called "The Wise Man" because he was involved in Religious Sciences, bringing revitalization to them to the extent of holding the position of Chief Justice in Cordoba. He was also dubbed "a proficient scholar" who focused on Mathematics and Medicine. His book "The Colliget," considered a significant reference in Medicine and still studied today, proves that. He was further known as as a critical philosopher, who delved into various philosophical issues and problems through reading, understanding, explaining and criticizing. He interpreted many logical issues with critiques and reservations. He was interested in metaphysical issues, especially those related to religious subjects trying to build a comprehensive philosophical system that coordinates philosophy with religion, wisdom with Sharia, making Muslim individuals capable of critical thinking, understanding, according to a distinctive rational perspective.

Mohamed Abid al-Jabiri states about him,

> *Ibn Rushd explained Aristotle's works but went beyond mere explanation to genuine philosophical endeavor. He was a jurist who surpassed the existing method in presenting issues of Sharia, Belief, Science, and Philosophy. Thus, he is still a model of the intellectual who combines heritage absorption with contemporary thought representation, as well as imbuing with critical spirit and scientific and moral virtue.* (Al-Jabiri, 1998, p. 10)

In his early days, Ibn Rushd was close to Prince Abu Ya'qub, offering him counsel and aiding in the managing the affairs of the principality as he was a chief judge. However, with Al-Mansur, things turned against him. He was accused of disbelief, atheism, corrupting people's minds, and attempting to go against the ruler and doubting his ideas and beliefs. Here, Ibn Rushd underwent a terrible crisis. He was imprisoned, exiled, and his books were burnt. All this happened due to extremists and radicals – enemies of reason, philosophy, and renewal, who sought to harm him, and they succeeded.

It was narrated that one unconvincing reason for Ibn Rushd's ordeal was when he wrote his famous book "the Animal" describing the types of the animals, especially the giraffe, where he mentioned: "I saw a giraffe at the Berbers' king,

meaning Al-Mansur". When this reached Al-Mansur, it exacerbated matters for Ibn Rushd. This was sufficient for the prince to imprison and send him into exile, although he justified that he did not intend to offend the prince, but he failed (Al-Qaioumi, 1997, p. 469).

Ibn Rushd lived during a time when critical thinking was lacking and superficial ideas diverging from reason and logic were prevailing. Though European pens acknowledged his merit and the strength of his rational philosophy, his society necessitated philosophical awareness. However, contemporary Arab thinkers have keenly interested in Ibn Rushd's writings. Annual conferences are organized concerning his thought and philosophy, and the Ibn Rushd Prize for Free Thought has also been established. All these highlights Ibn Rushd's competence, prowess, and philosophical creativity in advocating for diligence, modernization, and renewal.

Ibn Rushd died in 1198 AD. He left behind a rich legacy encompassing various fields of knowledge such as Astronomy, Mathematics, Medicine, Literature, Jurisprudence, and Philosophy. Among his notable works, we mention:
- "The Decisive Treatise on the Connection between Philosophy and Sharia."
- "The Distinguished Jurist's Primer."
- "The Incoherence of the Incoherence."
- "Exposition of the Methods of Proof in Doctrines of the Religion."
- "The Necessary in Politics" (Shahata, 2017, p. 05).

2.The landmarks of Ibn Rushd's philosophy.

The philosophy of Ibn Rushd is founded upon various principles, serving as landmarks of his philosophical approach. They include:

2.1. RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

Some Muslim philosophers, like Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, stated that philosophy (wisdom) and Sharia (religious law) are contradictory, through various issues subject of contradiction between philosophy and religion especially in metaphysics such as creation, annihilation, and the nature of the world… etc. He emphasized that they are of different sources: philosophy is a human creation. It is from the non-religious Greek environment, whereas religion is a path of life revealed by Allah for his servants, ordering them to follow for salvation in this world and the hereafter. He asserted that early Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle went astray for tackling super-rational and impossible issues. He rejected many of their ideas and called for avoiding metaphysical inquiries that necessitates absolute acceptance rather than intellectual inquiry. This is clarified in his book "The Incoherence of the Philosophers". Among these examples, he

challenged philosophers to subject their theological inquiries to their own logical standards. He stated:

> *We debate with them in this book in their language – I mean in their terminology of logic – and clarify that what they stated for the validity of analogy in the category of proof in logic, what they stipulated for its form in the book on logic, and what they posited in the "Isagoge" and in "Categors" – which are parts of logic and its preliminaries – they were not able to accomplish any of it in their theological sciences.* (All-Ghazali, 1966, p. 43)

Ibn Rushd criticized many of Al-Ghazali's ideas, rejecting many of his arguments and asserting the contradictions it contains and the logic of negation he adopted, which led him to oppose philosophy, despite his several ideas where he praised philosophy, logic, and the contributions of Greek philosophers to human thought. Ibn Rushd confirmed that the issues Al-Ghazali opposed, especially those of Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Al-Farabi, are originally philosophical. On one hand, he called for the refutation of delving into metaphysics, yet he tackled several philosophical topics such as substance, existence, and natural science… etc. Therefore, many specialists in Islamic philosophy regard Al-Ghazali's ideas critisizing philosophy and his statement that it opposes religion are philosophical ideas. They convey a philosophical style and intellectual framework founded upon deconstruction and critique.

Ibn Rushd considers philosophy and religion as complementary and agreeable, not contradictory. His viewpoint is that philosophy is a rational activity with the aim of contemplation of the universe to understand its secrets and intricacies, as well as obtaining knowledge of the Creator, His power, greatness, and justice. According to Ibn Rushd, philosophy demonstrates the supreme form of the mind. This is in line with the revelation of Allah via several verses in the Quran that urge for thinking, reflections, contemplation, and the use of reason. He emphasizes the utilization of both reason and religion for the pursuit of truth and attaining certainty, as they are harmoniously connected in serving human lack and aspirations for knowledge. According to Ibn Rushd, they are both necessary for human pursuit of achieving goodness, righteousness and virtue.

To clarify his stance concerning the relationship between philosophy and religion, and demonstrate the harmony between the two, Ibn Rushd authored his famous work "The Decisive Treatise on the Connection between Philosophy and Religion," which serves as a definitive response and proof and thorough refutation of Al-Ghazali's philosophy. He rejected all the issues in which Al-Ghazali denied philosophy, and so criticizing philosophers. Ibn Rushd highlights the necessity and

importance of philosophy for humans, and its strong connection with religion. He states:

> *If this Philosophy is indeed true and calls to contemplation leading to knowledge of the truth, then we Muslims know for certain that rational contemplation does not contradict what Sharia has revealed. Truth does not oppose truth, but rather asserts and testifies to it.* (Ibn Rushd, 1997, pp. 33-34)

Hence, it is evident that a key pillar of Ibn Rushd's philosophy is his assertion on the strong correlation between philosophy and religion, wisdom and Sharia (Islamic law), reason and revelation.

2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF REASON IN ACHIEVING CERTAINTY

Among the pillars upon which the philosophy of Ibn Rushd is founded is his considering proof to be the basis of truth, describing it by various concepts, most notably reason. He asserts that proof is the pathway to true knowledge. It represents one of the types of rational knowledge that stems from the reason and uses the rational method. Its bases are logic principles as the source of all truth according to Ibn Rushd. He shifted towards studying and interpreting formal logic. Then, he addressed its issues and discussions, until he surpassed many initial topics of logic such as propositions, statements, and syllogism, while emphasizing proof as the focal of logic and the method of study with the aim of certainty and objectivity. It is both an intellectual and even religious requirement.

Ibn Rushd defended proof, believing in its inseparability from logic, and asserting the role of logical proofs in attaining truth and knowledge. Proof is the pillar of every theory and concept. It represents the method of sound reason and scientific knowledge aiming for truth and certainty. He demonstrates the role of evidential method and its impact on religious discourse, highlighting the epistemological perspective of proof and its contribution in accomplishing harmony between wisdom and Sharia (Islamic law).

Ibn Rushd, sees proof as the most significant and the best method of intellectual inquiry because Allah has invited us to know Him and His creations, which prove His existence – Glory be to Him, through proof rather than mere acceptance, imitation, or adherence without comprehension and rationality. Ibn Rushd said:

> *As for Sharia (religious law), it calls for considering and seeking knowledge of existents with reason in many verses, confirming that it is imperative to utilize both rational and legal proof to attain knowledge of the reality of existents...* (Ibn Rushd, 1997, p. 24).

Ibn Rushd saw that proof, or what is sometimes referred to as evidential syllogism, as the pillar of knowledge of the Creator, Almighty Allah, in addition to

understanding the reality of existents because it represents rationality and insight, making it necessary for attaining such knowledge. Thus, he categorized people into different categories. The general public knows various religious and worldly truths via imitation and adherence, whereas the elite reflect and interpret. This is because knowledge of the universe and its Creator, Allah, is attained through proof, which is the key for comprehending various religious and worldly truths.

Ibn Rushd highlights the importance of reason as the pathway to truth and the basis for understanding religion and the world, not mere religious practices. According to him, religion alone cannot explain certain issues and matters that necessitate intellectual and logical action arising from reason. Therefore, he called for utilizing logic and reason as primary elements in attaining knowledge, goodness, and happiness. He rejected Al-Ghazali's arguments that favourite religion and deny the role of reason and philosophy. Meanwhile, he asserted the limitations of rational experience in proving different subjects. Thus, he considered religion as complementary to reason, because wisdom involves considering things in line with the nature of proof. Bernardino Longo states about Ibn Rushd's reason:

In general, Ibn Rushd's logic is based on the theory of reason because reason establishes all arguments and is the ultimate objective of logic. Therefore, reason is the essential nerve of the science of logic. (Ibn Rushd, 1984, pp. 14-15)

2.3. REASON IS THE PILLAR OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTAINING CERTAINTY

Ibn Rushd believed that reason is the pillar of truth and the starting point of every knowledge seeking certainty. He viewed it positively, asserting that it is humanity's noblest and most distinguishing feature among other creatures. Through reason, knowledge and scientific inquiry are attained and humanity manifests itself. It is the basis of thought, analysis, creativity, and moral elevation of humanity. In his time, Ibn Rushd defended reason against critics who criticized philosophy and intellectual knowledge for rejection and disbelief due to the narrow insight and false opinions especially of some Sufi thinkers. They accused philosophy and reason for several accusations and rejected the role of reason and logic and emphasized the adequacy of religion alone for achieving certainty. Through their narrow interpretation, they mistook Quranic verses which call for insightful thinking, contemplation, and the use of reason to comprehend the universe and worldly phenomena. Likewise, some medieval Christian and Jewish thinkers who favoured theology making it the essence of all truth, in addition, to rejecting logical reasoning and rational method in obtaining knowledge and attaining truth.

Ibn Rushd's philosophy is founded upon rationality, believing that reason is the start of every change and knowledge. He stated:

> *Reason is nothing more than understanding existents via their causes, and it distinguishes itself from all other perceptive faculties. Whoever elevates causes has elevated reason. The craft of logic establishes that there are indeed causes and effects. Knowledge of these effects is not absolute except by knowledge of their causes, and disrupting these causes nullifies knowledge.* (Al-Khudairi, 1983, p. 122)

According to this definition, it is evident that Ibn Rushd establishes a link between cause and effect, i.e., a link between the phenomenon and its material cause. He believes that events occur by being caused by something material. He associates a close connection between the cause and the effect in the occurrence of phenomena. This view contradicts that of Al-Ghazali's, who does not connect cause to effect. Similarly, he contrasts with Sufi thinkers who attribute phenomena to intuition.

Ibn Rushd claims that any truth not based on rational evidence is rejected because the truth he defends is associated to obvious and reasonable causes and reasons, founded on rational principles and proof. Thus, he defends reason in every instance and position. For example, concerning the issue of pleasures, he prefers intellectual and afterlife pleasures over worldly physical pleasures. He cited Quranic verses and Prophetic sayings to support his stance. Furthermore, he believed that the noblest sciences are rational sciences based on reason, logic, proof, and argumentation. These inherently beneficial rational sciences include knowledge about Allah, His attributes, angels, books, prophets, and the nature of existence itself. If a science directly leads to knowledge of Allah, it is beneficial. If it does not directly lead to knowledge of Allah, it is merely a craft or skill like any others. (Ibn Rushd, 2001, p. 559)

Ibn Rushd did believe in the role and significance of reason in achieving certainty, emphasizing its importance for humans. He adopted a sound methodology based on rationality, without imitation and adherence to preconceived notions of thought that have negatively impacted the Arab and Islamic nation for centuries. He called for that because it had drifted away from the spirit of reason, logic, and the method of proof reasoning, and followed the path of illuminative reason, which calls for imitation without critical thinking, analysis, interpretation, and reasoned debate. Therefore, he rejected this in his time, and warned against it. Thus, reason as the primary source of truth is the most important pillar of his philosophy.

2.4. Advocating for Diligence (Ijtihad)

Ibn Rushd lived between Al-Andalus and Cordoba, during the period of the 12th century, in the era of Almohad state which adopted the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and the Ash'ari doctrine, alongside the Sufi Illuminationist approach. This stagnated society and the cultural aspects across the Maghreb region, resulting in a decline in all aspects, together with the falling of the Islamic Caliphate, culture and thought. Here, Ibn Rushd addressed reality positively via a critical approach founded upon evidence, logic, and reason. He rejected imitation and the manipulation of religion and knowledge, and thinking for gaining positions or pleasing rulers. Instead, he adopted the path of a wise philosopher and scholar, seeking change and reform through highlighting various concepts such as the concept of diligence. He advocated for diligence in Sharia, societal issues, and religious rulings, regarding the general objective of Sharia, which is relevance in all times and places.

Ibn Rushd called for diligence, rejecting many ideas that restricted Muslim individuals in his era, causing them regression instead of being the creators of civilization and progress. His approach to diligence is founded upon reason and rationality, as cited in his book "The Distinguished Jurist's Primer". This book, despite being a jurisprudential book, Ibn Rushd took a different path in by presenting various opinions and rulings on a single issue, then providing the appropriate answer according to evidence and reason. Thus, he reviewed the issue and paved the way to diligence, to ensure its relevance to the time and place. He advocated for diligence through addressing issues of consensus and disagreement, by considering their evidences to verify their authenticity. His approach to diligence aimed at intercepting imitation and adherence, and promoting the pursuit of knowledge through diligence… (Ibn Rushd, 2009, p. 10).

Ibn Rushd believed in the role of diligence in constructing a thought, philosophical and cultural integrated framework, both in religious and rational sciences. For him, it is a secure pathway towards the nation's cultural rise. His rational evidential approach based on diligence had a great impact on Islamic and Western worlds.

These points advocated by Ibn Rushd are pillars of his philosophy. They highlighted his profound genius, and made him a source for many scholars and thinkers to draw from his thoughts and adopt his methodology of research and study.

3. The Presence of Reason in Ibn Rushd's Philosophy

A thorough study of Ibn Rushd's philosophy shows that it is a distinctly rational philosophy due to the presence of reason in various philosophical issues he addressed. Reason, or wisdom, is a pathway to truth, goodness, and virtue due to its faculties which enable humans to understand his behavior's path and actions' motives. According to Ibn Rushd, reason is the essence of ethical value. It assists to recognize good and evil, distinguish benefit from harm, and virtue from vice. Humans have the ability to recognize virtues and issue judges on the goodness of an action. This ability is called reason as the essence of the ethical action. Therefore, Ibn Rushd follows Aristotle in categorizing virtues, emphasizing that there are three types: theoretical virtue, practical virtue, and moral virtue, with his addition of the intellectual virtue based on reason as the most important. He states:

> *It has also become evident that the rational soul consists of two parts, practical and theoretical. Therefore, the perfections are, similarly, categorized into those attributed to the practical virtues and others to the theoretical ones. Since the appetitive soul, which is one of the human soul's faculties and anti-contemplation force, its condition is also linked to the rational faculty. Therefore, human perfections are three: theoretical virtues, practical virtues, ethical virtues, and intellectual virtues related to reason.* (Ibn Rushd, 1998, p. 153)

Thus, Ibn Rushd's rationality in the field of ethics manifests itself in giving great emphasis to reason, making it a referential faculty to judge ethical actions. Furthermore, the rational soul has a superiority and capacity that makes it surpass other souls because it relies on reason and evidence. He also highlighted the ethical virtue and its role in constructing the ethical framework as the source of correct thinking, rectitude, achieving happiness, and establishing justice. It is worth mentioning that Ibn Rushd's assertion on the role of reason as a foundation for embodying ethics does not deny religion (Sharia), but rather confirms that it is the origin of virtues and various values, while reason distinguishes, examines, analyzes, compares, and judges to embody ethics in entirety and universally in life. He views that sovereignty is for the rational and not the sensible. Also, Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, had a great impact on Ibn Rushd's ethical philosophy founded upon reason, a philosophy connected to high rational theoretical landmarks that elevate man to the level of perfection. Ibn Rushd stated about virtue: "Giving the enemy is virtue, whereas giving to a friend is not a virtue" (Al-Aqqad, 1992, pp. 19-20).

Regarding politics, Ibn Rushd highlighted the role of reason in establishing the political framework. Though, he was strongly influenced by the first Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and even Al-Farabi, he analyzed and

clarified the political problem. In his political philosophy, he addressed many issues and topics, such as the citizen's issue in the state, the role of woman in the political process, ruler and governed relationship, and the legitimate establishment of the political practice. Genuinely, he attempted to establish an integrated political approach alongside with the Islamic culture from one side and benefiting from the Greek heritage on the other side.

A careful contemplation of Ibn Rushd's political philosophy discovers that it was grounded upon reason and its role in the political practice by highlighting the role of the philosophers, sages, and scientists who possess wisdom and sound reasoning. Additionally, he defended the political model that is subject to the rational outputs, i.e., political action based on rational pillars.

In many of his political works, Ibn Rushd discussed the necessity of establishing a virtuous city where individuals live in harmony and concord according to absolute principles originating from religious basics and rational guidelines. A city where there is no place for injustice and tyranny, but rather justice, solidarity, and ideal ethical life. It is because humans have the faculty of reason that enable them encounter this challenge via the perfection of reason above anything else. Hence, he saw the perfection of human reason is of great importance because of its relation to religious laws and wisdom. Here, he stated: "Religious laws teach practical virtues, and wisdom teaches theoretical virtues" (Fakhoury, 1960, p. 463).

Hence, Ibn Rushd clearly confirmed the role of philosophy, i.e., reason, in establishing political practice through a set of laws that manage individuals' in their city.

Ibn Rushd discussed civic governance, asserting the necessity of founding the city upon justice and knowledge. Justice originates from Islamic Sharia principles, and knowledge is related to the activity of reason, that is, the authority of rational law. Additionally, justice, as high ethical virtue, relates to this rational knowledge. Therefore, justice is the fruit of knowledge, while injustice results from ignorance. Here, it comes obvious the influence of Socrates in Ibn Rushd's political philosophy.

Ibn Rushd stressed virtue founded upon reason as the first step to build the virtuous and righteous citizen. From this, the virtuous city comes into being, if it is built upon justice, reason, and individuals recognize their limits and capabilities, and act according to their qualifications without exceeding their physical and mental abilities. As for Ibn Rushd's discussion of authority and governance regimes, he resolutely defended the rule of the wise philosopher, who has sound

reasoning in understanding phenomena and rules wisely and reasonably, establishing justice, goodness, and truth. Thus, the rule of reason prevails.

Often, Ibn Rushd compared the situation of Plato and Aristotle with the existence of sophists who sought to extinguish the light of reason and philosophy, undermining rational human spirit. He contrasted it with the situation in his time, where many claim knowledge and thought, yet they are enemies of knowledge, philosophy, and reason. Their thinking is illuminationist, their approach is suffi and static. They rejected renewal and creativity, and preferred what is ugly and disparaged what is beautiful (Ibn Rushd, 1998, p. 59).

In summary of Ibn Rushd's philosophical-political thought, we find that his political theory is related to his ethical theory. Both of them revolve around a fundamental pillar, upon which ethical value and political practice rely, that is reason.

Concerning knowledge, Ibn Rushd sees that humans are driven by passion and desire to get to truth and attain knowledge through posing questions, leading to inquiry, contemplation, and thinking. Here, reason is a key tool in acquiring knowledge. Humans, also, inherently seek knowledge because of reason as a distinguishing feature, which continuously urge them towards achieving truth and certainty. Furthermore, Allah the almighty created humans to contemplate and think about the surrounding phenomena to reveal their governing laws. The most crucial knowledge that humans must achieve is the knowledge of their Creator, Allah the almighty, through reason. He stated, "The Sharia promotes knowledge of Allah and His creatures through reason" (Ibn Rushd, 1997, pp. 25-26).

Knowledge in Islamic sciences is also attained through reason by asserting in many of his writings that religious law necessitates reason to achieve its higher purposes in creation and existence. Therefore, in religious issues, he emphasizes the role of argumentation, evidence, and rational thinking, beyond imitation. His jurisprudential innovations surpassed expectations because of his call to diligence and the adoption of a rational approach in research, analysis, and verification by using reason and interpretation to reveal hidden truths of arising issues. As for empirical sciences like Astronomy, Medicine, and Physics, he was open-minded, considering these empirical sciences require experimentation and sensory experience, but always in line with reason. Investigation, experimentation, understanding, and analysis of experiments and facts cannot occur without utilizing reason, which is the primary source of knowledge.

Accordingly, Ibn Rushd emphasized reason, wisdom, and philosophy in explaining the relationship between reason and revelation. He viewed that human affairs cannot be rectified except through an enlightened reason and philosophy

that understands religion and enhances its embodiment, making true religious devotion a defender of the strong relationship between wisdom and religious law, as we mentioned before.

Hence, Ibn Rushd's rationality manifests in several fields of knowledge: ethics, politics, epistemology, alongside religious law and other philosophical subjects, in which reason was present powerfully as a foundation, guide, and organizer, yet they cannot all be addressed here. Here, it is confirmed to us that Ibn Rushd's philosophy is distinctly rationalistic, and he is indeed a philosopher of reason par excellence.

4. Ibn Rushd's Rationalism Characteristics

Ibn Rushd's rationalistic philosophy is characterized by:

4.1. GENUINE RATIONALISM

Ibn Rushd studied philosophy proficiently across its various fields and areas of study. He deeply studied Greek philosophy, and explained numerous Greek philosophical sources in ethics, education, politics... etc. Yet, he was not merely a transmitter; rather he innovated in his interpretation, adding new ideas and criticizing many Greek philosophical viewpoints. He sought to imbue his philosophy with Arab-Islamic cultural perspectives. Thus, he developed another philosophical framework representing a distinct rationality. According to this, many scholars defend Ibn Rushd's rationalistic philosophy, believing that he was a productive and creative thinker who surpassed Greek philosophy with his own creative ideas to the extent that many logic thinkers and renaissance and contemporary philosophers forgot about Plato and Aristotle, and relied upon Ibn Rushd's philosophy, particularly in Italy. The emergence of Latin Averroism is good evidence of Ibn Rushd's genius and his authentic rationalistic philosophy. Ernest Renan mentioned in his famous book "Averroès and Averroïsme", that Ibn Rushd had Jewish and Christian disciples. They were greatly influenced by his ideas, and they adopted his philosophy as a basis for their philosophical frameworks. Among them, the Jewish Ben Daoued, who referred to Ibn Rushd as embodying "the spirit of Aristotle and his reason" (Renan, 1957, p. 195).

4.2. HARMONIOUS RATIONALISM WITH RELIGION:

The rationalism in Ibn Rushd's philosophy elevated the status of reason, giving it a significant and distinguished place as a human faculty capable of attaining truth. He viewed reason as a necessary, important, and effective tool. It is the basis of all knowledge. Therefore, he defended reason and considered it as the start of his philosophical inquiry, meanwhile criticizing opinions that rejected

reason and attempted to undermine the value of humans, like those from Sufism, Illuminationist thought, and static philosophies grounded upon imitation and adherence in serve of personal interests or material benefits. However, Ibn Rushd defended reason with evidence and truth, highlighting the role of reason, evidence, logic and argumentation in constructing the philosophical framework. Additionally, his rationalism does deny other concepts such as religion, which he defended against adversaries, considering Sharia as the constitution of Allah for His servants, asserting its necessity for salvation in both worldly and spiritual realms. As Chief Judge, he ruled using Sharia of Allah and His provisions, emphasizing that reason and religion do not conflict but rather harmonize alongside each other, serving truth, goodness, and virtue. He asserted the strong correlation between reason and revelation. He stated: "Wisdom is the companion of Sharia, despite the enmity, hatred, and disputes between them; they are inherently affectionate in essence and instinct" (Ibn Rushd, 1997, p. 18).

4.3. RATIONALISM ALIGNS WITH PHILOSOPHY

A careful contemplation of Ibn Rushd's rationalism discovers that he is a rationalist philosopher who didn't consider reason merely as the foundation of knowledge in one field but as the starting point for all truths across various fields of knowledge. He elevated the status of reason, considering it the source of all knowledge and creativity. Therefore, he gave emphasis to logic, reasoning, and rational thought, and urged for their consideration at every stage of intellectual development. His rationalism did not imitate theologians or some scholars of his time who viewed reason as a structure devoid of spirit, like the Mu'tazilites and Kharijites… etc., but rather aligned with philosophical spirit. He believed undoubtedly that reason could attain knowledge and achieve certainty, relying solely on rational evidence. He rejected theoretical metaphysical argumentation that exclude reason and depend on other concepts such as intuition, hearing, sight, and other Illuminationist concepts where contradictions and ambiguity are apparent. These criticisms were addressed by Ibn Rushd. Here, it can be emphasized that Ibn Rushd's rationalism was founded on philosophical understanding founded upon rational principles relying on evidence, logical reasoning, and logical judgment. Therefore, many sources affirm that Ibn Rushd's fame is mainly attributed to his interest and pursuit of philosophy that drew attention to his brilliant and crafty ideas (Buluz, 2012, p. 50).

Hence, it can be said that Ibn Rushd's rationalism aligns with philosophy because he endeavoured to renew philosophical thought in the Maghreb region and Andalusia by making the Islamic intellect go back to its authentic rationalism,

which is the source of its strength and the distinctive feature of its progress, deeply embedded in his religion.

4.4. RATIONALISM INTERACTED WITH ITS CONTEXT

By observing the rationalism pioneered by Ibn Rushd we find that it interacted positively with its context. Ibn Rushd lived during a time of prevailing problems, complex societal conditions, intellectual confusion, and cultural disappearance. Strange ideas contrary to Islamic society prevailed, conflicting with the spirit of the Islamic religion, which calls for reason, diligence, knowledge, and work, rejects blind imitation, and advocates for all noble ethical principles that elevate both the individual and society. Therefore, it was imperative on a proficient philosopher like Ibn Rushd to act in defense of his religion, philosophy, and philosophical convictions, aiming for intellectual reform and change in a society where heresies, superstitions, and illusions were misleading minds. Hence, Ibn Rushd strived, through his writings, thoughts, and numerous debates, to disseminate his philosophical thought based on reason and rationalism. He made efforts to establish a new culture, meaning a new thought grounded on intellectual creativity, philosophical insight, and logical proof, making individuals think rationally, far from desires, myths, and superstitions. He sought to construct an integrated philosophical framework founded on reason and the outputs of intellectual and philosophical thinking. This is asserted by Salvador Gómez, who stated:

> *Ibn Rushd is not the rational atheist as Renan claimed, nor is he the Aristotelian pagan who deprived us of the personal eternity of the human soul, but rather, he is an authentic Muslim who strived to delve into the meanings of Quranic revelation to reassure his fellow believers in the dilemmas that reason or the scholars of other religions might pose.* (the Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs, June 10-19, 1976, p. 98)

5. The Impact of Ibn Rushd's Rational Philosophy on European Philosophical Thought

A deep study of Ibn Rushd's rational philosophy discovers the truth that he had a great impact on Islamic philosophy because of his quantitative and qualitative philosophical innovations. He managed to construct an integrated philosophical framework based upon reason and rationalism, making him a philosophical reference in the Arab and Islamic countries. He evidently impacted Ibn Khaldun in Tunisia, Malek Bennabi in Algeria, Mohamed Abed Al-Jabiri in Morocco, and many others. Ibn Rushd's philosophy did not restrict itself locally oriented but expanded and spread globally. With his widespread philosophy, he

influenced European philosophical thought. The philosopher Michael Scot was the first to introduce Ibn Rushd's philosophy to Europe in 1230 CE in Toledo, thus receiving the title of the founder of "Averroism" in Europe as an enlightened philosophy. His influence in Europe was prominent, incomparable by any other philosopher (Dhannoon Taha, 2004, p. 01).

