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### **Aims and Scope:**

*Changing Societies & Personalities* is an international, peer-reviewed quarterly journal, published in English by the Ural Federal University. *CS&P* examines how rapid societal-level changes are reshaping individual-level beliefs, motivations and values – and how these individual-level changes in turn are reshaping societies. The interplay of personality traits and sociocultural factors in defining motivation, deliberation, action and reflection of individuals requires a combination of theoretical and empirical knowledge. Since an interdisciplinary approach is needed to understand the causes and consequences of the contemporary world's changing socio-political institutions, moral values, and religious beliefs, the journal welcomes theoretical and empirical contributions from a wide range of perspectives in the context of value pluralism and social heterogeneity of (post)modern society.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to

- value implications of interactions between socio-political transformations and personal self-identity;
- changes in value orientations, materialist and post-materialist values;
- moral reasoning and behavior;
- variability and continuity in the election of styles of moral regime and/or religious identity;
- the moral bases of political preferences and their elimination;
- social exclusion and inclusion;
- post-secular religious individualism;
- tolerance and merely “tolerating”: their meanings, varieties and fundamental bases;
- ideologies of gender and age as variables in political, moral, religious and social change;
- educational strategies as training for specific social competences;
- social and existential security.

The journal publishes original research articles, forum discussions, review articles and book reviews.

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## EDITORIAL

# The Order of Concepts and/or the Order of Things as Triggers for Social Transformations

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In his famous book *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* [The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences] (1966), French philosopher Michel Foucault argued that, in every historical period, knowledge is based on underlying conceptual assumptions or specific ways of thinking (epistemes) that determine an acceptable discourse about a particular subject and affirm what is supposed to be true. Such a discourse is constantly evolving, which requires social researchers not only to develop concepts, which somehow reflect the order of things, but also to recognize the origin of these concepts and to duly reflect their transformations. Michel Foucault distinguished between the Renaissance, Classical era, and Modern era epistemes. However, today's epistemes are changing at an unprecedented rate; as a result, social researchers face the problem of replacing the existing, but yet developing, way of thinking with a new one.

The current issue of *Changing Societies & Personalities* provides a number of evidences that justify the evolution of epistemes in close conjunction with social reality. The authors search for ways of conceptualizing such ambivalent cases, as anti-vaxxer's referring to sacrifice for the sake of personal freedom; the validity and types of social support for young families and their reproductive behavior; the danger of becoming a "lost" media generation due to digital divide; the influence of self-based and group-based emotions on collective actions; the counteraction of humor and official narrative in the political sphere; and—last but not least—echoing the ideas of cooperation and collaboration, ability for self-improvement, and meaningful participation in social life between classical Persian literature and European philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The opening ESSAY *The American Anti-Vaxxer COVID Dead: A Dynamic Chronicle of Failed Sacrifices* by Ivan Strenski aims to analyze the usage of the idea of "sacrifice" by anti-vaxxers (especially those who support the Republican

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Party) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA. Such a usage may seem paradoxical, since sacrificing is normally referred to public good, in this case, to healthcare. As Strenski admits, his intention to analyze sacrificial rhetoric in anti-vaxxer refusal to be vaccinated was caused by its conjunction with the idea of personal liberty. Nevertheless, “just because someone says they ‘sacrificed’ does not make that claim meaningful or true”. In interpreting the anti-vaxxer concept of “sacrifice”, Strenski compared it with popular theories like René Girard’s theory of sacrifice as scapegoating, or Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant’s focus on sacrificial “cuisine”, and concludes that it fits none of them. The author concludes that the question whether vaccine resistance leading to Red-COVID deaths does, in fact, enhance personal liberty for Americans, is neither answered nor even addressed. On the contrary, some Red-COVID deaths should be better classified as “social murders”, which have resulted “from culpable neglect or even deliberate exploitation” of victims by powerful elites.

Danijela Vuković-Čalasan in the ARTICLE *Ethnocultural Pluralism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Montenegro: Lessons to Learn*, notes that Montenegro, as one of the oldest Balkans states that gained its statehood in 1878, has had a highly turbulent history due to its location at the crossroads between the East and the West. Historically, various invaders in the Balkans brought along new identities, that were further incorporated within the Balkan peoples in different ways. This is why “the Balkans is usually referred to as a region rich in ethnocultural pluralism in demographic terms, and a region that has historically been marked by a highly pronounced dynamic in terms of identity stratification and politics”. Montenegro belongs to the so-called multinational states where the dominant type of ethnocultural communities are national minorities, and ethnocultural pluralism varies in degrees and forms. Therefore, the issue of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism is indeed one of the most significant. Danijela Vuković-Čalasan stresses that “theorists and researchers focus, to a great degree, on legal-political measures and mechanisms that the state envisages and introduces for ethnocultural communities and their members, in accordance with the unique characteristics of their position”. In the article, she analyzes not just the nation-state level of management in Montenegro, but also two additional levels which are often overlooked by theorists: the level of ethnocultural communities, and the level of individual identities. The author is fully aware that these three levels could not be separated in practice.

As Natalia D. Blednova and Anna P. Bagirova argue in the ARTICLE *Leave Policy System in Russia: Is It Time to Change?*, childcare leave in Russia (analogous to parental leave in other countries) needs more flexibility in order to positively affect the demographic situation in the country. Their study “aims to evaluate the state regulation of the parental leave policy in Russia and public attitudes to the policy pursued”. The authors consider the parental leave system as a multi-faceted phenomenon related to different spheres of social and economic reality, and figure out different perspectives for the three key stakeholders of the leave system: mothers (including potential), fathers (including potential), and employers, whose interests are directly influenced by the parental leave system. At the first stage of the study, the authors investigated men’s opinion concerning taking parental leave (506 men aged 18 to 49

with and without children were surveyed). At the second stage, the authors evaluated public opinion on the flexibility of the Russian parental leave system (265 women were surveyed in the Sverdlovsk Region). At the third stage, barriers in the parental leave state regulation were analyzed (for which purpose, 2012–2021 cases of breaching parental leave regulations were extracted from popular Russian mass media). The results show opposing views on various aspects of the leave system in Russia.

In the ARTICLE *Factors Shaping the Reproductive Behavior of Young Families in Russia: Data Triangulation*, Tamara K. Rostovskaya, Ekaterina N. Vasilieva, and Veronika N. Kholina seek to address the following question: “How does social support for young families affect their reproductive behavior, and which policy responses and interventions can be used to stimulate childbearing more effectively?” This problem is particularly relevant to Russia because of the low fertility level. The authors consider several factors that influence the reproductive behavior of young two-person families with and without children: marital behavior; marital and reproductive attitudes of young spouses’ parents; material, psychological, and legal support for young families. The data for the research was collected in 10 regions in the European part of Russia. At the first stage, a survey of 893 members of young families under the age of 35 years in their first registered marriage was conducted. At the second stage, 50 respondents from young families were interviewed (20 childless and 30 with children). During in-depth interviews, the following questions were asked: How did the decision to register marriage was made? How did the future couple meet? Did the future couple live together before getting married? The conducted study identified a number of problems in the Russian social support system for young families that future research should address.

Anna S. Sumskeya in the ARTICLE *“Lost” Russian Media Generations in a Changing Social and Digital Environment* studies a fairly new phenomenon—the digital personality, which has emerged as a result of the growing amount of online personal data reflecting Internet users’ individual traits and habits. The digital lifestyle of young people “means not only digitalized media behavior, globalized streaming media use, interactive cultural digital practices, and symbols of communication, but also new vulnerabilities, traumatic communication experiences, and exposure to potentially traumatic media content, all of which can affect the subjective well-being of Internet users”. Apparently, in the author’s opinion, the disruption of sustainable generational media patterns and further exacerbation of the digital divide for “digital natives”—the generations of people whose formative period coincided with the development of the Internet and digitalization—may result in becoming “lost” media generations.

In the ARTICLE *The Impact of Digital Divide on Household Participation in Risky Financial Investments: Evidence From China*, Yuan Kefeng, Zhang Xiaoxia and Olga P. Nedospasova examine the impact of Internet information technologies on the financial industry in China. The authors note that despite the rapid increase in the number of Internet users in China in recent years, there is still a large digital divide between urban and rural areas associated with different access to digital infrastructure, Internet access rate, and Internet usage frequency. The authors apply empirical instruments to elucidate the impact of digital divide on the participation probability of Chinese households in risky schemes of financial investment. The authors formulate the following research

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hypotheses: the digital access, use, and inequality divides significantly affect households' participation in risky financial investment schemes; the digital divide between urban and rural areas, as well as family burden differences, leads to a different probability of households participating in such investments. The authors turned to the database of the Chinese General Social Survey, Renmin University of China, in order to gain access to comprehensive micro-survey data.

Ahmad Helmi Nugraha, Raehan Kautsar Julian, Rudy Adiguna, Veronica Lioni Hartono, Donna Kusuma, Muhammad Abdan Shadiqi, and Rusdi Rusli in the ARTICLE *The Dark Triad and Non-Normative Collective Action in The Save KPK Movement in Indonesia: The Mediation Effect of Contempt* focus on the cases of violent collective action that occurred in relation to the Save KPK movement (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* [Corruption Eradication Commission]), which was stirring social tension within the society for a number of years. The authors are particularly interested in self-based and group-based emotions in collective actions, which they differentiate into two categories: normative (peaceful, without violence) and non-normative (non-peaceful, with violence). Another important factor to observe are personality traits, namely those forming the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) and related to acts of violence. The article is aimed at explaining the involvement of group-based contempt and the Dark Triad of personality traits in predicting the intention of non-normative collective action in the Save KPK movement-related issues. The authors suppose that group-based contempt plays a role in non-normative collective action, and that some Dark Triad traits are mediated by group-based contempt.

In the ARTICLE *Markers of Sensory Well-Being in the Learning Environment for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Lyudmila V. Tokarskaya and Tatyana Yu. Bystrova underline that the environment can have a strong influence on people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This influence can be either positive or negative, because such people may exhibit a variety of atypical sensory characteristics. Hence, the hypothesis that the authors seek to test is as follows: "In order to create a more autism-friendly environment or in order to assess the 'autism-friendliness' of the already existing environment, it is necessary to apply a system of markers that measure its potential effects on ASD individuals' sensory well-being". The study of sensory issues is based on an interdisciplinary approach, namely the synthesis of psychological and architectural discourses. The authors critically analyze the key technical requirements regarding the sensory parameters of the educational environment, which are reflected in the official governmental documents in Russia, and promote "a more holistic approach to this problem, based on the understanding that the human body and psyche are not only interconnected, but also dynamic". For the purpose of developing a personalized set of markers, Lyudmila Tokarskaya and Tatyana Bystrova analyze the learning environment in a Russian school catering for children with ASD and mental retardation, as well as an expert assessment of the sensory profile of a 14-year-old ASD student.

Tatiana G. Skorokhodova in the ARTICLE *"Discovery of Hinduism" in Religious Thought of the Bengal Renaissance* mentions three challenges of the religious life in India in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: firstly, Christian missionaries' criticism of Indian indigenous religious beliefs and practices; secondly, their designation by the term

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“Hinduism”; and, thirdly, European theologians and orientalist’s attempts to study Indian religions. Those challenges required a creative response from educated intellectuals. The Bengal Renaissance was the epoch of national-cultural awakening in the most developed province of India, which had become a meeting space for Indian and Western dialogue of cultures. Tatiana Skorokhodova stresses that the significant part of that dialogue was the comprehension of the native Indian religious tradition, and proposes a term “Discovery of Hinduism” by analogy with Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous term “Discovery of India”. For Indian intellectuals, “Discovery of Hinduism” could be seen as an integral part of their own self-understanding in dialogue with the West, its society and culture. The author divides “Discovery of Hinduism” in Bengal religious thought into two phases and analyzes the views of Rammohun Roy, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (Chatterjee), Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose, and others.

In the ARTICLE *Humorous Portrayals of Celebrities in the Mass Media During the 2021 Papal Visit to Slovakia*, Petra Polievková, Terézia Rončáková, and Hedviga Tkáčová note that the significance of the Papal visit in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic “went far beyond the borders of Slovakia itself and served as an important event in the wider region of Central Europe, with the event serving to emphasize the contemporary regional challenge of migration and the varying approaches taken to the issue by different states”. The authors pay particular attention to the study of celebrities and analyze popular mass media responses to the visit of the Pope to Slovakia as reflected in the viral humor in both Internet memes and caricatures published in the most-read Slovak daily newspapers. The research aimed to identify the main features and differences in the depiction of the Pope and that of selected Slovak political celebrities emphasized in the memes, as well as to contribute to the academic discussion “of the social and political aspects of humor and their potential to develop a discourse which counteracts the official narrative and pushes against the rigid boundaries of the political sphere”. The research sample consisted of a series of 43 memes and eight caricatures, which were sourced from social networking sites and online media platforms. As a result, the authors discovered a considerable overlap between the topic of the Papal visit and contemporary political issues.

In the RESEARCH NOTE *Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology in Light of Classical Persian Literature*, Fayruza S. Ismagilova and Nazyar Khamenehei compare Alfred Adler’s humanistic philosophy of living and his holistic approach to human personality with questions discussed in classical Persian literature, more specifically, in the writings by Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair, Jami, Saadi, and Rumi. According to Adler, the most important period in the child’s development is before the age of six or seven; that is why the authors of the article selected the abovementioned writers’ poems and anecdotes focused on the same age range. In Adlerian philosophy, a human being has the capacity for cooperation and collaboration, as well as the ability for self-improvement, growth, self-realization, and meaningful participation in social life. At the same time, as Fayruza Ismagilova and Nazyar Khamenehei stress, “Persian literature is a treasure of narratives seeking to engage their readers with a variety of ethical and philosophical questions such as destiny and human effort, the objectives of

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human life, guilt, virtue, justice, striving for perfection, and so on". In addition, Persian authors attached great importance to literature's function as a medium of education and enlightenment. The authors are particularly interested in Adler's three ideas that most resonate with moral and educational philosophy found in the classical Persian texts: the feeling of inferiority and striving for recognition; the influence of the social environment on the child's early development; and the parental influence and the influence of education.

The BOOK REVIEW section consists of a review by Swapna Gopinath of Amitav Ghosh's book "The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis", 2021. The author characterizes the book under review as "a tale of the hegemonic human agency seeking control over nature, where violence, aggression, greed, and the desire for power define the trajectory of colonialism, capitalism, and Western modernity".

Discussions around the topics raised in the present issue will be continued in the subsequent issues of our journal. In planning to introduce new interesting themes, we welcome suggestions from our readers and prospective authors for thematic issues, debate sections, or book reviews.

For more information, please visit our journal web-site: <https://changing-sp.com/>



**ESSAY**

## **The American Anti-Vaxxer COVID Dead: A Dynamic Chronicle of Failed Sacrifices**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Unlike earlier pandemics, where a “politics of blame” was directed against those who spread infection, the COVID pandemic in the United States has created occasions for the deployment of a “politics of commendation” for performing acts of sacrifice. Frontline healthcare workers have been celebrated for sacrificing themselves in service to their patients, even as critics have charged their being hapless victims of “social murder” at the hands of irresponsible medical administrators. Governmental officials, notably in Texas, have also recommended the elderly to refuse COVID care, die and thus sacrifice themselves selflessly for the benefit of the younger generation. Lately, COVID vaccine-refusal has been seen as an act of noble political sacrifice—typically to further individual liberty against the coercive power of the Federal government’s promotion or mandating of vaccination. Anti-vaxxers embracing the role of such political sacrifices, however, generally fail to realize this aspiration, insofar they are often just culpable of their own demise by neglecting public health advisories. Furthermore, the partisan politicization of their deaths militates against the normal recognition of their being sacrifices. Party political calculations have frequently demanded denial of the COVID origins of the anti-vaxxer deaths, and also effectively eliminated any normal attendant rites of reciprocation, memorialization or sacralization of the victims, typical of sacrifices, proper.

### **KEYWORDS**

sacrificial process, politicization, suicide, social murder, gift, Henri Hubert, Marcel Mauss, COVID, Donald Trump, vaccine-refusal, Texas, freedom

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## Death in a Time of COVID: Scenes of Contestation

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019, few imagined COVID-victims applauded as “sacrifices.” Past pandemics, such as the Spanish flu of 1918–1919, the Egyptian H1N1 flu, the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and others, typically yielded an ugly “politics of blame” where the afflicted were reviled as “Typhoid Marys,” or some such (Farmer, 1992; Leach & Tadros, 2014). While there have been and still are moments of *blaming* the Peoples’ Republic of China for permitting the virus to emerge and spread beyond its borders, American partisan politics about vaccination soon rankled more Americans than anything the Chinese did. Vaccine resistance became a marker of political affiliation for the right, symbolizing resistance to “big government” public health efforts to get the population vaccinated. The will to risk COVID death by refusing vaccination was hailed by Republicans as a commendable act of “sacrifice” on behalf of individual freedom. Such sentiments did not go unnoticed by the likes Democratic congressman, Jamie Raskin, who attacked GOP<sup>1</sup> campaigns of “anti-testing, anti-lockdown, anti-mask, nothing-to-worry-about orthodoxy” as “like a policy of mass human sacrifice” (Andersen, 2022).

I challenge the use of sacrificial rhetoric to characterize anti-vaxxer refusal to be vaccinated in several ways. First, why, on the face of it, aren’t anti-vaxxers better described as simply foolhardy and misguided, ignorantly courting their own deaths, in virtual suicides? Second, by what standard meaning of sacrifice, do their claims to be “sacrifices”—for the sake of greater personal liberty—make sense of the idea of sacrifice? Surely, everything is not a “sacrifice”?! What, then, makes anti-vaxxer refusal to vaccinate, and possibly die in the process, a “sacrifice”—and not something else, better named foolhardy, a simple death, a misfortune, a bad wager, an “act-of-God,” and so on? I argue that, because of the context in which anti-vaxxers have the sincerest of intentions of being “sacrifices,” these anti-vaxxer attempts at sacrifice tend to *fail*. Simple misconceptions about what distinguishes sacrifices from other acts, together with their generally unfinished or just botched performance, together account for the failure of anti-vaxxer sacrifices.

When the notion of sacrifice is raised together with the COVID pandemic, the anti-vaxxer politics of sacrifice does not probably come first to mind. Very early in the pandemic reference was more often to healthcare and other frontline workers who *sacrificed* for the sake of the public good (Carrillo & Ipsen, 2021, p. 730). Notably, while President, Trump excitedly praised medical supply factory workers in sacrificial terms for staying on the job: “They’re running into death just like soldiers run into bullets, in a true sense ... I really call them ‘warriors’” (White House Office, 2020). Trump here reflected admiration for the frontline workers who died from exposure to COVID while fighting the virus or tending its victims. What Trump did not voice in the process was concern of the possible exploitation of frontline workers by bosses eager to enhance their own situations. But awareness of such administrative misconduct let medical leaders like Dr. Joseph Freer, Professor of Medical Leadership and Management at the University of London to indict the bosses of institutional healthcare

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<sup>1</sup> GOP—Grand Old Party, commonly used to indicate Republicans.

for *mischaracterizing* the COVID deaths of front-line workers as “sacrifices.” “For those in power,” accused Freer, appealing to “‘sacrifice’ conveniently retells the stories of premature death [of frontline workers] in a way that sublimates anger, grief and powerlessness into pride, bravery, and individual choice” (Freer, 2021). Confirming Freer’s worst suspicions, Ian R. Carrillo and Annabel Ipsen, reported that “workers are coerced to stay in a sacrifice zone,” and consequently believe that they are “deemed an essential yet expendable asset” and, unceremoniously dumped (Carrillo & Ipsen, 2021, p. 730). Talk of the “sacrifices” of these healthcare workers was thus fraudulent. The “nurses ... would [not] have seen their own deaths ... as *sacrifice* [emphasis added].” Instead, adds Freer, “they felt unsafe and afraid at work,” because they lacked means “to protect themselves” (Freer, 2021). Under such circumstances, the failures by public health administrators better to protect frontline workers ought to have been classified as something more akin to criminal negligence or murder.

Other leading medical professionals made just such accusations. Rankin School of Nursing’s Professor Elizabeth McGibbon (2021) argued that the surge of frontline worker COVID deaths recalled Friedrich Engels’ analysis of the “social murder” of similarly exploited 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial workers. Engels wrote, “When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another, or when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call this deed murder” (Engels, 1845/2009). However, Engels concludes, when an industrialist “places hundreds ... in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death ... [by forcing them] ... to remain in such conditions until that death ensues ... its deed is murder ... social murder.” (Engels, 1845/2009). Professor Kamran Abbasi, Imperial College (London), concurred, arguing that the moral responsibility of employers of front-line workers “cannot be ignored or spun away,” by disingenuous appeals to “sacrifices” (Abbasi, 2021; Mercola, 2022).

### **Kurt Andersen’s “Politics of Blame”: The Aztec Elites and the GOP**

In a heated, controversial article, *The Atlantic*’s Kurt Andersen made it his personal mission to indict the irresponsibility of the Trump administration elites for the COVID deaths occurring under their careless watch (Andersen, 2022). For Andersen, sacrifice of all kind and its invocations, scarcely conceal how direct and straightforward *murder* was. Andersen even thinks that COVID pandemic deaths represent *active and deliberate* killings by social elites, not the merely “negligent” social murders of Engels’ sort. Massive COVID deaths, “the real thing, comparable to the innumerable ghastly historical versions”— are just a “new and improved modern version of [Aztec] mass human sacrifice.” To his mind, *both* are the same because both are deliberately exploitative and massive “*ritual human* [emphasis added] sacrifices.” (Andersen, 2022). Both represent the efforts of elites “to keep the *hoi polloi* subservient” (Andersen, 2022). Their hidden purpose, says Andersen, was to terrorize Aztec commoners into political submission, “to fortify [their] ... political and economic power,” typically by employing nefarious “*forms of ‘sacrificial trickery’*” (Andersen, 2022). As radical as Andersen’s indictment is, he finds company with social critics like Kitanya Harrison. Wall Street elite for rushed to resume “business as usual” as soon as COVID cases seemed to slacken,

Harrison noted. And why, just “in order to keep the stock market from crashing.” But this very act, says Harrison, was to make “human sacrifices to Moloch” (Andersen, 2022).

### Sacrificial Populism and Georges Bataille

Commendable as Andersen’s moral outrage at elite victimizations is, he falls prey to a romantic populism. This is important to grasp as we try to assess the motives and aims of the “sacrificing” anti-vaxxers we will meet later. Aztec commoners also apparently eagerly volunteered for their sacrificial deaths. It is the same with those anti-vaxxers knowing courting COVID. Leonhardt’s study of disproportionately high COVID deaths in Ocean County, New Jersey, confirms how ordinary party rank-and-file promote sacrificial vaccine-refusal without elite prompting (Leonhardt, 2022). If Leonhardt is right, populism might then be as salient among anti-vaxxer COVID “sacrifices” as among Andersen’s Aztec sacrifices. Indeed, the more we learn about the voluntary, populist nature of MAGA<sup>2</sup> vaccine-resistance, the less GOP political “trickery” of MAGA folk leads to their own demise. Cases of anti-vaxxer COVID deaths might then be as easily marked by populist *willingness to be* sacrificed, or personally-motivated *self-sacrifices*, as the distinguished by cynical elite political manipulation.

Confirming this thesis of populist origins of MAGA vaccine resistance, Sungkyunkwan University economists, Yeonha Jung and Seungduck Lee contend that “COVID-19 vaccine-hesitancy ... is a phenomenon that arose from Trumpism”—from a mass movement, *not* from Trump himself (Jung & Lee, 2021). Recently even Trump’s latter-day promotion of vaccination was met with anger from the attendees of his 2022 Florence, Arizona rally. Trump seems then to have contributed to the creation of a Frankenstein monster of Trumpist vaccine-refusal, only to have it turn on him. Like the “fiend” of Mary Shelley’s novel, Trumpist vaccine-refusal has slipped its creator’s bonds and marauds the countryside on its own power. Its salience lies in its populist dynamics, not in elite direction, even though elites played a role.

A classic in the literature on sacrifice confirms the unsettling popular appeal of what seems like a populist death-wish. In the 1930s, Georges Bataille, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century French social revolutionary, erotico-theorist, Surrealist, and head librarian of Paris’ Bibliothèque Nationale, was obsessed with transgressive behaviors such as incest, capital punishment, necrophilia, sadism, violence, war, and what he called “sacrifice.” Bataille lamented the bland *bourgeois* mediocrity of conventional utilitarian life and sought to reanimate the creative energies of his world. Durkheim, Hubert, and Mauss had argued that small-scale traditional societies had technologies to recharge their collective batteries. Some of these involved performing violent, transgressive rites or launching wars to shatter the bland mentality dominating bourgeois society.

Bataille then set about experimenting with translating violent, “primitive” rites onto the contemporary urban French scene. If they had revived traditional societies, perhaps reinstating them in the modern day would do likewise for modern society? Bataille even formed a secret society, *Acéphale*, symbolized by a decapitated head of a sacrificial

<sup>2</sup> MAGA—Make America Great Again, Trump campaign slogan from 2016, now refers to Trump supporters.

victim, to realize his ambitions. *Acéphale* advertised in Paris' widely in newspapers for volunteers for ritual immolation, with the explicit understanding of Bataille plans for staging their extravagant deaths. Nothing, however, materialized of Bataille's scheme—but “the main obstacle ... was not finding willing victims.” Bataille later related that the difficulty lay in “finding an elite agent to perform the act” (Pearce, 2003, p. 5). I conclude from Bataille's experience that a certain proportion of the population are ready to die, even in bizarre circumstances like Bataille's. Andersen is wrong that elite prodding, manipulation or trickery are needed. How many more so, if we are to believe anti-vaxxer intentions to die for a lofty purpose like individual freedom?

### How the Vaccines Caused Vaccine-Refusal

MAGA sacrificial populism aside, the exploitation of frontline workers by appeals to “sacrifice” continues. But thankfully, much of the immediate danger to frontline healthcare workers has diminished with the arrival of the mRNA vaccines. Ironically, far from stopping anti-vaxxer “sacrifice,” it made it conceivable! With the arrival of first mRNA vaccine, Pfizer-BioNTech, came online in the USA in August 2020, US healthcare professionals believed they understood the conditions of transmission and morbidity of the virus. Hence, a US program of vaccination could begin. But with these policy decisions, *agency* also came into play. Individuals could *choose* whether or not to vaccinate. In doing so, classic measures of agency, such as personal responsibility, credit or blame, and so on became part of the COVID pandemic's discourse. The arrival of the vaccines made contracting and/or dying from COVID in large measure no longer an “act-of-God,” but a *civic act*, resulting in the transformation of the politics of blame and commendation.

Now, someone could be *blamed* for *sacrificing* their life by contracting COVID—and likewise *commended* for minimizing the possibility of their contracting COVID. Or, perversely, some party might *commend* someone for refusing vaccination to assert personal liberty, and thus become a *sacrifice* for individual freedom. Some anti-vaxxers were reported as having felt “[t]raitorous to cave and get the jab” (Marcotte, 2021). Among GOP loyalists, it “became a badge of honor to remain unvaccinated,” since they were prepared to *sacrifice* their health, and possibly, their lives in support of a “politics of insurrection” (Marcotte, 2021).

Once the government inaugurated public health policies, the politics of “blame” and “commendation” predictably hardened along American party lines. GOP anti-vaxxers claimed that COVID was either a “hoax” or that “sinister ingredients” in vaccines counseled vaccine refusal (Leonhardt, 2022). Other GOP elites discouraged vaccination by slandering the motives of the healthcare professionals “to prevent the disease—even among children—as an attack on red-state America” (Leonhardt, 2022). *The New York Times's* Paul Krugman said that “America's bad pandemic reflects a wager by rightist notables,” who believed “that they can reap benefits by making basic public health precautions part of the culture war” (Krugman, 2022).

Given the tendencies of American political culture, once freedom of choice, and its limitation became policy issues, an American COVID politics was irresistible. Whether

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to get vaccinated or not *signified* something elemental in one's personal identity—as political party identification had lately become. Getting COVID and potentially dying—statistically-speaking—also became contingent upon one's *political preferences*. *The New Yorker* writer, Benjamin Wallace-Wells notes how “the politics of COVID are no longer about death and disease, but about public-health restrictions” (Wallace-Wells, 2022). David Leonhardt's study of COVID deaths in “heavily Republican” Ocean County, New Jersey showed that the “large number of unvaccinated residents in Ocean County” corresponds to the “horrific amount of Covid illness and death” there. Ocean County's toll was “worse than ... in Mississippi,” the state “with the largest amount of Covid death per capita,” and “worse than in any country, except for Peru” (Leonhardt, 2022). Leonhardt's data clearly pointed to political affiliation. In Ocean County, “Donald Trump won ... by almost 30 percentage points in 2020, and many Republicans—including those who are older than 65 and vulnerable to severe Covid illness—are skeptical of the vaccines” (Leonhardt, 2022).

Trump's entry into the controversy on the side of the resisters only deepened the pandemic's politicization primarily by a program of disinformation. A “recent study has identified [former President Trump] as likely ... the largest driver of the COVID-19 misinformation infodemic ... [and] the main influencer in the anti-vaccination web” (Evanega et al., 2020; Germani & Biller-Andorno, 2021, p. 9). Leader of “a virtual community” of “anti-vaccination supporters” (Evanega et al., 2020; Germani & Biller-Andorno, 2021, p. 7), Trump has been accused of “willfully neglecting scientific advice, international and historical experience, and their alarming statistics”—all for the purpose of aiding his “political strategy or ideology” (Abbasi, 2021). Recognizing the politicization of the pandemic, Leonhardt coined a term *Red-COVID* to refer to anti-vaxxer Republicans who had risked contracting COVID deliberately to affirm their GOP political identity (Leonhardt, 2022). With the culture wars on in earnest, the anti-vaxxers saw the Red-COVID dead as having made the ultimate *sacrifice* by their heroic defiance—“insurrection by other means”—more “resistance against Democratic ‘tyranny’” (Marcotte, 2021).

Progressives angered by presidential disinformation or encouragement of anti-vaxxer *gullibility*, predictably fought back (Greenspan, 2021). A celebrated opinion piece, “The Quiet Rage of the Responsible,” Krugman captured this mood of resentment against anti-vaxxers for effectively breathing new life into the pandemic (Krugman, 2021). “Anti-vaxxers need to face penalties for their selfish choices, which threaten the lives of others” (Green, 2022). Although he never spelled out the consequences, President Biden ominously said that “patience with the anti-vaxxers was ‘wearing thin’” (Spiering, 2021). In a mood of bitter sarcasm, some progressives urged anti-vaxxers to even greater vaccine refusal—all the better to increase their morbidity, and lessen their electoral strength. Progressive digital sites like *The Stephanie Miller Show* and *Redbubble* hawked “Just Hurry Up and Die” tee shirts and other similarly themed merchandise (Just Hurry Up, 2022).

Giving as good as they got, rightwing organ, *Breitbart*, charged that progressives had created a phony “partisan gap in vaccination rates ... [as] part of a liberal plot” (Leonhardt, 2021). In distracting from the truth about the pandemic, *Breitbart* merely imitated the example Trump sent his supporters and administration:

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A content analysis of just over a month of White House briefing transcripts found that self-congratulations, often based on exaggerations or falsehoods, were the most common utterances of the president (about 600 times). He also blamed others more than 110 times. By comparison, he expressed empathy or appealed to national unity only about 160 times. (Kapucu & Moynihan, 2021, p. 603)

Reflecting Trump's policy of public denial, *Infowars'* Alex Jones piled on, accusing the left of lying that COVID deaths had been "overcounted." In fact, they had occurred primarily among the "co-morbid," or because of "ventilator malpractice" (Spiering, 2021). Added to these charges, mercenary "hospital incentives" of their healthcare allies had deliberately driven up the toll of "covid deaths" to create the appearance of a pandemic (Mercola, 2022).

### **But Just What Is a Sacrifice, Anyway?**

Skeptics of such a "politics of commendation" might be forgiven for thinking it paradoxical. If a Red-COVID death were a "sacrifice," what gain was to be had from refusing vaccination, and consequently dying of COVID? Personal liberty? But for whom? The dead are not reported to care about personal liberty. We are left with only other alternative—the examples set by the Red-COVID dead as sacrificing for freedom are expected to inspire the whole community of anti-vaxxers.