Ibn Rushd had a major impact in Europe, especially on Italian logical philosophers where they adopted his method of logical reasoning, on which they constructed their philosophical framework, such as Marcus Antonius Zimara who was influenced by Ibn Rushd's logical ideas based on evidence and attempted to explain them to utilize in his Epistemological theory. In addition to the researches of Baldwinus, whose studies followed Ibn Rushd's logical ideas and defended them, particular those related to the proof methodology in logic. In his part, Fortunatus Carlius explained the Second Analytics (The Proof) of Aristotle, being influenced by Ibn Rushd (Al-Khudairi, 1983, p. 15).

Thomas Aquinas and other Christian and Jewish medieval philosophers were also influenced by Ibn Rushd's philosophy. The greatest philosophers and theologians especially those of the modern Renaissance attributed themselves to Ibn Rushd, and prided themselves on it. They were called "Latin Averroists". Many European institutes and universities adopted Ibn Rushd's rational philosophy leading to the emergence of a new philosophical school called "Averroist School", from which Descartes and Spinoza derived their opinions, particularly the relationship between philosophy and religion (Buluz, 2012, p. 73).

Ibn Rushd became an icon of his time, both domestically and internationally. His impact on European philosophy during the Renaissance and the modern era was crucial. Many modern philosophers such as Descartes and Kant were influenced by his distinctive rational philosophy, which exceeded philosophical inquiry to become a method for seeking truth in various fields of knowledge. Here, we have presented some examples and ideas as illustrations but not limited to, highlighting the impact of Ibn Rushd's rational philosophy on European philosophical thought.

Conclusion

Finally, we conclude that Ibn Rushd was indeed a proficient philosopher worthy of study because in spite of the challenging circumstances and hardships, he managed to construct an integrated philosophical project with its pillars, dimensions, and goals founded upon reason, which made it the ground of every truth and the starting point of every research experience seeking certainty. Reason was prominently present in his creative philosophy. His rationalism was

characterized by depth and authenticity because he was a distinct rational philosopher. He had a major impact on the thinking of many philosophers in Europe; therefore, it is crucial to study and understand his rational philosophy and benefit from it to establish a new philosophical project that reinstates humanity's lost rationality, which is on the verge of collapse in our world today.

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An Understanding of Sartre's Conception of The Absolute Freedom

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Abstract

According to Sartre, humans are ontologically distinctive beings not because of any predetermined essence, but because of their absolute freedom. His ontological inquiry of being leads him to claim that human existence precedes his essence. Sartre argues that this unique existence grants humans absolute freedom. For Sartre, the proper knowledge of "being" can be achieved through an analysis of two fundamental types of being i.e., "being-for-itself", and "being-in-itself". According to Sartre, "being-in-itself" is the stuff of the world. It is essentially objecthood. Whereas, "being-for-itself" is a conscious being who can change himself through his freedom. "Being-for-itself" is fundamentally a human self that always finds itself in "facticity" or given situations. For Sartre, the most important aspect of the human self is his act of negation of facticity. This means that a human constantly negates his given situation through "his absolute freedom and constantly re-interpret or re-define it. The question that arises here is how a human can truly be considered a "free being" in the absolute sense, given that he always finds himself in a specific social situation and physical circumstances that restrict his actions and undermine his freedom. This study aims to focus on this question. It explores Sartre's argument that human freedom cannot be undermined by specific social and physical situations or "facticity". This study examines how Sartre relates the human act of negating facticity with his ontological structure and thus constructs an ontological ground for absolute freedom.

Keywords: *being-for-itself, being-in-itself, Facticity, negation, "ontological structure of world-man relation".*

Introduction

"How is a human being ontologically distinctive being" is the main question that Sartre probes. Traditionally, it has been assumed that man is an ontologically distinctive being because of his rational soul which is assumed to exist prior to his existence. However, Sartre disagrees with this view. According to him, man is an ontologically distinctive being not because of any supposed prior essence, but due to his absolute freedom. For Sartre, "freedom" is a phenomenon of the existential

structure of a human being. It is a fundamental part of human existence. His ontological inquiry of being leads him to say that man's existence precedes his essence. This unique type of existence makes humans absolutely free. One of the most important aspects of Sartre's ontological inquiry is not only comprehending the "being" but also an understanding of the relation between "being" and "nothingness". Sartre believes that through an understanding of "being" and "nothingness" we can better understand the existential structure of "being" and thus can apprehend the ontological status of human beings. For Sartre, the proper knowledge of "being" can be achieved through an analysis of two fundamental types of being i.e., "being-for-itself", and "being-in-itself" as Reynold explains (Reynolds, 2006, p. 52). According to Sartre, "being-in-itself" is the stuff of the world which cannot change itself. Whereas "being-for-itself" is a conscious being that can change itself through freedom. Humans are fundamentally "being-for-itself". Humans always find themselves in "facticity" or given situations. For Sartre, the most important aspect of a human is his ability to negate facticity. This means that a human constantly negates his given situation through his absolute freedom.

The question that arises here is how a human can be considered a "free being" in the absolute sense, given that he always finds himself in a specific social situation and physical circumstances that restrict his actions and undermine his freedom. This study aims to focus on this question. In the first section of this study, we investigate how Sartre argues that human freedom cannot be undermined by specific social and physical situations or "facticity". Here we see how Sartre derives absolute freedom from the ontological structure of human existence. In the second section of this study, we examine in what way Sartre's notion of absolute freedom contains some ambiguities. We assess these ambiguities and conclude that Sartre's primary focus is not on the constraints that limit human freedom, but rather on deciphering the ontological structure of man, which causes individuals to bear sole responsibility for giving meaning and interpreting the world and themselves. In this sense man is free.

1. The Priority of Existence over Essence and Human Freedom

The concept of priority of essence over existence implies that existence must adhere to a specific plan or purpose. Sartre compares the case of the existence of humans with the concrete existence of a pen and a triangle. He agrees that a triangle has an essence that is prior to its construction. A triangle has a form that precedes its existence. One draws a triangle with a prior idea of a plane figure having three sides and three angles. In the same way, a pen is made with a prior

idea that it will potentially be able to perform the function of writing. That is its essential function. However, Sartre does not agree with the idea that there is an essence that is prior to human existence (Reynolds, 2006, pp. 53-54). He argues that the essence of a human can only be considered prior to his existence if his existence is either a result of a prior plan made by a "mind" or if his existence originated from a permanent substance. Alternatively, human essence can also be prior to his existence if existence is merely a manifestation of a permanent reality. However, Sartre's position is that none of the aforementioned cases can be established. He agrees that there may be things or objects whose forms or essence may be prior to their existence but as far as human existence is concerned it cannot fall into such kind of essentialism. Human existence is prior to essence. We first exist and then are defined or interpreted. Rational soul or thinking substance as the essence of men is a mistaken idea for Sartre.

Criticizing Descartes' thinking substance, Sartre thoroughly discusses the notion of consciousness and believes that it is misunderstood by Descartes. According to him, Descartes takes for granted that consciousness has a single mode, which is the consciousness of "I think". It ultimately endorses a predefined or transcendental separated self. Consequently, Descartes assumes that essence precedes human existence. What Sartre argues is that consciousness of self cannot establish the existence of a permanent self which is prior to existence. He contends that consciousness has two fundamentally different modes which cannot be reconciled. For him, consciousness may be "pre-reflective" and "reflective". Pre-reflective consciousness is the original and primary mode of consciousness. That is consciousness of existence or more properly consciousness of "am-ness". In this state, we directly experience the world without the concept of soul or ego. This occurs when we do not consider our past experiences or for-granted notions. However, in the reflective mode of consciousness, we reflect on our past experiences, which leads us to develop a sense of "self". Here the concept of soul or ego is the requirement for reflection of past experiences. Hence according to Sartre, the self is not an ontologically separate substance, but rather a product of cognition or recollection of memory (Reynolds, 2006, pp. 54-55). We can say that "self" is simply a requirement for unity of experience. Sartre firmly believes that consciousness of existence is an original or prior mode of consciousness. This means that there is no need to reconcile "pre-reflective" and "reflective" modes of consciousness. Sartre's critique of Cartesian cogito leads him to assert that "existence precedes essence". He concludes that there is no predefined-permanent self. There is no prior plan or essential rules that human has to follow. Humans are absolutely free.

1.1 CORRELATION BETWEEN HUMAN EXISTENCE AND FREEDOM

The idea of the priority of existence over essence leads Sartre to conclude that there is neither an absolute being nor absolute moral law that exists as an authority over humans. Man is solely free to pursue whatever essence he desires as Reynolds explains Sartre's position (Reynolds, 2006, p. 56). For Sartre, essence is simply a concept that is created and chosen by a human, rather than an external principle that must be followed. In his book, *Being and Nothingness* Sartre explains that the essence of a thing is always set a limit. This means that essence defines things, which in turn, determines what they can and cannot be. However, according to Sartre, since there is no prior essence that defines "human reality", human beings are absolutely free and unbounded. There is no way to set a limit for a human. In other words, man is the only being that has no predetermined essence. For Sartre, man is freedom and freedom is man in a sense for Sartre (Sartre, 1956, pp. 24-25).

The question that arises here is how a human can be a "free being" in the absolute sense. This is because a human always finds himself in specific social situations and physical circumstances that restrict his action and hence undermines his freedom. Sartre responds to the question by stating that even though we are born in specific social and physical situations or "facticity"[1], it cannot undermine our freedom for two reasons. First is that without restrictions in life, we cannot be free. Freedom is a rebellion against these restrictions. We cannot have freedom without context. Helstrom better explains it. According to him, Sartre's notion of freedom presupposes that freedom can only be possible through its facticity. Sartre's literary work claims that man is always subject to the constraints imposed upon him by his "facticity". Despite this, it does not affect his ability to make free choices. For instance, however, war is a compulsion that restricts our freedom, it simultaneously provides a ground for our freedom. Without compulsion, there will be no possibility of freedom. Our response to war is entirely based on our own choices, and we cannot excuse to take responsibility for those choices. What Sartre has been of the view in his literary works is that "facticity" is the context in which a human chooses his options (Helstrom, 1972, p. 111). The second reason is that there are always choices available for us that we may have against restriction, even if they are just on a level of intention or belief. For example, as Sartre explains, even when someone is being tortured, he still has options. He can be completely immersed in his pain or he can ignore it by looking into the eyes of the persecutor. In this case, physical pain is there but he is free to respond to this pain. In

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[1] "Facticity" is defined as our social situation and physical circumstances (2006, p. 56)

elaborating on Sartre's position, Landau explains that while certain aspects of human beings may not be free, humans are still free to choose their fundamental projects in life and to give meaning to situations in which they find themselves. For instance, a person having no legs is not free to walk. However, Sartre argues, he is free to give meaning to his disability. This disability is not a limit in the absolute sense. There will still be choices for him and he will be responsible for choosing them (Landau, 2012, p. 2). We can say that in a sense freedom is always there in human existence. Sartre believes that freedom is constitutive of human existence (Reynolds, 2006, p. 56). Freedom primarily differentiates between a human existence and the existence of other beings. Freedom is man and man is freedom. In Sartre's words, "Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being free" (Sartre, 1956, p. 25).

In order to explain the constitutive role of freedom, Sartre explicates that human existence is not simply the sum of his facts of life. It is a continuous resistance against facts of life or "facticity". A human being resists the facts of life through his freedom. A human is not what his circumstances or history are. A human being is "freedom" that negates his circumstances or history (Reynolds, 2006, p. 56). In short, for Sartre human existence has two different but inseparable aspects. One is "facticity" or facts of life. Another is freedom or revolt against "facticity". He explicates the ontology of human existence in connection with these inseparable aspects.

1.2 ONTOLOGY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Sartre probes human ontology through phenomenological analysis[2] of the nature of being. Sartre explains human ontology by differentiating two fundamental types of being i.e., being-in-itself (the en soi) and the being-for-itself (the pour soi). According to Sartre, "being-in-itself" is not a conscious being. It is pure object-hood that is found around us. It is the stuff of the world. We can properly define or interpret it as it cannot change itself. While "being-for-self" is a conscious being that is characterized by self-awareness and choices. This is fundamentally an individual human being who can change itself through his freedom. He constantly redefines himself. He never completes as he constantly shapes his life and his choices. "Being-for-itself" has no prior essence. Man exists first and defines himself afterwards. In this sense, 'being-for-itself is not an object

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[2] In phenomenological analysis we see what exists in our immediate experience. Sartre explores what our consciousness entails about our being. In other words, Sartre's ontology of human existence deals with the question of how we are conscious about our being in our immediate experience.

but a subject as Anthony explains (Asekhauno, 2017, p. 342). For Sartre, as a conscious being the most important aspect of a human being is his act of negation. A human constantly negates his "facticity" or situation where he finds himself. He denies his past, which was constituted by facticity, and sets future goals through his free-thinking constantly. In this way, humans fundamentally transcend facticity and deny their past situation. Humans set their meaning of facts or try to transcend from them (Reynolds, 2006, p. 58).

1.3 FREEDOM, NEGATION AND NOTHINGNESS

Sartre argues that our ontological structure of consciousness, which functions through the negation of facticity, reveals our freedom. According to Sartre, negation is not just a quality of judgment that appears as a result of an assessment of a situation. Instead, negation is originated in "nothingness" (Sartre, 1956, p. 6). In other words, "nothingness" is not a result of negation; rather, negation is by virtue of "nothingness". One can simply presume nothingness as "not-ness". But for Sartre, "nothingness" is not merely "not-ness". It is part of being. "Nothingness" is the "hole" of being (Sartre, 1956, p. 76). The Being and nothingness both have an ontological status for Sartre. The problem that arises here is how "nothingness" has an ontological status. Sartre addresses this question by an inquiry of tripartite themes of negation. These are (i) questioning (ii) absence (iii) destruction (Reynolds, 2006, p. 60). Through this inquiry, Sartre shows how "nothingness" as a source of negation is related to the freedom that is, in fact, a part of being of man.

Questioning as 1st theme of Negation

For Sartre, "questioning" is one of the most fundamental aspects of man. Sartre argues that man raises the question not because they are trying to discover the ultimate truth, but because of the way human consciousness is structured. This ontological structure allows humans to negate givenness and facticity. We can say that when Descartes doubted everything, he was questioning everything as Reynolds explains (Reynolds, 2006, p. 62). For Sartre, however, there is no universal essence of human, human ability of negation describes him. His "questioning" is his negation of facticity and this negation reveals that there is "nothing at all". Questioning reveals "nothing" or "non-being" because there is always an objective possibility of replying a question in the negative. In other words, questions do not cease the possibility of "No". Sartre argues that if someone asks "Is the Statue of Liberty elegant?" some may say "Yes", but it is not

the only possible answer to this question. Others may answer with "No", it is not elegant".

Moreover, a question may involve "negation" in another way. When a genuine question is asked, we can say that there is a state of not-knowing because if it is known, it cannot be asked. In other words, questions presuppose indetermination. If one has absolute certainty about something, there will be no room for a genuine question about this thing. Interestingly, questions that have positive answers involve a negation. Every "positive" answer has its negative aspect that sets a limit to the world. For example, if we are sure that it is 8 o'clock, then it cannot be any other time except 8 o'clock; it is not 9 o'clock. This is also a negation or non-being. What Sartre meant by the human act of questioning is that a question may be formulated in interrogative judgment but it is not itself a judgment. "Questioning" is a pre-judicative attitude that is rooted in the "nothingness" (Sartre, 1956, p. 7). Sartre concludes that we are encompassed by "nothingness". We all are covered by "nothingness" (Reynolds, 2006, p. 62). We can say that the act of "questioning" is the manifestation of "nothingness". Thus, Sartre argues that there is a "gape" or "hole" in the totality of being, which provides an ontological ground for negation and allows humans to negate things and ideas. Nothingness is part of the ontological structure of the "human-world" relation as Reynolds explains (Reynolds, 2006, p. 62).

According to Sartre, however, "nothingness" is a part of "being", it is not reducible to "being". There is a definite ontological status of "nothingness" because it exists as a category in itself. "Nothingness" is not because of our capacity to negate something, capacity to negate is possible because "nothingness" exists as an ontological category. "Nothingness" is not merely a result of our reflection of the non-existence of something. There is a "gape" or "hole" of being because of which we negate something. "Nothingness" is prior to our reflection because of which we negate.

Destruction as 2nd theme of negation

For Sartre, "destruction" is not also known through merely reflective judgments like "questioning". It is also pre-judicative or pre-reflective. Sartre believes that men introduce "destruction", but it is not through his act of judgment or reflection of the situation, as reflection can only entail "change", which is not the same as destruction. Change is just a re-arranging of things, whereas "destruction" is more than just a redistribution or rearrangement. For instance, a storm only redistributes things. There is no less after the storm than before as Sartre says (Sartre, 1956, p. 8). Thus theoretically, "destruction" is a human thing

that is produced by his consciousness (Sartre, 1956, p. 9). It is also rooted in "nothingness". "Nothingness" is an ontological part of men-world relation because of which humans have a pre-reflective idea of the fragility of the world and comprehend "destruction". In other words, a man does not say that as some objects are disassociated, so there is destruction. Rather, he says that some objects are disassociated because the world is fragile. He is free to negate the robustness of the world.

Absence as the third Theme of Negation

Is the absence of something known through reflective judgment or known through a pre-judicative way? According to Sartre, we find "absence" through pre-reflection, as reflective judgments can only deal with things that are located somewhere. Whereas, "absence" is not something that is located at a specific place. For Sartre, "absence" is constructed by consciousness. He argues that when someone anticipates the presence of something somewhere and discovers that it is not there, then "absence" pervades everywhere. Here Sartre uses an example to explain that when his friend is absent from the café, the "absence" is no longer just related to the precise place of the café; it infuses the whole cafe. If some other persons come into the café, he nihilates them as he does not see who they are rather he just sees they are not his friends (Reynolds, 2006, p. 64). In Sartre's perspective, the "absence" of his friend is the non-being of his friend that encompasses the whole café. That is why Sartre considers the "absence" to be more than just a psychological state. For Sartre "absence" is because of the ontological category of "nothingness". "Nothingness" allows us to take "absence" everywhere. In this connection, our being or consciousness is free to transcend the realm of being (the world as there). That is why "absence" is the third theme of negation.

All three above manifestations of negation imply that humans are free. Human consciousness is not bound to accept reality as such, as human consciousness is separated from the realm of things in a sense as Reynolds explains (Reynolds, 2006, p. 65). Consciousness that functions through negation is grounded in 'nothingness' and provides an ontological ground for human concrete freedom. In other words, negation is not just a reflective act. It is made possible by "nothingness or non-being". Our act of negation upon which our absolute freedom stands is an ontological part of our being. In this way, we are not free because we make choices, as choices are a matter of conditions. Rather, we make choices because we are inherently free. Choices are because of our freedom; freedom is

not because of our choices. This is why, Sartre argues that man as "being-for-itself" is absolutely free (Sartre, 1956, p. xviii).

According to Sartre, if man is not absolutely free, he will be bound to see reality in a specific way. Whereas, man can perceive reality in his unique way (Reynolds, 2006, p. 66). He explains his point by stating that human freedom is absolute in the sense that no limit to freedom is absolute. For example, a cliff may be seen as a barrier or a limit to freedom if we want to displace it. But it is not a limit rather it is valuable if we want to see the countryside from its top. What Sartre explains is that the cliff in itself is neither a barrier nor a facilitator. It is our freedom that allows us to make it into whatever we want it to be. One can think that climbing the cliff is difficult, but with practice, he can gain expertise and the same cliff becomes easier to climb. There is no absolute limit in the way of humans (Sartre, 1956, p. 482).

2. The Assessment of Some Ambiguities in Sartre's Notion of Absolute Freedom

Sartre's notion of freedom carries some ambiguity. On the one hand, he declares that humans are absolutely free, which suggests that humans do not need freedom since they are already free. On the other hand, in his concept of "facticity," Sartre also talks about how humans always try to escape "facticity". So, they are not absolutely free or they are un-free in a sense. In other words, however, Sartre argues that humans are absolutely free, he also maintains that "facticity" imposes limitations on human choices. This apparent ambiguity can be resolved by understanding that Sartre does not define human absolute freedom by analyzing the limits of freedom. We have seen that Sartre does not view the limit of freedom as an absolute limit. For him, limitations are the necessary context of freedom which gives meaning to freedom. "Facticity" is the givenness of humans. however, it is not an absolute limit. For Sartre, freedom should be explained by the fact that human consciousness is absolutely free; no essence can determine human consciousness. We have seen that even though humans find themselves in facticity, their absolute free consciousness can negate facticity. Human consciousness is not bound to take facticity as a limit.

We have seen how as a "being-for-itself" human consciousness has no limit in its way. Halstrom focuses on this issue. He explains that Sartre's thought involves two aspects of human existence. First is our "facticity" which imposes limitations on us by the environment where we find ourselves. The second is our transcendence or consciousness to negate facticity. In one we are not absolutely free and, in another way, we are absolutely free (Helstrom, 1972, p. 117).

According to Halstrom, however, human freedom is finite because our choices are determined by "facticity", this does not mean that we are completely unfree in a sense, facticity cannot dictate which of the available choices are made. We can still be free to choose the option from the available options. Moreover, our consciousness is not bound to accept "facticity" as such. Man can define facticity for himself and can shape his own freedom (Helstrom, 1972, p. 118). We have seen how Sartre argues that humans have the ability to interpret reality in various ways. They are not bound to accept reality as it is. According to Sartre, this grants humans absolute freedom. For instance, Sartre explains that a man without legs obviously cannot walk, which limits his freedom, but he is absolutely free to cope with this disability and give it meaning. This disability is not an absolute barrier to his project of life. But here it should be noted that the project of life is also determined by facticity. Paradoxically, we are free but exercising freedom is defined by facticity. In other words, we are absolutely free to give meaning but are not absolutely free to act. Thus, absolute freedom is empty as Halstrom believed (Helstrom, 1972, p. 118).

Sartre's concept of human freedom can be interpreted as absolute in another sense. It can be said that since Sartre does not derive human freedom from any foundation, it is absolute. Landau focuses on this issue. He explains that Sartre's notion of freedom rests upon the idea of the priority of human existence over any essence. Therefore, it has no foundation (Landau, 2012, pp. 1-2). We have seen that the idea of the priority of human existence over any for-granted essence leads Sartre to argue that man is freedom himself. Thus, in Sartre's thought, freedom cannot be based on any external foundation. According to Landau, Sartre has been of the view that humans choose a value without any external justification. We can say that humans have no objective justification for their choice of value. Instead, they only emphasize their consent. In other words, humans cannot objectively determine "what to choose" as there is no objective justification for their choice. There is only a subjective criterion. Moreover, because the choice of value is entirely subjective, humans are absolutely responsible for their choice. Thus, it leads Sartre to say that humans are absolutely free as he cannot shift his responsibility for their choices to others. Sartre believes that this absolute freedom is a defining characteristic of human beings.

Not having a criterion to objectively justify our choices leads to serious moral implications according to some critics of Sartre. Sartre believes that if one does not take responsibility for his act and shift responsibility for his act to others, he would be acting immorally. However, the question that arises is whether taking responsibility of own actions is enough. In other words, is someone only morally

accountable for not taking responsibility for his action or is he also accountable for the choice that he makes? What someone has done is always relevant to moral accountability. Detmer focuses on this issue. Detmer argues that accountability or responsibility would be meaningless if we did not determine whether a choice is good or bad. According to Detmer, whether a choice is good or bad can only be determined by objective value. He explains that when Sartre blames Nazis, he presumes objective value and believes that the Nazis are responsible for their worst choice (Detmer, 1988, pp. 170-172). However, we see that Sartre also declares that our choices are absurd, as there is no reason that can justify choices as either right or wrong. If choices are absurd, how can responsibility be meaningful? This shows how Sartre's conception of freedom involves serious moral implications.

To explore the moral implications of Sartre's conception of freedom, Detmer identifies an ambiguity. On the one hand, Sartre believes that freedom is the highest value because it allows humans to make their own values. This position presumes that choices are prior to values. On the other hand, Sartre also explicates that freedom is the highest value because it is necessary to improve human life. Detmer points out that this statement contradicts Sartre's earlier statement. Here choices are not prior to values, but rather they are determined by such values that improve human life. According to Detmer, Sartre's earlier statement suggests that freedom is the highest value in the subjective sense because here choices of individuals are prior to external values. In contrast, Sartre's latter statement suggests that freedom is the highest value in an objective sense because here external values are prior to choices (Detmer, 1988, p. 203). Detmer contends that freedom can only be considered the highest value if we understand how it is necessary for humans. We must require freedom for the fulfilment of our empirical desires, goals, and other needs. What Detmer believes is that some basic or essential human needs are valuable and that in order to fulfil these needs, we need to have freedom. Freedom is the highest value because without it human necessities cannot be achieved.

According to Detmer, freedom is a substantial and non-vague value because it is to improve the essential human needs or the "universal human condition". In his latter position, Sartre seems to accept the idea of the "universal human condition". Here Sartre considers "values" that improve the "universal human condition" and assumes these values precede human choices (Detmer, 1988, p. 181). However, as we have seen, Sartre also believes that human choices are prior to values. There are no external conditions that can dictate or bind humans to choose a specific value. Humans are absolutely free to make their own values. If

that is correct, everyone will invent his own moral principles or ends and no one will admire other's principles. To admire others' principles we must admire others' freedom. Detmer identifies that Sartre is intuitively inclined to admire the freedom of others (Detmer, 1988, p. 186). However, in principle, we cannot admire others' freedom unless we set a limit of freedom. We cannot allow others to have absolute freedom. To set a limit, some agreed or objective principles must be set. As we have seen earlier, there is no absolute limit for Sartre. Hence, when we set a limit, we set it for a practical purpose. There is no absolute or rational limit because human consciousness cannot accept a limit in an absolute sense. Humans are always capable of denying or negating it. There is no limit for humans because there is no solid reason or ground that can dictate consciousness to not deny something.

We have seen how Sartre argues that negation is always possible for human consciousness. One can deny any proposed universal principle as a "being for itself". Sartre's notion of freedom is entirely based upon his understanding of the ontology of humans. For him, the ontological structure of humans makes them radically free. It is better explained by Braddock who argues that man is radically free not because of the reason that he is not created by God or because he faces no constraints in the world. Man is free because he has the capacity to interpret himself and the world where he is thrown (Daigle, 2006, p. 92). According to Braddock, there is always a gap between facts of the world and the meaning we give to those facts. He is absolutely free to give meaning or interpret facts. Similarly, he is also free to deny or accept any proposed meanings. Humans can interpret facts and choose what suits them. For humans, no fact of the universe and proposed principle has an explicit sense or meaning (Daigle, 2006, p. 98). Humans are always responsible for making choices based on their interpretation. In this sense, man is absolutely responsible and absolutely free. Braddock argues that even written commands of God are open to interpretation and the believer is free to interpret it. Believers are free to act upon God's command by their understanding and radical freedom. Radical freedom is because of the existential structure that man. It allows humans to negate any interpretation or meaning of facts. Human consciousness is not determined by any absolute nature or law that can dictate a particular choice (Daigle, 2006, pp. 99-100). It is absolutely free to negate any meaning and any interpretation.