Before submitting that proposition to testing, a host of legitimate questions need first to be raised about what qualifies Red-COVID deaths as "sacrifices"? Were personal declarations enough? Some critics might argue that failing to follow public health advisories only qualifies one as "self-destructive" or a "suicide." Or, even if the intention to sacrifice were genuine, maybe that intention was frustrated or unfulfilled in the process? Perhaps anti-vaxxer deaths diminished society's devotion to individual freedom? These questions do not even consider the Red-COVID dead who expressed no sacrificial *intentions*. Could a third party declare them so to be *ex post facto*—say, in the way the deaths of soldiers are often officially declared "heroic," even though nothing is known about their intentions?

It is no simple matter, then, to decide whether Red-COVID deaths are "sacrifices." As the proverb says, the road to hell is paved *with good intentions*. So, too, the road to sacrifice may be similarly paved with "good intentions," but little more. Sacrificial intentions, like proverbial "good intentions," do not a sacrifice make. Just because someone *says* they "*sacrificed*" does not make that claim meaningful or true. "Sacrifice" is word tossed around in everyday discourse covering everything from the Catholic eucharistic theology to the Pillow Guy's announcing an annual sale where "everything must be *sacrificed!*" Perhaps the anti-vaxxer actor claiming "sacrifice" just blundered negligently into death? Perhaps, the anti-vaxxer simply had known enough of the science of COVID infection—even while uttering "sacrifice" on their dying lips? Needless to say, not every death constitutes a "sacrifice." But which ones do? Consider only one facet of the semantics of "sacrifice"—the relation of killing to sacrifice.

A killing might be an execution, a stylized murder, or sadistic slaying done for this sheer pleasure of inflicting pain. But, for all that, the killing might not entail sacrifice.

Second, sacrifice may not entail any killing, either. In Confucian China, even though sacrifices nourish the gods, “the victim’s slaughter does not mark a culminating moment of the rite” (Wilson, 2002, p. 253). Tracking the origins of *ahimsā*, Herman W. Tull (1996) tells us how ritual slaughter gradually became repulsive entirely. The *Mānavadharmasāstra* 5:53 teaches, moreover, that “the abjuration of sacrificial violence ... leads to the same reward as that gained by performing the horse sacrifice every year for a 100 years” (Tull, 1996, pp. 224–225). In the Bible, many sacrifices involve no killing at all (Levenson, 1993). In *Leviticus*: 1–7, for instance, only one of the five basic sacrifices—burnt offering—requires killing. The other sacrifices, namely guilt, sin, and well-being, as well as the four kinds of grain sacrifices, involve none (Dozeman, 2017, p. 376). Even in the classic biblical example of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, the “sacrifice” was not merely Abraham’s proposed *killing* of Isaac. Cain didn’t *sacrifice* Abel by murdering him anymore than Abraham would have obeyed God’s command to “sacrifice” Isaac just by killing him. Much else was involved. Abraham had to build an altar and, specifically, on Mt. Moriah (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Genesis 22:6–9). He needed to *prepare* for the sacrifice by gathering fuel for the “burnt offering” Isaac was to have become. Abraham had, then, to *bind* Isaac (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Genesis 22:9). Only then, would Abraham have taken knife to Isaac and killed him in preparation for making of him a “burnt offering.” Presumably, after Isaac’s body had been consumed in flames, Abraham and his retinue would have eaten the burnt flesh—in a sacrificial meal shared with God. And, God, in return would have been somehow obligated to Abraham, and so on.

Beyond rejecting the identity between killing and sacrifice, the Abraham–Isaac story helps us make a critical point about the semantics of sacrifice. Unlike simple killing, sacrifice is not clearly a *discrete* act—“one and done,” although it may be spoken of in this way. Instead, “sacrifice” names a *process*—as a *sequence* of acts as the Abraham–Isaac story reveals, constituting the complex process of making a successful “offering” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Genesis 22:2). In order to do the sacrifice properly, the person making the offering needs to be prepared, typically made “pure” and worthy to make the offering. Once the offering is made, a whole sequence of responses is set in motion—sharing the offering in a communion meal, thanksgiving, reciprocation and so on.

Critically, as series of acts, the sacrificial process needs to adhere to certain rules in order to succeed. Where the rules are neglected, the sacrifice can simply fail. Sacrifice is fraught with *contingencies*. In *Leviticus*, for instance, much is made of “accentuating the need for precise and correct performance” (Dozeman, 2017, p. 376). All this means that sacrifice that can be done well or badly, perfectly or imperfectly, completely or incompletely, successfully or botched to the point of being something else altogether. In the case of putative anti-vaxxer COVID sacrifices, they may, thus, better be regarded as suicides or “social murders.” About the *process* of sacrifice in the *Puranas*, Christopher Z. Minkowski, for instance, itemizes various ways that a “sacrifice can be interrupted ... (destroyed, say, or disrupted, or intervened in) by various kinds

of interrupters ... with various effects on the sacrificial victims (they might be released, or stolen, or sacrificed all the same)" (Minkowski, 2001, p. 170). Minkowski even notes how one recommended ancient Indian way of getting a story started was, for instance, to *interrupt* a sacrifice! The possibilities for sacrificial failure are limitless.

Summing up thus far: saying that COVID deaths are *sacrifices* must consider that they may be processes. As sacrificial processes, they differ from the *discrete fact* of just being dead, or in the *discrete act* of killing that may have led to a death. Sacrificial offerings, purifications, preparations, killings, deaths, communion meals, reciprocations, and such are all parts of the whole *sacrificial process*. In a given sacrifice, omitting one of these parts, or not performing the same properly can render the sacrifice invalid, incomplete, aborted, or simply, *failed*. Thus, as far as Red-COVID deaths as sacrifices goes, how well or not do they meet the requirements of performing the sacrifice *well*?

### COVID Deaths, "Sacrifice", and Texas Freedom

We now know quite a lot about sacrifice. Sacrifice is potentially as much a matter of elite imposition—even to the extent of looking like "social murder" (Andersen, 2022; Engels, 1845/2009)—as it is populist, grassroots phenomenon. Next, we also know that Red-COVID "sacrifices" may *look* like "suicides" or "social murders," but that their being "sacrifices" requires further specification. What do these preliminary conclusions then entail about evaluating whether critical cases of Red-COVID deaths, designated as "sacrifices," succeed in being sacrifices?

One prominent case of sacrificial language lately applied to the COVID dead in public discourse has drawn considerable attention. It exhibits many, if not all, the salient features of Red-COVID claims about being sacrifices. I refer to public remarks linking COVID deaths to sacrifice made in a 23 March 2020 nationally-televised interview with Fox's Tucker Carlson by GOP Texas Lieutenant Governor, Dan Patrick. Patrick specifically urged "those of us who are 70 plus" to make a regular practice of "*giving up*" their desire to prolong their lives in face of the COVID pandemic. Patrick was thus *recommending* and "commending" the elderly to sacrifice their lives by ceasing to resist COVID infection, so that they would vacate public space for youth. In more technical language, Patrick encouraged "generational self-sacrifice" by declaring a policy known as "calculated ageism" (Barrett et al., 2021, p. e201).

Explaining why he was recommending something essentially commendable, the Texas lieutenant governor noted that "he and other [presumably Red, GOP] grandparents would be willing to risk their health and even lives"—"sacrifice" or give-up—"for the United States to 'get back to work' amid the coronavirus pandemic ... But don't sacrifice the country" (Knodel, 2020). A month later on Fox, Patrick defended the high-mindedness of his original view: "There are more important things than living," said Patrick adding a note of nobility to his proposal, "and that's saving this country for my children and my grandchildren and saving this country for all of us" (Samuels, 2020). Bottom line: to promote the greater good of Texas's civic and economic health, the over-70s' should "give-up" ("sacrifice") their own attempts to avoid COVID death.

Interestingly, Patrick's comments attracted nearly 32,000 retweets, expressing various points of view (Barrett et al., 2021, p. e203). Clearly, the linked subjects of the voluntary aspects of COVID deaths and their relation to civic sacrifice struck a tender public note. Although only 5% supported Patrick's views, and although his remark referred to the aged only, "opposition centered on moral critiques, political-economic critiques, assertions of older adults' worth, and public health arguments. Support centered on individual responsibility and patriotism" (Barrett et al., 2021, p. e201).

The question to be asked, however, is how well the sacrificial practice of COVID death as imagined by Patrick conforms to the sacrificial ideals Patrick and others of his ideological persuasion enunciate? How can Patrick assure us that the sacrifices ordered will be done *well*? Or, will they instead look more like pathetic suicides, or cruel social murders than the grand sacrifices Patrick seems to envision? What rules of "sacrifice" is Patrick proposing, as well? Patrick seems to misconceive sacrifice as "one-and-done"—a discrete act whose consequences don't much matter. Once dead, the old timers will be forgotten, plowed into the earth like so much compost, enriching the tilth of the Texas soil so that the young generation can move on with the good life. What if sacrifice proceeds in steps, all or many of which needed to be completed—a process beginning perhaps with an individual act that, however, requires completion, follow-up and response? If sacrifice is such a social process, like all *ritual processes*, sacrifices can fail. They can *fail* to be completed, or botched, along the way. I suggest that one way to weigh the quality of Red-COVID sacrifices is by measuring the quality of performance. That, in part, means seeing how well or not Red-COVID sacrifices square with theories of sacrifice.

### What Theory of Sacrifice Covers Red-COVID "Sacrifices" Best?

Theories of sacrifice are many. Which would fit Dan Patrick's data? Would, for instance, they fit René Girard's theory of sacrifice as scapegoating? On the face of it, no, since the deaths of Patrick's Texas elderly do not incriminate anyone. "Scapegoating" is just not an issue in Dan Patrick's Texas—not even the innocent elderly that Patrick wishes to let die. Nor, like Andersen and Girard, does Patrick focus on how sacrifice becomes a vehicle for promoting the injustice of social victimization (Girard, 1977). As theorized by Andersen, Girard and others, the sacrificial process entails *blaming* an innocent party for certain wrongs, then heaping the burden of guilt for those wrongs onto the victim—"scapegoating" them. But Patrick's elderly are blameless. That makes them an awkward fit for Girard.

Similarly, Jon D. Levenson, Martin Bergmann, William Beers and others fix on the Hebrew Bible's mention of the violent practices of ritual killings of cherished, but helpless, first-born infants—"child-sacrifice" (Beers, 1992; Bergmann, 1992; Levenson, 1993). But, again, to the extent that Patrick imagines the elderly dying, it is not as the cherished, who are given-up in an act of self-abnegation. Patrick's elderly are the *uncherished*, the expendable. Disposal of the elderly seems particularly *unfitting* then to the Hebrew Bible cases spelt out by Levenson, Bergmann, and Beers. Even less is Patrick's scenario conceivable within the theory of Marcel

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Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's focus on sacrificial "cuisine" (Detienne & Vernant, 1989). Detienne and Vernant conceive sacrifice from the viewpoint of the processes of arranging a sacrificial meal of the slaughtered victim to be shared with the gods. But it is immediately absurd to imagine Patrick proposing Texas retelling of "Soylent Green." Texans are not about to feast on the sacrificed elderly—or indeed even *with* them. Indeed, what distinguishes Patrick's conception of the elderly in sacrifice is their *exclusion* from any Texas common table. As disposable, the Texas elderly are the *garbage* to be jettisoned to make way for new Texans, not the stuff of some macabre barbecue.

Therefore, although Dan Patrick presents a recognizable—if monstrous—example of sacrifice involving COVID, it fits no theories of sacrifice thus far canvassed. Nor, as well, do they accommodate what matters to Red-COVID sacrificial deaths—acts done to promote individual freedom. In Patrick's case, as with the other Red-COVID sacrifices reviewed thus far, the salient acts are "offerings", "contributions", "pledges", and so on—in short, *gifts* and *social exchanges*. Patrick wants to *exchange* the deaths of COVID-compromised Texas elderly for economic benefit, for a future Texas. He wants them to *give-up* their struggle to stay alive during the pandemic; resources that might be diverted to them would go elsewhere. Given Patrick's conception of sacrifice, featuring gift, offering, and social exchange, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss's theory of sacrifice offers a natural fit with Patrick's intended sacrifices (Hubert & Mauss, 1964). The Red-COVID dead *constitute* sacrifices because they are special, "sacred," kinds of gifts, recalling the often-used soldier/warrior imagery frequently associated with death in the pandemic.

What I then propose is *pragmatic test* of the extent to which Red-COVID "sacrifices" like Patrick's live up to their claims to be sacrifices—at least insofar as the elements of gift, offering, and social exchange are focal to what sacrifices are. Crucially, in what ways do Red-COVID sacrifices *succeed* and, in what ways, do they *fail* at being sacrifices, as far as Hubert and Mauss have laid it out? To claim a Red-COVID death was indeed a *commendable* sacrifice, a given death would need *successfully* to complete the process of sacrifice being a gift, offering, social exchange, and so on. Failure to complete the process would mean that such an act—whatever the intentions—would have to be judged a "failed" sacrifice, an "aborted" sacrifice, or some other term indicating its lack of success at completing the particulars of a sacrificial process defined by giving, offering, and social exchange.

Grading Red-COVID deaths presents us with some of the weighty scenarios. Some people want to *commend* the deaths of anti-vaxxers as noble sacrifices made as *gifts* or *offerings* for advancing individual political freedom. In speaking of Red-COVID deaths as sacrifices, one suggests something more than a commonplace "giving-of." One holds out the sometimes-chilling prospect of a total "giving-up," an unconditional surrender, even to the extent of complete elimination, or erasure. I, thus, want to join those who argue that many "sacrifices" show that people like giving gifts, cooking and eating communally, or raising things from the profane to the sacred. Others frown on the COVID deaths of anti-vaxxers—as *condemnable*, claiming instead that what may seem like gifts or offerings are really suicides, social murders because

they are heedless squandering—a *giving away* of precious life. Even worse, refusing vaccinations *steals* from the larger community, rather than *giving* to it, by providing hosts for COVID to mutate further. With these and other examples in mind, let me begin testing claims that some Red-COVID deaths ought to be commended for being sacrifices as Hubert and Mauss see it.

### The Ambiguity of the Sacred and Gift in Sacrifice: “Making Sacred”

Hubert and Mauss (1964) proposed that the salience of sacrifices lay in their “making (something) sacred,” as its Latin roots in “*sacri-ficium*” attest: “It is indeed certain that sacrifice always implies a consecration; in every sacrifice an object passes from the common into the religious domain; it is consecrated” (p. 9). Therefore, as a process of “making sacred,” Hubert and Mauss tell us that sacrifice is an action that makes something experienced as *qualitatively* “holy”, “hallowed”, “heroic”, “treasured”, “sacred”—distinct from something that had been experienced as *qualitatively* mundane. Thus, Hubert and Mauss observe that “the victim does not necessarily come to the sacrifice with a religious nature already perfected and clearly defined: it is the sacrifice itself that confers this upon it” (Hubert & Mauss, 1964, p. 97). The war dead ascend to the lofty status of “heroes,” or loftier still—transcendently—to being akin to “martyrs” or “saints”—“giving up” their lives as soldiers *sanctifies* them. In the COVID pandemic, for example, everyday frontline care-givers *sacrificed* of themselves for the infected, and thus earned exalted, heroic, “warrior” or “sacred” designations.

Can the anti-vaxxer Red-COVID dead, however, be said to be “sacrifices” by this logic? According to Hubert and Mauss’s way of thinking, the Red-COVID dead might be seen as sacred because they had sacrificed their lives for GOP goals by resisting governmental public health measures. But seeing the Red-COVID dead as sacred in this way also entails *recognition* by those promoting these “sacrificial” deaths. Hubert and Mauss note that “the sacrificed victim”—here the Red-COVID dead “were treated with a religious respect; honours were paid to them” (Hubert & Mauss, 1964, p. 35). The reason for recognition is, as Hubert and Mauss say, because sacrifice “has so frequently been conceived of as a form of contract” (Hubert & Mauss, 1964, p. 100). Doing sacrifice *well* means, for instance, that those who “sacrificed” to support Trump’s anti-vaccine policies and died as a result, *oblige* Trumpers, at least, to revere, honor, recognize, remember, or memorialize them by whatever means seem appropriate. Doing sacrifice *well* indeed requires that the sacrificing Red-COVID dead are so recognized as *sacred*.

This does not, however, seem the case among the anti-vaxxer population and its elite sponsors. First, an air of profanity seems to have settled over attitudes toward the anti-vaxxer dead. Dan Patrick, in effect, confesses his entirely profane attitude to the matter in his 21 April 2020 *FOX News* interview, saying “I don’t want to die, nobody wants to die, but man we’ve got to take some risks and get back in the game and get this country back up and running” (Samuels, 2020). Risks aplenty, but from Patrick not a word about a sacred *obligation* to those taking the risks or *solidarity* with those who sacrifice in one’s behalf. “Those of us who are 70 plus, we’ll take care of

ourselves,” said Patrick to *Fox News*, perhaps unaware of the bleak scenario of the lone elderly dying off in isolation, he broadcasts. Patrick does not even need to add that the over-70s’ are expendable—and therefore their deaths do not register *morally*, nor could they trigger a moral reaction, such as obligation, much less spur sacred feelings of *solidarity*. As social “garbage,” the elderly have outlived their utility, and can be “dumped” along with all the other “garbage” that makes up profane reality (Knodel, 2020). Let me suggest along with Carrillo and Ipsen’s report on the neglect of workers in “meatpacking facilities ... critical [to the national] infrastructure in the COVID-19 pandemic.” They too were treated as “expendable” and unceremoniously “dumped”—in effect, “garbage,” profanity at its most profound (Carrillo & Ipsen, 2021, p. 730). What aborts interpretations of Patrick’s Red-COVID deaths as sacrifices is the same *profanity* with which frontline workers in the early stages of the pandemic were treated.

Second, even when the dead are calculated for economic reasons, a deep wave of denial smothered recognition of the would-be moral gravity of Red-COVID sacrifices. For instance, in GOP South Dakota, dying GOP loyalists even deny having COVID! Emergency Room nurse, Jodi Doering, recently stated to *The Washington Post* that the “last dying words [of many Red-COVID anti-vaxxers] are, ‘This can’t be happening. It’s not real’”. Doering added that “some patients prefer to believe that they have pneumonia or other diseases rather than covid-19 [*sic*], despite seeing their positive test results” (Villegas, 2020). But statistics show how mistaken these feelings were. In a *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR) report, by the end of December 2021, *unvaccinated persons were six times*—more likely to contract COVID than fully boosted vaccinated persons, and *10 times* more likely to die from COVID, as measured from early April through much of December 2021 (Johnson et al., 2022).

*Vanity Fair*’s Caleb Ecarma also reports how Fox News effectively pursues the policy of Red-COVID denial:

Ever since the start of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S., Fox News has largely focused its coverage on downplaying its severity and the health risks ... The network’s top talent found new ways to misinform their audience about the outbreak’s dangers around each new development and every updated death toll. (Ecarma, 2020)

A further wrinkle on *denial* about COVID, has been how Fox headliners, Tucker Carlson, Laura Ingraham, and Sean Hannity routinely played down the lethality of COVID (Davidson, 2021). The effect of this is, of course, to put populations at increased risk of infection (Davidson, 2021; Ecarma, 2020). Treated in this way, GOP media leaders regards Red-COVID deaths less as gifts or sacrifices than *thefts*. Disguised forms of *taking*, Red-COVID deaths become opportunities to *reduce* the approval and power of GOP political opponents. Red-COVID deaths are, thus, *fake* gifts and phony sacrifices in that they primarily seek to *take* political approval from GOP opponents, rather than offering them to someone.

To Fox, since so few have died, in theory, even fewer have “sacrificed” anything for anyone. One, thus, seldom hears rightist media or personalities calling attention

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to the COVID death-toll, since that would remind audiences of what the loyalists have *given up*. *The Guardian* thus reported that “as Donald Trump agitates for the US to reopen, the American right appears to have found a novel way to deal with the rising coronavirus death toll: deny it altogether” (Gabbatt, 2020). Even conservative organs, like *Forbes* have concluded that no one has given up anything for anyone:

A growing number of conservatives (especially fringe sites like Alex Jones’ *Infowars*) are embracing a conspiracy that government-approved death tolls are inflated for various political reasons—and some reports suggest President Trump will soon endorse the murky theory as well. (Perez, 2020)

GOP elites thus never really wanted to *acknowledge* the full extent of COVID deaths, much less memorialize or celebrate their nobility as they would were Red-COVID dead felt to be the *sacred gifts* that real sacrifices are. Red-COVID deaths are not then acknowledged or remembered as they should were they real sacrifices. “At worst,” whether they die or not makes no difference, Krugman argues. Anti-vaxxers are “engaged in deliberate aggression to make a point,” which tragically may never get acknowledged (Krugman, 2022).

As a result of their program of denial, Fox and other rightist media outlets undercut any sense of obligation and social solidarity that might develop were Red-COVID deaths really treated as sacrifices. Mauss well captured the sense of obligation in gift-giving that seems so conspicuously missing in the lack of recognition by Fox and other of Red-COVID sacrificial intentions. For Mauss, gifts are given and repaid under *obligation*, even though they may seem to be voluntary. Gift-giving generates its own social consequences. Gifts elevate the status of the giver and, put the *receiver* in debt—to *reciprocate*.

By analogy, this would mean that Red-COVID deaths should incur *obligation* in being sacrificial gifts. Red-COVID sacrificial victims *should expect* the process to play out, such that, for instance GOP leaders would *feel obliged* to express recognition for their sacrifice. One might have expected acts of recognition, memorialization, or perhaps even celebration, like those for wartime soldiers who *gave-up* their lives in combat. But instead, the very politicians and media leaders who found it politically useful to advocate their Red-COVID constituents—in effect, to *give-up* their lives by refusing vaccination—often systematically discount, ignore or even deny the existence of those deaths entirely (Ecarma, 2020; Motta, 2021). Witness what political scientists, Naim Kapucu and Donald Moynihan, observe about Trump in this connection:

While President Trump sometimes acknowledged the cost of the disease, he did not make expressions of empathy or of loss central to his messaging. Indeed, the White House never undertook an acknowledgements event or commemoration that acknowledged the scale of the loss even as the disease passed milestones such as 100,000 deaths. One of the most memorable statements from President Trump was “I don’t take any responsibility at all”. (Kapucu & Moynihan, 2021, p. 602)

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In consequence, although once hailed as defenders of liberty, the Red-COVID dead now only serve as examples of sacrifices done *badly*. Their potential sacrality goes unheeded. The moral contract at the heart of sacrifice goes unhonored. No one of their cohort remembers, honors, reveres, memorializes, or mythologizes these sacrificed Red-COVID dead as the sacrificial occasion should dictate. Leonhardt shows how MAGA culture warriors systematically suppressed recognizing the many “memorials to the dead ... [that] pop up on a daily basis” on social media. Or they refused to face the inconvenient facts of Ocean County’s hospitals being “overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients” (Leonhardt, 2022). The anti-vaxxer MAGA performance of sacrifice would thus be unrecognizable to the likes of a Confucius, who knew how to do sacrifice *well* because he followed the socio-logic of sacrifice, its rhythm of give and take, its dialectic of act and memory, and so on. “The superior man,” said Confucius, “while his parents are alive, reverently nourishes them; and, when they are dead, reverently sacrifices to them. His thought to the end of his life is how not to disgrace them” (Muller, 1885). And that is what Hubert and Mauss mean when they say that in sacrificing someone

gives up something of himself ... [But] if he gives, it is partly in order to receive. Thus, sacrifice shows, itself in a dual light; it is a useful act, and it is an obligation. Disinterestedness is mingled with self-interest. That is why it has so frequently been conceived of as a form of contract. Fundamentally there is perhaps no sacrifice that has not some contractual element. (Hubert & Mauss, 1964, p. 100)

From available evidence, we know then how the Red-COVID dead, their *sacrifices* have been done *badly*. Truncated by how the sacrality of the sacrificial victim has been violated, or by the failure to memorialize the acts of the Red-COVID victim, their sacrifice has effectively been aborted. Such “sacrifice done badly”—sacrificial processes begun but left incomplete—might arguably be said to be no sacrifices at all.

This was not always the case with Trump and others in his camp. He, for instance, hinted at appreciation of the contractual nature of sacrifice. He acknowledged the sacrality of those who worked at critical industries, in effect, sacrificing their labor to produce medical equipment for the nation. Of workers at a plant manufacturing healthcare devices—Owens and Minor, Allentown, PA—Trump said that they were *giving of* themselves because “they’re running into death just like soldiers run into bullets, in a true sense ... I really call them ‘warriors’” (White House Office, 2020). Company training coordinator, Ms. Carol Timm likewise echoed Trump’s soldierly sacrificial theme: “I know it well—the workers at this facility have answered the call in America’s hour of need ... We all work. We’re all working hard ... Every incredible worker here today is part of the greatest mobilization of American society since World War Two” (White House Office, 2020). Trump’s tone would have pleased Hubert and Mauss for its appreciation of the sacrality of “sacrificing” frontline workers. Just as Hubert and Mauss would have wanted him so to do, Trump exalted in the paradigmatic sacrificial acts frontline workers, acting like soldiers “giving of” and even “giving up” their labor for the national interest in maintaining medical preparedness.

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But compare Trump's early words at the Minor and Owen plant to his later Tweets. Once the growing COVID pandemic threatened him politically, Andersen reminds us how Trump changed his tune. Now, Trump, like Andersen's Aztec elites, pushes "the nation"—not just the "warrior" factory workers at Owen and Minor—to court COVID death, but without acknowledging a contract with the dying! Speaking from his elite position as president, Aztec-Trump said that everyone will "just have to accept the idea that ... there will be more deaths."

What commends our attention to Hubert and Mauss's theory, then, is that according to its logic, Trump qualifies as doing sacrifice—but doing it *badly*! In effectively exploiting the sacrificial dead for his own purposes, he has not honored the essentially contractual socio-logic of sacrifice. The Red-COVID dead and the Aztec commoners, presuming Andersen right, are apparently "dead to" both Trump and the Aztec elites, respectively. Neither Trump nor the Aztec elites have acknowledged the relevant sacrifices of the victims' gift of themselves by acknowledging or honoring the fact, much less reciprocating in kind. As a gift, sacrifice *ought to* entail a return of the gift. But both Trump and the Aztec elites shirk their obligations. They are just "takers." Trump and the Aztec elites *owe* debts to those who have sacrificed or given up, but neither Trump nor the Aztec elites honor their social debts.

### Sacrificing for Individual Freedom

But despite shortcomings in grasping the moral gravity of appeals to sacrifice, what of the possible claims of anti-vaxxers that in resisting what they take to be oppressive federal health measures, consequent Red-COVID deaths would be "sacrifices" intentionally made for the preservation and increase of personal liberty? Kurt Andersen cites rightist Christian, Joy Pullmann's grotesque view that "the Christian faith makes it very clear that death, is now good for all who believe in Christ" (Andersen, 2022). Is that what informs anti-vaxxer refusal of life-preserving vaccines? Andersen suggests as much. Lamenting the tragic consequences of the right's politicizing of COVID to the point of tolerating the COVID deaths of its own constituents, Andersen says

whatever their reasons, millions of Americans have been persuaded by the right to promote death, and potentially to sacrifice themselves and others, ostensibly for the sake of personal liberty but definitely as a means of increasing their tribal solidarity and inclination to vote Republican. (Andersen, 2022)

The question, however, neither answered nor even addressed, remains: Whether vaccine resistance leading to Red-COVID deaths does, in fact, enhance personal liberty for Americans (Cohen, 2021)? Fear of "big government" motivated many "people on the right" to refuse vaccination. Does that also mean personal freedom would be enhanced by the resistance entailed in Red-COVID deaths? If so, where is the empirical evidence supporting vaccine-refusal? Where is the empirical evidence that the many anti-vaxxer Red-COVID deaths have increased or sustained personal freedom in the nation? Surely some indication of increased liberty should have been

evident by this time? One can only conclude that since partisan media are seldom shy about broadcasting their successes, the silence on this question is rather deafening.

Lacking empirical evidence that Red-COVID deaths enhance individual liberty, perhaps empirical tests can be made of other claims of the efficacy of Red-COVID deaths? A classic sacrificial religious text, the *Hindu Manusmriti* 5:39 hints at just such an area of testing. It reads, “Animals have been created by the Self-born God himself for the purpose of sacrifice: sacrifice is conducive to the well-being of all this world; hence killing at a sacrifice is no *killing* [emphasis added] at all” (Jha, 1920). Is it, then, empirically true that society at-large has benefitted from Red-COVID sacrificial deaths? In places plagued by overpopulation, Red-COVID sacrificial deaths might, for instance, produce Manusmriti-like social benefit. Texas’s Dan Patrick sees just such potential social betterment from the sacrificial COVID deaths of the elderly. “Those of us who are 70 plus, we’ll take care of ourselves. But don’t sacrifice the country.” Let the elderly hurry up and die as Red-COVID sacrifices, Patrick implies—for the sake of Manusmriti-like benefit of society at-large. While Twitter<sup>3</sup> reactions to Patrick’s calculations of social good would hardly seem to constitute rigorous empirical proof, a study of Patrick’s proposal at least tested whether it was widely persuasive. The Methods statement outlined an impressive procedure that began by “using Twitter’s advance search feature,” and concluded that 90% opposed Patrick’s view (Barrett et al., 2021, p. e202). Any doubts about the rigor of using Twitter material should be dismissed given the statement of the methods employed in reaching this result. The researchers “addressed Patrick’s statement ... posted the day he made it (March 23, 2020), included the name “Dan Patrick,” and were written in English.” Further, the “dataset includes 188 deidentified tweets ... each post’s retweet count between initial posting and data collection ... 1 month later (April 24, 2020).” Then a “thematic analysis, a qualitative method” identified “topics and ideas ... revealing overarching patterns ... using Nvivo.” This “involved three steps. First, we read the tweets to develop initial coding categories ... Second, we coded each tweet using these codes, along with others emerging ... Third, we examined the tweets associated with each code to identify justifications for positions of support versus opposition. Justifications were not mutually exclusive” (Barrett et al., 2021, p. e202).

## Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there are many reasons to be skeptical about claims that Red-COVID deaths are sacrifices, given the different conditions under which people have died of the virus. Some deaths, better classified as “social murders,” have resulted from culpable neglect or even deliberate exploitation of victims by powerful elites. Other Red-COVID deaths look increasingly more like “suicides,” to the extent that individuals have been culpably negligent. Indeed, examining Red-COVID deaths carefully reveals that many Red-COVID anti-vaxxers seem to have acted by omission

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<sup>3</sup> Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

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and chosen—negatively, by their negligence—to hasten their own deaths. If true, responsibility for Red-COVID deaths shifts, correspondingly, from influencers like Trump to the vaccine-hesitant cohort itself—the “Red-COVID” dead (Leonhardt, 2022). This shift of responsibility contrasts to how early in the pandemic, elites may have been chiefly responsible for the “social murders,” described by Abbasi, McGibbon, and the others.

But, once the new mRNA vaccines came onto the scene in abundance, without cost to the citizens of the major industrial nations, responsibility for COVID deaths (plus transmissions and further mutations of novel strains of COVID) shifted to the popular level of vaccine resistance (Leonhardt, 2022). If Leonhardt is accurate about this self-inflicted aspect of Red-COVID deaths, these deaths look best to be classified as something—at least—approaching “suicides”? A measure of the intentional nature of these deaths would depend, say, upon how sincerely Red-COVID victims believed in the efficacy of their many so-called therapeutics—Ivermectin, Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate, household bleach, various botanicals, or lately, chug-a-lugging one’s own urine. And to the extent, recourse to these “remedies” signals vincible ignorance or culpable negligence, the resultant deaths tend to favor classification as suicide. Deep down inside, while Red-COVID anti-vaxxers know that drinking their own urine has symbolic value, equally well, they surely know it isn’t a therapeutic for anything. Yet, some did so anyway.