Conclusion

By examining Sartre's concept of human freedom and its apparent ambiguities, we can conclude that the primary concern of Sartre's apprehension of

human freedom is not to focus on the constraints that limit human freedom. It is to decipher the ontological structure of man. Sartre firmly believes that the ontological structure of man makes him solely responsible for giving meaning and interpreting the world and himself. In this sense, man is free to choose. According to Sartre's inquiry into the ontology of man, though man is born in certain circumstances and is subject to various constraints, his existence is not solely determined by those circumstances or facticity alone. His existence is not merely the sum of his facts of life. Instead, his existence is a continuous resistance against facts of life or "facticity". We can conclude that there are two main ideas upon which Sartre's concept of absolute freedom rests. First, he believes that human consciousness is not determined by any absolute nature or law. In other words, human consciousness has no predetermined essence. It is "nothingness" in this sense. This means that humans are absolutely free to impose their own meaning upon the facts. Humans are free to redefine the world and themselves. The second idea is that the possibility of human freedom is related to the ontological structure of the "men-world relation". For Sartre, there is a "gape" in the totality of being that provides an ontological ground for negation. This means that humans are free to negate the robustness of the world. It can be said that humans fill the "gaps" by interpreting the facts of the world. Humans are always responsible for choosing based on their interpretation. That is what Sartre means by humans are absolutely free.

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Digital Fandom and Cyber Identity Construction through Language Use "The Song of Ice and Fire" Fandom

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Abstract

This article explores the digital fandom surrounding "The Song of Ice and Fire" on Discord, focusing on the intricate interplay of identity, community, and media engagement within online fan communities. Drawing upon definitions and key concepts of fandom, as well as insights from scholars in the field, the study investigates fan typologies and societal perceptions, highlighting the diverse ways in which fans are classified and understood. Additionally, the paper delves into the dichotomy of "Good Taste" versus "Bad Taste" in media content consumption, examining how individuals are perceived based on their affiliation with specific media productions. With a narrowed focus on "The Song of Ice and Fire" digital fandom, the study explores the construction of identity and cyber identity within this online community. Through discussions on user motivations for learning and teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian on Discord, the research uncovers the multifaceted reasons driving fan engagement and participation in language learning endeavors. Insights gleaned from personal interviews with linguist David Peterson and Reuben Hayslett (known as Khal Tihi – his Dothraki name), a prominent member of the fandom, provide depth and context to our understanding of fan motivations for constructed language learning. In conclusion, the study underscores the complexity of digital fandom spaces, revealing the diverse array of motivations that shape fan engagement, participation, and interactivity within online social platforms.

Keywords: *fandom, fan typologies, cyber identity, Game of Thrones fandom, constructed language use.*

Understanding "Fandom": Definitions and Key Concepts

In this segment of the present study our main focus lies on the concept of "fandom" providing a review of the varied definitions and descriptions found in scholarly literature by various authors. Before exploring the reasons why fans participate in different activities, such as learning constructed languages created for entertainment purposes but not originally intended for real-world use, or any other fan-related pursuits, it is necessary to define several key concepts. These

include "fan", "fandom", and "digital fandom" which are relevant to our discussion.

According to Jenkins (1992, p. 12), "*fan* is an abbreviated form of the word "fanatic," which has its roots in the Latin word "fanaticus." In its most literal sense, "fanaticus" simply meant "of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee" but it quickly assumed more negative connotations, "of persons inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy *(Oxford Latin Dictionary)*." Similarly, Cochran (2008, pp. 239-240) states that 'the root of the term "fan" can be found in the Latin word *fanaticus,* meaning "insane, mad, possessed by the gods", which may explain some of the widespread "otherness" connotations of fans still evident today. Jenkins (1992, p. 12) states that

> *its abbreviated form, "fan", first appeared in the late 19th century in journalistic accounts describing followers or professional sports teams (especially in baseball) at a time when the sport moved from a predominantly participant activity to a spectator event, but soon was expanded to incorporate any faithful "devotee" of sports or commercial entertainment.*

As per Booth (2010, p. 18), "from the 1930's onward, groups of people who all enjoyed the same media entertainment were referred to as «fans», from the pejorative meaning of the term «fanatic»." Jenkins (1992, p. 12), further elaborates on this point by stating that 'the term "fanatic" moved from a reference to certain excessive forms of religious belief and worship to any "excessive and mistaken enthusiasm", often evoked in criticism to opposing political beliefs, and then, more generally, to madness "such as might result from possession by a deity or demon" *(Oxford English Dictionary)*." Jenkins cites Jewett and Lawrence (1977) who claim that 'science fiction television and its fans constitute a kind of secular faith, "a strange, electronic religion… in the making." Jenson (1992, p. 9) agrees by admitting that "the literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance. The fan is consistently characterized (referencing the term's origins) as a potential fanatic. This means that fandom is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged, behaviour." Jenkins (1992, p. 11) states that "fans are characterized as «kooks» obsessed with trivia, celebrities and collectibles; as misfits and «crazies»; […] as childish adults; in short, as people who have little or no «life»." Harrington and Bielby (1995, p. 112) somewhat agree, claiming "according to most accounts, to be a fan is to be abnormal: the normal fan is the lunatic fan." Thus far, it is apparent that the term "fandom" often carries negative associations. As previously mentioned, various descriptors such as "kook", "obsessed", "crazies", "childish", "lunatic", and "people who have no life" are commonly used to characterize individuals who harbor strong passions for certain subjects. According to Jenkins (1992, p. 12),

> *if the term "fan" was originally evoked in a somewhat playful fashion and was often used sympathetically by sports writers, it never fully escaped its earlier connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs orgiastic excess, possession, and madness, connotations that seem to be at the heart of many of the representations of fans in contemporary discourse.*

The fairness and ethical considerations surrounding the use of such terms to characterize individuals with specific interests may be subject to scrutiny. This approach seems to exhibit bias and subjectivity in some cases. While a definitive answer to this question remains elusive, it is evident that there is a prevalent tendency among individuals to criticize or reject ideologies, activities, or enthusiasms they do not comprehend or with which they cannot identify. While studying individuals' responses to such phenomena may merit independent research within a distinct field, our primary focus remains on comprehending the "Game of Thrones" digital fandom's inclination not only towards expressing enthusiasm for the TV show but also towards actively participating in the study and teaching of the two constructed languages showcased in the series. This particular phenomenon captured our scholarly curiosity and served as the primary motivation for undertaking this research endeavor. While fan studies hold significant appeal within academic circles, it remains a vast and intricate subject demanding further scrutiny and research efforts. However, our study primarily falls within the domain of sociolinguistics, necessitating a concentrated focus on the linguistic dimensions of the "Game of Thrones" fandom's engagements, rather than delving into other facets of fan behavior associated with this designation. Contrary to our findings, our target fanbase does not align with the fanatic or "obsessed" fan category we will subsequently elaborate on in this paper.

Fan Typologies – A Brief Account

Prior to delving into this topic, it is imperative to establish a clear understanding of the concept of "fan" itself. Booth (2016, p. 19) contends that "in traditional parlance, a fan is a person who invests time and energy into thinking about, or interacting with, a media text: in other words, one who is enraptured by a particular media object." In "Fan Phenomena: Star Trek", Drushel (2013, p. 5) cites the forerunners of fan phenomena, noting that "these devotees did not invent fandom" and refers to Bacon-Smith (1992), who argues that "media fandom as it is now practiced originated in *Star Trek* fandom." Booth (2010, p. 19) references Jenkins, who categorizes television media consumers into three generalized groups: "Zappers", "Casuals", and "Loyals". He explains that

Zappers flit around the television channels, flipping between shows, but watching no program in particular. Casuals enjoy watching different television shows when they are on the air, but rarely schedule time to watch. Loyals as fans, actually watch fewer hours of television each week than the general population: they cherry pick those shows that best satisfy their interest, they give themselves over fully to them, they tape them and may watch them more than one time; they spend more of their social time talking about them; and they are more likely to pursue content across media channels. (Booth, 2010, p. 19)

Jenkins's classification appears to offer a pragmatic and plausible framework. It is evident that the term "fan" encompasses a diverse range of individuals, making it impractical for scholars to lump every type of fan into a single category. Such an endeavor would be overly simplistic and unfeasible. Therefore, we concur with Jenkins's delineation of fan categories, recognizing the need for a nuanced examination to ascertain the appropriate classification for the "Game of Thrones" fandom. Drawing from Jenkins's definitions and our research findings detailed in a preceding study, it is reasonable to position the "Game of Thrones" fandom, notably the "The Song of Ice and Fire" subgroup, within the "Loyals" category. Nevertheless, this categorization represents a broad assumption. Based on our observations, the extent of active involvement in language learning or teaching activities among fandom members remains undetermined, given the diverse outcomes reflected in our data. Nevertheless, according to Vilela (2019), the "Game of Thrones" TV show's popularity,

coupled with the cultural and technological factors that precede it, is symptomatic for understanding the development of the so-called "series culture" (see Silva, 2014a, 2014b), which has in the fans one of its biggest catalysts. Through different levels of engagement, fandom constructs critical and interpretive practices, cultural productions, and the formation of an alternative social community through active consumption. (Jenkins, 2007, 2015; Fiske, 1992).

Booth (2010, p. 20) concludes that

whether or not we are fans of cult television, chances are good that everyone is a fan of something. *We may not be the fans of* Doctor Who or Star Trek*, (...) but we might be fans of music, of sports, or even food.*

He continues along the same line and states that "whatever we are fans of we base part of our identity on our appreciation of that fandom" (Booth, 2010, p. 20). Booth references Sandvoss's (2005) concept that a media object contributes to a fan's sense of self, suggesting that some fans utilize their fan identity to distinguish themselves from other media audiences (Booth, 2010, p. 20). In his work "Textual Poachers" (1992, p. 15), Jenkins discusses the emergence of distinct fan categories, including the "orgiastic", "groupie", "comic", "psychotic",

and "eroticized' fans, and highlights how these labels have developed over time. He ultimately observes that, within contemporary culture,

>   *the fan still constitutes a scandalous category in the contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety of dread and desire. Whether viewed as a religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist, or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remains a "fanatic" or false worshiper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the "realm" of normal cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality.* (Jenkins, 1992, p. 15)

In Lewis's edited work, "Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media", Jenson (1992, p. 9) also describes two fan types, namely "the obsessed individual" and "the hysterical crowd". She suggests that "these two images of fans are based in an implicit critique of modern life" wherein "fandom is seen as a psychological symptom of a presumed social dysfunction." She continues along the same line stating that "once fans are characterized as deviant, they can be treated as disreputable, even dangerous «others»" (1992, p. 9). Jenson provides an insightful perspective on this phenomenon, claiming that

>   *fans, when insistently characterized as "them", can be distinguished from "people like us" (students, professors and social critics) as well as from (the more reputable) patrons or aficionados or collectors.* (1992, p. 9)

Jenson's perspective is intriguing as she draws a comparison between two distinct social categories with varying preferences in media content consumption or hobbies. One of these categories, such as art collectors or patrons of specific restaurant chains or cuisines, is often regarded as respectable or reputable, while the preferences of the other category are deemed wrong and are subject to societal rejection. However, according to Jenson,

>   *respectable social types could also be defined as "fans", in that they display interest, affection and attachment, especially for figures in, or aspects of, their chosen field. But the habits and practices of, say, scholars and critics are not deemed fandom, and are not considered to be potentially deviant or dangerous.* (1992, pp. 9-10)

It is quite natural to ask why this phenomenon occurs. Jenson's conclusions claim that "the characterization of fandom as pathology is based in, supports, and justifies elitist and disrespectful beliefs about our common life" (1992, p. 10). It is evident that labeling fandom as a mental disorder can lead to negative perceptions about our everyday lives. This perspective is concerning because it implies that millions of people who share common interests, such as enjoying the music of a particular band or following a TV series, are somehow abnormal. This raises the

question: when does being a fan become viewed as problematic? Are individuals who passionately support a rock band or a rap artist automatically categorized as having a mental disorder? Certainly, it is important to recognize that there have been instances of extreme behavior among fans, including criminal acts and even homicides directed towards celebrities. While there are well-known cases of such incidents, we will not delve into them here as our research is primarily focused on a fandom that hasn't been associated with scandalous or dangerous behavior.

In specialized literature, there exists a tendency to link fans primarily with music or movie celebrities. The concept suggests that fans are, implicitly at least, a product of celebrity culture, defined as a response to the star system (1992, p. 10). Jenson provides an illustration of a psychologist's perspective on the subject, as outlined in an article from *People Weekly* concerning the tragic killing of television actress Rebecca Schaeffer by an obsessive fan:

> *The cult of celebrity provides archetypes and icons with which alienated souls can identify. On top of that, this country has been embarking for a long time on a field experiment in the use of violence on TV. It is common-place to watch people getting blown away. We've given the losers in life or sex a rare chance to express their dominance.* (Jenson, 1992, p. 10)

Jenson also offers an alternative viewpoint from a security guard, who was also cited in the article:

> *It's because of the emphasis on the personal lives of media figures, especially on television. And this has blurred the line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.* (Jenson, 1992, p. 10)

We concur that extreme behaviors are not considered healthy or acceptable, particularly when they involve serious offenses or crimes. However, evaluating the behaviors of obsessive fans and providing specialized explanations is beyond our expertise. Instead, we can refer to scholars who have conducted thorough research in the fields of Fan Studies and Psychology and present a brief account of their insights on the subject. Jenson (1992, p. 11) cites Schickel (1985), who compares deranged fans and serial killers to "us"; he concludes that we "dare not turn too quickly away" from "these creatures" who lead "mad existences" because "the forces that move them also move within ourselves in some much milder measure". Jenson concludes that "these academically-oriented accounts develop an image of the pathological fan who is a deranged version of «us»." Jenson also presents Caughey's perspective (1978a.), who describes how "in a media addicted age, celebrities function as role models for fans who engage in «artificial social relations» with them" (1992, p. 11). Evidently, the media played a significant role in shaping these fans' behaviors, ultimately leading to actions, some of which were

tragic. According to Jenson (1992, p. 11), "one model of the pathological fan is that of the obsessed loner, who (under the influence of the media) has entered into an intense fantasy relationship with a celebrity figure. These individuals achieve public notoriety by stalking or threatening or killing the celebrity." Jenson explains that "this loner characterization can be contrasted with another version of fan pathology: the image of a frenzied or hysterical member of a crowd" (1992, p. 11). Here we observe a unique manifestation of enthusiasm among fans and their behaviour. Jenson illustrates this by describing fan types, citing instances, such as the screaming, weeping teen at the airport catching sight of a rock star, or the roaring, fervent sports fan causing disturbance at a soccer game. She concludes that this portrayal of the frenzied fan prevails in conversations about music enthusiasts and sports fans (1992, p. 12).

We agree that when individuals have an affinity for something, such as a song, music genre, or the band performing the music, it is common to react to these stimuli. Typically, this involves moving one's body, nodding along, singing along to the lyrics, and generally feeling uplifted. If the song is melancholic, people typically respond by listening to it and perhaps feeling nostalgic at most. However, upon reading specialized literature discussing various fan typologies, we became intrigued by why some fans feel compelled to express themselves so intensely, dramatically, and in some cases, extremely violently in response to their passions. Why is it difficult for them to simply enjoy the experience and derive happiness from it? One of the explanations could be Jenson's example, namely "the influences of the music's supposedly licentious lyrics and barbaric rhythms" (1992, p. 12). According to her,

> *crowds of teen music fans have been depicted as animalistic and depraved, under the spell of their chosen musical form. Heavy Metal is the most recent genre of youth music to evoke this frightening description of seductive power: Metal fans are characterized, especially by concerned parents, as vulnerable youngsters who have become "twisted" in response to the brutal and Satanic influence of the music.* (Jenson, 1992, p. 12)

In Jenson's aforementioned classification of fans, she also illustrates the sports fan archetype. Specifically, she mentions the category characterized by exaggerated and aggressive behavior during sporting events, by pointing out that "obviously, not all soccer fans engage in spectator violence, the association between fandom and violent, irrational mob behaviour is assumed" (1992, p. 13):

> *Concern over fan violence in crowds also appears in relation to sports. There is an academic literature, for example, on football hooliganism. This literature explores*

the reasons for violence at (mostly) soccer games, where "hard-core hooligans" engage in violent and destructive acts, often against the opposing teams' fans. (Jenson, 1992, p. 13)

Jenson concludes that,

there is very little literature that explores fandom as a normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon. Instead, the fan is characterized as (at least potentially) an obsessed loner, suffering from a disease of isolation, or a frenzied crowd member, suffering from a disease of contagion. In either case, the fan is seen as being irrational, out of control, and prey to a number of external forces. The influence of the media, a narcissistic society, hypnotic rock music, and crowd contagion are invoked to explain how fans become victims of their fandom, and so act in deviant and destructive ways. (Jenson, 1992, p. 13)

The phenomenon of fandom, which encompasses individuals' deep dedication to diverse subjects or entities, constitutes a complex and broad field of study, underscored by the extensive scholarly research carried out in this domain. Scholars have thoroughly explored the phenomenon of fandom, spanning both traditional and digital forms, yielding a wealth of literature on the subject. As Jenson noted, there is a limited amount of literature examining fandom as a typical, everyday cultural or social occurrence. Nonetheless, the objective of this study is to investigate the activity within the "Game of Thrones" fandom, particularly the language-related engagement of one of its subgroups, the "The Song of Ice and Fire" digital community. Specifically, we aim to explore the motivations and incentives of its members to learn a constructed language, while also uncovering the social and psychological aspects underlying their choices. The fandom under consideration belongs to the category of "ordinary" fans, showing no signs of violent or extreme behavior, either in online or offline settings. However, what adds intrigue and warrants examination is their unconventional hobby preference: the pursuit of learning and, eventually, teaching constructed languages. This atypical social behavior merits scholarly investigation and analysis. While our study cannot cover all facets of "fandom", we aim to delve into one significant aspect: *taste*. Therefore, we will briefly examine this topic, a subject also scrutinized by Jenkins (1992) in the subsequent segment of this paper.

"Good Taste" vs. "Bad Taste" in Media Content Consumption

According to Jenkins (1992, p. 16), "concepts of «good taste», appropriate conduct or aesthetic merit are not natural or universal; rather, they are rooted in social experience and reflect particular class interests." Fundamentally, it entails more than merely an individual's specific selection of whom or what they favor, become a fan of, and demonstrate their appreciation for. Jenkins underscores the

diverse social experiences that vary from person to person. He states that "taste distinctions determine not only desirable and undesirable forms of culture but also desirable and undesirable ways of relating to cultural objects, desirable and undesirable strategies of interpretation and styles of consumption" (1992, p. 16). The author argues that

> *taste is always in crisis; taste can never remain stable, because it is challenged by the existence of other tastes that often seem just "as natural" to their proponents. The boundaries of "good taste", then, must constantly be policed; proper tastes must be separated from improper tastes; those who possess the wrong tastes must be distinguished from those whose tastes conform more closely to our own expectations. Because one taste is so interwoven with all other aspects of social and cultural experience, aesthetic distaste brings with it the full force of moral excommunication and social rejection. "Bad taste" is not simply undesirable; it is unacceptable.* (Jenkins, 1992, p. 16)

It is intriguing to explore the significant role one's taste plays in their inclusion or exclusion from diverse social circles, as well as its influence on how they are perceived by society at large. Personal preferences can elicit both positive and negative reactions from others and may seemingly assign individuals to various social categories. However, we find this labeling to be overly harsh and dramatic, considering the inherent diversity among people. Each individual's choices regarding clothing, diet, music, romantic preferences, language acquisition, residence, occupation, and more should be respected. If these preferences are not shared by others, they should at least be disregarded or not subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism. The specific inclination or preference of many members within the "Game of Thrones" fandom to learn one or both of the constructed languages featured in the TV series, rather than opting for a natural language – a choice that might be more widely accepted and considered conventional within society – is precisely the focal point of our research. We embarked on this investigation due to its intriguing and, frankly, uncommon nature: the active involvement of individuals in the study of artificial languages, which were originally crafted solely for cinematic purposes, rather than for fostering universal communication, as seen in the case of the widely recognized Esperanto. In essence, Jenkins's theory, as discussed earlier, validates society's tendency to react strongly to the unconventional, the unfamiliar, or anything that deviates from the perceived norms of "good taste" in terms of hobbies or interests. Jenson (1992, p. 20) frames this notion similarly, while also pondering whether "the existence of passion" serves as the defining factor distinguishing a fan from

an aficionado, delineating between harmful and benign, and between deviance and conformity. Jenson establishes that

one aspect of the distinction between "them" and "us" involves a cultural hierarchy. At least one key difference is that it is normal and therefore safe to be attached to elite, prestige-conferring objects (aficionadohood), but it can be abnormal, and therefore dangerous to be attached to popular, mass-media objects (fandom). (Jenson, 1992, p. 20)

Several fandoms face scrutiny, characterization, and at times, criticism due to their preference for particular media content. It is reasonable for members of these fandoms to respond to the assumptions made about them and their pursuits. Jenkins (1992, p. 20) states that

Star Trek fans often find themselves arguing from a position of weakness in attempting to defend their fascination with the program. For many, the only legitimate defense is to assert the "normality" of their lifestyle, professing their general conformity to middle-class culture as a way of creating common ground with non-fan friends. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 20)

Jenkins cites Kulikauskas (1988, p. 5) who exemplifies one of the Star Trek fans' reactions, 'in response to an incendiary sketch on Saturday Night Live wherein "Star Trek" star William Shatner tells "Trekkies" to "Get a Life!". Here is the excerpt of the fan's response:

I resent having those assumptions made about me. I have "got a life". I have a husband and children. I do volunteer work and have opinions on a wide variety of matters, both political and religious. I do shopping, vote in elections and change diapers. I do live in a real world, with all of its tensions and stress. That is the reason I am a Trekker.[1] A hobby is necessary for mental health. Star Trek helps me from burning out in all the "important" things I do. It helps me relax. It helps me retain my perspective. It is fun. It is not my religion. I already have a perfectly good religion. (Well, I'm Catholic). And I suspect that the majority of fans are more like me than the stereotype. (Kulikauskas, 1988, p. 5)

In society, various aspects such as cultural practices, traditions, culinary tastes, and especially individual preferences towards specific media content often become subjects of stereotyping. Stereotyping involves forming fixed notions about someone or a particular group of people, often inaccurately. Generally, the term "stereotype" carries negative connotations and is frequently linked with certain fandoms, as illustrated earlier. We will not explore this topic further at the moment, but it is important to acknowledge that even devoted followers of the

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[1] "Trekker" or "Trekkie" – someone with a special interest in the television show "Star Trek" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment).

"Star Trek" franchise, often referred to as "Trekkies", encounter stereotypes and unwarranted criticism. According to Gibson (2000, p. 9),

> *most often, a fan's relationship with a cultural text is based in a consumerist sensibility emphasizing the production of pleasure. Pleasure comes through the enjoyment of choosing to engage with a text, feeling a part of something bigger than oneself, entertainment through surprise and anticipation, escape from life challenges, temporary fulfillment of desires, the excitement of vicariously sharing the intimacies of another person's life, and the feeling of camaraderie through identification with a character.* (Gibson, 2000, p. 9)

Upon encountering the above-illustrated excerpt detailing a "Star Trek" fan's reaction to Shatner's "Get a Life" statement, we observed a parallel between this individual's response and Reuben Hayslett's (Khal Tihi's) reaction when we asked him in our interview about the motivations for learning Dothraki or High Valyrian (Dothraki, in his case). Khal Tihi, a dedicated admirer not particularly of the "Game of Thrones" TV series but specifically of the Dothraki language featured within it, offered a straightforward and coherent response to our inquiry. It is not uncommon for people to anticipate intricate explanations from fans, and some struggle to comprehend why individuals invest considerable time and effort in fictional media content. This skepticism extends to our research queries as well; many individuals outside the realms of fiction or languages, particularly constructed languages, find it challenging to grasp or acknowledge that for some, studying languages like Dothraki is just as ordinary as learning Spanish or Swedish, for example. Below is Khal Tihi's response:

> *Back in 2013, I was living in NYC and working a very demanding job in state and local electoral politics. I was getting burned out and turned to TV as a way to de-stress and relax. [...]. I wanted/needed a hobby, I had little money to put into a hobby, and I already had a background in linguistics.* (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014).

Upon scrutinizing Tihi's response, it becomes evident that there is nothing questionable or unconventional about choosing a hobby, regardless of its nature, as a means to unwind and relieve stress after prolonged work hours. In Khal Tihi's case, his decision to learn Dothraki, a constructed language intended for cinematic purposes rather than real-world communication, is especially understandable, considering his academic background in linguistics. This choice may represent a desire to explore language diversity and indulge in a mentally stimulating activity outside of professional responsibilities. Upon inquiry regarding his longstanding interest in constructed languages or whether it emerged solely following the airing

of the "Game of Thrones" TV series, and if there were additional constructed languages that intrigued him, Tihi provided the following response:

I studied Linguistics in undergrad and in one class we had a semester-long group assignment to create our own language and attempt fluency. To date, this is still one of my favorite class assignments ever. My group got an A and I think everyone really enjoyed the process. I certainly did. I was aware of other conlangs from film and television, like Klingon from Star Trek, but was not interested in either the language or the franchise. In my linguistic classes Klingon often came up and we studied some examples of the language but that's as far as I went. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

It is worth noting that there is no inherent problem with the decision to learn a constructed language; in fact, it is quite intriguing and commendable. The essence of having a hobby lies in indulging in activities one finds enjoyable and investing time and effort into them. If others fail to comprehend or appreciate this pursuit, it is more a reflection of their perspective than the validity of the individual's engagement in the activity. Diversity ought to be regarded with interest and curiosity as long as it is not considered to be harmful to anyone. Participation in activities within the "Trekkies" or "Game of Thrones" fandom, for instance, does not inflict harm upon others. This holds particularly true when such engagement occurs online, within dedicated platforms or servers that generally are not publicly accessible. Regarding the categorization of "Game of Thrones" fandom members and their alignment with previously described fan categories, is a topic that will be addressed later in this paper. Proceeding, Gibson (2000, p. 7) references Grossberg (1992, p. 54), who suggests that fans may exhibit interest not solely in the media content they favor but also in additional dimensions. Here is an excerpt:

audiences never deal with only a single cultural text, that is, just the music or the film or the television show. At any given time, audiences may be fielding information related to musical texts and practices, economic and race relations, images of performers and fans, social relations (for instance, of gender, of friendship), aesthetic conventions, styles of language, movement, appearance and dance, media practices, ideological commitments, and, sometimes, media representations of rock-n-roll itself. (Grossberg, 1992, p. 54)

Drawing from Grossberg's examples, we can discern at least two facets that Khal Tihi referenced during our interview concerning his personal intrigue with the world of the Dothraki, vividly portrayed in "The Game of Thrones" television series, namely race relations and styles of language. His response is exemplified in the subsequent excerpt from the interview:

> *I was drawn to "Game of Thrones" because of the way the show (and the books, though I've never finished any of the books) dealt with politics and political intrigue in a fantasy environment, something I hadn't seen before in media. I felt an affinity to the Dothraki people early on because they looked like me, and my family. I come from a long line of interracial and multiracial marriages and couplings and today identify as Multi-generational Mixed-Race (or MGM). That means that I am a person of color with dark brown skin and that, to most people, I appear racially ambiguous. There's not a lot of depiction of racially ambiguous people in mainstream media so I was very fascinated by the Dothraki people in the show. Jason Momoa is obviously native Hawaiian, but I noticed that other Dothraki characters look like different kinds of ethnicities, and that there's no single phenotypical "look" of a Dothraki person. Some extras were lighter skinned, some were darker, and there was a wide of hair texture within them. This stood out to me. When I found out that the language had been created for the show I was very curious. I studied Linguistics in college and had played around with conlangs before and I desperately needed a hobby since I was burning out at my job. So I decided to try to learn on my own and very quickly fell in love with the language.* (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

To conclude, in response to our inquiry about his interest in the Dothraki language, Khal Tihi provided a response that went beyond surface-level explanation. Instead of giving a straightforward answer such as "I just liked it", he elaborated on a more profound connection. He perceived a likeness between his own physical attributes and the fictional Dothraki people described by George R. R. Martin – a barbaric tribe characterized by an ambiguous racial background – thus feeling a sense of affinity with the franchise despite its fictional nature. Additionally, he was drawn to their language, intrigued by its novelty and uniqueness, especially given his existing linguistic background. However, it is important to note that Khal Tihi emphasized the subjective nature of motivations, stating, "everyone has different reasons and motivations, so I can really only speak to mine". Therefore, his reasons may not necessarily apply to other fans. Each individual may have found distinct motives for embracing the "Game of Thrones" fandom. In Khal Tihi's case, racial identity and language played pivotal roles in his interest in learning a constructed language. Advancing further, we aim to allocate the subsequent section of this study to exploring the notions of "online community" and "digital fandom"

Considering the digital scope of our research, our main emphasis lies on digital fandoms rather than traditional ones. As stated by Booth (2016, p. 10), "it is *«digital»* fandom not because it assumes that there is some inherent difference in the way digital technology affects fans, but rather because many creative fan

practices rely on the characteristics of the digital." According to Pearson (2010, p. 2),

> the digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom, empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, creating symbiotic relationships between powerful corporations and individual fans, and giving rise to new forms of cultural production.

She continues along the same line stating that "some fans revel in the new opportunities presented by digital technologies, while others lament the digitally enabled encroachment of corporate power into every space of fandom" (2010, p. 2).

Moving forward, our next section will be dedicated to exploring the "Game of Thrones" digital fandom, with a specific focus on identity formation in the online realm. We will commence by providing an overview of pertinent theoretical frameworks and conducting a literature review on the topic of "identity". Next, we will explore identity construction through language use and interactivity within "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord group, particularly emphasizing group social identity. Additionally, we will investigate user motivations concerning the utilization of Dothraki and High Valyrian on Discord, incorporating insights gleaned from interviews with key figures such as David Peterson and Reuben Hayslett (Khal Tihi). Finally, we will present our conclusions based on the findings.

Identity and Cyber Identity – Definitions and Key Concepts

When addressing a nuanced phenomenon or concept, it is crucial to offer clear definitions and elucidate essential ideas to have a better understanding of that particular concept. In this section of the present chapter, our aim is to explore "identity" and "cyber identity" and briefly examine several theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars in the field. Prior to delving deeply into the concept of cyber identity, we propose an initial discussion on identity in a broader context. Given the complexity of the concept, scholars have proposed diverse definitions for identity, indicating the absence of a universal definition. Therefore, we aim to present multiple interpretations to gain an understanding of the central topic in this sub-chapter. According to Cover (2023, p. 6),

> at its most, identity usually refers to the set of traits, beliefs, appearances, experiences, memories, attitudes and behaviour that characterise a person – what makes a person seem to themselves unique and individual but also related to other people in our everyday belonging and social participation. Identity is inseparable from a concept of cultural identity, which is how a person perceives themselves (or is

perceived by others) in relation to a range of categories and demarcations, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class affiliations, social generation groups, shared histories and so on. (Cover, 2023, p. 6)

Poletti and Park (2014, p. 8), define "identity" as 'the process of knowing oneself by an interplay of difference and similarity; at the same time it is also about knowing one's social place due to a host of technologies outside of one's self, which authenticate and delimit one's existence, such as identity cards, dog tags, or PIN numbers.' As stated by Doise (1998), "identity is conceived of as a very peculiar set of opinions, judgments, evaluations, attitudes, manifested by a person towards him- or her-self." As per Sullivan (2011, p. 6),

identity has traditionally been a nebulous notion and in referring to "identity" without defining it, much of the legal literature in this area lacks precision. It gives the impression that "identity is identity" whereas the constitution, function and nature of identity depend on context. (Sullivan, 2011, p. 6)

Proceeding, Cotoc (2017, p. 191) references Jenkins (2008, p. 17), who notes that

the verb "to identify" is a necessary accompaniment of identity because identity is active: it is not something that is "just there", it's not a "thing" or a product, it must always be established. This adds two further items: to classify things or persons: to associate oneself with, or attach oneself to, something or someone else (such as a friend, a sports team or an ideology, etc.). (Cotoc, 2017, p. 191)

Wood and Smith (2005, p. 52), state that identity "is a complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us." As per Cotoc,

in what cyber-identity is concerned, the focus is more on how we wish others to perceive us and on the process of setting forth an image we want others to perceive (online self-presentation), but also on how we contribute to the perception of other users and how other users contribute to our perception. Hence, online identity is the social identity encountered in cyberspace, what users display on SNSs, Websites, Weblogs, public chats, emails, etc. (Cotoc, 2017, p. 206)

However, what precisely does the term "social identity" entail? It "refers to similarity between/among people" Cotoc (2017, p. 193). The author draws on the work of Deschamps and Devos (1998, pp. 2-3), who underline that

the feeling of belonging to a group and the phenomenon of identification are only possible in connection with groups or categories one does not belong to. Thus, social identity refers to the fact that the individual perceives him – or herself as similar to others of the same background (the "we"), but social identity also refers to a

difference, to a specificity of that "we" in connection with members of other groups or categories (the "them"). (Cotoc, 2017, p. 193)

In connection with the sense of affiliation with a collective and the process of identification, Windley (2023, p. 7) references the insights of Minuchin (2009, p. 47), who claimed that "the human experience of identity has two elements: a sense of belonging and a sense of being separate". Windley continues along the same line and states that "this is as good a description of digital identity as it is of our psychological identity. A digital identity contains data that uniquely describes a person or thing but also contains information about the subject's relationships to other entities" (2023, p. 7). According to Cotoc (2017, p. 193), "Belonging to a group does not only trigger the construction of a social identity, but also allows individuals" "to develop a sharper and better defined self-image, to perceive themselves as being quite specific and highly distinctive individuals" (Serino, 1998, p. 25). Windley (2023, p. 12) underscores the concept of multiple identities, asserting that:

> *we usually speak of identity in the singular, but subjects, especially people, have multiple identities. From an internal point of view, these seem like different facets of our singular identity, but other entities have a specific view that corresponds to only a subset of our internal view. […] My multiple identities represent different perspectives on who Phil Windley is and what attributes I possess.* (Windley, 2023, p. 12)

Cotoc (2017, p. 194) mentions Deschamps and Devos's notion of "self-permanence" "pointing to Goffman's idea that individuals play different roles for different audiences [1956] and to Gergen's idea that the self is «fluid»" [1965, 1982]. They argue that it is necessary to think about identities in the plural form because every individual or collective social agent can actualize, mobilize or produce identities according to a specific context (see 1998, p. 3). Cotoc agrees with the above-cited scholars, concluding that

> *a user participates in different SNSs and constructs a different representation on each of them: he plays a professional role on LinkedIn, a friend role on Facebook, a host/guest role on Couchsurfing, a music lover role on MySpace, etc. Furthermore, he can actualize all these identities from his mobile while he is also participating offline, constructing a real-life identity as well.* (Cotoc, 2017, p. 194)

Cover (2023, p. 6) draws a parallel between identity and the concept of "cultural identity", which he considers to be inseparable. According to him, this is

> *how a person perceives themselves, (or is perceived by others) in relation to a range of categories and demarcations, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class affiliations, social generation groups, shared histories and so on. And these all involve practices of identification to varying degrees, meaning there is always a process of*

> *communication, reading, interpreting and engaging that operates across different settings, not always consciously.* (Cover, 2023, p. 6)

Given these theoretical considerations, our intention is to focus our study on a specific digital fandom and examine how its members shape their cyber identities on Discord through language usage. We aim to explore the concept of "participatory digital creativity" and "interactivity", as proposed by Cover (2023), given its relevance to the online activities of our target fandom. Furthermore, since our research centers on language involvement within the "Game of Thrones" fandom online, our aim is to guide the discussion towards the notion of group identity and membership in digital communities initially. According to Doise,

> *personal identity is often considered as unique and singular. On the other hand, shared group membership involves common characteristics. Hence, individuals would be considered similar to the extent that they belong to the same or similar categories. In this sense, group membership would result in homogeneity and individual differences would correspond to personal characteristics which are not shared by other group members.* (Doise, 1998, p. 14)

Furthermore, Doise also claims that "identity emerges from the relationships between the individual and the group and that different situations signal different relationships and different identity dynamics" (see Cotoc, 2017, p. 195). Cotoc (2017, p. 195) draws on Worchel's work (1998), who describes social identity and claims that "groups satisfy the individuals" desire to be accepted and recognized by others. However, groups also require obedience and conformity, the placement of group needs above personal needs and giving up some of their personal identity (see Idem, p. 55). In the context of cyber identity, Baym (2000, p. 144) states that, "it is the *content* posted by digi-participants in different Internet environments and one cannot create a recognizable identity in any digital space or group without posting". Cotoc (2017, p. 207) explores further the concept of group identity and the construction of identity in cyberspace. The author proposes several terms that can be employed to describe cyber identity, among which she mentions: "online Identity, Internet Identity, cyber-identity, digital identity, electronic identity, e-identity, CMC identity, Internet persona, Cyber persona, etc." (Cotoc, 2017, p. 207) According to her, "all users construct an identity in cyberspace, regardless of the Internet situation in which they are in." Thus far, the scholars we have examined typically refer to online social platforms like Facebook or, in Cotoc's instance, MySpace, Couchsurfing, Facebook, and Gmail. However, Discord has not been extensively explored as an online platform in these studies, further narrowing the focus of our research. Cover (2023, p. 17) states that

the early Internet allowed new kinds of "virtual" communities to form across newsgroups, forums, websites, chat programmes and email. Although these were often represented in idealistic ways as a future world of harmonious, online settings for belonging and engagement (Rheingold 1993), they had an important impact on the relationship between belonging and identity. (Cover, 2023, p. 17)

According to Worchel (1998, pp. 72-73),

groups, like individuals, must establish their own identity. This identity has two dimensions: the identity of the group (similar to the personal identity of the individual in social identity theory) and the identity of the group as it relates to other groups in its universe (similar to the social identity of individuals'. (Worchel, 1998, pp. 72-73)

Cotoc (2017, p. 198) draws on Worchel's (1998) theory, according to which

groups are dynamic units that develop through a series of stages: identification, group productivity, individuation, decay. These stages are cyclical as some members might no longer be part of the group and new members take their place. There is an amount of time spent on each stage, depending on intragroup and intergroup factors. The transition between stages can be abrupt and clear or slow and gradual. (Cotoc, 2017, p. 198)

Having reviewed the perspectives of several scholars on individual and group identity and their development, we now turn our attention to the "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord online fandom. Our objective is to explore how its members shape both their cyber and group identity. Cotoc (2017, p. 201) argues that, "identities emerge from the narrativization of the self which implies «suturing into the story» that is partially imaginary." The author considers that "in cyberspace, there are three situations of the narrativization of the self: exclusively imaginary, partially imaginary, and the imaginary is excluded altogether" (Cotoc (2017, p. 201). Cotoc cites Baym (2000, p. 173), who states that

various online discursive strategies and identity-building resources. Some examples are: filling in basic profile information, frequent posts, names and signature files, relevant knowledge transmitted through the users' repertoires, distinctive roles that users can take on, performances that build distinctive styles. (Cotoc, 2017, p. 201)

However, "these strategies differ from one digital space to another and cyber-identities are shaped by the online contexts in which they are created and which change very fast" (Cotoc, 2017, p. 207). The author draws on Weber and Mitchell's idea, stating that

like youth identities, new technologies keep changing, converging, morphing – seemingly always in flux, and like youth identities, young people's own digital production facilitate a blending of media, genres, experimentations, modifications, and reiterations. (Cotoc, 2017, p. 207)

"The Song of Ice and Fire" Fandom – Digital Group Identity Construction

According to Cotoc (2017, p. 199) "in cyberspace, users join groups of discussion that are already created or they open a new group and others join in." This situation is precisely exemplified by the "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord community, where certain members transitioned from pre-existing Facebook groups to Discord. Cotoc (2017, p. 199) suggests that scholars have termed this migration from platforms as an "exodus" phenomenon (refer to Hogan, 2011). Cover (2023, p. 17) offers a notable example concerning the formation of diverse online communities, particularly highlighting the "furries" community. Cover cites Dobre (2012), who defines "furries" as a "subculture within science fiction and fantasy fandom, and practices involve dressing as non-human anime characters." Dobre explains that

> the identification as a Furry – that is, as a person whose sense of selfhood is defined by the engagement in such play – is deeply felt, an attachment that is subjective and meaningful. Such play, of course, may involve more serious identification with animals themselves as some choose to live lives in an everyday sense through the theatrics of being a wolf or a cat. (Dobre, 2012)

However, how does Cover's example of the "furries" community relate to the discussion of online identity, which is the focus of our current topic? Cover states that

> the Furry community and the construction of identity did not simply emerge by itself. Nor was it about pre- existing furries suddenly finding they had an opportunity to talk to each other through digital means and thereby, as individuals, coming together as a community. Rather, the community itself came about, developed and gained a shared sense of identity because the affordances of digital media allowed the gathering online of very dispersed voices of those who were otherwise disenfranchised from identity norms and forming the name, language and shared symbolic belonging that stabilised as an identity. (Cover, 2023, p. 18)

Following, we will concentrate on the latter aspect of Cover's theories and establish a comparison between the fandom he discusses and our chosen fandom. Upon examining the formation of "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord community, we concur with Cover's assertions. Since the debut of the "Game of Thrones" TV series and the introduction of the two constructed languages, Dothraki and High Valyrian, we posit that individuals, even if not initially fans, developed a keen interest in these languages and their associated cultures. However, merely harboring passion for something or transitioning into a fan role proves inadequate for many individuals. They seek out others with similar or identical interests, a

task that can be challenging and even unfeasible in offline settings for some. In the case of our chosen fandom, comprised of members dispersed globally, frequent in-person meetings for language learning would be nearly impracticable. As Cover suggests, "the early Internet was therefore a setting that had an impact on identity and belonging but in complex ways". (Cover, 2023, p. 18). The digital realm provided an ideal platform for these individuals, as all they required was internet access. Through this medium, they could connect with fellow fandom members and establish an online community open to anyone sharing their interests. Cotoc (2017, p. 199) states that in cyberspace,

> *the identification is achieved in the moment when users join the group and productivity depends on the number of posts, shares, comments and likes. The posts and the shares represent the young authors' input and the comments and the likes are the qualitative/or quantitative feedback. The number of comments and the number of likes is important because they assure validation, social approval and group social identity.* (Cotoc, 2017, p. 199)

Cover adds that 'social media was obviously one of the most significant affordances made available to everyday users, and it is perhaps this most of all that has had an impact on how we practice online identity' (2023, p. 19). Certainly, each social media platform offers distinct affordances, and Cotoc likely delineates Facebook's affordances employed by its users in crafting their online social identity. Nevertheless, Discord bears similarities with other social media platforms. For instance, users can create posts that others can react to through comments, similar to Facebook. Similarly, Discord offers features such as the "like" option, where users can express approval of posts and comments using various emojis. Another shared feature is the option to react to specific comments rather than the entire post. Nevertheless, there are notable differences as well. From both a researcher and user standpoint, Discord proves to be a more convenient platform for engaging in fandom activities due to several reasons. Firstly, it enables users to establish distinct servers, akin to separate rooms where subgroups can discuss their specific interests. For instance, within "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord, numerous servers exist, each with its unique focus. For High Valyrian language enthusiasts, servers such as "high-valyrian", "valyrian-for-beginners", "valyrian-duolingo", "valyrian suggestions", "valyrian-djpedia", "valyrian-only", "high valyrian voice chat", "valyrian-lessons-and-learning", and "valyrian-glyphs" cater to various aspects of language learning. Similarly, for Dothraki language enthusiasts, servers like "dothraki-general", "dothraki-only", "dothraki-for-beginners", "dothraki voice chat", "dothraki-learning-resources", and "dothraki-djpedia" serve as dedicated spaces for discussion and learning the

Dothraki language. Secondly, Discord offers additional convenience for language learning through its chat rooms, allowing users to gather and coordinate voice calls. This feature holds particular significance for language learning, especially for constructed languages with limited resources. Learners can exchange insights not only on grammar and vocabulary but also on pronunciation, accent, and tone, fostering a more complex learning experience. This functionality also facilitates the cultivation of a more intimate relationship within the fandom. Through oral communication via voice chats, individuals can develop a stronger sense of personal connection with their fellow members of the fandom. Thirdly, Discord is designed as an online platform that encourages ongoing discussions rather than limited interactions through comments on specific posts. We presume that the "exodus" phase mentioned earlier occurred when members of the "Game of Thrones" fandom, particularly those interested solely in the two constructed languages rather than the TV series itself, sought to sustain dialogues with fellow fandom members without engaging in endless commenting on the same post. Indeed, Discord facilitates continuous dialogues among its users once they access their preferred server. Upon entering the server, users can freely post content, ideally related to the server's theme. For instance, in the "Valyrian-Duolingo" server, one anticipates discussions related to studying the High Valyrian language on Duolingo. However, users also understand that they can sustain or initiate new discussions within ongoing conversations by replying to other users' responses. While such interactions are not impossible on Facebook, they are less common. In our observations, Facebook discussions in "Game of Thrones" fandom groups typically consist of a post by a user followed by a few brief comments. Certainly, this method does not provide an optimal means to interact with fellow learners and share insights on language-related subjects.

Fundamentally, the various features offered by the digital platform Discord coalesced to create a cohesive community dedicated to learning and instructing the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages. Over time, this community expanded, attracting additional members and nurturing a collective identity based on their mutual interest in these constructed languages. The "Song of Ice and Fire" Discord fandom unifies under a cyber-identity reflected in their chosen name, which draws from the series, thus establishing a symbolic connection to this online community.

Moving forward, we wish to explore the concept of participatory culture proposed by scholars. Theorist Terry Flew, cited by Cover (2023, p. 28) explains the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 as one characterized by

a move from personal websites to blogs and blog site aggregation, from publishing to participation, from web content as the outcome of large up - front investment to an ongoing and interactive process, and from content management systems to links based on tagging. (Flew, 2008, p. 19)

According to Cover,

in a Web 1.0 environment, most everyday users tended to retrieve information, with only a few who were building websites and generating their own texts. In the Web 2.0 environment that emerged from 2005 onwards, platform architecture was more frequently being built around the idea of users as participants. (Cover, 2023, p. 29)

Considering the attributes of the Web 2.0 landscape, we acknowledge the resemblance between our digital fandom and its environment. Specifically, the platform architecture is structured with the user as an active participant. Members of this online community are not mere consumers of content but rather contributors, actively shaping discussions and generating their own textual material to share within the group. In this manner, they collectively construct a digital environment centered on shared interests and a dedication for learning constructed languages. Through their active engagement, they foster ongoing interactions and cultivate meaningful connections with fellow members. Referring back to Cotoc's (2017, p. 199) framework discussed previously, it becomes evident that the identification of members within the fandom occurs almost seamlessly upon their integration into the group. Our research findings (see Chapters IV and V) further illuminate the active nature of "The Song of Ice and Fire" fandom in the digital realm. Here, members consistently generate new content and engage in ongoing discussions, particularly within specific servers, on a daily basis. Cotoc's notion that "the posts and the shares represent the young authors' input and the comments and the likes are the qualitative/or quantitative feedback" is resonant within our observed dynamics. Notably, our investigation reveals a continuous exchange of feedback within our focal group. Active participants consistently respond to others' posts, offer assistance, and notably, exhibit active interaction with David Peterson. They seek clarification on language-related matters or await his validation on certain linguistic issues. According to Cover (2023, p. 29), Facebook or Instagram, have no real purpose for most people if they are not generating content for distribution and engaging with other people's content through commentary and sharing. Cotoc extends this notion by underscoring the significance of comments and likes, which serve as indicators of validation, social approval, and group identity (2017, p. 199). We concur with these perspectives. Consider a scenario within "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord group where members post content on the servers. If these posts receive minimal

engagement, lacking likes or comments from other members, the original poster may perceive a lack of feedback. While it is not obligatory for every member to immediately react to others' posts or comments, consistent disregard for such interactions can disrupt the group dynamic over time. Active engagement with others' content is pivotal for securing validation, social approval, and reinforcing group identity. Encouragingly, our research findings suggest that members within our focal digital community adhere to these unspoken norms, fostering a culture of acknowledgment and validation within the online collective. In this context, it seems fitting to explore the notion of "interactivity" as delineated by Cover (2023). According to the author,

> *we often use the term interactivity to describe the face-to-face conversational way in which people engage with each other, and that metaphor of interactivity began to apply to the early Internet because digital engagement was marked by the shift from engaging with earlier, traditional media that did not have a mechanism to allow us to change or utilise the text in different ways (e.g., radio, film, books).* (Cover, 2023, p. 27)

Cover defines the notion of interactivity as

> *some of the ways in which digital communication and networking re-figured practices of authorship, co-creativity or co-participation in the production of texts, remixes and mash-ups, thereby producing new texts and new ideas and the changing nature, role and function of audiences.* (Cover, 2023, p. 27)

At this juncture, we find it appropriate to briefly introduce the concept of online "relationality", a topic that has garnered attention from scholars. Cover (2023, p. 43) cites Lewis, West, and Green, who argue that online rationality is developed through 'the creation and maintenance of friends lists through reciprocal adding and accepting of friends (Lewis & West, 2009, p. 1210), and "engaging with those friends to varying degrees through interactive communication such as updating, commenting, responding and tagging" (Green, 2008, p. 7). Cover adds that

> *just like profile management, both of these are performative acts of identification that occur in relation to others and in terms of belonging. They are specific activities which produce, constitute and stabilise our identities.* (Cover, 2023, p. 43)

Subsequently, we will illustrate one of Cover's forms of performativity which, according to the author is "through friendship and relationality, where identifications are *stabilised* through commentary, updates, discussions and communication with those in our network" (2023, p. 44). The author states that

the performativity of relationships and belonging in social networking is, in other words, not limited to (a) owning a list of friends and/ or (b) being on another's list of friends but on maintaining flows of communication through the multifarious vectors of friendship and relationality on social networking sites. (Cover, 2023, p. 44)

According to Lewis and West (2009, p. 1222),

communication and comments are not always necessarily simply updates on one's actual status, thoughts and feelings; responses to others' comments; and other engagement with networked friends. Rather, they operate within various sets of connotations and significations that may be recognised by others – common experiences, shared amusements, in-jokes among a close inner circle. (Lewis & West, 2009, p. 1222)

Cover (2023, p. 45) argues that, "what this means, is how we perform our identities is recognised in different ways by others, and the intelligibility of the self may be more *easily* recognised by some in our network as opposed to others." The author concludes that

belonging becomes not a thing but a momentary intersection between different dimensions of identification managed but always persistently in flux. Online relationality, identification, mutuality and performance, then, are constituted by a structural logic of "nodes and hubs" (Castells, 2000, p. 443) *whereby we relate in complex ways to others across a fluid network of relationships.* (Cover, 2023, p. 45)

We agree that for an online community to be recognized as such, it is essential to exhibit the four main characteristics outlined by Cover (2023): relationality, identification, mutuality, and performance. Lacking these components makes it challenging to perceive it as an authentic digital community where individuals actively cultivate relationships and uphold a sense of community and belonging. Being part of a fandom encompasses more than mere admiration for someone or something; it also entails actively engaging in the community and playing a role in its continuity by utilizing the diverse interactive features offered by digital social platforms. Subsequently, we aim to discuss the users' motivations with learning and teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian within the "Song of Ice and Fire" digital fandom on Discord in the last section of the present sub-chapter.

User Motivations for Learning and Teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian on Discord

When it comes to leisure activities beyond work-related responsibilities, individuals encounter a plethora of options. Whether one delves into a chosen pastime for relaxation, personal passion, intellectual curiosity, the urge to explore

new avenues, emotional fulfillment, seeking excitement, fostering social connections, or aligning with specific social circles, whether in virtual or physical spaces, each person harbors a motivation for their engagement. Needless to say, it is within everyone's right to pursue such activities. Yet, an intriguing dynamic arises when those who do not share the same interests find such hobbies both strange and intriguing. Common inquiries include how one developed an interest in a particular pursuit along with the recurring "Why?" question that consistently arises in such conversations. In numerous instances, grasping individuals' decisions proves challenging, often leading to not only query but also pass judgment on their interests. Consider, once more, the example of "Trekkies." This expansive "Star Trek" fanbase has faced considerable criticism over the years merely due to the fervent dedication of its members to the franchise. According to Jenkins (1992, p. 10), there are many popular stereotypes about fans who:

> - *devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge;*
> - *place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material ("It's just a television show");*
> - *are social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience ("Get a Life");*
> - *are infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature;*
> - *are unable to separate fantasy from reality.* (Jenkins, 1992, p. 10)

Interestingly, similar descriptions apply to other franchise fandoms, such as the "Game of Thrones" fandom. Much like Star Trek enthusiasts, GoT[2] fans exhibit a passionate devotion to a television series, devotion that some may perceive as placing undue importance on culturally devalued material. Moreover, they may face unwarranted accusations of blurring the lines between fantasy and reality. Additionally, many within these fandoms harbor a significant interest in learning the constructed languages featured in the respective series – Klingon in the case of "Star Trek" and Dothraki and High Valyrian in the case of "Game of Thrones." As our study focuses on the "Game of Thrones" fandom, particularly the "The Song of Ice and Fire" digital fanbase on Discord, where members gather to further their knowledge of these constructed languages, our discussion will revolve around the motivations driving their engagement in language learning within this fandom setting.