In other cases, both elites and commoners may share responsibility for Red-COVID deaths insofar as both elites and commoners conspire to further a common political strategy. But upon closer inspection, although superficially like sacrificial gifts, Red-COVID deaths fail as “sacrifices.” They both fail as gifts and for sanctifying public life. They are, thus, neither reciprocated, nor do they create obligations and social solidarity. Second, they also fail as sacrifices because they fail to “make anything sacred.” Red-COVID deaths are routinely denied or suppressed by those who should be doing just the opposite. Red-COVID deaths thus do not stimulate recognition, inspire memorialization, or contribute to any form of sanctification. The Red-COVID dead are “dumped” and forgotten like so much garbage. They are drowned in denial and purged from mindful recognition. Red-COVID deaths are then the antitheses of gifts and sacralizing processes. They are quintessentially profane.

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ARTICLE

## Ethnocultural Pluralism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Montenegro: Lessons to Learn

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### ABSTRACT

The paper discusses successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in the context of Montenegro, viewed from the perspective of multiculturalism as a normative-legal model that this state adopted in relation to ethnic and national communities that inhabit its territory. Particular emphasis is placed on three different levels at which ethnocultural pluralism can be discussed, and the paper elaborates the issue of successful management at each of those levels. On the basis of available data, obtained by conducting relevant research and analysis of the applied model of multiculturalism, the paper delves into the key challenges of the process of transformation of Montenegrin society in the context of dominance of ethnonationalism.

### KEYWORDS

ethnocultural pluralism, multiculturalism, Montenegro, ethnic relations, identity

### Introduction

Successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in modern democratic societies is among the key challenges that these societies face. Ethnocultural pluralism varies in degrees and forms, depending on the type of ethnocultural communities that exist in particular countries. Modern migrations and globalisation processes render the issue of pluralism even more important. The United Nations estimates that the number of immigrants leaving their countries of origin for various reasons will only continue to grow (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Therefore, an increase in the degree of ethnocultural

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pluralism in modern democracies can also be expected. Simultaneously, in the sphere of developing international standards in the field of collective rights of minority national and ethnic communities, the process of globalisation seems to assert the dominance of the model of multiculturalism in modern democracies, given that these modern democracies are comprised of different ethnocultural communities. Of course, some countries are officially multicultural and the obligation to implement measures and mechanisms of this model is imposed by the constitution or laws. Other countries, although officially non-multicultural in the normative-political sense, still envisage legal and political solutions that enable ethnocultural communities to preserve their identity specifics and achieve full integration without assimilation. In that sense, they are also multicultural to a certain extent. Immigration is not the only challenge that multiculturalism has been facing; rather, there is also the issue of governing ethnocultural pluralism, which is based on existence of the so-called national minorities that are territorially concentrated and historically present on the territory of a certain country (Eriksen, 2002; Kymlicka, 2007, pp. 68–71; Mesić, 2006, p. 82).

The problem of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism from the perspective of needs of ethnocultural communities, as well as the interests of the social community as a whole, is mainly the subject of reflection and analysis at the state level. More precisely, theorists and researchers focus, to a great degree, on legal-political measures and mechanisms that the state envisages and introduces for ethnocultural communities and their members, in accordance with the unique characteristics of their position. Additionally, the Balkans and Montenegro are still dominated by the ideology of ethnonationalism (Danopoulos & Messas, 1997; Dyrstad, 2012). The reasons for the above are numerous and include a specific process of nation formation as well as the legacy of the authoritarian socialist order, which slowed down the process of individualisation and maturing of the society, while enabling the primacy of the collective principle<sup>1</sup>.

In determining the basic elements of the ideology of ethnonationalism, we start from the definition provided by Dušan Kecmanović (2014), one of the most relevant authors and researchers of ethnonationalism in the Balkans. He singles out the following most important characteristics of this ideology: simplification, dichotomisation, rigidity, demarcation, uniformity, degradation of the rational, anti-individualism (pp. 117–133). In short, according to Kecmanović, the ideology of ethnonationalism is based first on the simplification of a reality that is always complex, and then on the dichotomisation which

<sup>1</sup> On the formation of nations in the Balkans in the process of so-called *Vernacular mobilisation* or *etatization* of a nation that resulted in the creation of nations in an imperial, hostile environment without the help of the state, see (Smith, 1991). This type of national identity is historically much closer to the ethnic than the civic model of the national identity, more related to the assumed common origin, cultural elements, myths and religion than to the territory, state and legal-political components. As such, it is more introverted and emotionally rooted compared to the territorial, civic variant of national identity and it is much more susceptible to instrumentalisation and politicisation by political actors (Smith, 1991, 1995).

As a result of their different origin, i.e., their emergence in completely different and specific circumstances, these two types of national-state identities kept those differences in later periods of development. The ethnonational form of national identity remained dominant in the Balkan region, which is a very significant circumstance when it comes to attitude towards national minorities.

implies exclusive division into two sides, us and them, in which we cannot and must not be neutral, undecided. Achieving compromise, rapprochement and the search for a minimum common denominator that could connect us is considered a weakness and is contrary to the ethnonationalist view of the world. Furthermore, ethnonationalists insist on the notion of immutability of them as individuals but also of the communities to which they belong, as well as on the necessity of clear demarcation of identity, but also in every other sense. Kecmanović explains the degradation of rationality by the fact that ethnonationalist messages are intended more for the heart and emotions than the head (Connor, 1994, p. 85; Janjić, 2009, p. 21; Kecmanović, 2006, pp. 123–124, 2014, pp. 117–133).

In the context of management of ethnocultural pluralism in Montenegro and the rest of the Balkans, both in theory and the field of public policy, we note a lack of appreciation of the fact that ethnocultural pluralism can and should not just be the subject of attention at the *state level*. There were very few researchers who dealt with this topic in the Montenegrin context, and they mostly focused on the aforementioned level (see Vukićević, 2004). The fact that successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in democratic contexts depends on two additional levels, the level of *ethnocultural communities* and the level of *individual identities* of their members, is often overlooked. For the purpose of this paper, we distinguish between the three levels in a theoretical sense, fully aware of the fact that in practice they do not exist in the form of three separate strata. Thus, the distinction is made for theoretical and analytical purposes and aims to underline certain tendencies that are critical for successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in the Montenegrin context.

Additionally, it is important to provide a couple of terminological clarifications at the very beginning. The term *multiculturalism* is rather inconsistent and is used inconsistently in various scientific disciplines and by public actors, policy makers and members of political elites. It is most often used in a demographic sense, referring to the fact that several ethnic and national communities live in the same state<sup>2</sup> (Horton, 1993, p. 2). Another possible meaning of the term is normative-political, which offers a definition of multiculturalism as a political-legal model that a certain state adopts in order to enable legal-political and institutional solutions for full integration of ethnocultural communities into social and political life, while preserving their identity specifics (Nye, 2007, p. 111; Rex, 1996, p. 16; Silj, 2020, p. 2; Young, 2001, p. 116). In a broad sense, it is a part of the so-called politics of recognition (Parekh, 2004, p. 199).

We argue that imprecise use of the term, whereby it is being used to convey both meanings, should be avoided. The ambiguity often occurs not only in literature

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<sup>2</sup> There is no uniform agreement on the denotation of terms *ethnic* and *national community*. Some authors separate the notion of ethnic group from the notion of nations, considering the latter a modern phenomenon formed by the emergence of modern states, while others define national communities as those dominated by ethnic elements that have been reworked in the new circumstances of modern society, but continue to form the very core of national communities and provide them with emotional roots, a sense of historical continuity and a common collective destiny shared by all members of the community (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 4; Jenkins 1997/2001, p. 250; Llobera, 1994, p. 214; Tadić, 1999, pp. 8–15). Without intending to go into more detail in the analysis of differences and similarities between ethnic and national, we intend to use the term *ethnocultural community* for both aforementioned types of communities, considering it broad enough to include these types of communities and what they have in common.

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but also in the aforementioned use of the concept by public officials and members of the political elite. One possible solution to this problem is the proposal that the term *multiculturalism* should be used exclusively in the normative-political sense to denote the model of management of ethnocultural pluralism, which is accepted in different national contexts to different degrees, and involves the application of a range of legal and institutional solutions, measures and mechanisms that enable integration without assimilation. To denote the demographic plurality of modern states in the ethnic and national sense, we suggest the use of terms such as *ethnocultural pluralism* or *multiethnicity*. Accordingly, in this paper, the term *ethnocultural pluralism* denotes ethnic and national pluralism in the demographic sense, the context of the state level. Simultaneously, we acknowledge the complexity of ethnic and national identities on the other two levels that will be discussed in the paper.

### **Ethno-Cultural Pluralism in Montenegro**

The Balkans is usually referred to as a region rich in ethnocultural pluralism in demographic terms, and a region that has historically been marked by a highly pronounced dynamic in terms of identity stratification and politics. Given its position at the crossroads between the East and the West, the Balkans were ruled by various invaders who stayed in this area for shorter or extended periods of time, bringing with them new identity contents that were incorporated within the Balkan peoples in different ways. Montenegro, as one of the oldest Balkans states, which gained its statehood at the Berlin Congress in 1878, had a very turbulent history. Having developed in stages ranging from a tribal organisation over a theocracy, a modern state was slowly formed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which included territories that were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006; Dašić, 2000; Gopčević, 2008; Jovanović, 2001). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the national and ethnic structure changed and, with the restoration of statehood in 2006, Montenegro entered a new phase of consolidation of its national-state and political identity (Vuković-Čalasan, 2013, pp. 80–84). The foundations of the model of multiculturalism as a model of managing ethnocultural pluralism in Montenegro were created within the Constitution, adopted in 2007. This Constitution defines the state as civic and founded in multiculturalism (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007, § 1). The combination of the principles of citizenship and the model of multiculturalism was a significant step forward for Montenegrin society and its democratisation and emancipation. In order to emphasise the reality of ethnocultural pluralism of Montenegro and its preservation, the drafter of the Constitution dedicated a complete chapter of the Constitution to collective minority rights, although this is not a regular practice for the Constitution as the highest legal act (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007, § 79). Additionally, the Constitution places a ban on assimilation in all its forms (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007, § 80). Thereby, the importance of preserving the ethnocultural and plural character of the state was recognised, which is a solution that follows the model of multiculturalism. In the demographic sense, Montenegro belongs to the

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so-called multinational states, if we use Kymlicka's terminology, which assumes that in a multicultural (ethnoculturally plural— author's note) state, its members "either belong to different nations (multinational state) or they immigrated from different nations (polyethnic state)" (Kymlicka, 1995).

According to the latest population census from 2011, there are 278,865 or 44.89% of Montenegrins living in Montenegro; 175,110 or 28.73% of Serbs; 53,605 or 8.65% of Bosniaks; 30,439 or 4.91% of Albanians; 20,537 or 3.31% of Muslims; 6,251 or 1.01% of Roma people; 6,021 or 0.97% of Croats. A total of 30,170 or 4.87% of the population remain undeclared (Uprava za statistiku, 2011). Having in mind the structure in the ethnocultural sense of the word, it is clear that Montenegro is a country with a pronounced degree of ethnocultural pluralism (see Raduški, 2003). Montenegro is the only country in the region and in Europe in which the majority ethnocultural community makes for less than 50% of the population (Bešić, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, the issue of successful management of this type of pluralism becomes even more pronounced, since in such circumstances it is more challenging to provide communities and their members with the necessary space for freedom to develop their identities, while strengthening the components that they have in common with others, which provides for identification with a shared political identity, and preservation of social cohesion. Consequently, and in light of increasingly complicated and complex global and regional circumstances and challenges, it is necessary to pay attention to this issue on a theoretical level as well. All the more so as research shows a growing concern about challenges related to achieving social cohesion in many countries. For example, an IPSOS survey from October 2020 shows that 41% of people perceive social cohesion in their country as weak (Social Cohesion in the Pandemic Age, 2020, p. 9).

Therefore, considering the levels of possible treatment of ethnocultural pluralism, it is necessary to briefly draw attention to the nature of ethnocultural pluralism in Montenegro or, more precisely, to the types of ethnocultural communities that inhabit its territory. In Montenegro, the dominant type of ethnocultural communities are *national minorities*, i.e., communities that have lived on the territory of Montenegro for a historically long period, and communities that perceive Montenegro as their homeland. Some of the ethnocultural communities in Montenegro are territorially concentrated in one or more self-administrations (municipalities) (see Vuković-Čalasan, 2018, pp. 155–156). In the most general sense, successful management of ethnocultural pluralism would entail the adoption and implementation of legal and political solutions, measures and mechanisms that would result in equal possibilities to reach more successful integration for all ethnocultural communities. In addition, it would mean greater equality between these communities, reduced ethnic distance, good quality of relations between communities that would be characterised by acceptance, understanding, strong social ties and developed relations of exchange and interaction, elimination of various forms of discrimination and marginalisation of communities, as well as expansion of freedoms of their individual members. Such effects would contribute to the process of democratisation of society and would have a positive impact on the social cohesion of the community.

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## National-State Level: The First Level of Managing of Ethnocultural Pluralism

It is clear that the issue of managing ethnocultural pluralism is mostly related to the most general, national-state level, primarily as a result of the nature of the model of multiculturalism, the essence of which is embodied by the legal-political and institutional solutions adopted and applied at the state level. In that sense, it can be argued that Montenegro has adopted certain legal and institutional solutions in line with the model of multiculturalism, especially with the adoption of the Constitution in 2007, which laid a solid foundation for further improvement of the solution within the framework of the aforementioned model (Vuković-Ćalasan, 2018, pp. 161–172). The 2007 Constitution finally laid the foundations for the model of multiculturalism in Montenegro, and treated this matter through an entire chapter dedicated to the protection of identity and collective rights that can be enjoyed by ethno-cultural communities (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007). Prior to the adoption of the Constitution, *Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama* [Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms], adopted in 2006, was the model used to treat the above issue. This Law foresaw three key pillars of the model of multiculturalism in Montenegro: The Minority Policy Strategy, National Councils, and the Minorities Fund (*Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama*, 2006). What would successful management of ethnocultural pluralism mean at this level, in the context of Montenegrin society, but also in the context of any society that is democratic, regardless of the degree of its democratisation? First of all, it would mean *the existence of normative preconditions, in the legal-institutional and political sense, which should enable all ethnocultural communities to enjoy full integration into the social and political life of the community, on equal terms*. Can we say that the aforementioned normative preconditions have been fully implemented in the context of Montenegro? Although significant improvements have, undoubtedly, been made in terms of normative and legal solutions along the lines of the model of multiculturalism, attention should be drawn to the most visible shortcomings that call into question the basic principles on which the model is based, and which pertain to the obligation of equal treatment of ethnocultural communities that share a similar position—the foundation of equality and uniformity in defining and implementing key solutions. In that sense, we note that the Roma ethnic community is exposed to what its representatives define as *systemic political discrimination* (Beriša, 2017). In line with the need to ensure participation in political decision-making of minority ethnocultural communities in a manner that will ensure their authentic representation and representation in the Parliament, measures of affirmative action in the field of electoral legislation have been envisaged (*Zakon o izmjenama*, 2014)<sup>3</sup>.

The standard electoral threshold of 3% of the total number of valid votes was reduced to 0.75% of the total number of valid votes for national parties and lists representing the interests of individual ethnocultural communities. In order not to leave the Croatian national community without authentic representation, for the electoral lists

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the actualisation of the right to political participation as a necessary precondition of the process of integration of ethno-cultural communities, see the chapter “Effective participation as the key to integration” (Đorđević, 2016, pp. 199–201).

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and parties of this national community, the electoral threshold was further reduced to 0.35% of the total number of valid votes (Zakon o izmjenama i dopunama zakona o izboru odbornika i poslanika, 2014, §62). What is problematic, however, and is in the zone of normative discrimination, is the fact that a similar solution has not been provided for the Roma ethnic community, which is represented to approximately the same extent as the Croatian national community in the total population, but suffers a worse social position in all dimensions of integration. The above results in members of the Roma community being unable to have their own authentic representatives in the Parliament of Montenegro. In addition, lack of affirmative action that would enable their political representation is reflected in the degree of their political participation in general. Without the possibility to cross the electoral threshold, the Roma did not have a motive for political engagement or party formation, so Montenegro remains the last former Yugoslav state in which the Roma formed a political party, the Democratic Party of Roma, in December 2019. Representatives of the Roma population in Montenegro, as well as relevant institutions, such as the Ombudsman, consider this circumstance as unacceptable discrimination and hope to see changes in the legislation that would create normative prerequisites for the realisation of equality of this community in Montenegrin society, without which successful management of ethno-cultural pluralism is impossible (for more details see Damjanović, 2022; MINA, 2022; Vlahović, 2022; Zaštitnik ljudskih prava i sloboda, 2022).