At the outset of our investigation, we initially relied on assumptions to discern the motivations of these dedicated fans. However, recognizing the limitations of mere conjecture or hypotheses, particularly in scientific inquiry, we

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[2] *Game of Thrones*

deemed it imperative to gain firsthand insights from individuals intimately involved with Dothraki and High Valyrian, as well as members of "The Song of Ice and Fire" fandom. In order to delve deeper into the motivations behind individuals' pursuit of learning a constructed language – particularly one confined to the realms of fiction or digital environments, and distinct from natural languages, as well as to understand their choices regarding leisure activities, we reached out to David Peterson, the linguist responsible for crafting Dothraki and High Valyrian for the HBO series "Game of Thrones," and Reuben Hayslett (known as Khal Tihi), an avid and involved member of "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord community. When queried about the motivating factors driving members of the "Game of Thrones" fandom to attain fluency in Dothraki or High Valyrian, despite the abundance of natural languages suitable for communication in diverse social contexts (such as Spanish, French, Dutch, etc.), Khal Tihi provided the following response:

I think "The Languages of Ice and Fire" community is motivated by the want to feel like a part of the franchise, and a desire to engage with the franchise on a deeper, personal level. As I said earlier too, there's an element of play here as well. To be able to play around with the world-building of the franchise, which is quite rich. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

One motivating factor involves a sense of belonging to the franchise and a desire for deeper association with it. This incentive may be shared among many fans who actively participate in a fandom. Nonetheless, numerous other motivations likely exist, and our aim was to gain insights into as many of these as possible. Another motive we deemed probable was that individuals' primary motive for acquiring proficiency in the Dothraki or High Valyrian languages was practical in nature, similar to learning any other language, with the aim of engaging in real-world interactions with fellow Dothraki or High Valyrian speakers. Consequently, we included this query in the interview, and Khal Tihi provided the following response:

I think most people like the idea of a shared language among a small community. Almost like a "secret code." Being a "Game of Thrones" fan is almost like a gateway into the community, but eventually that fades. For instance, I personally don't like the show anymore and don't recommend it to people who haven't seen it. I do love the language, though. After the initial interest in the show fades, what keeps speakers active is the idea of playing around in the language. Learning how to talk about your life and express yourself in a Dothraki way, rather than your native language. This hasn't come up in any other questions so far so I'll just insert this here: The depiction of Dothraki people on the show is much more barbaric, violent, and patriarchal than their depiction in the books, and in the language itself. Most new speakers are surprised and comforted by how the Dothraki language subverts the assumptions

people have about the Dothraki people. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

What we found particularly intriguing in Khal Tihi's response was the observation that while enthusiasm for the show may diminish over time, the dedication to learning the constructed languages from the series persists. As a result, another motivating factor for members of the fandom is the acquisition of this "secret code", which they exclusively share with fellow community members, thereby enabling them to creatively engage with the language.

Naturally, we were curious to learn Khal Tihi's personal perspective on the two constructed languages. Consequently, we inquired about his preference between Dothraki and High Valyrian, and, of course, the rationale behind his choice. Here's an excerpt from the interview with Tihi's response:

Dothraki. Apart from the pseudo-cultural ties of it being a language spoken by racially ambiguous brown skinned people, I prefer Dothraki because it's a more developed language than Valyrian, which in many ways; David Peterson is still creating and developing. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

As previously discussed in this paper, individuals may possess various motivations and rationales for learning a constructed language. One of Khal Tihi's principal drivers was the perceived racial parallels between himself, his family, and the Dothraki people within the "Game of Thrones" universe. This alone sparked his initial interest in their language. In the subsequent segment of our interview, we asked Khal Tihi regarding alternative motivations that individuals might harbor when undertaking such an endeavor. Assuming someone lacks inclination to learn Dothraki or High Valyrian for practical conversational purposes and does not share Khal Tihi's personal reasons, such as hobbies or racial associations, what other incentives might drive them? During our interview with David Peterson, he expressed, "I imagine that people study High Valyrian for the same reason I create languages: They enjoy it. There's nothing mysterious or nefarious about it." Subsequently, we inquired whether Khal Tihi shared Peterson's perspective, to which he responded as follows:

I agree. There's not much to be gained or to be lost in learning Dothraki or Valyrian. I see it as a fun, unique, and interesting hobby that helps color my life. On a slow, boring day, I can translate a favorite song and learn how to sing it in Dothraki. Not to perform for others, but just for my own enjoyment of doing it. That said, I am aware that I'm a steward of the language and that that in itself has some significance. Every February, for Black History Month, I translate something written by an African American into Dothraki, so that the work of African Americans is predominantly

featured in the "corpus" of Dothraki translations. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014).

For individuals uninvolved with a TV franchise or the study of constructed languages, such a pursuit may seem utterly absurd. Let's consider the scenario where studying constructed languages is viewed as a typical hobby – an activity devoid of any extraordinary attributes. However, the question arises: why invest significant time and effort into mastering a language spoken by a limited number of individuals, especially when proficiency is not guaranteed, and its usage is primarily confined to digital spaces? Naturally, one may ponder: is the investment worthwhile? Khal Tihi's perspective on this matter was:

I believe it is worthwhile. For one, there's the enjoyment factor. But there's also an immense sense of joy I get when I can more accurately express myself in Dothraki than I can in English. While traveling I often journal while waiting at airports, and I've found over the years that I can be more honest, forthright, and vulnerable while journaling in Dothraki than I can in English. And I enjoy revisiting journal entries written in Dothraki from my past travels. It's hard to put this precisely to words but there is a certain kind of fulfillment from having "Dothraki language speaker" as an identity. I include Dothraki on my resume when listing the languages I'm proficient in. We have a Dothraki holiday (April 29th) that I observe every year since it started in 2020. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

Drawing from our research findings and insights provided by one of the most active members of "The Song of Ice and Fire" community on Discord, who possesses a high level of proficiency in Dothraki, we discovered that engaging in constructed language learning transcends mere conversation with fellow speakers. As depicted in Khal Tihi's response, individuals often utilize such languages for deeply personal reasons. For many, language serves as a vital instrument for self-expression, whether through verbal communication or written expression, as exemplified by Khal Tihi's journaling. Utilizing a constructed language for this purpose is no different from employing song lyrics or poetry; each individual must determine the most suitable means of expression that works best for them. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the enjoyment derived from such endeavors. Many people immerse themselves in activities that bring them joy and fulfillment, and constructed language learning is no exception. While some may perceive fandom as merely expressing fondness for a specific franchise, language, or interest, for many enthusiasts, it evolves into an integral aspect of their lives, ingrained into their daily routines, and eventually woven into their identity. Khal Tihi's experience exemplifies this phenomenon. Through our interview, we discovered that he has adopted a Dothraki name, by which he is commonly addressed, despite not having formally changed it yet:

I've been successful in changing my name (not legally, yet, but interpersonally) to my Dothraki name, and have faced very little pushback from people. But again, I'm a racially ambiguous person of color and "Tihi" appears to most people as an ethnic name of some kind. I've been going by Tihi since 2017 and most people I know now aren't aware that it is not my legal name. Even my family refer to me as Tihi, although they occasionally dead-name me. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014)

As previously stated, we also sought to obtain insights from David Peterson regarding the enthusiasm of "Game of Thrones" fans for his constructed languages. His response was somewhat unexpected and diverged from our research findings thus far. Here is an excerpt:

Honestly, I find the focus on these two languages to be a kind of epiphenomenon of the myth of their popularity. At this point I think my name has a higher status (whether it's lauded or derided) than any of the languages I've created. [...] I really and truly do not think either language has a huge following, and neither has very many users (certainly not Dothraki). [...] Maybe one day there will be an actual community around one of my languages that isn't Trigedasleng, but I sincerely doubt it. They're only going to become less relevant, at least as languages, as opposed to art pieces. (David J. Peterson, personal communication, June 5, 2023)

It was rather intriguing to discover Peterson's sense of disappointment regarding the level of engagement with his constructed languages within the fandom, particularly as it contrasts with the data we gathered from online platforms. Our observations revealed a significant level of fan involvement with both Dothraki and High Valyrian on Discord. While there appears to be a higher number of High Valyrian enthusiasts, this can largely be attributed to the availability of language learning resources such as the Duolingo app. As a closing mark, we were keen to understand both Peterson's and Tihi's perspectives on the influence of Dothraki and High Valyrian on popular culture and the broader community of language enthusiasts. Peterson's response to this inquiry was as follows:

I don't know if it's had a large impact. The fact that people know that Dothraki and Valyrian exist has had some impact (i.e. people know created languages exist, that they can exist, and that people may enjoy learning them), but neither have made the footprint of Klingon, or even Na'vi. My fondest hope is that their presence has demonstrated that language learning can be fun; it need not be a chore. The fact that language study has been turned into a chore is one of the more senseless crimes of the 20th century. There's nothing about elective language learning that should require it to be a source of stress, and yet for so many it is, and that is truly a shame. Dothraki especially has also been used as fodder for cranks who want to complain about people learning "fake" languages instead of "real" languages. None of their

arguments withstand scrutiny, as it essentially boils down to "I only want people to do things I approve of". Of course, if it wasn't Dothraki, it would be Klingon, or whatever other conlang is en vogue. The guilty will always find a ready weapon with which to bludgeon the innocent. (David J. Peterson, personal communication, June 5, 2023)

Tihi's response was succinct and conveyed a degree of disappointment similar to Peterson's sentiment, however stating that,

there is some influence. We are usually regarded with fascination, but not always given a platform. I think that proficient Dothraki speakers have just as much, if not more, to say about Dothraki people as George RR Martin, Jason Momoa, and/or other actors who spoke the language on the show, because we actually live with the language full time. (R. Hayslett (Khal Tihi) personal communication, March 3, 2014).

The sense of disappointment evident in both Peterson's and Tihi's perspectives is understandable. From the standpoint of the language creator, Peterson likely anticipated a sizable fanbase for Dothraki and/or High Valyrian, akin to the popularity experienced by Klingon. However, this expectation was not met. Conversely, Tihi, as an active member of the Dothraki fan community, may seek greater validation and recognition, similar to the acclaim garnered by actors who spoke Dothraki in the TV series. However, despite their disappointments, both Peterson and Tihi persist in their respective pursuits: Peterson continues to construct languages, while Tihi remains actively involved with fellow Dothraki language enthusiasts, utilizing the language in various contexts. Nevertheless, when queried about considering proficiency in another constructed language, Tihi answered negatively.

Conclusions

In exploring the digital fandom surrounding "The Song of Ice and Fire" on Discord, we traversed through various dimensions of fandom culture and identity construction. Beginning with an examination of the foundational definitions and key concepts of fandom, we delved into fan typologies and societal perceptions, shedding light on the diverse ways in which fans are classified and understood. Our exploration extended to the nuanced dynamics of taste and media consumption, elucidating the implications of identifying with specific media productions. As our focus narrowed to "The Song of Ice and Fire" digital fandom, we delved into the intricacies of identity and cyber identity construction within this online community. Through discussions on user motivations for learning and teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian on Discord, we uncovered the multifaceted reasons driving fan engagement and participation in language learning endeavors. Among these reasons, fan members are drawn to the allure of immersing

themselves in the rich fictional world of "Game of Thrones", seeking to deepen their connection with the narrative by mastering the languages spoken by their favorite characters. Additionally, the desire to communicate with fellow enthusiasts and express their passion for the franchise in a unique way serves as a compelling motivation. Moreover, some fans view language learning as a form of cultural exploration, embracing the opportunity to delve into the linguistic intricacies of a fictional civilization. These varied motivations underscore the diverse and dynamic nature of fan engagement within the digital landscape of "The Song of Ice and Fire" fandom on Discord. Further motivations expressed by Khal Tihi include the pursuit of a hobby, the identification with racial and cultural aspects portrayed in the franchise, the desire to connect with the storyline on a deeper level, the need to be part of a community that shares a "secret code", and the quest to find a means of expressing thoughts and feelings in a unique manner. These additional motivations enrich our understanding of the multifaceted reasons driving fan participation in language learning activities within the "The Song of Ice and Fire" digital fandom on Discord.

Integral to our investigation were the insights gleaned from personal interviews with linguist David Peterson and Reuben Hayslett (Khal Tihi), a prominent member of "The Song of Ice and Fire" Discord fandom. Their perspectives provided invaluable depth and context to our understanding of the motivations, challenges, and aspirations of individuals within this digital community. In summary, our research highlights the intricate interaction between identity, community, and media involvement in digital fandom environments. Through an analysis of fan culture and language learning behaviors, we have provided insight into the diverse array of experiences and motivations that influence the "The Song of Ice and Fire" online fandom. As digital technologies evolve, the dynamics of fandom and cyber identity will undoubtedly evolve as well, presenting numerous opportunities for further exploration and analysis within the continually expanding sphere of online communities.

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Reading for Conducting Research Purposes: The Case of Second-Year Master's Students of British Civilisation

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Abstract

This paper explores the area of reading for research purposes. It examines the reading habits and techniques employed by second-year British Civilisation Master's students at Mustapha Stambouli-Mascara University, Algeria. To meet this end, a mixed-methods approach was used. A questionnaire was selected to investigate the learners' attitudes towards the different available information sources, reading habits, and difficulties when reading and synthesising those materials. A semi-structured interview was conducted with supervisors to get more in-depth insights on conducting research work. The paper sheds light on learners' complex processes while choosing, understanding, and combining materials from academic literature. A special focus was placed on digital resources' availability and influence on their research fulfilment. The results showed that the twenty learners involved in this study faced various issues at different levels and often resorted to techniques that they deemed helpful. Teachers-supervisors also highlighted important insights that should be considered, such as devoting modules to the teaching of conducting research and reading for research purposes, besides providing training on the use of technology and AI tools.

Keywords: *Digital resources, reading habits, second-year Master's students, scholarly texts, techniques.*

Introduction

Today, reading and research are fundamental key concepts in higher education. Effective reading habits and carefully selected research strategies are two essential academic success parameters. They enable learners to investigate the complexities of academic literature, gather relevant data, and construct a comprehensive understanding through integrating knowledge from various sources. For students enrolled in their second year of Masters in British

Civilisation, a field rich in historical significance and cultural exploration, and required to conduct research and write a thesis, mastering these two skills is necessary.

In this vein, British Civilisation is widely known as an interdisciplinary field of study that goes beyond history to reach culture and societal evolution. To master research in this field, traditional approaches rely on different techniques, including library research, printed literature, document synthesising, recording events, and note-taking. However, with the advent of technology as a facilitating tool, digital resources are mainly promoted among researchers, teachers and learners. This shift in preferences, accessibility, and usefulness raises essential questions about how Master's students in British Civilisation navigate this transition and fulfil their academic research.

While the significance of effective reading habits and research strategies is widely acknowledged, a lack of comprehensive studies examining the practices and challenges encountered by second-year Master's students in this discipline is noticed. To meet this end, this study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the reading habits and research strategies used by these learners for research purposes. It also aims to understand the complex relationship between traditional and digital methods, as the latter become an integral academic research tool. In this regard, two questions are put forward:

- What are the primary information sources and reading strategies used by second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation at Mustapha Stambouli-Mascara University for research purposes?
- What challenges do second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation encounter when engaging with scholarly texts for research purposes, and how do digital resources influence these challenges?

This study is believed to provide essential data for researchers. Exploring the way second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation search for the needed information, understand it, and synthesise it is believed to be of vital significance. In this line of consideration, findings are expected to contribute to understanding the dynamics within this academic discipline and the broader debate on the evolving relationship between technology and traditional reading habits and techniques in academic research. Moreover, the insights gained from this study are expected to offer practical implications for teachers, syllabus designers, and researchers, enabling them to adjust their approaches and teaching methods to respond positively to the needs of the learners and the requirements of the digital era.

2. Literature Review

2.1. DEFINITION OF READING

Reading is an essential skill for students as it plays a crucial role in their overall academic success. Scholars propose different definitions. McKay (2006) defines reading as both a process and a product, emphasising the interaction between the reader and the text. She states, "Reading is both process and product. This means the reading process involves interacting with the reader and the text. The product of reading is reading comprehension or internal construction of meaning; there has been understanding." (McKay, 2006, p. 224)

Frankle *et al*. (2016) also highlight that reading goes beyond merging information from the text with the reader's prior knowledge. It encompasses the knowledge derived from the reader's past experiences and relationships. They (2016) state, "Reading is about more than combining information from the text with a reader's prior knowledge. It is also about the kind of knowledge that the reader possesses based on prior experiences and relationships." (p. 8)

Moreover, it is essential to recognise reading as a complex skill. Broughton *et al*. (1998) highlight this complexity, stating, "First it must be recognised that reading is a complex skill, that is to say, that it involves a whole series of lesser skills." (p. 89). One of these fundamental skills is recognising stylised shapes, including figures on the ground, curves, lines, and dots in patterned relationships.

Ultimately, scholars offer diverse perspectives on the definition of reading, highlighting its complexity and the cognitive processes involved. Some definitions emphasise reading as the ability to decode written symbols and derive meaning from text. Others stress the interactive nature of reading, where readers actively engage with the text to construct meaning, make connections, and critically analyse information.

2.2. READING HABITS AND STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

Developing effective reading habits and strategies is essential for academic research, which requires fostering efficient reading habits and strategies. Similarly, Owusu-Acheaw (2014) believes that students' academic achievements are significantly influenced by their reading habits, emphasising the strong connection and dependence between reading and academic success.

According to Singhal's study (2001), Oxford (1990) presented a comprehensive classification scheme that proves helpful, stating that if applicable to the various aspects of language learning, including the realm of reading strategies, it is more appropriate to consider six sub-strategies summarised as follows:

Cognitive strategies encompass a range of language-manipulating activities such as note-taking (Gourley, 2021) and summarising, that is, to express information in one's own demanding the reader identify critical elements during reading and succinctly express the information using their own language words (Armbruster *et al.*, 2001), paraphrasing, predicting (Küçükoğlu, 2013), analysing, and utilising context clues. Ultimately, these strategies help readers engage actively with the material and express their understanding in their own words.

Memory strategies, also known as mnemonic techniques, enhance learners' capacity to remember and retrieve information effectively. These strategies encompass a range of methods, including the creation of vivid mental images by grouping and associating concepts (Küçükoğlu, 2013), utilising semantic mapping to organise information, employing keywords as memory triggers, making word associations to establish connections, and situating new words within a contextual framework. By employing these strategies, readers can enhance their ability to remember and comprehend the content.

Compensation strategies encompass skills like making inferences, through which students can draw conclusions, predict, identify themes, extract meaning from text, interpret images (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), and engage in contextual guessing while reading and employing reference materials like dictionaries. In other words, these strategies help readers fill in gaps in their understanding and extract meaning from the text.

In reading, metacognitive strategies encompass different methods such as focusing attention, evaluating oneself, structuring information, establishing objectives, actively seeking opportunities to practice, etc. Moreover, another illustration of a metacognitive strategy in reading is the capacity to monitor one's performance and rectify mistakes, which helps readers become more aware of their reading strengths and weaknesses, effectively set goals, and adjust their reading strategies accordingly.

Learners also employ effective strategies for managing emotions and creating a conducive learning environment. Such strategies include engaging in self-encouraging behaviour to alleviate anxiety and foster a positive attitude towards learning. By fostering a positive attitude towards reading and reducing anxiety, individuals can approach reading tasks enthusiastically and openly, improving comprehension and enjoyment.

Finally, social strategies pertain to involving others in the learning process. These strategies include collaborating with peers, engaging in discussions, asking for corrections, and seeking feedback. For example, while reading, a student may actively seek input and feedback from another individual regarding their

comprehension, interpretation, or analysis of the text. By interacting with others, readers can gain different perspectives, deepen their understanding of the text, and refine their reading comprehension skills.

2.3. Impact of Digital Resources on Reading Comprehension

The digital revolution has significantly transformed how students read, write, and access information in academic settings. However, it is undeniable that reader preferences still lean towards print rather than screen-based reading, as demonstrated by several studies (Kretzschmar *et al*., 2013; Baron *et al*., 2017). Despite this preference, the impact of digital resources on reading comprehension remains a subject of debate among researchers. Studies comparing reading comprehension in digital and print mediums have yielded mixed results, further adding to the complexity of this issue.

Kretzschmar *et al*.'s study (2013), which compared reading from digital media "tablet" to reading from print books, showed that comprehension accuracy did not differ between the two. Ultimately, they emphasised the need to separate subjective evaluations from cognitive processes in digital reading.

In this vein, Schugar *et al*. (2011) write, "Our research found no discernible differences in reading comprehension levels between the e-Reader and non-e-Reader groups". (p. 174). However, they went a step further and argued that according to the survey findings, it was observed that students tended to utilise active reading techniques such as highlighting, bookmarking, and annotating when engaging with traditional printed texts. However, these same active reading skills were not consistently applied or transferred to their reading of electronic texts or e-readings.

The latter results highlight the findings of Dillon *et al*. (1988) regarding reading texts on screens. According to their study, reading from screens was found to be slower, less accurate, and more fatiguing, resulting in reduced comprehension and being subjectively perceived as less effective than reading from paper (as cited in Ackerman, 2011). However, it is essential to question the relevance of these findings in the present day and whether they still hold true.

2.4. Challenges Faced by Students Who Are Conducting Research for Literature Review Writing

Students face common challenges in research writing, particularly when navigating the literature review process. This shared experience is evident across various studies, highlighting the complexities students encounter in their academic journey. In a qualitative study conducted by Yeh (2010) at a Taiwanese university, graduate students' experiences with research writing were examined in depth. The

study revealed that reviewing related literature was one of the most difficult tasks for these students. As novice researchers, they faced numerous challenges in this area. Searching for appropriate sources and assessing their quality and relevance posed significant difficulties due to their limited knowledge and skills. Additionally, they struggled with paraphrasing others' ideas effectively, finding it challenging to convey concepts from existing literature in their own words. Furthermore, correctly using vocabulary and academic language proved another obstacle for these students.

Furthermore, Benbellal and Khaledi (2021) pinpoint several challenges students face in writing the literature review chapter, which is discussed based on interviews and content analysis. The difficulties identified by students include summarising and paraphrasing ideas, counterclaiming, and indicating gaps in previous research. Students also struggled with writing in-text citations and the list of references, synthesising knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position, and maintaining language, coherence, and cohesion in their writing. Additionally, issues such as asserting formative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed, indicating theoretical positions/frameworks, and interpreting terminology used in the dissertation were revealed during the content analysis.

Collectively, these studies bring attention to the extensive array of challenges that students encounter throughout the literature review process. The findings highlight the diverse and multifaceted nature of students' difficulties as they engage with the intricacies of conducting literature reviews.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted with twenty-six second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation at the English language and literature department of Mustapha Stambouli-Mascara University, Algeria, and six teachers-supervisors working in the same Department.

This study used a non-probability sampling method to select learners and supervisors. The non-random selection technique is deemed the most adequate as it allows for the inclusion of every single informant. In other words, it is essential to select individuals based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010).

In this respect, convenience sampling was selected mainly because it allowed for targeting individuals who were available and willing to be involved in the study and met the necessary criteria, including primarily the idea of sharing the same purpose, i.e., to read for conducting research purposes and supervising

students' works. It is worth mentioning that although this sampling technique may not ensure the generalisability of the findings, it provides valuable insights and an in-depth understanding of the selected population.

3.2. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Two research instruments were employed in this study. A questionnaire was administered to second year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation. It aims to gather the needed data on the learners' preferences for information sources, reading practices, and challenges encountered when engaging with scholarly texts. A semi-structured interview with supervisors is another essential tool that provides further insights into the research process.

As mentioned before, the questionnaire was selected to gather the needed data. It was administered to twenty-six learners. It consisted of different types of questions, including open-ended, close-ended, and demographic questions. The following are examples taken from the questionnaire:

- Demographic questions: What is your speciality?
- Close-ended questions: Apart from research, do you read?
- Open-ended questions: How do you synthesise scholarly texts you choose to include in your research?

The questionnaire comprised 20 questions divided into four rubrics: The first rubric was devoted to learners' profile and reading habits, including their areas of specialism, their adopted reading habits, the time allocated to reading, and the inclusion of technology. The second rubric was dedicated to exploring the main obstacles students face while reading for conducting research purposes. The third rubric was reserved for the strategies learners adapt to overcome the issues highlighted in the second rubric. In the last rubric, students were invited to provide recommendations to better cope with their situation. At this stage, it is important to stress that the questionnaire was piloted with informants. After the piloting phase, a number of questions were simplified, and others were modified and added.

The semi-structured interview was conducted with six teachers-supervisors working at the English language and literature department of Mustapha Stambouli-Mascara University. It consisted of 16 questions divided into four sections, each devoted to enlightening an important element. The first section was reserved for teachers' profiles, including their qualifications, specialisation, and expertise in supervising students' work. The second section, Challenges Faced, aimed to shed light on the issues their students faced while reading and conducting their research. Questions related to the common issues students faced in understanding research

materials and whether they found it challenging to combine information from different sources were asked.

The third section was devoted to the strategies students have to use while fulfilling their research. Elements, such as the types of documents, tools, resources and strategies, were discussed in this section. The last section discussed support and help as fundamental elements students often seek while conducting research. Teachers were asked about the guidelines they offer to their students, the organisation of workshops and training, and their suggestions for selecting the needed materials, reading and synthesising documents effectively, and conducting appropriate research.

In this semi-structured interview, a mixed type of questions was used, including close-ended questions such as the following example:

- Do you offer guidelines to help your learners in selecting materials?
  Open-ended questions were also asked, including notably:
- How do you deal with the students who face issues in conducting research and materials selection?

3.3. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In this case study, a mixed-methods approach is used. Gathering data from different sources using qualitative and quantitative methods is essential for exploring the situation, cross-checking results, and ensuring the credibility of findings. To meet this end, a questionnaire was administered to second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation, considered an essential tool. It aims to gather the needed data on the learners' preferences for information sources, reading practices, and challenges encountered when engaging with scholarly texts. The semi-structured interview with supervisors is another essential tool that provides further insights into conducting research work. Data collected are analysed systematically to provide a holistic understanding of the importance of considering the relationship between technology and traditional reading methods in academic research, even though using a mixed-methods approach is valuable for researchers. Still, it has its limitations, which are highlighted in this paper.

4. Results and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the study explores the information selection, comprehension and synthesis processes adopted by second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation at the English language and literature department of Mustapha Stambouli-Mascara University, Algeria. The research

also considers the availability and the impact of digital resources on their research process. At this level, important results were gathered from the learners' questionnaire provided. The twenty informants who answered the questionnaire were adults enrolled in their second year of Master's and specialised in British Civilisation. This latter may reveal their awareness of their reading habits, the obstacles they face and the strategies they adopt.

The informants taking part in the study revealed that apart from their research, they often read for a period that ranges from a few minutes to entire hours. They read for different purposes, as mentioned in the figure below:

Figure 1.
Students Reading Purposes
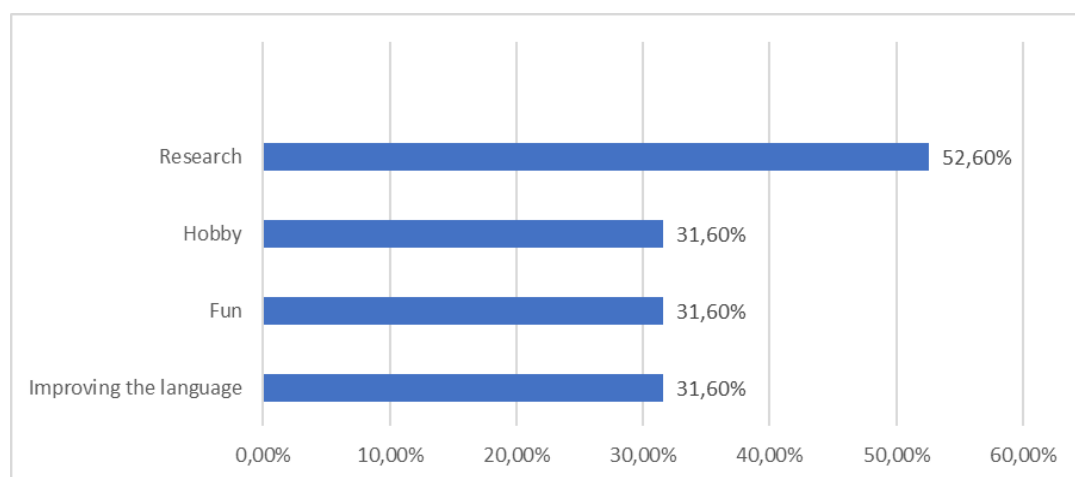
Believing in the vital role played by technology (78.95%) of the responses highlighted its crucial significance in research, emphasising its role, ease of use, assistance in data collection and access to information, and its ability to provide sources and simplify the research process. As for the type of reading documents, (63,20%) of the informants show a preference for printed documents over digital ones. Informants, also acknowledge the availability of various resources, from pdf to articles, books, e-books, etc. They considered technology a facilitating tool for conducting research, contributing to their reading experience. Still, the majority (63,20%) prefer books, as mentioned in the figure below.

Figure 2.
Types of Materials / Reading Resources
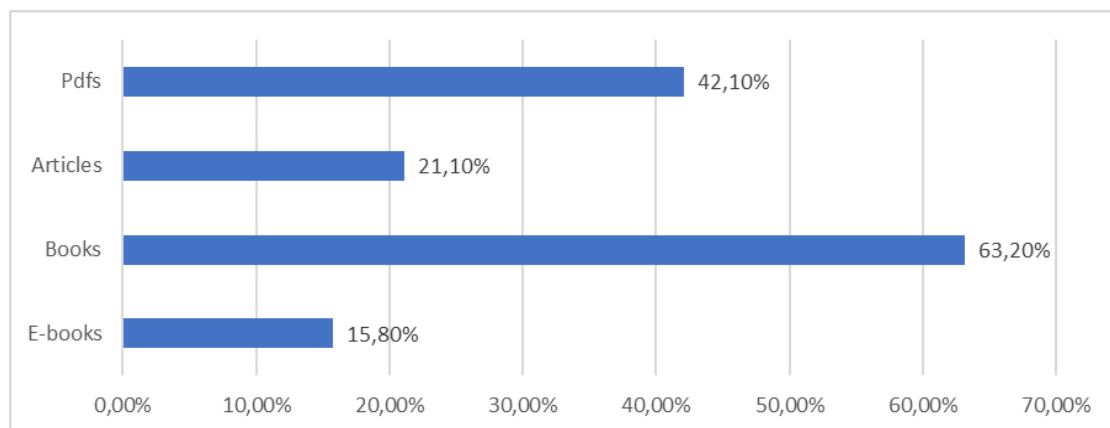
As for the second rubric, informants agreed on the following issues they face when reading for conducting research:

- Understanding complex academic texts.
- Lack of motivation to engage with reading materials.
- Limited time for reading due to other academic commitments.
- Loss of focus and interest while reading.
- Difficulty in synthesising information from multiple sources.
- Lack of access to relevant reading materials.

They go beyond to mention other obstacles, including primarily:

- High costs of printed books and limited access to printed sources can pose challenges.
- Difficulty in understanding complex terms and vocabulary, which can impede comprehension.
- Specialty-specific vocabulary and vague words may require additional effort for clarification.
- Forgetting ideas and reading too quickly without proper focus can affect retention and understanding.

Based on the difficulties mentioned above, informants were invited to identify the strategies they adopt to facilitate the reading process. In this regard, students revealed that they often resort to the use of the following strategies, including:

- Breaking down readings into smaller, manageable sections.
- Actively highlighting and taking notes while reading.
- Utilising online resources or supplementary materials.
- Summarising the main points or critical arguments.

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Another element of the questionnaire was selecting the needed materials. Informants' answers varied from a random selection based on availability to an objective one based on relevance and reliability. Online sources such as academic databases or specific websites were also mentioned. The use of AI was another method informants used to select their materials.

Respondents relied on rereading the materials, relating them to the research topic, conducting close reading and analysis, using summarising tools and simplifying language, employing translation methods and dictionaries, and relying on prior background knowledge to understand these selected materials. However, some respondents expressed uncertainty or lack of comprehension.

Informants need to use AI tools and summarisation techniques to synthesise scholarly texts to be included in their research and identify common points. Mixing ideas from different sources and selecting appropriate methods were also mentioned. Overall, the reliance on AI tools and the ongoing exploration of strategies were the dominant strategies among the respondents' answers.

Apart from the already mentioned strategies and to overcome the reading barriers, informants suggested other solutions, including:

- Watching videos as an alternative method to understand the topic.
- Using other platforms like YouTube or academic channels.
- Reading the abstract and conclusion sections.
- Looking for the meaning of the target concept when facing reading obstacles.
- Moving forward to the next line.
- Translating methods to enhance understanding.
- Key information and summarising main ideas to enhance comprehension.
- Searching for events or terms individually to gain a clearer understanding.

In the last rubric, informants were invited to provide suggestions to better cope with their needs and facilitate the reading for research purposes. Their answers were summarised as follows:

- The inclusion of AI tools.
- Working in groups.
- Actively highlighting and taking notes while reading.
- Summarising the main points and key arguments.
- Reading abstracts and conclusions while searching for relevant information.

As mentioned before, the semi-structured interview was selected as the second research tool that aims to enlighten the reading process for conducting research purposes from the angle of the teachers-supervisors. In this regard,

findings revealed that the informants in question hold a doctorate in various fields, including ESP, Didactics, Civilisation, and Literature, and they supervise students in different fields. The common element is that they all supervise second-year Master's students specialising in British Civilisation at the English language and literature department of Mustapha Stambouli-Mascara University, Algeria. Their supervision experience ranges from 7 to 20 years. This latter denoted that their expertise in monitoring students' works increased their awareness of the learners' needs. It allows them to detect the main issues and offer their learners assistance with diverse expertise and extensive supervisory experience.

While reading for research purposes, students faced different challenges. In this regard, teachers-supervisors prefer to divide them into four areas, including:

1. Reading Challenges:
   - Difficulty in grasping material gist.
   - Weak idea connections.
   - Vocabulary comprehension.
   - Fear of full-book reading.
   - Uncertain starting point.
   - Lack of reading strategies.
   - Critical thinking, paraphrasing.
   - Selective reading.
   - Idea connection difficulties.
   - Vocabulary gaps.
   - Research topic narrowing.
   - Material selection issues.
2. Understanding Research Materials Challenges:
   - Difficulty in selecting appropriate research materials.
   - Unfamiliarity with the field.
   - Lack of practice navigating research materials.
3. Sources Introducing Complexity for Supervisees:
   - The high cost and lack of access to research materials.
   - Challenges and complexities posed by the length of books, long articles, and specialised archives.
   - Unique demands and difficulties associated with specialised books.
4. Synthesising Information from Multiple Sources Challenges:
   - Challenges related particularly to literature review.
   - Struggle with combining information from various sources.

- Difficulties in classifying, switching, and commenting on information.
- Challenges in deciding what to include or exclude due to limited reading.

As for the sources and strategies adopted by the learners, teachers-supervisors answers indicated that students depend on various sources, like eBooks, Google Books, Google Scholar, PDFs, videos, journals, and periodicals for their research. As a result, they emphasised the learners' dependence on digital resources. For the strategies, informants identified a set of common strategies that are summarised as follows:

- Selective reading.
- Skimming.
- Summarising.
- Paraphrasing.
- Note-taking.
- Highlighting the keywords and main points.
- Using websites and AI tools such as ChatGPT.
- Elaborating reading cards.

Responses to collaborative strategies teachers-supervisors deem successful were varied. Some noted partnerships in synthesising quotes, interpreting findings, and providing recommendations, while others called for more practice or reported rare instances. The effectiveness of collaboration was seen to depend on students' ability to employ diverse strategies. One participant specifically mentioned successful collaboration during the development of reading cards.

To assist students facing reading issues in conducting research, materials selection and synthesising data, teachers-supervisors claim that they often resort to:

- Guide them in choosing the appropriate research method.
- Help develop an outline and list of references.
- Conduct preliminary sessions to explain the matter.
- Provide individualised help and support.
- Practice together before they work independently.
- Review key points from research methodology courses.
- Offer guidelines.
- Organising workshops / training at the beginning of their research journey depending on their motivation and teachers' schedule.

Drawing from the previous data, teachers-supervisors were invited to provide suggestions for enhancing students' research experience, specifically improving their reading skills. Their suggestions are summarised as follows:

- Formal training in thesis fulfilment and digital tools to enhance research quality.
- Emphasise extensive reading in the students' field of speciality to familiarise them with the subject matter, academic writing style, and different research methods.
- Conduct training sessions on specific points, such as source selection, reading techniques, and synthesis.
- Devote a practical module for thesis development from the undergraduate years to the Master's level.

The interview analysis also provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by students during the research process, particularly in the area of reading. The teachers-supervisors, with extensive academic experience and expertise in various fields, identified several common reading challenges among students. In this regard, the informants highlighted the following difficulties:

- Understanding the main ideas of the different reading materials they recourse to;
- Failure to draw logical relationships between the identified ideas;
- Hostility towards lengthy books;
- Students often fail to understand technical terms;
- They do not know how to narrow down their research topics;
- They also find it challenging to adopt the appropriate technique, including paraphrasing, summarising, note-taking, quoting, etc.

Informants also stressed that in the literature review, i.e., the theoretical part of the student's work, where they should reveal a high command of the different research skills already gained, students enrolled in their second-year Master's do not know how to combine ideas and discuss them systematically. In this case, they often appeal to their supervisors to ask them "what to include" and "what to exclude."

To address these challenges, the teachers-supervisors mentioned various resources and strategies students employ. These include relying on digital sources like eBooks, Google Books, Google Scholar, PDFs, videos, journals, and periodicals. Students also employ strategies such as selective reading, skimming, summarising, paraphrasing, note-taking, highlighting keywords and main points, and utilising websites and AI tools like ChatGPT. It is worth noting that reading cards were specifically highlighted as a successful collaborative strategy.

It is known that teachers-supervisors have a vital role in assisting students who face reading challenges and conducting research. In this study, informants

help students by guiding them in choosing appropriate research methods, mainly related to outlining and referencing. Besides, they provide preliminary sessions to explain the research process through workshops to offer individualised support. Additionally, they practice together before working individually and review key points from research methodology courses, and they provide them with guidelines.

In terms of enhancing students' research experience, the suggestions provided by informants include formal training in thesis fulfilment and digital tools, emphasising the importance of extensive reading in the student's field of speciality. They also stressed the need to organise regular training sessions devoted to the different academic writing techniques, including reading and writing techniques such as note-taking, note-making, brainstorming, and mind mapping. They also suggested that students should have a purely practical module devoted to the art of writing and defending a thesis.

Results gathered from the semi-structured interview conducted with teachers-supervisors revealed crucial insights related to the issues students often struggle with while reading and conducting their research. Besides, valuable insights were also gathered, related to the type of resources students often use, the strategies they adopt, and the kind of assistance they seek from their supervisors. Informants also provided valuable recommendations to enhance the quality of the research conducted by students while improving the needed skills.

The study offers valuable insights to researchers who often seek to understand students' reading habits and practices in their second-year Master of British Civilisation. Today, with the advent of technology and based on the results of this study, the intricate relationship between technology and traditional reading methods needs to be reviewed. To meet this end, flexibility is a key parameter. This latter can be best practised by adopting a balanced approach between traditional and innovative approaches in our academic settings. Results also highlighted that students who examine issues in selecting appropriate materials, understanding complex ideas, lacking time, funding, and motivation, and facing difficulties critically reviewing the needed information must be addressed carefully.

To move further, it should be acknowledged that students often adopt essential techniques and strategies to overcome the already-mentioned difficulties. Among those strategies is the use of online resources for their accessibility. They also relied on their prior knowledge, motivated by the idea that having background knowledge would facilitate their understanding of the task. Adopting note-taking, summarising, and breaking down reading materials into small units will help them maintain their focus while reading. Results also show that students are open to

using AI tools, which they consider facilitating tools. Informants also acknowledge the need to use other solutions, including watching videos, reading translated materials, focusing on abstracts and conclusions, looking for definitions in different databases, and searching for the needed information individually.

As mentioned above, AI tools were perceived as facilitating tools students often use when reading and writing for conducting research purposes. This latter could reveal that incorporating those tools is no longer a personal choice but a must. In this regard, after carefully examining the techniques and strategies adopted by the informants, it is revealed that ongoing research is needed to adopt a positive view toward innovative ideas. The diverse range of strategies informants often resort to use also highlights the individualised nature of reading preferences and the need for a flexible approach in research-related reading practices.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, syllabus designers are invited to reconsider the inclusion of modules that offer formal preparation for students to use technology, especially AI, as a facilitating tool in education. Libraries should prioritise the acquisition and accessibility of diverse resource materials, encompassing both traditional and digital formats, to respond positively to different students' preferences. Furthermore, decision-makers at different institutions are recommended to equip their institutions with different Artificial Intelligence tools and packages to enhance the quality of student research.

Despite the already mentioned contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge, it is important to reveal the set of limitations of this study. These can be related to the following parameters: the sample size, the absence of an effective assessment of the learners' implemented strategies, and the lack of consideration for discipline-specific requirements. At this level, future research is needed. This latter should consider including larger-scale studies to explore other difficulties, assess the effectiveness of different strategies, and shed light on the demands of different disciplines. While adopting these recommendations, studies will contribute to a holistic understanding of the issues and perspectives related to reading for research purposes among students.

Finally, employing and adapting efficient reading techniques in traditional and digital research approaches is crucial. The implementation of these techniques is deemed to enhance learners' reading experiences. In this line of consideration, this paper provides significant insights for the learners, the teachers-supervisors, and syllabus designers who wish to understand and improve the reading experiences of students enrolled in their second-year Master's and who are

supposed to conduct research for thesis fulfilment. In this regard, teachers are advised to implement a practical approach focusing on the two key parameters, i.e., guidance and assistance in reading comprehension and research techniques. They are also encouraged to set up a positive environment that fosters the effective implementation of various strategies to successfully overcome obstacles in reading.

Based on the research findings that align with the existing literature (Hayashi, 1999; Duke & Pearson, 2009; Küçükoğlu, 2013), a set of recommendations are offered below for effective reading strategies that can be adapted for research purposes. It should be noted that the effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on the reader. The suggested strategies are summarised as follows:

1. SQ3R Method
   - Traditional: Use the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) method for in-depth reading. Survey the text, generate questions, read actively, recite or summarise key points, and review the material.
   - Digital: Apply the SQ3R method to digital reading using digital tools to survey the text, generate digital annotations and questions, actively read and engage with the material, recite or summarise digitally, and review digital notes.

2. Skimming and Scanning
   These two are related to the pre-reading phase and can be applied as follows:
   - Traditional: Skim through physical text by quickly running your eyes over the pages to identify main ideas and key arguments.
   - Digital: Use scrolling and visual scanning techniques to skim through digital text quickly, focusing on headings, subheadings, and highlighted information.

3. Summarising
   - Traditional: After reading a physical text, summarise the main points by writing a concise summary or discussing it with others.
   - Digital: Create digital summaries by highlighting and annotating important points within the text or using note-taking features in e-readers or reading apps.

4. Visual Representation
   - Traditional: Create visual representations of information using pen and paper, such as mind maps or diagrams.

- Digital: Utilise digital tools like mind-mapping software, diagramming tools, or note-taking apps to create visual representations of information while reading digital texts. Text or using note-taking features in e-readers or reading apps.

5. Read a Variety of Texts
- Traditional: Explore various physical texts, including books, journals, and newspapers, across different genres, subjects, and authors.
- Digital: Access a variety of digital texts, such as e-books, online articles, or blogs, to diversify your reading experience and access a broader range of information.

6. Chunking
- Traditional: Break down the physical text into smaller, manageable chunks or sections. Read and comprehend each chunk before moving on to the next.
- Digital: Utilise digital features like page breaks, scrolling, or digital bookmarks to create virtual chunks within the digital text, aiding comprehension and focus.

7. Multi-modal Reading

A combination of traditional and digital is required by supplementing reading with other sensory experiences, such as listening to related podcasts, watching relevant videos, or exploring visual aids like maps or diagrams.

8. Collaborative Reading
- Traditional: Engage in reading groups or book clubs to discuss and exchange ideas with others who have read the same physical text.
- Digital: Participate in online forums, discussion boards, or virtual book clubs to connect with fellow readers and collaborate on reading digital texts.

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Language as a Catalyst:
The Catalan Language, Nationalism, and the Impact of the Language Immersion Model on Education

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Abstract

This article explores the role of language in consolidating identity and promoting a sense of belonging. Taking the Catalan model as a case study, the article intends to analyze how language and education are used as means of integrating or excluding linguistic groups. Moreover, aspects related to language policies are addressed, highlighting the positive and negative aspects, and supporting the need for a balanced approach to avoid exclusivist tendencies.

Keywords: *identity, language, nationalism, language immersion model, Catalonia.*

Introduction

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.

In an era of transformation, states must learn to manage the cultural diversity they face within their borders and develop policies that emphasize mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and socio-cultural integration. They must find the most appropriate option and a balance between the equality of all citizens, as a fundamental human right, and the recognition of the distinct character of each culture and the right to have access to and enjoy one's own culture, through special rights. But in many cases, cultural diversity became problematic when majority rights and minority rights overlapped.

A community's identity is deeply rooted in attachment, devotion, participation, and a shared interest in preserving its linguistic, cultural, or historical distinctiveness. Moreover, the injustices suffered in the past leave a mark on their

collective identity and make the sense of belonging even deeper. Mother tongue is perhaps the most distinctive and enduring element of identity. Be it majorities, national or ethnic minorities, the fundamental goal of any group is linguistic continuity as a means of group survival. Language is not only a communication tool, but also the expression of a culture and a collective consciousness. How people adapt their language to different contexts and how societal norms, history, and political decisions influence language are debated topics in both sociolinguistics and international relations.

In the case of Catalonia, the spirit of identity and attachment stem from two sources. The first is the economic momentum taken long before the rest of Spain, complemented by the cultural, literary, and linguistic richness, which gave them their distinct character. The second source is the suppression of language and culture during the Francoist period and the need to compensate for the injustices suffered.

In the context of Catalonia's distinctive character, balancing linguistic preservation with social inclusion proved to be a challenging task. This article raises the question of how language policies in Catalonia impact the collective identity of the Catalan minority. Specifically, it examines the legal framework and the immersion program and investigates how language policies in Catalan education shape the cultural integration of linguistic groups, exploring both the positive and negative implications of using language as a tool.

Theoretical perspective

The concepts of minority, identity, and nationalism are closely intertwined. As professor Andre-Louis Sanguin pointed out, a

> *stateless ethnic group defines a small community in isolated form, that has to defend a language which is not spoken anywhere else. Without having a sovereign state, the community cannot be based either on a homeland neighboring country or a linguistic hinterland, often evolving in a difficult context (see the cases of the Sami, Frisian, Welsh, Corsicans, Occitan, Bretons, Catalans, Basques, Sardinians etc.).* (Ivan, 2011, p. 109)

In this context, stateless ethnic groups do not have a state of their own to rely on. For example, languages like Catalan, Basque or Sami are spoken in limited areas, with no neighboring nation to actively promote the languages. These groups are in a vulnerable position and susceptible to disappearance. Even though Catalans have regional autonomy, they still face pressures from the dominant language, the struggle for linguistic preservation being a continuous challenge.

Some scholars, such as Gellner and Hobsbawm, argue that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, the result of industrialization, mass literacy, and the postmodern state, while others, like Smith, emphasize the role of religion, cultural traditions and attachment to land. In the case of Catalonia, both historical and modern elements shape its national identity (Miller, 1996, p. 114). The promotion of Catalan as the main language of instruction in education reflects the dynamic character of their identity, evolving while maintaining cultural traditions and a strong connection to place.

Besides being a tool of identity preservation, language plays a very important role in self-determination, legitimizing political aspirations. Thus, language functions as a linking symbol of collective identity, connecting a group and differentiating it from the rest. Kedourie argues that: "language is the external and visible badge of those differences which distinguish one nation from another; it is the most important criterion by which a nation is recognized to exist and to have the right to form a state on its own." (Miller, 1996, p. 114) This perspective is relevant in the case of Catalonia, where the promotion of the Catalan language justifies their political goals of self-determination and autonomy. Thus, language preservation is a goal in itself and a means to achieve further political goals and establish power relations.

Discussing the issue of individual versus collective rights, there are two distinct perspectives regarding Spain and Catalonia. The monolingual liberal Spain-centered view promotes the idea that Spanish is the main official language of the state known by all Spaniards and bilingualism is an issue to be debated only at local level. Therefore, the use of local languages should be territorially limited, and policies should be implemented only at this level. The social-democratic peripheral perspective suggests that there is no peaceful coexistence between the dominant Spanish language and the rest of the local languages, but a relation of subordination. In this situation, the logical step should be to normalize the status of the subordinate languages and make them equal with the dominant one (Clua i Fainé, 2017, p. 55). Hence the never-ending dichotomy between the individual rights of Spanish speakers and the collective rights of Catalans and between the Spanish nation-state and the stateless Catalonia. We can observe two contrasting types of nationalism manifested here. Firstly, Spanish nationalism considering Spanish as the official language of the state and, consequently, the right of every citizen, regardless of the region in which they live, to speak and study it freely. Secondly, Catalan nationalism, shaped by a history of oppression that severely limited linguistic rights, emphasizes the need to preserve and promote the Catalan language. From their perspective, Spanish, as the official and dominant language,

is known and spoken by all, not needing more support and promotion, unlike Catalan, which is restricted in number of speakers and geographical location, thus the need to put more emphasis on its preservation.

Minority, identity, and nationalism are linked through the struggle for linguistic and cultural preservation. A stateless ethnic group, as a minority, must protect their language and culture against all the elements threatening their survival. The increased vulnerability of these groups is exploited for political reasons, using language as a main tool. In this way, nationalism for stateless groups becomes not just a cultural expression but also a way to face subordination.

The roots of Catalan nationalism

From a theoretical standpoint, Ernest Gellner promotes the idea that "industrialization rearranges the social fabric, making it more susceptible to different social phenomena than agrarian societies". (Kark, 2007) Thus, with this shift in focus and activities, people need to change their habits too. Mobilities from the rural area to the urban one and contacts with people beyond your local community require education and knowing a common language, pushing individuals towards a wider cultural space, and creating a new collective identity than the previous one, as a significant sign of advancement (Kark, 2007).

Starting from the 18th century, Catalonia established itself as a distinct region, standing out especially in terms of economy and culture. In contrast to the highly agrarian Spain, Catalonia started to industrialize and urbanize, leaving them behind in terms of economic growth and profitability. The uneven development of the country, with Catalonia being the primary provider and yet having no support from the state, fueled their discontent.

The German Romanticism arrived in Catalonia in the 1830s, taking the form of the cultural movement known as Renaixença (Renaissance). The core concept during this period was Herder's concept of Volk. According to him, individuals can define themselves based on religion, language, or a common feeling. The Volk, this collective entity, has a joint soul manifested through culture, and a strong common consciousness, making mixing with others merely impossible. The concept of Volk influenced the Catalan intellectuals, who started to question the differences between the Spaniards and the Catalans in terms of success, seriousness, and common sense (Kark, 2007).

Following the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and Francisco Franco's nationalist ideology promoting the dominance of Spanish, the Catalan language and culture were marginalized for a long period of time. Only later, with Spain's orientation

towards the European democratic values, was Catalonia acknowledged as a distinct nation within Spanish borders.

The legal framework

The roots of Catalan nationalism and their attachment to language go back to the Franco era, when their linguistic rights were practically annulled. The Catalan was banned from all fields of activity, economic, social, political or cultural. In schools, public administration, and media, the official language was Castilian. Additionally, all the names were translated into Spanish. The only source of language preservation remained their own home. After Franco's death and the change in regime, the Catalan nationalism focused on the recognition of the Catalan's language status.

In 1979, the Spanish Autonomous Communities were established, making Catalonia one of the main autonomous regions of Spain, with a high degree of self-government. Generalitat de Catalunya (the Catalan Government) placed education and culture at the core of their activity, as a means of identity preservation. This includes the promotion of the Catalan language in all spheres of activity and a language immersion model to normalize the use of Catalan (Clua i Fainé, 2017, pp. 46-47).

The legal framework for the Language Immersion Model relies on the Spanish Constitution of 1978, the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia (1979) and the new version of 2006, Law 7/1983 on Linguistic Normalization, replaced by the Language Policy Law (1998) and Law 12/2009 on Education. To understand the role of this initiative we shall analyze the main provisions.

Article 143 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 mentions the right to form Autonomous Communities and self-government for provinces with common historic, cultural, and economic characteristics (Spanish Constitution, 1978). References about culture, research and teaching in the local language can be found in Article 148.

Article 3 of the same Constitution states that:

> *Castilian is the official Spanish language of the State. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it. The other Spanish languages shall also be official in the respective Autonomous Communities in accordance with their statutes.* (Spanish Constitution, 1978)

The first Statute of Autonomy (1979) provides the legal framework for language policy. Catalan was recognized as the official language of the region, alongside Castilian, the official language of the state. The Generalitat ensured

access to and use of both languages, with the legal provisions to guarantee equal rights and responsibilities (Language Policy Law, 1998).

In 2006, an updated version of the Statute promoted Catalan as the primary language within Catalonia. While still recognizing both Catalan and Castilian as official, the revised statute placed Catalan's normal and preferential use in administration, media, and education. This evolution was a clear attempt to strengthen the Catalan presence in all domains and to balance bilingualism with language preservation. In terms of education, Catalan shall normally be used as the teaching and learning language. Students should also have the right and obligation to have a sufficient knowledge of Catalan and Castilian when completing compulsory education, with both languages being represented in the curricula. Students will not be segregated based on their language of use (Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, 2006).

Law 7/1983 on linguistic normalization in Catalonia had the purpose of standardizing the use of Catalan in all areas of activity. According to the law, the Catalan language is the main language of Catalonia, and the language normally used in education, political, social, or economic affairs or in relation to the authorities. However, Castilian is an official language also and may be used if the speaker requires it to be used. Education should be ensured in both languages at non-university level and all students have the obligation to know both languages when graduating from their compulsory studies (Law on Linguistic Normalization, 1983).

The Language Policy Law adopted in 1998 replaced the 1983 law. As it is stipulated in Articles 2 and 3, Catalan is the language used in administration, institutions, companies, public services, media, and education. At the same time, Castilian is also the official language that can be used in all public or private activities. In the case of administrative procedures, public and judicial documents, both Catalan and Castilian might be used at request. Moreover, personal and place names should be written only in Catalan. Chapter III offers an insight into the educational system. Article 20 specifies that: "Catalan, as Catalonia's own language, is also that of education, at all levels and types of schooling." (Language Policy Law, 1998) In pre-university education, the teaching of both Catalan and Castilian is guaranteed. In colleges and universities, the language of study is of students' choice. Regarding the written media, radio, television, as well as all types of entertainment and cultural events, the main language is generally Catalan.

The 2009 Law on Education emphasizes Catalan as the primary language of instruction, with the specification that almost all subjects, except Spanish language and literature and foreign languages, be taught in Catalan. At the same time,

segregation based on language is prohibited and by the end of their compulsory education students should acquire a strong command of both languages. Article 15 of this law describes the immersion model as a factor of social cohesion. The program includes strategies for linguistic adaptability based on the local linguistic landscape, tailoring language instruction to community needs and allowing schools to modify their schedules to effectively implement these measures. (Law on Education, 2009)

The main goal of the immersion was to create a unified system, integrating all children and giving them the opportunity to learn both languages. However, complaints started to appear, coming from Spanish parents dissatisfied with the fact that their children are forced to study in Catalan and don't have enough opportunities to study Castilian.