Such discrimination becomes even more pronounced if we bear in mind that the Roma are in the most difficult position in terms of integration into Montenegrin society, in almost all areas of socio-economic and political life (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Their position and the obstacles they face in the process of integration into Montenegrin society are incomparable with any ethnocultural community living in Montenegro. Trapped in a vicious circle of poverty, ethnic distance, and the refusal of the rest of the population to accept them as equal citizens, unemployment, and often unresolved basic legal status are all circumstances that prevent members of this ethnic group from finally having a better quality of life in Montenegrin society. Roma are the most exposed to hate speech in Montenegro and this is clearly perceived by 55.2% of Montenegrin citizens in the latest study on the patterns and degree of discrimination in Montenegro, from December 2022 (see CEDEM, 2022a, p. 54). Although this treatment of Roma in the field of electoral legislation has been criticised by relevant European institutions monitoring the process of Montenegro's accession to the European Union, there has been no indication of a change in the direction of political will to eliminate this normative shortcoming. The 2022 European Commission Progress Report on Montenegro, clearly states that "Roma and Egyptians are still the most vulnerable and discriminated minority group" adding that "in January 2022, the Roma Council submitted an initiative to Parliament to reduce the threshold for political representation of Roma in the Law on the Election of Councillors and MPs. This issue falls under the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Committee on Comprehensive Electoral Legislation. There were no developments in this regard" (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2022, p. 43). Thus, successful management of ethnocultural pluralism at the level of institutional and legal-political solutions should include elimination of this and

similar shortcomings that have deep and far-reaching consequences not only for the position of the discriminated community, but also in the context of interethnic relations, thereby creating a sense of injustice and exclusion.

Even though national communities in Montenegro do not have territorial autonomy, even when they are territorially concentrated to a certain extent, the model of multiculturalism implies the so-called non-territorial minority autonomy embodied in the existence of the so-called national councils. Territorial autonomy, as a form of governing minority nationalisms, has never taken root in the Balkans and has always been viewed through the prism of security and lack of trust in minority communities in terms of their attitude towards potential secession (for more details see Harris, 1993, pp. 307–308; Kymlicka, 2004, pp. 148–150).

It has been mentioned that Article 79 of the 2007 Constitution of Montenegro specifies, inter alia, that members of minority peoples and other minority national communities have the right to establish a Council for the Protection and Promotion of Special Rights. Article 33 of the 2006 *Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama* [Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms] provides that members of minority peoples in order to preserve their identity and promote their rights and freedoms, may establish a Council representing the given minority people. In October 2019, the author of the paper conducted research on the functioning of national councils, as a form of non-territorial minority self-government in Montenegro. The research showed that the councils of different ethno-cultural minority communities face different challenges, but that the Roma National Council is definitely in the most complex position, which reflects the complexity of the situation in which the Roma community finds itself.<sup>4</sup> For example, Representatives of the Roma Council point out the problematic composition of the council. According to the legal framework, the Council consists of members appointed by function, or more precisely automatic members, in addition to those who are elected by delegates at the electoral assembly (*Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama*, 2006). The Roma National Council has no members appointed by function due to the lack of authentic representatives in Parliament, the lack of representation of members of this community in state institutions, public administration bodies, courts, the prosecution and other

<sup>4</sup> The research included in-depth interviews with representatives of national councils who were asked to answer the following questions: 1. How do you evaluate the regulated position of national councils in terms of the election of members, their composition and prescribed competences? 2. What problems do you see in the functioning of your council in the current legal and political context? 3. How do you rate the quality of communication with institutions that decide on matters of relevance for minority peoples and other minority national communities? 4. What would you change, and how would you make the change to improve the work of your council and the institution of national councils in general? Of the six national councils that exist in Montenegro, representatives of four national councils provided answers—the respective presidents of the national councils of Roma, Serbs, and Croats, while representatives of the national councils of Bosniaks and Albanians were not available for an interview.

The research was conducted for the purpose of participating in two international conferences held in 2019 and 2021. The former was held in October 2019, under the name “Cultural Autonomy and Minority Self-Government”, Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade; Academic Network for Cooperation in Southeast Europe. (Conference paper: “Minority Self-Government in Montenegro—Possibilities and Challenges”). The latter was held in 2021, under the name “Monitoring and Evaluation of Performance of National Minority Councils”, The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), Flensburg, Germany (Presentation: “National Minority Councils in Montenegro”).

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institutions working on creation and implementation of public policies, and protection of freedoms and rights. Representatives of Roma Council consider the fact that they do not have members appointed by function a great shortcoming, because their existence would strengthen the position of the Council itself and its influence in the efforts for integration and equality of the members of this community. The Roma Council considers the fact that they do not have a backing through political party particularly problematic. Without a political party supporting them, they assess the work of the Council as very difficult, in terms of exerting any real influence. In their opinion, political support is necessary in order to achieve the desired goals. The quality of cooperation and communication with institutions dealing with this issue is another shortcoming in the process of integration of this community. Institutions either do not consult the Council at all, or fail to consult it sufficiently in decision-making processes of importance and relevance to the Roma people. For example, in the case of the appointment of mediators intended for school-age children of the Roma community—the Roma Council was not consulted at all by the Ministry of Education in the appointment process. In the end, mediators who did not speak the Romani language were appointed. The Council also pointed out the problem of irrational spending of funding, for example for teaching Roma children the Romani language, sending Roma children on separate school trips and the like.

Another significant element of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism at this first level concerns *the way in which a common political, national-state identity is constituted*. Although all states are, to a greater or lesser degree, involved in the process of nation-building the challenges they face in this regard are specific in each individual context. The type of political culture, historical background, degree of ethnocultural pluralism, legal-political solutions and the like, differ from country to country, from region to region. We previously underlined that a particular challenge is faced by countries that have a high degree of demographic ethnocultural pluralism in the sense that there is no single ethnocultural community that makes for the majority of the total population. In terms of the established common political identity, Montenegro is defined as a civic state (Constitution of Montenegro, 2007, §1). From the aspect of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism, we consider the above a good solution. Certainly, a civic state does not function as a post-national one in practice. It retains the ethnocultural component of national identity but seeks to make it as inclusive as possible for different ethnocultural communities. Therefore, we believe that it is unrealistic to expect that the civic state can be completely devoid of the ethnocultural component and rely exclusively on the political and legal components. Nor does it need to be such. The constitution of a political identity in the framework of civic nationalism implies an important element on which successful management of ethnocultural pluralism largely depends. The element can be outlined as *reducing the degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national affiliations and their politicisation in a negative sense*. In fact, pacifying ethnic and national divisions and their politicisation for daily political purposes would be very useful in the context of the process of building a common political identity, since the ethnocultural component would not be in the forefront, which happens when the degree of politicisation is high.

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Building a civic society based on developing a culture of dialogue, reducing the use of hate speech motivated by ethnic and national differences, building capacity for compromise on identity policies and ways to build a common identity are essential for successful management of ethnocultural pluralism. Successful application of the model of multiculturalism and further democratisation of society depends, inter alia, on the development of a society based on public, inclusive dialogue and the reduction of the instrumentalisation of ethnic and national differences. The previously mentioned research on patterns and degree of discrimination in Montenegro, from December 2022, confirms our thesis: political parties and politicians, as the most significant political actors in Montenegro, are perceived as actors who make the least contribution to the fight against discrimination and actors who mostly use hate speech that is directed towards communities that differ by the colour of their skin and national or ethnic affiliation (Bešić, 2022, pp. 43, 50, 52). In our view, further investment in building a civic state, and development of a civic society in all the elements that strengthen the process of individualisation, expand the space of individual freedom and pacify ethnocultural divisions, which can only strengthen social cohesion and facilitate successful management of ethnocultural differences. A common political identity must remain as open and inclusive as possible. The degree of identification of the Muslim national community with the state of Montenegro shows that the construction of a common political identity on civic grounds is one of the critical components of successful management of ethno-cultural pluralism. This form of identification is much more pronounced in Montenegro compared to the rest of the region, which is why the degree of acceptance of the national designation “Bošnjak” (which binds Muslims to Bosnia as their motherland) is lower (see Đečević et al., 2017).

### **The Level of Ethnocultural Communities: The Illusion of Homogeneity**

The model of multiculturalism has a twofold relationship with the category of ethnocultural communities. On the one hand, the measures and mechanisms of this model are aimed at improving the position of communities and preserving their identity specifics. Thereby, their identities continue to be profiled and the politicisation of ethnocultural identities of communities in this sense has a positive impact on their survival. On the other hand, the elite of ethnocultural communities, which consists primarily of political subjects and intellectuals, i.e. the scientific elite, interprets and profiles the identity of the community in a certain way and strives to make it accepted to the highest possible degree by the members of the community. In this sense, each community, i.e., its elite, is interested in increasing the degree of homogeneity within the community, which can be quite a challenge for its individual members. In contexts dominated by ethnonationalism, the pressure from the community elite on its members to accept the “dominant” view of its identity can be very pronounced. The political elite of the community seeks to present the community as a single, homogeneous entity. However, it should be noted that ethnocultural communities are never really homogeneous. These are heterogeneous entities within which individual members have different views on identity, its position in a particular context as well as

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different views of the best direction of the development of the community in the future (Baumann, 1999, p. 140). Certainly, in regions where ethnonationalism is traditionally dominant, such as the Balkan region, this homogeneity is further insisted upon. Thus, successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in a democratic context and in line with a democratic political culture, must include taking into account that these are heterogeneous entities that are themselves plural and complex (Žagar, 2010, p. 387)

Another important issue that is often in the background, but concerns this level of our discussion, relates to the quality of links and relations between ethnocultural communities in a particular context. Policies of multiculturalism focus mainly on the rights of communities and their position, but very often neglect the relationships between communities, i.e., what happens between them. If policies of multiculturalism were implemented in an uneven and one-sided way, it could lead to negative consequences. For example, in Montenegro, there is a constitutionally guaranteed right to proportional representation of members of minority peoples and other minority national communities in public administration, state administration bodies, courts, prosecutor's offices, etc. in accordance with their share in the total population (Constitution of Montenegro, 2007, § 79). If this right were implemented in such a way that the bodies in charge of its implementation employed members of one or more ethnocultural communities at a pace that was not aligned with employment of members of other ethnocultural communities, despite the fact that it would not be against the law, it would ultimately lead to negative consequences. It is very easy to trigger a feeling of injustice and exclusion among those who are not part of this process, which directly affects the quality of relations between ethnocultural communities. Therefore, implementation of these measures must be carried out in a way that will not jeopardise the purpose of the envisaged legal and other solutions, if successful management of ethnocultural pluralism is desired.

Additionally, at this level, it is important to monitor trends in inter-community relations. Is there an increase in the level of interest of members of a community in the culture and identity specifics of others with whom the same political space is shared, as well as interest in understanding the position of other communities and specific challenges they face in the integration process? Or, do we have a pronounced ethnic distance at work, with self-closure and a certain degree of self-isolationism of ethnocultural communities, as well as a focus exclusively on their own ethno-national interests? This is a significant issue that is very topical in the Montenegrin context. Research on ethnic distance in Montenegro shows that it is increasing rather than decreasing, and that it is quite pronounced. In the period from 2013 to 2018, the level of interethnic distancing increased in almost all aspects, as well as the level of overall ethnic distancing in Montenegro. Simultaneously, the total ethnic distance in this five-year period increased by four percent (Bešić, 2019, pp. 2, 6). This further indicates that there are problems with the effects of the model of multiculturalism on ethnic relations and the quality of relations between different ethnic and national communities in Montenegro. The high degree of politicisation and instrumentalisation of ethnic and national identities by political actors certainly contributes to this. The abuse of these affiliations for political purposes and for the interests of political parties is reflected in interethnic and inter-

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national relations. This is amplified by one of the characteristics of the authoritarian political culture that prevails in Montenegro, “the confinement of individuals to the group and the confinement of the group to externalities” (Čupić, 2020, p. 80). Due to the fact that it is a very powerful mobilising resource in the political sense, and one that mostly produces an emotional reaction, political parties are most inclined to use it as a means of achieving political objectives. In that sense, it is very interesting to analyse the degree and forms of political participation of citizens in Montenegrin society.

Montenegro traditionally has a high degree of political participation in parliamentary elections, with generally high turnout. However, other forms of political participation, such as participation in public debates, civic activism in various areas, and the like, are scarce in the period between elections. One of the explanations for this tendency lies in the high degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national elements by political actors, primarily political parties. By generating internal enemies embodied in members of certain ethnic and national communities who are allegedly a threat to the survival of their own community, and making extensive use of recent and not so recent history, political parties contribute to the horizontal level of trust declining and individuals becoming very prone to perceiving members of other ethnic and national communities through the prism of fear and mistrust. According to the European Social Survey conducted in Montenegro in 2019, approximately half of respondents do not trust people of another religion or nationality (European Social Survey, 2021). Only 11.4% of respondents have complete trust in people of another nationality, while only 9.5% have complete trust in people of other religious affiliations (European Social Survey, 2021). We consider this to be a direct consequence of the politicisation of ethnic and national affiliations by political parties. Ethnicisation of politics and the politicisation of ethnicity (in the sense of its instrumentalisation) occur, which makes it difficult to successfully manage ethnocultural pluralism. Bearing the above in mind, and considering the process of ethnicisation of politics in the post-socialist context of Balkan societies, Vučina Vasović (2013) states the following:

Part of the reason for the strong tendencies of ethnicisation of politics should be sought in the authoritarian inclinations among a significant part of the political elite, regardless of whether it is the ruling majority or the opposition. Rather than democratisation, the elite chose hyper-ethnification or nationalisation of politics. That process ran parallel to the process of politicisation of ethnicity. (p. 163)

In addition to the above, Vasović refers to inadequate political representation of ethno-cultural communities as one of the most significant reasons for the emergence of a negative tendency of ethnicisation of politics, which was discussed in the previous chapter (Vasović, 2013, p. 163). This represents a challenge and danger for social cohesion of Montenegrin society. The country’s social cohesion is based on the need to strengthen trust not only in the vertical but also in the horizontal dimension, as well as the need to strengthen social ties and activate the so-called linking social capital (Szreter, 2002). Successful management of ethnocultural pluralism at this level implies raising awareness of political actors in the direction of their greater understanding of

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the consequences of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national elements, especially from the perspective of achieving and strengthening social cohesion. Individual party interest must not endanger social cohesion, and yet we believe that Montenegro is exposed to that risk. In a sense, citizens recognise the often-irresponsible actions of political parties, which are reflected in both interethnic and inter-national relations. This is further illustrated by the fact that in public opinion polls that are conducted continuously, trust in political parties is traditionally at the very bottom of the scale of trust that citizens have in institutions and social organisations (CEDEM, 2022b, p. 11; for 2021, 2020, 2019, see CEDEM, n.d.). Political actors must be aware that their actions primarily determine whether the level of exchange, interaction and understanding between different ethnic and national communities will increase, or whether their inaction or misconduct will erode trust between community members and reduce the model of multiculturalism to creating an environment in which members of different ethnic and national communities do not *live with each other* in a common social space but *next to each other*.