The European Parliament's report on the efficiency of the language immersion model

The European Parliament sent a mission to Catalonia in December 2023, to analyze the language immersion model and its impact on Spanish-speaking pupils. The goal was to investigate the complaints coming from several Spanish-speaking parents about the refusal of the authorities to ensure more classes in Spanish. After meetings with the petitioners, the representatives of the teachers, members of the judiciary, regional authorities and several visits to schools, the committee concluded that the petitioners accuse the Catalan authorities of not complying with the law and ensure a minimum of 25% teaching in Spanish. Besides the refusal of the schools, they also faced discrimination, harassment, bullying and hate speech coming from Catalan society.

On the other hand, the Catalan authorities insisted that the language immersion model is highly efficient, offering competence in both languages by the end of the educational cycle. Moreover, they intend to continue with full immersion due to the need to preserve the Catalan language, which would otherwise be lost.

After visiting several schools, the delegates observed that even if school representatives support the idea of bilingual education, in practice, the announcements and official sites offer information only in Catalan or English. Besides, not too many school subjects in Spanish are added to the curriculum. The justification was that Spanish is known and spoken by everybody, therefore, the focus is placed on Catalan.

The delegation's primary recommendation urges Catalonia to ensure equal treatment for Spanish and Catalan as languages of instruction and particularly to

accommodate students with special needs who have Spanish as their first language. They emphasized that Catalonia's language policy significantly affects social and economic factors, impeding families from other Spanish regions to relocate due to language barriers, thus infringing with the European Union's principle of free movement.

To address these concerns, the regional authorities should improve communication and provide information on official school websites in both languages. Furthermore, both regional and national authorities should establish a defense protocol for families to protect them from harassment, bullying, and social exclusion.

The delegation also calls for close monitoring by the Commission regarding the implementation of EU Article 165 in Catalonia, especially regarding the regional authorities' commitment to respecting cultural and linguistic diversity. Additionally, the delegation notes that the High Court of Justice of Catalonia's ruling on December 16, 2020, mandating a 25% provision of teaching in Spanish within the Catalan education system, is currently not being enforced by the Regional Administration. It emphasizes the importance of upholding the rule of law, a fundamental principle of the EU outlined in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and asserts that the failure of both Spanish and Catalan public administrations to comply with judicial decisions constitutes a breach of this principle (Mission Report, 2024).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to analyze the legal framework regarding Catalan language rights, the educational system, and the effectiveness of the language immersion model, addressing the complex dynamics between Catalan and Spanish linguistic rights. As can be seen, although the legal framework has been in place for some time, grievances have not stopped arising.

On the one hand, the Catalan authorities believe the approach is effective and inclusive, with all students being bilingual and competent in both languages upon completion of compulsory education. On the other hand, Spanish speakers in Catalonia accuse the authorities of lack of communication and refusal to allocate more hours in Spanish for their children. Following the visit of the European Parliament's delegation, the conclusions are not exactly favorable to Catalonia. They found deficiencies in communication between the Spanish petitioners and the authorities, as well as the reluctance of Catalan society regarding their rights, raising concerns over the efficiency of the program.

As for the European Union, since the respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the main principles guiding the organization, and any discrimination based on language is prohibited, they will continue to monitor the situation in Catalonia and the changes brought with the language immersion model. The article ultimately suggests that Catalonia's case exemplifies the complexities of linguistic integration. Adopting a legal framework is just the first step of an ongoing process of consultation and adaptability.

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Recruitment of informers and collaborators by the security system from within the religious entities, in communist Romania

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Abstract

The article "Recruitment of informers and collaborators by the Security system from within the religious entities, in communist Romania" explores the mechanisms and methods used by the communist Securitate to infiltrate and control the various religious cults in Romania. During the communist period, the regime viewed churches and other religious organizations as potential threats to the atheist state and acted to expand its influence and surveillance over them. Through a combination of pressure, blackmail, rewards and coercion, the Securitate system managed to recruit a significant number of informers and collaborators from among the clergy and laity.

These individuals were used to report on the activities and opinions of believers, to monitor religious leaders, and to destabilize any form of resistance against the regime. The article details specific recruitment strategies, including the use of compromising files and promises of protection or career advancement. The moral and social implications of these practices are also analysed, highlighting the internal conflicts and betrayals that have undermined religious communities.

Keywords: *Securitate, Informers, Recruitment, Religious entities, Communism.*

Introduction

During the communist period in Romania, control over many aspects of social, economic and political life was a priority of the totalitarian regime. Among the main objectives of the *Securitate*, the regime's secret police, was the surveillance and infiltration of religious cults. The communist regime perceived religion as a threat to its absolute authority and therefore implemented a number of strategies to control and manipulate religious activities. Recruiting informers and collaborators from within cults was one of the main methods used to maintain this surveillance.

Religion, in its essence, represents a sphere of influence that runs counter to communist ideology, which promotes atheism and rejects any form of power or authority that could compete with the state. Consequently, the Church and other religious organizations were systematically targeted by the *Securitate's* agents. Clergy and active members of religious communities were considered likely to direct believers against state policies, organize forms of resistance or support dissident movements. In order to neutralize these risks, the *Securitate* resorted to the recruitment of informers and collaborators from among them (Troncotă, 1999, p. 32).

The process of recruiting informers within religious cults was complex and often coercive. A variety of methods were used, from blackmail and psychological pressure to promises of protection or material advantages. For example, individuals with compromising records were often coerced into cooperating to avoid exposure or retaliation. Other times, promises of professional advancement or family protection were enough to convince certain people to become informers or collaborators (CNSAS, 2007, pp. 168-169).

The impact of these practices on religious communities was profound and devastating. First, the recruitment of informers created an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust within the communities. Members of the religious community no longer knew who they could trust, and this undermining mood eroded cohesion and solidarity. Moreover, informers were often used to manipulate and control religious activities, to discredit inconvenient religious leaders, and to destabilize any form of resistance.

1. *Methods of recruitment of informers*

INTIMIDATION AND BLACKMAIL TACTICS

The recruitment of informers by the *Securitate* in communist Romania was a complex and often brutal process based on a combination of intimidation, blackmail and psychological pressure. The *Securitate*, the main tool of repression of the communist regime, aimed to supervise and control all aspects of social life, including religious activities. To achieve his goals, he used various methods of recruiting informers, of which intimidation and blackmail tactics were the main ones. Terror constituted an instrument of power and the *Securitate* was used as a means of repression at the disposal of the party, hitting any potential opponent regardless of where they came from (Troncotă, 2006, p. 11).

The intimidation tactics used, were varied and extremely effective. One of the most common methods was to summon the targeted person to the headquarters of a force structure or to a conspiratorial house, for repeated interrogations. The

atmosphere in these premises was intentionally intimidating: the walls were often decorated with communist symbols and the security guards often behaved in a hostile and threatening manner. The interrogations were conducted in a way that induced fear and undermined the psychological resistance of the individual (ACNSAS, R0066822, f. 9). The agents did not hesitate to use direct threats, suggesting that refusal to cooperate could have serious consequences, including arrest, loss of job, or other forms of repression (Pelin, 1997, p. 67).

During the interrogations, agents used various psychological manipulation techniques. These included falsely accusing the person of subversive activities and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension. Often, threats of reprisals were directed not only against the person concerned, but also against members of their family. Threats to one's spouse or children were particularly effective because they induced a deep sense of responsibility and fear (Pelin, 1997, p. 67).

Blackmail was another central method in recruiting informers. Compromising information was collected about individuals, either through wiretapping, mail monitoring, or direct surveillance. This information was then used to coerce the targeted individuals into cooperating. For example, if an individual had an extramarital affair, he could be threatened with disclosure of this information, thus destroying the individual's reputation and personal life. In cases where people had a problematic political past or family members involved in anti-communist activities, they were also used as leverage for blackmail (Troncotă, 2006, p. 98).

Another aspect of blackmail involves the use of financial debt or legal problems. If a person was involved in illegal economic activities or had large debts, he could be offered "help" in exchange for cooperation. This type of intimidation was effective because it offered an apparent solution to the individual's problems, but in reality, the *Securitate* was taking advantage of the situation and making him dependent on its protection.

They also exploited individuals' personal vulnerabilities, such as fear of torture or inhumane prison conditions. People who had already been arrested or who had lived through the experience of detention were often more easily intimidated and blackmailed. During interrogations, agents often used physical and psychological torture to weaken the individual's will and make him accept cooperation as a way to escape.

In addition to intimidation and blackmail, more subtle methods of psychological coercion were also used. For example, offering material benefits, such as job promotions, access to rare goods or opportunities to travel abroad,

were used to attract collaborators (ACNSAS, SIE fund, file 0004973, f. 2). These offers were often presented as rewards for loyalty and collaboration, and refusal was seen as evidence of insubordination that could attract retaliation.

Another way of subtle intimidation involved creating an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. They spread rumours about the activities of the targeted individuals, creating the impression that they were already under surveillance and that any form of resistance would be futile. This technique was particularly effective in religious communities, where solidarity and mutual trust were essential (Deletant, 1997, p. 83).

The recruitment of informers from among the clergy and laity active in religious life also had an ideological component. The *Securitate* tried to convince individuals of the value of collaboration to protect the socialist state and prevent "threats" represented by external influences and internal opposition. In this sense, the security agents used persuasive speeches and tried to convey a sense of false patriotism, suggesting that their acts of collaboration were a service to the nation (Troncotă, 2006, p. 99).

An illustrative example of these tactics is the case of priests and pastors who were forced to cooperate by threats against the churches they served in and their members. Some of them went as far as closing churches, banning religious services or arresting active members of the religious community if their leaders refused to become informers. This put religious leaders in a difficult moral position, forcing them to choose between protecting their congregations and betraying their own principles.

The effectiveness of these methods of intimidation and blackmail was enhanced by the general atmosphere of fear and distrust established by the communist regime. Anyone could be an informer, and the *Securitate* used this sense of uncertainty to maintain tight control over the population. Consequences for refusing to cooperate were often drastic, including arrest, torture, deportation, or other repercussions, which meant that few had the courage to resist the *Securitate's* pressure. Cicerone Ionițoiu quotes professor Grigore T. Popa who said in 1947 that "one of the most terrible forms of ethics is the tyranny of the file... People fear and suspect each other." (Ionițoiu, 2006, p. 50).

The *Securitate's* recruitment of informers within religious cults in communist Romania was a complex process based on a combination of intimidation and blackmail tactics. These methods were extremely effective in maintaining control over religious activities and preventing opposition to the regime. Through the use of fear, psychological coercion and blackmail, the *Securitate* managed to create a vast network of informers to support the goals of

the communist regime, while undermining cohesion and trust within religious communities. This period influenced the collective memory quite a lot and deeply affected the relations between the state and the church even in post-communist Romania.

PROMISES OF MATERIAL BENEFITS AND SOCIAL ADVANTAGES

The recruitment of informers and collaborators, involved various strategies designed to attract individuals from all social and professional backgrounds. Among these strategies, the promise of material benefits and social advantages has been one of the most effective methods of gaining the loyalty and cooperation of individuals. In a society where resources were strictly controlled by the state and access to goods and services was limited, such promises had a significant impact on people's decision to collaborate with the regime (Dobre, 2004, p. 56).

During the communist period, the economy was centralized and planned, and the state held a monopoly over the distribution of goods and services. This meant that access to resources was a privilege controlled by state authorities. Thus, offering material benefits such as food, better housing, rare consumer goods or even access to vacations in other countries became a powerful recruiting tool. In a society where shortages of goods were frequent and many people faced economic difficulties, the promise of such benefits could persuade even the reluctant to become informers (Troncotă, 2006, p. 99).

Owning your own home was one of the most desired benefits. In communist Romania, where property rights were controlled, obtaining a comfortable apartment was often difficult. Through the administrative network at its disposal, the *Securitate* could offer more spacious housing or apartments in better areas as a reward for cooperation. This not only considerably improved the quality of life of the collaborators, but also offered them a higher social status, in a society where social inequalities were apparently denied, but in reality, very present.

Access to rare consumer goods and imported products was another major material benefit. In the context of the scarcity economy of communist Romania, many consumer goods, from household appliances to quality clothes, were difficult to obtain for the majority of the population. Access to such goods could also be facilitated for those who were willing to collaborate, either through special stores for communist nomenclature or through controlled supply channels. These material benefits not only improved the standard of living of the collaborators, but also gave them a sense of superiority and belonging to a privileged elite.

Career opportunities and professional promotion were also used to motivate individuals to cooperate. In a system where career advancement was tightly controlled by the state and loyalty to the party was an essential criterion, the *Securitate* could offer significantly improved career prospects for those who agreed to become informers. This included quick promotions, access to management positions or transfers to better paying and less demanding jobs. For many, these opportunities were hard to turn down, especially in a context where alternatives were limited.

Social benefits offered to collaborators included access to high-quality medical services, education for children in elite schools and participation in exclusive events reserved for the nomenclature. The *Securitate* could facilitate admission to an elite hospital or arrange for the education of collaborators' children to take place in prestigious schools and universities. In a society where the quality of public services varied enormously, such advantages were extremely valuable and represented a strong motivation for collaboration.

Another form of benefit was access to privileged information. Collaborators often had access to information that was hidden from the general public, including the regime's economic and political plans. This knowledge allowed them to make better informed decisions for themselves and their families and gave them a sense of security and control in an often chaotic and unpredictable environment.

Also, collaboration with the *Securitate* could provide protection against possible accusations or persecution. In a regime where suspicion was pervasive and any deviation from the official line could attract severe reprisals, collaborators enjoyed a certain immunity and protection. This not only ensured their personal safety, but also protected their families, giving them an additional reason to engage in collaboration (Câmpeanu, 2002, p. 42).

A more subtle but equally important aspect was the sense of power and influence that the collaborators acquired. As part of a system that controlled all aspects of social and political life, informers often felt invested with indirect power. This influence gave them a sense of belonging to the regime's power structures, a rare privilege in a strictly hierarchical and controlled society.

The material and social benefits offered were not without risks and moral costs. Many who accepted these advantages were aware of the price of collaboration, often involving betrayal of friends, colleagues or members of religious communities. This created a strong internal tension and, in many cases, a sense of guilt and shame. Furthermore, once a person became a collaborator, it was difficult to withdraw because the *Securitate* could use the information they held to blackmail and maintain control over them.

The communist regime in Romania used promises of material benefits and social advantages not only as a means to attract collaborators, but also as a way to strengthen loyalty to the political regime and dependence on the state. This created a highly effective system of rewards and punishments, where those who cooperated were rewarded and those who refused were severely punished. Thus, the regime could maintain strict control over the population and prevent the formation of significant opposition nuclei.

In many cases, collaborators recruited through these promises became effective *Securitate's* agents, actively contributing to the surveillance and control of religious communities. They provided valuable information about religious activities, clandestine meetings and critical attitudes towards the regime. This information was used to plan repressive actions, to intimidate religious leaders and to discourage any form of resistance (Pelin, 2003, p. 73).

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, many of those who had been collaborators were exposed, and the impact of their collaboration was often devastating to their reputations and social relations. The discovery of the *Securitate's* archives brought to light the extent of the collaboration and exposed the complex mechanisms through which the communist regime managed to control and manipulate Romanian society. For many, this period represented a painful lesson in human vulnerabilities and how totalitarian regimes can exploit the needs and weaknesses of individuals to maintain their power.

Promises of material benefits and social advantages were a central tool in the recruitment strategy of informers and collaborators by the *Securitate* in communist Romania. These benefits were extremely attractive in a society marked by shortages and tight control, giving individuals strong motivations to collaborate with the regime. Although collaboration brought concrete advantages, it also involved considerable moral and personal risks, contributing to the perpetuation of an oppressive system and undermining trust and solidarity within religious communities and beyond.

PSYCHOLOGICAL METHODS AND PRESSURES ON FAMILIES

During the communist regime in Romania, the *Securitate* used a wide range of psychological methods and pressure on families to recruit informers and collaborators. These tactics were an integral part of the regime's strategy of control and repression, designed to undermine opposition and maintain ideological order. In a context where fear and suspicion were omnipresent, psychological

manipulation and threats to the family became essential tools to force collaboration and ensure loyalty to the state (Tismăneanu, 1995, p. 52).

The psychological methods used by the *Securitate* were sophisticated and often insidious, based on exploiting the emotional and social vulnerabilities of individuals. One of the main tools was creating a climate of uncertainty and fear. The agents used repeated and prolonged interrogations to induce stress and anxiety. They asked trap questions, suggesting that the targeted person was already suspected or betrayed by someone close to them. Through these techniques, it was possible to undermine individuals' trust in those around them, isolating them and making them more susceptible to manipulation.

In addition to interrogations, the *Securitate* resorted to constant surveillance techniques to maintain a sense of omnipresence and inevitability. Targeted individuals were often followed and their daily activities closely monitored. This surveillance was not always hidden; sometimes it was deliberately made visible to intimidate and suggest that any attempt at resistance was pointless. The targeted persons thus became prisoners of their own fear, which facilitated their recruitment as informers.

Pressure on families was another effective method used to force cooperation. Threats to loved ones, such as a spouse or children, were highly effective in getting someone to cooperate. The *Securitate* knew that most people would do anything to protect their family from danger and suffering. Thus, agents threatened direct retaliation, such as arresting family members or restricting access to education and jobs. These threats were often strong enough to defeat any resistance.

An illustrative case is that of priests and pastors who, under pressure, were forced to collaborate to protect their families and congregations. These religious leaders were often threatened that if they refused, their churches would be closed and their parishioners would be persecuted. For many of these leaders, the moral dilemma was profound: they had to choose between loyalty to their beliefs and the safety of those they shepherded. The *Securitate* exploited these moral dilemmas to force cooperation, using manipulative tactics that placed religious leaders in a highly vulnerable position.

In some cases, the *Securitate* resorted to temporarily separating family members to induce fear and compliance. Spouses or parents were taken for prolonged interrogations, and other family members were left in a state of uncertainty, with no information about the fate of the missing. This technique created enormous psychological pressure, as those who remained at home lived in constant anxiety, fearing for the safety of their loved ones. In such conditions, the

promise of release or protection of family members in exchange for collaboration became extremely attractive (Oprea, 2002, p. 32).

Disinformation techniques were also used to induce paranoia and discouragement. The agents spread rumours and false information about the activities of the individuals concerned, suggesting that they were already under surveillance or that they had collaborators in their inner circles. These tactics destabilized the relationships of trust and solidarity, essential in religious and family communities. People thus became more isolated and more vulnerable to the manipulation of the *Securitate*.

In the precarious economic context of communist Romania, control over resources was another instrument of pressure. The *Securitate* could manipulate housing allocation, job promotions, and access to scarce goods to reward cooperation and punish resistance. Promises of economic and social advantages, such as better jobs or access to elite schools for children, were used to motivate individuals to cooperate. Refusal to cooperate could result in the loss of these benefits, thus creating additional economic pressure on the family.

Moreover, more subtle methods of psychological pressure, such as social isolation, were also used. People suspected of disloyalty or critical attitudes towards the regime were often marginalized, and friends and colleagues were discouraged from interacting with them. This form of social ostracism created additional pressure as isolated individuals looked for ways to reintegrate into the community, and the collaboration was often perceived as the only way to regain social and professional status.

The psychological pressures on individuals and their families had lasting effects on Romanian society. The atmosphere of fear and mistrust has eroded interpersonal relationships and left deep scars in the collective memory. After the fall of the communist regime, the discovery of the *Securitate's* archives revealed the extent and brutality of these methods, revealing the devastating impact they had on individual and community lives (Crișan, 2004, p. 29).

It is evident that the surveillance political system used many psychological methods and pressures on families to recruit informers and collaborators. Exploitation of fear, emotional manipulation, threats to the family and promises of material and social advantages were central tools in the control strategy of the communist regime. These tactics not only undermined the opposition, but also created an atmosphere of suspicion and isolation that deeply affected Romania's social structure. Understanding these methods is essential to form a picture of the

mechanisms of control and repression used by totalitarian regimes and their long-term impact on society.

They wanted to recruit an informer who held a leadership position within the church in the Bacău area. Before starting the recruitment process, detailed information is required about the activity of the person who was to be the informer within the Adventist entity. It was aimed that the people from the leadership of the cult who move through various churches in the Galați, Bârlad and Constanța Regions would not impress the believers with a line against the state. There was also the frustration that there was not enough agency to detect the counter-revolutionary activity that would be carried out under the mask of religion. That is why an informative penetration of some elements capable of discovering all those activities that would be carried out, under religious pretexts, against the state was necessary. After the situation was studied, it was concluded that the most suitable person would be the president of the "Conference" (name for the administrative area that included several counties in eastern Romania). After the life and course of the targeted person is analysed in detail and his entire activity is reported, it is proposed to recruit the person in question who showed many qualities necessary to carry out the activity of informer. Among these qualities are: the general culture that the person has, the patriotic attachment, the seriousness and the outlet that he has among the believers.

The details for recruitment are being worked out. The person will be invited to the *Consiliul Popular* to discuss issues related to worship. This invitation is the pretext to be approached and not to suspect that there are other intentions. When he gets out of there, an agent will invite the person to the Security Region residence.

In the meantime, until the actual recruitment meeting, his mail is monitored, every move he makes is tracked, multiple evidence orders are issued, he is kept under surveillance but fails to collect enough incriminating material.

A person from the *Securitate* structure is appointed to lead the recruitment process. The agent calls to the recruitment site the pastor who was to be recruited "on the basis of patriotic feelings in the Adventist issue" (ACNSAS, MFR 0002144).

The reason why this recruitment was wanted was the unmasking of the elements that carry out activity against the regime and inducing the recruited person the need to do a service to the state through this activity.

After a discussion that lasted about 6 hours, it was found that he would not be the right person because he leans too much towards religion, but he is given an undertaking that he will not divulge the discussion to other people. After taking this commitment, he is allowed to go but is told that whenever necessary he will be called to give details about the activities carried out within the Adventist cult.

Because it was not possible to collect the compromising material and blackmail the person in question, promises were made that he would be provided with work housing, which would make his work easier.

The proposed person refused any facility offered and any commitment to work as an informer for the security service. For this reason, his activity was very carefully monitored and when a plausible excuse was found, he was called to the Security, threatened and beaten.

This is an example of resistance to threats and blackmail practiced by the Securitate. And yet there were also people who succumbed to blackmail, who accepted the promises and who collaborated with the Security organs, betraying their faith and the leaders of the churches they belonged to. *(The example is taken from the file of an Adventist pastor),* (ACNSAS, MFR 0002144).

2. *Profile of informers and collaborators*

The profile of informers and collaborators during the communist period in Romania is complex and varied, reflecting the various recruitment strategies used to control religious cults and ensure the stability of the regime. In the context of an oppressive and surveilled society, both clergy and laity were targeted to become informers, each with distinct reasons for collaboration or refusal.

First of all, the recruitment of clerical informers was a priority for the *Securitate*. Clerics, through their position as spiritual leaders, had direct access to religious communities and were in a position to influence public opinion. They also held sensitive information about the activities and attitudes of believers. A combined method of intimidation, blackmail and material rewards was used to force the cooperation of the clergy. Some clerics gave in out of fear, fearing reprisals, while others were motivated by opportunism, seeing collaboration as a way to gain material and social advantages.

As for the laity involved, they included active members of the congregations, administrative staff of the churches and other influential people in the religious communities. As with the clergy, the laity were recruited through various methods of pressure and fear-mongering. The personal and economic vulnerabilities of

believers were exploited, offering tangible advantages for cooperation and threatening job losses or other sanctions in case of refusal.

The motivations for collaboration were diverse and reflected the complexity of the social and political situation in communist Romania. Fear was one of the strongest motivators. Fear of reprisals, arrest, torture, or job loss leads many to accept cooperation as a way to avoid greater suffering. The *Securitate* was adept at exploiting this fear, creating a climate of terror in which even the least cooperative was forced to yield (Betea, 2006, p. 28).

Opportunism was another significant motivation. In a society where resources were limited and access to goods and services was controlled by the state, collaboration with the *Securitate* could bring substantial benefits. Promises of better housing, access to scarce food and consumer goods, professional advancement, and other material advantages enticed many to become informers. These benefits not only improved the quality of life of the collaborators, but also gave them a higher social status in a strictly hierarchical society.

Coercion was also a major motivation. Many informers were forced to cooperate under the direct threat of reprisals against themselves or their family members. The *Securitate* threatened to reveal compromising information about individuals' personal lives to coerce them into becoming informers. Threats of arrest of family members, loss of access to education for children, or other forms of economic and social repression were frequently used methods to force cooperation.

However, not all those targeted by the *Securitate* yielded to the pressure. There have been notable cases of resistance and non-cooperation, demonstrating the courage and determination of individuals to maintain their moral and spiritual integrity in the face of oppression. A notable example is that of pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who flatly refused to cooperate and was imprisoned and tortured for his attitude. Also, priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa became a symbol of religious resistance, being subjected to multiple arrests and torture for his refusal to give in to the pressures of the regime (Buzatu, 1996, p. 45).

These instances of resistance had a significant impact on religious communities, inspiring many to maintain their faith and resist in the face of oppression. Although the *Securitate* often managed to recruit informers through fear and coercion, the resistance of those who refused to cooperate demonstrated the capacity of the human spirit to resist even the most severe forms of repression. These individuals often paid a high price for their courage, but they left a legacy of courage and dignity that survived the collapse of the communist regime.

The profile of informers and *Securitate's* collaborators within religious entities in communist Romania reflects a variety of motivations and circumstances. From clerics to laymen, from fear and opportunism to coercion, these individuals were drawn into the regime's web of surveillance and control through a combination of psychological manipulation and direct pressure. Despite the effectiveness of these methods, cases of resistance and refusal to collaborate highlight the power of spiritual and moral resistance in the face of an oppressive regime. Understanding these dynamics is essential to fully appreciate the complexity of the communist period and its impact on Romanian society.

3. The activity of informers within religious entities

The activity of the informers within the religious entities in communist Romania was an essential component of the regime's strategy to control and suppress religious influence. Through a well-organized and extensive network of informers, the *Securitate* managed to penetrate deeply into the religious life of communities, monitoring sermons, religious activities, reporting suspicious activities and criticism of the regime, and infiltrating the leadership structures of churches (Ciuceanu & Păiușan, 2001, pp. 238-240).

Monitoring religious sermons and activities was one of the main objectives of the informers. They attended services and other religious events, listening carefully to sermons and observing the behaviour of religious leaders and parishioners. During the services, the informers noted down any statement that could be interpreted as subversive or critical of the regime. They also watched how religious leaders approached political and social issues, and how they urged believers to live their lives in the context of the communist regime.

Detailed reports about sermons were analysed by agents to identify potential threats and decide on intervention measures. Sermons that contained messages of spiritual resistance or criticized state policies were considered dangerous and often led to the interrogation and arrest of the religious leaders involved. This constant monitoring was aimed not only at identifying direct critics, but also at indirectly discouraging any opposition. Religious leaders were aware of the close surveillance measures, of the reports being drawn up on the activity being carried out, and in many cases, censored their messages to avoid reprisals.

Informers also had the role of reporting suspicious activities and critical attitudes within religious communities. They observed private meetings of believers, Bible study groups, and other forms of religious socializing. Any discussion or activity that could be interpreted as subversive was reported

immediately. Informers also identified and reported individuals who expressed views critical of the regime or who displayed significant influence over other believers. This information was vital to the *Securitate* in assessing risks and planning enforcement actions.

The reporting of informers was not limited to public and official activities. They also collected information about the personal lives of religious leaders and influential believers, including personal relationships, financial problems and other vulnerabilities. This information was used to put additional pressure on individuals and compel them to cooperate. In some cases, informers recorded private conversations or planted microphones in the homes and offices of religious leaders to obtain incriminating evidence.