### Level of Personal Identity: The Right to a Plural Identity?

It is also possible to discuss ethnocultural pluralism at the level of personal identities of individuals. This level is mostly neglected and ignored. Societies dominated by the ideology of ethnonationalism do not sustain an environment that affirms and respects the fact that the ethnocultural identities of individuals are often complex and plural. In the conditions of dominance of ethno-nationalism, it is easy to activate the authoritarian-collectivist type of ethno-cultural (national) identity within the two previously mentioned levels, which is inevitably reflected on the level of personal identity. In the context of Montenegro and the Balkans in general, this translates to hate speech towards members of other ethno-cultural communities, non-affirmation of plural identities of individuals, as well as primacy of the collective over the individual (Golubović, 2007, p. 344; Marković, 2010, p. 18; Vuković-Čalasan, 2014, pp. 126–128). Montenegro is among the 25 percent of the most authoritarian countries, according to the European Values Survey, and is characterised by a subservient-participative political culture that is authoritarian by nature (Knežević, 2012, p. 398; Komar, 2013, pp. 112, 173). It is clear from the above that the environment for expanding the space of personal freedom in terms of identity in Montenegro is not particularly affirmative. One of the basic characteristics of authoritarian political culture concerns the primacy of collective identity in the sense that “in a culture of a community dominated by authoritarianism, *we* is more important than *I*” (Čupić, 2020, p. 79). An important factor to consider is the often-neglected circumstance of identity duality in Montenegro in the historical sense. There is a so-called Montenegrin *homo duplex* in terms of simultaneous existence of categories of *Serb* and *Montenegrin* that are not mutually exclusive in ethnocultural sense (Darmanović, 1992, as cited in Džankić, 2015, p. 137). Furthermore, to the extent that the state succeeds in building a civic political identity that is inclusive in character, it can be expected that members of minority ethnocultural communities will also adopt the identity determinant Montenegrin, and thus build a

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complex identity in the national sense. The fact that the identities of individuals are often complex is recognised in the *Ljubljana Guidelines for the Integration of Diverse Societies*, which clearly underlines that

individual identities can be and in fact increasingly are multiple (a sense of having several horizontal identities; for instance, belonging to more than one ethnicity), multi-layered (various identities coexist and overlap in the same person, such as ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, professional and the like), contextual (the context might determine which identity is more prominent at a given moment) and dynamic (the content of each identity and the attachment of individuals to it is changing over time). (The Ljubljana Guidelines, 2012, p. 14)

However, if there is a visible presence of a high degree of politicisation and the instrumentalisation of ethnic and national elements, political elites seek to deepen ethnic and national divisions, insisting on clear boundaries and pure identity positions. This situation is a precondition for political profit, which is much easier to build if individuals who inherit plural and complex identities in the ethnocultural sense are discouraged from nurturing and strengthening that pluralism. Pluralism is viewed with suspicion and distrust as it disrupts the black and white image of the world that the ideology of ethnonationalism is founded upon. If the environment is favourable and plural identities are affirmed by those who possess them, and individuals are encouraged to not give up on their different affiliations in ethnocultural terms, as a result we could see strengthened social networks, interaction and understanding between ethnic and national communities, which runs against the intentions of ethnonationalists. Ethnonationalism as an ideology is based on simplification of reality, clear identity boundaries and profiling of differences, very often to the point of exclusivity. Therefore, we believe that successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in modern circumstances must take into account the level of the individual and personal identity. The space of personal identity is a space of individual freedom and, in that sense, it is inseparable from democracy (Davis & Marin, 2009). Dominance of ethno-nationalism and the reduction of multiculturalism primarily to particular identities of ethno-cultural communities are fertile ground for the emergence of the so-called essentialisation of identity (Parekh, 2008, p. 34). It leads to development of authoritarianism at the level of ethnocultural communities towards individual members who are under pressure from the community to preserve its homogeneity and dominant view of identity (Crespi, 2006, p. 162).

Having in mind the above, one of the challenges faced by Montenegrin society is to recognise the importance of individualisation in the sphere of identity in the process of further maturation and democratisation. This would translate into resistance to the enslavement of this area by political actors in the first place. Each individual must be free to build their ethnocultural identity in a way they think they should by nurturing their ethnic and national affiliations, if there are more than one, without facing pressure, rejection, suspicion, and mistrust. Although the model of multiculturalism is more focused on ethnocultural communities and less

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on their individual members and the space of their freedom, we are of the view that certain negative tendencies resulting from the dominance of ethnonationalism must be recognised at the level of individual identity. Any insistence on differences, the point of exclusivity, even where there is much in common between communities and their identities, potentially erodes the social networks that are prerequisite for preserving social cohesion. However, the step that precedes this moment occurs at the level of personal identities of individuals who, under the pressure of the ideology of ethnonationalism, must set clear boundaries even with those with whom they share much in common in terms of identity.

### Concluding Remarks

Since 2007, Montenegro has adopted legal-institutional solutions based on the model of multiculturalism. Despite significant improvements in terms of equality of ethnocultural communities, a factor that significantly reduces the rates of success in managing ethnocultural pluralism at this first, state level is the normative discrimination of the Roma ethnic community members and uneven application of measures and mechanisms of this model to all ethnic and national communities in Montenegro. At the second level, which refers to the ethnocultural communities themselves, i.e., the quality of interethnic relations, rates of success of implementation of multicultural policies show significant shortcomings, especially in the context of ethnic distance, which has been growing since Montenegro regained independence

The above shows that at the level of communities and relations between them, we have a case of more self-closure, distancing and self-isolationism than interaction. At the third level, the level of individual identities, creation of a legal and political environment that will deter the detected negative tendencies is very important. They are reflected in the high degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national identities, which results in a tighter space for expressing and nurturing plural identities among the citizens who possess them.

In the context of Montenegro, insufficient attention is paid to the different levels of ethnocultural pluralism, i.e., the tendencies that can be observed at these levels, and which have a negative impact on the process of democratisation. The issue of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism is indeed one of the most significant for modern societies. Tendencies to pluralise contemporary national-state contexts, at different levels, complicate old challenges and give rise to new ones that states must face. States with varying degrees of democratic consolidation in the management of ethnocultural diversity accept, officially or unofficially, the measures and mechanisms of model of multiculturalism to varying degrees. They do this by guaranteeing different collective rights, envisaging measures of affirmative action in different areas of integration—from education to electoral legislation, and ensuring political participation of members of all ethnic and national communities.

In the post-communist countries of the Balkans, as well as in Montenegro, elements of the model of multiculturalism slowly began to be introduced and implemented at the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A decade

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and a half into implementation, we can acknowledge a partial success of legal-institutional solutions that have provided a greater degree of equality for minority national communities. The acquired rights as well as the possibility of political participation enabled minority ethnocultural communities to better integrate into the wider social community. However, attention must be drawn to several tendencies that exist in Montenegro, which we perceive as negative, and which cannot be associated with successful management of ethnocultural pluralism. Firstly, at the first level that we referred to, there should be no formal-legal discrimination against any ethno-cultural community, as is currently the case with the Roma community. Any such unequal treatment ultimately produces a feeling of injustice, exclusion, and affects both the position of the ethno-cultural community and the quality of inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion. At this first level, it is also important to continue the process of building a common political identity in civic terms, making it as inclusive as possible in relation to different ethno-cultural communities. Montenegrin society, as distinctly plural in the ethno-cultural sense, and a society characterised by the absence of single community that constitutes a dominant majority, requires additional attention in this sense. On the second level that was discussed, constant evaluation and monitoring of the impact of the measures and mechanisms of the model of multiculturalism are required, on the social community and especially on relations between ethnocultural communities. Apart from sporadic research on ethnic distance, very little has been done in this area. Insufficient attention is paid to raising the level of community interest in each other, overcoming self-closure and ethnic distance, connecting communities that would help strengthen social cohesion and reduce the experience of others through the prism of fear and mistrust. If we want to successfully manage ethno-cultural pluralism at this level, political and social actors must find a way to encourage building relationships between communities. The latter is particularly important for the Balkan region, which is characterised by traumatic events and conflicts in the not-so-distant past that have severely damaged relations between communities and triggered a new vicious cycle of mistrust that was already strong following World War II. This is an additional reason to focus theory and research on the level of ethnocultural communities and the effects that solutions in the framework of models of multiculturalism produce in relations between communities. Successful management of ethnoculturalism at this level would include a mandatory reduction of ethnic distance, which is currently very pronounced in Montenegro, especially towards the Roma population. If the level of exchange and understanding between communities is not improved, and if the level of politicisation and abuse of ethnic and national differences for political purposes by political parties is not reduced, further closure of these communities and increase in level of distrust can be expected. In the long run, this can jeopardise social cohesion.

Successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in a democratic context is not possible without a careful analysis of tendencies that emerge at the level of personal identities of individuals who, very often, belong to two or more ethnocultural communities and inherit complex identities. The dominance of the ideology of ethnonationalism in Montenegro is still present today and, in the Balkans, overall.

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Low levels of individualisation, authoritarian political culture and a high degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national identities by political actors are a suitable environment for embracing the ideology of ethnonationalism. This results in a type of pressure on individual members of society to fit, in terms of their identity, into pre-defined identity matrices that are promoted as the only authentic forms of identity by political and social actors. Individuals who see their national or ethnic identity differently in terms of the content and status they hold in an individual's personal identity are marginalised and labelled as less authentic members of the community. An environment that is not affirmative of plural and complex identities and where individuals who inherit them face pressure from the community or political actors to accept the dominant version of identity is not favourable from the perspective of increasing the level of democratisation and building a society of free citizens. If the space for freedom is narrowing for individuals and if they suffer negative consequences due to the fact that they inherit a plural identity, there is little room left for discussion about successful management of ethnocultural pluralism or further democratisation of society.

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ARTICLE

## Leave Policy System in Russia: Is It Time to Change?

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### ABSTRACT

As a demographic and family policy measure, the parental leave system is flexible in many countries. For example, parents can take full or partial leave, choose shorter leave with higher payments or vice versa; leave can be taken by other relatives of the child. In Russia, the labor legislation regulates only one of such flexible parameters—taking full or partial parental leave by not only the mother, but also the father or other relatives of the child. To study social attitudes towards the existing system of parental leave in Russia, we surveyed 506 male and 265 female employees of different organizations with and without children. To explore barriers in the system of the parental leave regulation, we carried out a content analysis of employees' complaints published on the [онлайнинспекция.рф](https://onlineinspektsiya.ru) website and analysed five cases of breaching parental leave regulations extracted from popular Russian mass media. Our results demonstrate discrepancies between the existing system of parental leave and respondents' attitudes to its legal regulation. To address the problem, the system should be transformed to embrace flexibility. To foster the transformation, the government may promote conscious and responsible fatherhood and integrate the social institute of the labor market in the demographic policy.

### KEYWORDS

parental leave, paternity leave, parental leave policy, leave-takers, leave policy legislation

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## Introduction

In recent decades, parental leave—similar to economic support measures—has become one of the most important instruments of many countries' demographic policies. By parental leave, we imply those periods when a mother (or other relatives of the child) focuses on parental functions.

In world practice, there are 3 types of leave—maternity leave, which is usually given to a woman before and after the childbirth; paternity leave, which can be taken only by fathers (e.g., it is provided in Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Latvia, Spain, etc.); and parental leave, a gender-neutral type, which can be used by both parents (or other relatives of the child as provided by some countries).

Historically, the formation of the leave system was accompanied with the intense involvement of women in the economy (Canaan et al., 2022). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, women worked for industrial facilities on equal terms with men. In order to protect the mother's and future child's health, some governments initiated measures for the pregnant women's security. The first country that in 1877 restricted the recruitment of pregnant women was Switzerland. Employers were not allowed to recruit women 2 weeks prior and 6 weeks after the childbirth. Over the following 30 years, similar laws were adopted in Germany, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (Wikander et al., 1995). Still, the term "maternity leave" (or "pregnancy and delivery leave") appeared in legislation much later. Initially, 168-day pregnancy and delivery leave was introduced in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1917. In Europe, maternity leave acquired normative status 2 years later, when the International Labour Organization approved the Maternity Protection Convention (O'Neill & Johns, 2009).

Over time, there was initiated the so-called parental leave. Unlike maternity leave, its key aim was to secure labor rights of employees who had to be absent from work to take care of the child or children. Parental leave was considered an employment guarantee, as the employee's position and salary level were secured whereas the risk of job loss or labor discrimination was reduced (Valentova, 2019).

Finally, at the end of the last century, there appeared paternity leave and paternity quotas. European governments introduced paternity quotas to encourage fathers' involvement in the child rearing. The first country to pilot paternity quotas in 1993 was Norway. Later, other countries—for example, Sweden, Iceland, and Spain—followed suit (Canaan et al., 2022).

At present, the parental leave system exists in all OECD countries, excluding the USA. Parental leave policy is an essential element in the family policy structure in many developing countries (ILO, 2012). It is closely related to employment policy (protecting employees on the labor market), gender equality policy (involving fathers in the child rearing), and demographic policy. Many researchers point out a positive influence of parental leave on increasing the birth rate in the country (Ekberg et al., 2013; Kotila et al., 2014). Firstly, when fathers take leave, the burden traditionally borne by women decreases. The reduced level of mothers' anxiety and stress positively impacts reproductive intentions of women, who will most likely decide to have the

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second and subsequent child. Secondly, employment security allows women not to postpone the childbirth, as parental leave almost eliminates the risk of a job loss in case of pregnancy or having children.

The fact that parental leave is interrelated with other policies determines a special research interest in leave; in recent years, the topic has been increasingly studied by foreign researchers (Kosłowski, 2019; Kurowska, 2019; Meil et al., 2019; Moss & O'Brien, 2019). Particular attention is paid to maternity leave and how it affects women's professional development (Bartoš & Pertold-Gebicka, 2018; Wood & Neels, 2019); however, fatherhood and paternity leave also attract increasing interest (Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Duvander & Lammi-Taskula, 2011; Lappegård, 2008; Rostgaard & Lausten, 2015). Some researchers study how parental leave (Jou et al., 2020) and leave to care for sick children are granted to single parents. Traditionally, parental leave has been considered an instrument to close the gender gap by fostering women's engagement in professional labor and men's contribution to parental labor simultaneously. At the same time, a parental leave policy, where at least some types of leave are paid, is a critical element of a comprehensive family support policy.

The year of 2004 saw the establishment of The International Network on Leave Policies and Research (LP&R), which studies parental leave in participating countries. The organization involves 60 experts in employment, family, and gender policies from 47 countries; it provides annual reviews on parental leave policies in these countries. The review covers maternity, paternity, parental leave, and some other types of leave (e.g., to care for a sick family member). According to the data presented in the 2021 Annual Review (Kosłowski et al., 2021), we can identify several criteria which determine specificities and differences in parental leave policies of various countries. These are such criteria as, for example, the following:

1. Availability/lack of a certain type of leave. For example, popular maternity leave is not available in Sweden, Norway, Portugal, and New Zealand. Paternity leave as a separate type of leave is not regulated in Germany, Iceland, Serbia, and Slovakia. Russia provides two types of leave—pregnancy and delivery leave (known as maternity leave in other countries) and childcare leave (in the academic literature, it is also referred to as parental leave). Paternity leave as such is not available in Russia, but fathers are eligible for the full childcare leave or its part.

2. Duration of leave. The duration of leave may significantly vary in different countries. The international and European legislation establishes the minimum leave duration. For example, according to the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183), the minimum maternity leave period is 14 weeks (International Labour Organization, 2000); however, not all countries follow these recommendations. In European countries, the duration of leave must be at least 4 months, which is stipulated in the Directive 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the European Council (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2019). The leave duration in the UK is 4.2 months, which is the shortest out of all European countries. The longest leave duration is recorded in Germany, where parents are eligible for 72 months of parental leave (only 28 of them are paid). In Russia, the childcare leave duration is 36 months, but only half of this period is paid.

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3. **Payment.** The amount of parental leave benefits is established by each country individually. In most of the countries, it depends on the salary level of the employee with children. There are two types of payments—“paid” and “well-paid”. In the former case, the level of benefit accounts for less than 66% of the employee’s income level; in the latter case, 66% and more. However, there are countries where parental leave is completely non-paid. These are, particularly, the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, and Israel.

4. **Flexibility elements.** By flexibility elements, we imply specific parental leave points, which make it more convenient to use. In particular, these are the following:

- opportunity to take leave fully or partially to keep working part-time;
- opportunity to choose a shorter leave with a higher payment and vice versa;
- opportunity to take leave by other relatives of the child;
- opportunity to adjust leave duration depending on the number of children born;
- opportunity to choose periods of leave to use at some particular age of the child, and so on.

These flexibility elements are integrated in parental leave policies of different countries. For example, in Spain, Poland, and the Czech Republic, maternity leave may be also used by the father; in the Great Britain, Latvia, and New Zealand, parental leave may be granted to two parents simultaneously. Some countries provide so-called “maternity and paternity quotas”, which divide parental leave between parents—some particular periods are allotted to the mother only and then to the father; the time left may be used by either of parents. For example, maternity and paternity quotas in Sweden are 90 days each (out of 480 leave days). Similar quotas are provided in Norway, where both parents are allotted from 15 to 19 weeks of parental leave.