Infiltrating the leadership structures of the churches was another essential strategy of the *Securitate*. Informers were often placed in key positions in church administration or promoted to leadership positions to influence internal decisions and policies. These informers had the dual role of providing information to the *Securitate* and manipulating the church's activities and messages from within to align them with the interests of the regime. Infiltration allowed direct control of religious activities and prevention of any form of organized resistance.

An illustrative example of infiltration is the case of religious leaders who, under pressure, were forced to collaborate and act as double agents. These leaders were required to report on the activities of their parishioners and supervise other religious cadres. Instead, they were protected from reprisals and allowed to continue their religious activity, albeit under strict control. In some cases, collaborators within the churches helped organize smear campaigns against uncooperative religious leaders, using propaganda and disinformation to undermine their authority and influence.

The impact of these activities on religious communities was profound. Constant surveillance and infiltration created an atmosphere of suspicion and fear, undermining mutual trust and social cohesion. Many believers were aware that they could be monitored by informers and moderated their behaviour and speech accordingly. This led to a form of self-censorship that deeply affected religious life and limited freedom of expression.

Although the *Securitate's* network of informers was able to control and suppress many forms of religious opposition, it could not completely eliminate resistance. In some cases, religious leaders and believers have found creative ways to continue to practice their faith and express opposition to the regime. Clandestine services, private meetings, and the distribution of surreptitiously multiplied

religious materials were just some of the methods used to defy censorship and control.

The activity of the *Securitate's* informers within the religious entities in communist Romania was characterized by intensive surveillance and strategic infiltration. They played a key role in monitoring religious activities, reporting suspicious activities and criticism of the regime, and infiltrating church leadership structures. This activity created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, undermining the trust and cohesion of religious communities, but it failed to completely eliminate the spirit of resistance of the faithful.

4. Consequences of collaboration

Collaboration with the *Securitate* in communist Romania had profound and long-lasting consequences for religious communities and spiritual leaders. This collaboration, often forced or resulting from intense pressure, had devastating effects on the cohesion and trust within religious communities and undermined the integrity of many religious structures (Oțetea, 1970, p. 78).

The impact on religious communities was immediate and obvious. Constant surveillance and infiltration by *Securitate* created a climate of suspicion and fear. The faithful were aware that anyone around them could be an informer, which led to severe self-censorship. This climate of fear prevented the free expression of beliefs and criticism, which deeply affected the internal dynamics of religious communities. Religious services and gatherings became occasions where members felt the need to be ever careful with their words, fearing that any statement they made could be reported and used against them.

Spiritual leaders who were forced to collaborate suffered not only personally, but also had a negative impact on their parishioners. Their collaboration was often discovered after the fact, after the fall of the communist regime, when the *Securitate's* archives were opened. The revelation of these collaborations caused shock and dismay among believers, undermining trust in religious leadership and fracturing communities. Many religious leaders were seen as traitors and their spiritual authority was severely damaged. This loss of trust had long-term consequences, affecting the churches' ability to recover and fulfil their role as moral and spiritual leaders.

The long-term effects on religious structures were also significant. The infiltration and control exercised by the *Securitate* eroded the organizational integrity of the churches. Collaborators placed in leadership positions influenced internal decisions, often to the detriment of the interests of the religious

community. These collaborators implemented policies and practices that reflected the needs of the state more than those of the congregation, leading to the alienation of many believers and the loss of religious autonomy. After the fall of the regime, many churches faced the challenge of rebuilding their structures and restoring the trust of their communities.

A notable example of repression based on information provided by collaborators is the case of pastor Richard Wurmbrand. He was known for his outspoken criticism of the communist regime and his religious activism, and was arrested and tortured based on information provided by informers in his community. His brutal detention and sufferings endured in communist prisons became symbols of religious repression in Romania (Wurmbrand, 2008, pp. 32-36), and his case highlighted how the *Securitate* used the network of informers to eliminate religious opposition.

Another emblematic case is that of the priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa. He was a vocal critic of the regime and suffered multiple arrests and torture. The information that led to his arrests was often provided by collaborators within the church and its inner circles. His suffering underscored the enormous cost of religious resistance and the treacherous role of informers in perpetuating repression.

The collaboration with the *Securitate* also had psychological consequences even on the informers. Many who collaborated lived with a constant sense of guilt and shame, aware of the betrayal of their friends and communities. After the fall of the regime, some tried to reintegrate into society and religious communities, but the stigma of collaboration was hard to overcome. The discovery of collaboration led to internal conflict and social exclusion in many cases.

In the long run, the collaboration had devastating effects on the churches' public image and legitimacy. Many churches have experienced the loss of believers, who have lost faith in religious institutions and sought other forms of spirituality or abandoned religion altogether. The process of reconstruction and reconciliation has been long and difficult, requiring significant efforts to overcome the legacy of the past.

5. Conclusions

In the study regarding the collaboration with the *Securitate* in communist Romania, especially in the context of surveillance and control over religious cults, a complex picture of a society deeply affected by the regime's oppressive methods emerges. The findings of this analysis highlight not only the immediate impact of

these practices, but also the long-term consequences for the religious structures, communities and individuals involved.

The communist regime perceived religion as an ideological adversary, incompatible with its materialistic and atheistic doctrine. Thus, the subordination and control of the churches became essential priorities for the communist state. The *Securitate*, as the main tool of repression, played a crucial role in the implementation of this policy. His methods ranged from recruiting informers through intimidation and blackmail, to offering material benefits and social advantages, to psychological pressure and direct coercion.

One of the major consequences of collaboration has been the erosion of trust within religious communities. Constant infiltration and monitoring created a climate of suspicion and fear that undermined social cohesion and solidarity. Members of religious communities have become reluctant to freely express their beliefs and opinions, fearing that every word could be used against them. This self-censorship has deeply affected the internal dynamics of the churches, limited freedom of expression and thought.

Religious leaders who were forced to collaborate suffered not only personally, but also had a negative impact on their parishioners. Their collaboration, often discovered post-factum, caused dismay and shock among the faithful. The moral and spiritual authority of these leaders has been severely damaged, and in many cases, communities have lost their cohesion and trust in religious leadership. This loss of trust had long-lasting consequences, making the process of rebuilding and restoring relationships between believers difficult.

In the long term, religious structures were deeply affected by the infiltration and control exercised by the *Securitate*. Collaborators placed in leadership positions influenced internal decisions, often to the detriment of the interests of the religious community. These collaborators implemented policies and practices that reflected the needs of the state more than those of the congregation, which led to the disorientation of many believers and the loss of religious autonomy. After the fall of the regime, many churches faced the challenge of rebuilding their structures and restoring the trust of their communities.

Notable cases of repression, based on information provided by collaborators, highlighted the treacherous way in which the *Securitate* used the network of informers to eliminate religious opposition. The examples of those who suffered arrest and severe torture based on information provided by collaborators underscore the enormous cost of religious resistance and the treacherous role of informers in perpetuating repression. These cases have become symbols of

suffering and resistance in the face of oppression, demonstrating the courage and determination of some religious leaders to maintain their integrity despite intense pressure.

Many who collaborated lived with a constant sense of guilt and shame, aware of the betrayal of their friends and communities. After the fall of the regime, some tried to reintegrate into society and religious communities, but the stigma of collaboration was hard to overcome. The discovery of collaboration led to internal conflict and social exclusion in many cases.

In the long run, the collaboration had devastating effects on the churches' public image and legitimacy. Many churches have experienced the loss of believers, who have lost faith in religious institutions and sought other forms of spirituality or abandoned religion altogether. The process of reconstruction and reconciliation has been long and difficult, requiring significant efforts to overcome the legacy of the past.

Collaboration with the *Securitate* during the communist period in Romania had profound and long-lasting consequences for religious communities and spiritual leaders. The impact on religious communities has been devastating, eroding trust and internal cohesion. Long-term effects on religious structures included loss of autonomy and integrity, and notable cases of repression highlighted the treacherous role of informers in perpetuating repression. This dark period in Romania's history left deep traces, which continue to influence the relations between the state and the church and shape the country's religious landscape.

Reflections on this period show how deeply the religious communities were affected by the oppressive regime and highlight the need for processes of reconciliation and moral reconstruction. It is essential that the Romanian society understands and learns from these experiences, in order to prevent the repetition of such abuses of power in the future and to ensure the protection of religious rights and fundamental freedoms within a democratic state. Only through an honest and complete assessment of the past can we build a more just and humane future for all communities.

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ESSAYS

PRESENTATIONS

REVIEWS

Politics and Abyss

Review

***Arthur Suciu, Simulacru și război. Discursul politic în postistorie, /
"Simulacrum and War: Political Discourse in Post-History", Litera
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In his book *Simulacru și război*, published this year by the Litera Publishing House, Arthur Suciu brings up a very current problem: that of the lack of substantiation of the political discourse and the increasingly stifling presence of the simulacrum as a substitute for reality. The term simulacrum is taken from Jean Baudrillard who uses it in his book *Simulacra and simulation*, published in 1981. The concept has a longer history being used by atomist philosophy to explain the process of perception: the perceptual images are formed by "miniatures" of the external object penetrating the knowing subject. To a certain extent, Plato also talks about simulacra when he talks about the shadows and the appearances that tend to replace or to cover the true reality.

The strong meaning of the simulacrum emerges, however, only when it is no longer possible to talk about a true reality, about a world or an object that the image or the appearance hides or transports in the perceptive structures, when the place of the "real world" is taken by the abyss itself, by the groundlessness. Nietzsche's role in the foundation of this "nihilism" is well-known: in a world from which essences have disappeared, the very concept of appearance loses its meaning! And yet the fundamental concern remains: that of discovering the generative source of the historical worlds as they present themselves one after the other, more and more rapidly in recent times, primarily because of technological developments. According to Nietzsche, the source can be sought in the differentiation of wills to power: a strong will to power wants to impose its own

value system, it substantiates a world where others will have to live. However, such a perspective remains tributary to the traditional metaphysics, as Heidegger notices, since it appeals to an ultimate substantiation, to an essential reality, to a "nature", be it a psychological one: the will to power. The overcoming of this onto-theological thinking can only be done, according to Heidegger, by an exit from the state of oblivion of the being, that is, by restoring the being in the terms of nothingness, of the abyss, of the groundlessness. The rediscovery of the negativity of the being – as it had been several times understood by the philosophical and theological apophatism or, to some extent – sweetened by the logical systematization by Hegel – is Heidegger's most original contribution, which would fuel the postmodern theories and philosophies.

By removing any Hegelian logic of becoming, for Heidegger the being discovers its meanings thus grounding historical worlds in a manner which is close to the total contingency, the randomness and the absolute unpredictability. The human being is at the same time a substitute for being but also for the nothingness, and he utters the meaning of beings, thus bringing them to their being, only because it experiences the abyss in the deepest and most authentic way, the groundlessness that is revealed to him, in anguish, as if enthroned in the midst or beyond the totality of beings. Only by starting from this transcendence of totality of beings into the abyss, in the "original" groundlessness, can man also actualize being, can he become an utterer of the being of beings. The transcendent – with Heidegger – becomes a completely empty "place", but it generates through its total emptiness a knowledgeable, interrogative and researching attitude. In this reformulation of the problem of being, it becomes completely impossible to distinguish between the human "part" and the "part" of the being, as man is named by a word from which the name of the being can no longer be absent: *Dasein*. As it is difficult to have any other criterion of the true statement if anyone can claim that through his statements or works a meaning of being can be discovered.

Arthur Suciu scrutinizes this new world in which we have already been living for more than a century – which is confirmed, the author believes, even by those political constructions and those ideologies that aim to oppose nihilism, such as the Nazism and the Communism. The most impacted, as the author notices – who has extensive experience in the field of communication and institutional image – is the political discourse. The politician of this day and age feels the disappearance of an ultimate referential and he or she is discouraged to invoke it or even to think about it not only because of the resounding failure of the great political utopias, but also – because of it! – of the utterly intimidating triumph of

capitalism which, through its means of propaganda and censorship, it sanctions or it simply forbids the discussion of any alternative.

Capitalism is a world that rests on an abyss since no critical perspective upon it is possible. The capitalism claims self-sufficiency – there is no other viable economic and political system competing it, as – its followers claim – history itself has proven that through the bankruptcy of the communist system and the disasters produced by the fascist and the Nazi ideologies. The paradox is obvious: the competitive society refuses to be competed by any other society and it tries to unify the whole planet to a single economic and political model. Equally, the democratic and liberal society forbids questioning democracy and freedom. It is based on a few un-provable and indisputable postulates which, consequently, rest on an abyss, on nothing.

It is this very nothingness that the current politician, unable to be anything other than a puppet of the market, of the capitalist economic system, feels... to the fullest. Politics is totally subjugated to economics which it permanently reconfirms in a perfect circularity. Politicians who attempt to challenge the capitalist and competitive economy doom themselves to isolation, marginalization and ultimately to exclusion. Even the sovereigntist and nationalist movements do not dare to attack the foundations of the capitalist system, which remain completely unquestioned. Russia and China are the best examples thereof, with Russia reverting to pre-Bolshevik revolution oligarchy and plutocracy, and with China transplanting its communist head onto a huge capitalist body.

In this new world, "the best of possible worlds", which no longer rests on anything and which has found a prophet to announce the "end of history", that is, of the search for a better and more just world (Francis Fukuyama), the confrontation with the abyss remains a permanent threat. Capitalism has nothing left to fight against except the awareness of its founding abyss and which the individuals – not just political people – feel from time to time in their own lives. The boredom, the anguish, maybe even the anxiety derive from the feeling of suffocation that this perfectly closed, spherical world, this surrogate of the absolute, cannot help but evoke.

Beyond this world there is nothing – this is implied by all means of propaganda, but – moreover! – the individual is not allowed to face the lack of alternative and the frustration of being extirpated from one of his defining, almost vital functions: the interrogative, reflective and critical function. The capitalism does not allow one to see that its world is a closed world – opening within itself infinite avenues of entertainment, a labyrinth whose stake is always the self-loss. Capitalist entertainment is the hiding of capitalism's groundlessness.

This proximity of the alternative ground is highly interesting because, Suciu believes, one can only talk about the ground of a world from the positions of another competing world – be it a purely fictional, ideal world. As long as such a discussion is impossible – capitalism remains another form of totalitarianism – it is indeed better than the others, but totalitarianism, nevertheless.

Despite the harbingers of its end, history proves that it continues its evolution – and Arthur Suciu identifies several convincing examples that the globalism has evolved from its first American posture to a multipolar structuring, that the nationalism and the capitalism find strange forms of symbiosis or that, in some countries such as Russia and China, private enterprises remain to a large extent inextricably linked to their respective states, while in others – such as the American companies such like McDonald's or Coca-Cola – they are more independent and therefore increasingly global in a more specific sense, although under given conditions they can align with the state policy, as it is the case with their withdrawal from Russia during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

So, history moves on – altering even the structures and relationships once seen as defining for the capitalism. What is left for us to do? Shall we wait for this very movement to bring humanity before another world created from the accumulation of events, contingencies and chance – so that only then can one judge the foundations of the world that will have disappeared? This has happened before in history, and perhaps this is the very way history works: every historical world considers itself to be the last, to be total, to be definitive and unchanging. To question the relations between sovereign and subjects, between suzerains and vassals, between masters and slaves – was, for each form of government and regime, as unseemly and unimaginable as the debate about the justification of the capitalism is nowadays.

Every society is totalitarian in its own way, and we wonder if it is not global as well. Humanity seems to synchronize – obviously when there is contact between the parts of the world – and walk evenly, borrowing each other's ways and lifestyles until brought to some common denominator. The slave society was common to both the Persians and the Greeks, with all its peculiarities and its ideological confrontations between the two civilizations. We cannot say that there are radical temporal breaks between people's worlds – if these worlds communicate in one way or another. We can assume that the pre-Columbian America constituted a parallel history only if we accept the thesis of the total isolation from the Old World; otherwise – if united by roads, influences, travels – the humanity seems to have always shared a certain form of globalism.

So, shall we wait for the end of this historical world to truly judge it? Arthur Suciu is not satisfied with this solution, especially since the historical becoming itself, the end of an era or a historical world seems to be, at present, a simulation, something incomplete, a parody of the end. The simulation of the historical development, of its becoming, has long fallen to the task of technological evolution, the production of various *devices*, whose rapid moral wear fuels an entire industry of nostalgia.

We are rather nostalgic for the "time" of the pick-up or the black-and-white TV, of the landline; soon we will become nostalgic for I-phones – and this technological successor of the technological succession actually covers the immutability of the capitalist system. Technology becomes complicit in maintaining the illusion of movement and historical becoming, and so it is essential that the producers of technology create, at regular intervals, resounding innovations as they are equally producers of historical… time. The absence of social and political revolutions is well disguised by these technological "revolutions".

Certainly, the technology in turn can change the deep structures of the society – imposing new ways of feeling, thinking and seeing – but the current capitalist technology, Arthur Suciu tells us, is captive to the electricity, it produces novelty only within the paradigm of the electric current; in other words it cannot really propose a radically different way of being, but only improvements and diversifications of the light bulb, screens and telecommunications. A true new technological era is supposed to emerge when the electricity gives way to a different energy breakthrough that will re-found the world of people and the relationships among them. It is not by chance that the current apocalyptic scenarios are linked to a universal black-out that would shut down all current technology. "The world no longer revolves around the sun, but around the bulb," says the author, and elsewhere he adds that we no longer look at the sky except through a screen.

Since today's world is so indisputable and undeniable, the escapist scenarios are much more easily created around populating other planets than around changing the capitalist system. It is not difficult to perceive the inherent difficulties of the latter which cause economic crises, social segregation and, ultimately, the prospect of a global catastrophe. Competitive society faces a well-known paradox: maintaining prosperity implies the continuous accumulation; it is by definition insatiable and it implies permanent development and expansion. In turn, the consumption-based economy destroys the natural resources, leading to severe

climate change and, ultimately, to the desolation of any form of life that does not allow itself to be industrialized.

Environmentalism is directly contradictory to capitalism because economic consumption destroys the very functioning mechanism of the consumer economy that lives on the very waste of food, on excess purchases and so on. Also, in a global world, the ecological measures cannot be applied only to a certain part of the world (as Europe is forced by the *Paris Agreement*) because it creates deep discrepancies and inequalities among economic agents facing each other in the global market. The Science Fiction utopias of populating other planets are, therefore, those that respond to man's need to find a solution to a seemingly insoluble problem unlike the social utopias based on a new… natural contract, on a new agreement with the surrounding nature.

The de-demonizing of money. The Manelistic ethics and the spirit of the Romanian capitalism

Consumerism is capitalism's counterpart and its way of responding to the Marxist criticism. For capitalism has realized that it can only survive by corrupting all souls, by devoting them to the pleasure of owning capital. More precisely, the ideal of liberal capitalism – anyone can become a business owner! – is implemented through *consumerism*, transformed into a physical sensation, be it a surrogate one.

For the consumer behaves like an enterprise owner who *buys* the labor power thanks to the capital he owns, as every consumer knows that behind any product there is a quantity of labor that he pays for by the act of purchase. Much of the compulsion to buy comes from this self-validation of the consumer as a patron, through which he endlessly reconfirms – through the consumption behavior itself – the current social model, in a circularity from which he can no longer escape.

We know well that modern society, capitalism, links its destiny to a prior de-demonizing of wealth, to an acceptance of usury under the more aseptic name of interest and under the institutional form of the bank. Romania, as Suciu shows, citing Alexandru Racu, did not benefit from a similar exemption of material possession, or at least not in a systematic and constant way, but fragmentary and syncopated. Even those who "adapted" to the market economy, becoming successful owners or investors, suffered, rightly or wrongly, from a certain social stigma: the mere fact of having more presupposes certain culpability. The responsibility for this resentful allergy to money and wealth, but also for the rooting of a sui-generis entrepreneurial attitude that deflates its sense of guilt through evasive and illicit behaviors, falls on the orthodoxy and the communism.

Practically, in the case of the latter, the denial of personal wealth in favor of a collective property, of everyone and no one, means the transposition of a monastic, ascetic ideal in the form of a state policy, secular and atheistic. There is a coenobitic communism perfectly similar to the political communism. The communist state is a huge monastery, extended to the dimensions of a people, of an entire world, where no one prays. With the exception of the prayer, mysticism and God, the monastic values, mainly the exaltation of the physical labor, the denouncing of the selfish individuality and the dispossession in all aspects are promoted by the communist social model.

Money cannot be lacking either in a monastery or in a communist state, but it is dealt with as a temptation, as "the eyes of the devil", and its possession as an earthly and forgivable brotherhood with the devil ("befriend the devil 'till you pass the bridge"). As compensation, those who do join the free market game will be tributary to the same mentality and they will try to obtain its favors by bending the rules in force, by cheating the system, by being "tricksters". Trickery is, one might say, a moral behavior as long as the world of money is, by definition, ruled by the Sly. Otherwise, to behave rightly towards what is fundamentally wrong, to be honest with what is flawed in its essence puts you not only in the category of "suckers", but also in that of the most reprehensible sinners. On the contrary, to circumvent and trick, to deceive the absolute Deceiver is a model preferred by those in the Orthodox-communist space, as the most illustrative image is probably that of Ivan Turbincă.

In contrast, in Western countries, shaped by the Protestant ideal, corruption, although frequent, does not become a lifestyle, an ethos, or an ethics. To understand the Orthodox post-communist space means first of all to understand the profoundly negative valence of material possessions, in this case, the money. So, on the one hand, the poor (but honest), on the other hand, the "thieves", who are hardly sanctioned by public morality. Although the poor majority has no doubts about the illegal sources of the wealth of the wealthy, it softens the thievery, even expressing a certain sympathy and understanding towards it, as long as terms such as "thief", "trickster/slicker", swindler, rogue (i.e. the one worth standing at the gallows) have an obviously positive connotation (see Marius Ghilezan, *Hoția la români*). The highwayman was rechristened, in traditional culture, as an outlaw (*haiduc*, a Robin Hood like character) and turned into the object of eulogy and folk epic.

A partial reconversion to the assumption of wealth as a moral value is achieved in post-communist Romania not thanks to a religious movement similar to Protestantism, nor to the entrepreneurial education carried out by opinion

leaders, but through... music, more precisely through a musical genre known as "manea", exercised predominantly by musicians of Roma ethnicity. While the church and the intellectuals are silent on this matter, the "manele" start to be heard more and more often in Romanian households, familiarizing the former Orthodox-communist collectivists (but the legionnaires were also followers of collectivism) with the new values of the consumer society. What Protestantism represented for the Western capitalism is the "Manelism" for the Romanian capitalism.

When we say that Romania has become *manelized[1]* under the influence of this music genre, we must understand by this an internalization of financial values, an act of civilization - through a marginal minority with a much wider and freer onerous experience. The "Manelism" also suits the prior structures of the Romanian mind because the "money and wealth" promoted by the "Manelism" does not confirm the Western model (of Kantian duty), but that of "outlaw", "thief", trickster. The affluent Roma – living on the fringes of society and being forced to a certain defiance of its laws – becomes a model for the post-communist Romanian, for the young generations who thus express both their revolt against the system and their integration into the same system. Today the "manele" are listened to even by those young people who still call themselves Rock music fans.

This is the reason why Arthur Suciu pays attention to the figure of the *cocalar* ("thug"), a "proletarian" converted to the model of the market economy, this hybrid interested in politics, but only to the extent that it can validate him as such, as what he is. As man, unlike God, is nothing but what he does and what he has, the cocalar is defined by making money and owning money, just as the proletarian was once defined as the one who has numerous children.

The melting of Europe into the European Union

This is a memorable saying that should be reflected on for a long time. Who would have thought that the European Union is actually the end of Europe, at least in its classical sense? Even if it is a fulfillment of the deepest ambitions of Europe, of its past ideals, this fulfillment is also an end, and the Romanian language knows how to show the connection between achievement, fulfillment and finishing, end and death. Moreover, apocalyptic discourses regarding the destiny of Europe proliferated after the creation and expansion of the European Union.

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1 The term manelization, used in Romanian society, reflects the spread of manele as a musical genre. At the same time, it also refers to the acquisition of much more relaxed attitudes regarding respect for others, the values of high culture, or the appropriation of vulgar epicureanism as a fundamental principle of life.

If some while ago the Western powers, Germany, France, as well as Italy or Spain, represented poles of attraction for Eastern European countries, they also became, as important elements and centers of power within the EU, the object of Romanians' criticism and resentment and, in general, of the objections of the Eastern European nations. How can a Romanian still be a Francophile today in the way his ancestors were – after, from the height of the Élysée's armchair, he is reminded in certain contexts, that he should be silent or that he is part of the second category of European countries (Macron's Multi-speed Europe)?

Germany is, for its part, an economic power, increasingly irrelevant culturally, confirming C. Noica's providential words about its transformation into a land of butter. So, the other pole of attraction for the Romanian culture is also deactivated. The situation is as serious as possible if we consider that the formative influences of the Romanian culture are German and French. This is, then, a culture (which has recognized its mimetic vocation many times) outside of its once structuring axes. As he sensed this profound dis-alignment of Romanian society, Traian Băsescu, president of Romania for ten years, explicitly proposed a different axis to restructure the collective mind: the Washington-London-Bucharest axis.

This axis soon proved to be much shorter, as only the American influence was remarkable, both in general, through technology, digitalization, and in particular an active military presence, and through a strategic interest in the Black Sea area. Great Britain did not show interest in Romania almost at all, on the contrary, the reception of eastern countries in the EU was for the UK a decisive reason for Brexit. So, the old Europe is, from a Romanian viewpoint, melting into this simulacrum called the EU – while currently the Romanian is formatively heading towards America, a country from which it is separated not only by an ocean, but also by the requirement of visas. Curiously enough, this very country, which is closed and far away for most Romanians, constitutes the closest model, the strongest stimulus of our phantasmal apparatus.

However, the new political situation in America also threatens this existential, constitutive orientation of the Romanian society, leaving us exposed to the abyss, the groundlessness, the lack of foundation which, Arthur Suciu states, is ultimately the true reality, hidden in the invisible core of any political speech.

The confessional panopticon

Confession is generalized in the form of the virtual presence on social networks, although it radically changes its meaning and significance: its source is no longer the guilty conscience, but its very opposite, since the object of public "confession" in today's world is given by the virtues, and not by the vices of the

person concerned, by his or her successes, and not by his or her failures. As we have shown elsewhere, even today's confessional literature, with a few exceptions, is tributary to a narcissistic, positive vision of the self, with the narrator counting less and less on the therapeutic function of his presentation as an antihero. But who knows if it is not precisely the presumption of guilt that presses everywhere on everyone that does determine this confessional-positive counter reaction, as if everyone wants to prove it – through *selfies*, through the thoughts they express publicly, through the revelation of all events that make up his or her life – that he is alright as a person, a person credible and worthy of respect.

In lieu of a conclusion...

If I were asked what oracular source can give us the best answer regarding the things to come, I would say: A world, like a man, ends in caricature. The Roman Empire ended with some barbarian and illiterate emperors; the American Empire will end with a string of sleazy presidents. Do you want to know the future? Forget about political scientists, futurists, sci-fi writers in favor of humorists, satirists and buffoons. The men of old had the good habit of organizing collective anticipatory shows (saturnalia, carnivals, etc.) proving to us that they were wiser than we are today. They knew that the inexorable destiny of the present was the masquerade.

Arthur Suciu's book has the merit of not only being a deep, nuanced and erudite analysis of our world, but also of understanding it through a certain kind of amused detachment, through a piercing irony that allows him a visionary dimension that is otherwise difficult to reach. He often manages to look at the world – and at himself – with that "dead man's eye" he once spoke of.

References:

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