In Russia, in turn, the labor legislation provides for only one flexibility element—childcare leave (analogous to parental leave in other countries) may be used fully or partially by not only the mother, but also the father or other relative of the child. Other elements of flexibility—for example, choosing a shorter leave with a higher payment or using leave by both parents simultaneously—are not stipulated. Today, when women are more economically proactive, the lack of these elements may trigger a conflict between work and family and negatively affect the future potential of the demographic situation in the country.

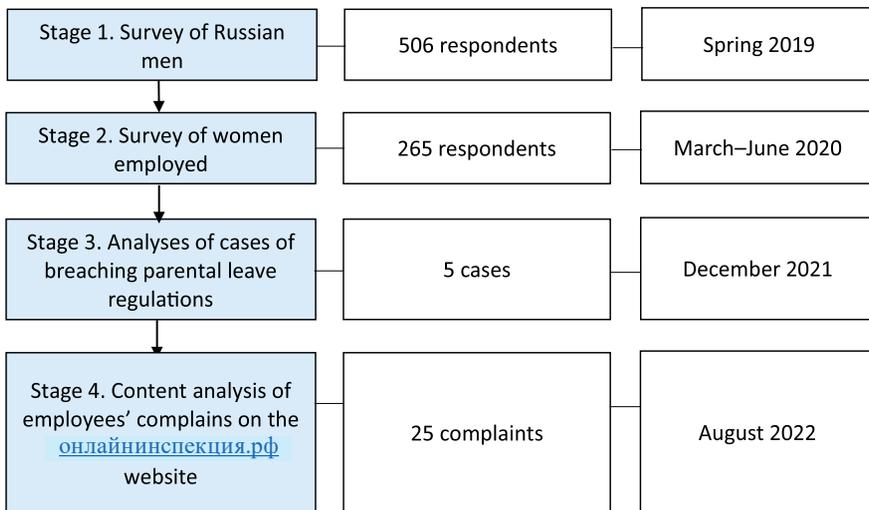
Our study aims to evaluate the state regulation of the parental leave policy in Russia and public attitudes to the policy pursued. As the parental leave system is a multi-faceted phenomenon related to different spheres of social and economic reality, we attempt to explore the problem in our research from different perspectives taking into consideration ideas of three key stakeholders of the leave system. The status of the first two stakeholders we attribute to the representatives of the family subsystem—mothers (including potential), who are the major leave-takers in Russia, and fathers (including potential), who are eligible for parental leave on an equal basis with mothers. The third key element is the representatives of the professional labor sphere—employers, whose interests are directly influenced by the parental leave system, as employers allow working parents to “leave” the sphere of professional labor to have time for parental labor.

## Data and Methods

The study can be divided into three stages (Figure 1). To study the problem comprehensively, we used the mixed-method research; the approach presupposes using both quantitative and qualitative research methods simultaneously, which not only complement, but also reinforce each other (Johnson et al., 2007). In the academic literature, the use of several approaches together is referred to as methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970). Researchers argue that it contributes to increasing the validity of empirical research results and allows gaining a systematic understanding of the problem explored (Kosharnaya & Kosharnyy, 2016).

**Figure 1**

*Logical Structure of Studying Regulation of the Parental Leave Policy in Russia*



To clarify, we would describe each stage in more detail.

*Stage 1.* We analysed Russian men's willingness for the future paternity labor, parental functions. We also identified their opinion on taking parental leave when the child is born. The survey was carried out in the spring of 2019; we surveyed 506 men aged 18 to 49 with and without children. We chose this age category because in Russia it is considered a period of potentially becoming a father. For the further analysis, we chose 2 questions which deal with young people's attitudes towards parental leave and childcare: "What would you think of the opportunity to take leave?" and "Are you planning to take care of your children right after they are born?" (for men without children). Additionally, we found out whether respondents were aware of the opportunity to take leave by the father and men's attitude towards leave taken by fathers (to that end, we asked the following question: "How would you feel if your relative/friend/someone you know decided to take childcare leave or its part after becoming

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a father?"). For the subsequent analysis, we determined subgroups of fathers with and without children. It was important to observe the strength of stereotypes about the use of parental leave among those men who were not fathers yet. We proceeded from the fact that they lacked experience as fathers, and thus their parental strategies were not fully developed yet and could change under the influence of a policy aimed at promoting proactive fatherhood.

*Stage 2.* To evaluate public opinion on the flexibility of the Russian parental leave system, in March–June 2020, we surveyed women working for different companies in the Sverdlovsk Region ( $n = 265$ ). The Sverdlovsk Region is an industrial region of Russia with a population of 4.264 million people. We surveyed women aged 18 to 49 with children ( $n = 191$ ) and without them ( $n = 74$ ). To measure the sample, we used data on the employment in the region provided by the Federal State Statistics Service (the Sverdlovsk Region branch). And importantly, the survey stage took place in the coronavirus pandemic and the global self-isolation period. The online format of the survey caused some discrepancies between the structure of respondents and the previously determined sample. The share of working women with children proved to be considerably higher than that in the sample. Deviations in the age structure of women did not exceed 10 percentage points.

Subsequently, we selected answers of women with children as they already had experience of taking childcare leave. We chose questions aimed at studying working women's opinions on paternity leave. Particularly, we asked respondents whether it is necessary to legally regulate paternity leave in Russia: "Many European countries adopted the so-called 'paternity leave'—a childcare period, which is granted to fathers only and cannot be taken by mothers. Do you think this type of leave should be stipulated in the Russian legislation?" The second question was formulated in the following manner: "If paternity leave was legally provided in our country, do you think your family would use it?"

*Stage 3.* To analyse barriers in the parental leave state regulation, in December 2021, we analysed 2012–2021 cases of breaching parental leave regulations extracted from popular Russian mass media. Additionally, in August 2022, we carried out a content analysis of employees' complaints published on the website [онлайнинспекция.рф](https://onlineinspekcija.rf). This e-service is a part of a large-scale Russian project *Otkrytaia inspektsiia truda* [Public Labor Inspection] pursued by the Federal Service for Labor and Employment. It is designed to collect complaints of citizens, whose rights on the labor market were violated. As part of our research, we analysed 25 working fathers' complaints (the entire data set) from different regions of Russia about the violation of their rights in terms of the parental leave usage in 2014–2022.

## Results

Russian men aged 18 to 49 have opposing views to paternity leave. Their opinions divide almost in half—both about being aware of paternity leave as such and about its usage by the man himself or other people. As many as 52.8% of men are aware that Russia provides childcare leave to fathers (Table 1). Of the respondents,

41.7% are to some extent positive about taking paternity leave by their relatives/friends/people they know. Curiously, the share of those willing to take paternity leave themselves is higher than that of those who are positive about others taking paternity leave—54.3% versus 41.7%. At the same time, less than a half of the respondents without children at the moment of the study—43.4% of men—are planning to take care and raise their child since they are born. It should be noted that the awareness of the opportunity to take leave and the men’s attitude to leave taken by a father, as shown in Table 1, is quite sustained and has nothing to do with the presence or absence of children. Additionally, there is not any relationship between these ideas and the number of children and the family’s income. A positive attitude towards taking leave themselves is most evident in extreme groups based on the income self-evaluation.

**Table 1**  
*Awareness of the Opportunity to Take Leave by Fathers and Male Respondents’ Attitudes to It*

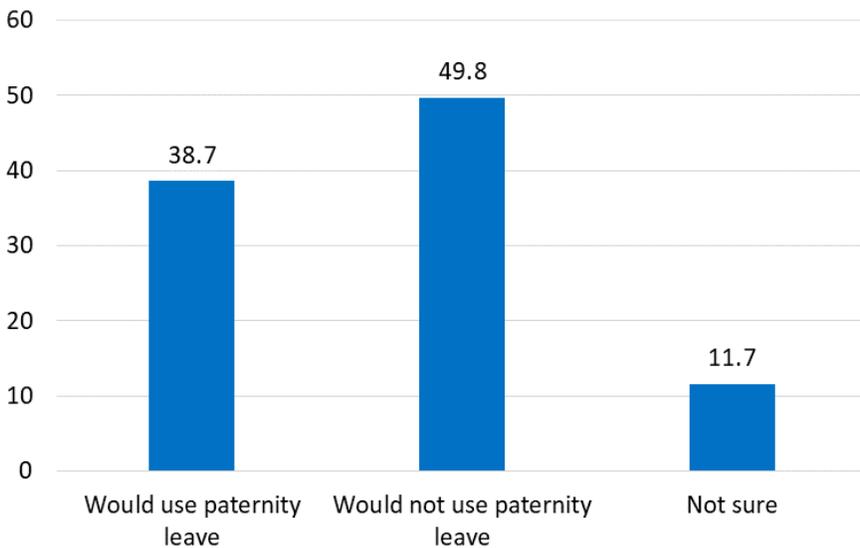
Variables	Groups and subgroups of men aged 18–49	Options	Share of answers, %	Statistical significance of differences between subgroups of respondents (chi-square test of significance)
Awareness of the opportunity to use childcare leave	With and without children/subgroups based on the income self-evaluation	Are aware	52.8	0.392/0.944
		Are not aware	47.2	
Attitude to parental leave taken by a relative, friend, etc.	With and without children/subgroups based on the income self-evaluation	Rather positive	41.7	0.575/0.305
		Neutral	19.8	
		Rather negative	38.5	
Attitude to taking parental leave himself	With and without children/subgroups based on the income self-evaluation	Positive	54.3	0.558/0.011
		Negative	45.7	
Plans on contributing to child-rearing since birth	Without children	Yes	29.4	—
		Rather yes	14.0	
		Not sure	15.4	
		Rather no	20.6	
		No	20.6	

According to the survey of working women, the overwhelming majority of mothers surveyed (83.1%) is aware that childcare leave may be taken by the father or other relatives of the child. More than a half of mothers surveyed advocate for legislating paternity leave (Table 2).

**Table 2***Respondents' Answers on Whether Paternity Leave Should be Legislated, %*

Options	Share of answers
Yes	58.2
No	35.2
Not Sure	6.6
Total	100.0

More than a third of mothers surveyed claim that their family would use paternity leave if it existed in Russia (Figure 2), which, in turn, may implicitly testify to the fact that the parental leave policy in Russia should be reformed.

**Figure 2***Mothers' Answers on Taking Paternity Leave If It Existed in Russia, %*

We analysed 25 complaints of working fathers published on the [онлайнинспекция.рф](http://онлайнинспекция.рф) website (Table 3). In 20 cases, fathers were denied the right for childcare leave. Most notably, employers either did not specify the reason for the denial or ignored employees' applications for childcare leave. Among the reasons for rejecting was a lack of blood relationship between the worker and their child, mother's unemployment, and gender assumptions (leave has to be taken by women, not men). We would like to highlight that all these reasons do not comply with the Russian legislation. Fathers also mentioned other violations of their labor rights, which they faced on childcare leave; these are the employer's rejection to grant the right to work part-time while they are on leave, dismissal or a threat of dismissal, disciplinary

sanctions for those who applied for parental leave. Among those who were denied the right to use childcare leave are also fathers who faced further infringement of their labor rights (dismissal, penalties, etc.).

**Table 3**  
*Reasons for Denying Working Fathers' Right to Take Childcare Leave and Other Violations of Their Labor Rights*

No.	Year of case	Region of Russia where the violation took place	Reason for denying childcare leave	Other violations of rights
1.	2014	Moscow	—	Denied the right to work part-time while on childcare leave
2.		Saint Petersburg	Employer did not specify the reason	—
3.		Astrakhan Region	Employer did not specify the reason	—
4.	2016	Saint Petersburg	Employer did not specify the reason	Further dismissal
5.		Kemerovo Region	Employer did not specify the reason	—
6.		Moscow	Lack of evidence that the father actually took care of the child	Further dismissal
7.	2017	Penza Region	Employer did not specify the reason	Further dismissal
8.		Sverdlovsk Region	Employer did not specify the reason	Further official review of the worker's performance
9.		Stavropol Region	Employer did not specify the reason	—
10.		Moscow	—	Denied the right to work part-time while on childcare leave
11.		Kaluga Region	—	Denied the right to work part-time while on childcare leave; forced dismissal
12.	2018	Moscow Region	Employer did not specify the reason	—
13.		Moscow Region	Did not provide the document from the employment centre proving that the spouse was not receiving the unemployment benefit	—
14.		Tver Region	Employer did not specify the reason	—
15.	2019	Moscow	—	Denied the right to work part-time while on childcare leave

Table 3 Continued

No.	Year of case	Region of Russia where the violation took place	Reason for denying childcare leave	Other violations of rights
16.		Moscow	Lack of blood relationship with the child. Lack of documents proving kinship	—
17.		Moscow		Denied the right to work part-time while on childcare leave
18.	2020	Republic of Buryatia	Different addresses of registration with the child	
19.		Moscow Region	Mother is unemployed	Disciplinary sanction for being absent from work while on childcare leave
20.		Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Region	Employer did not specify the reason	
21.		Chuvash Republic—Chuvashia	Employer did not specify the reason	Further dismissal
22.	2021	Tyumen Region	Childcare is not a man's duty	Threat of dismissal in case of further applications for leave
23.		Voronezh Region	Lack of blood relationship with the child	Further dismissal
24.		Republic of Buryatia	Lack of blood relationship with the child	
25.	2022	Moscow	Mother is unemployed	

On analysing cases of breaching parental leave regulations, we conclude that Russian employers are still sceptical of men taking parental leave. In July 2021, there were made public 4 cases of violating employees' rights. In 2009–2010, lower courts in Saint Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Syktyvkar, and Nizhniy Novgorod received 4 lawsuits from male workers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation who had been denied their right to take childcare leave. Even though these 4 cases occurred in different cities and at different periods, they are almost similar. Men applied for parental leave, and the administration denied their request claiming that men were entitled to parental leave only if children had lost their mother. Lower courts also rejected their lawsuits and took the side of the employer. Only after 12 years, these judgments were appealed against in the European Court of Human Rights, which considered the parental leave refusal an outright discrimination against male workers (Gordeev & Poryvaeva, 2021). The similar case occurred in Saint Petersburg in 2012 when a male worker tried to apply for childcare leave and was subsequently dismissed from his job for unauthorised absence. This time, the court took plaintiff's side, and he was reinstated in his position (Ermakov, 2012).

## Discussion

Our results show that generally men do not dismiss the opportunity of taking parental leave themselves. However, according to the Social Insurance Fund of the Russian Federation, in 2019, this right was exercised by 684,000 people, and only 14,000 (approximately 2%) out of them were men. With the opportunity to take parental leave by men being stipulated in the legislation, major reasons for the discrepancy are economic (men, as a rule, have higher wages as compared to women), popular gender stereotypes, a traditional family model, which does not treat an unequal distribution of household responsibilities in Russia as a problem. Additionally, some fear that men risk their professional development (there may also arise another stereotype, and employers may be more favourable to those men who decide to take childcare leave, as this decision may prove their responsible and decent nature and their ability to make a right choice for themselves). Our findings also demonstrate that only half of men are aware of the opportunity to use parental leave when the child is born. Such a low level of awareness can possibly be explained by the fact that some respondents do not have children yet.

Meanwhile, researchers argue that paternity leave is a crucial instrument in the parental leave structure (Bacheron, 2021). In today’s context, when gender stereotypes are gradually becoming a thing of the past and there arises a need for a more even distribution of responsibilities within the family, paternity leave serves as a regulator of family and parental relationships. Paternity leave contributes to a more proactive involvement of men into the child rearing. By taking care of children, men take a part of the parental burden, which is traditionally shouldered on women; they help mothers morally and physically after the childbirth (O’Brien & Wall, 2017; Petts & Knoester, 2018). Researchers claim that paternity leave positively impacts not only women, but also other subjects—fathers themselves, children, and even employers (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Effects From Paternity Leave Usage*

Subjects	Effects
Fathers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– improving parental competence</li> <li>– having positive influence on men’s emotional well-being</li> </ul>
Mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– facilitating adaptation after the childbirth</li> <li>– reducing level of emotional and physical tension</li> <li>– closing the gender gap on the labor market</li> </ul>
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– better physical and emotional health</li> <li>– lesser exposure to depression and mental disorders</li> </ul>
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– increasing corporate loyalty</li> <li>– reducing employee turnover and dismissals of workers with children</li> </ul>
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– improving intrafamily relations</li> <li>– more even distribution of household responsibilities</li> </ul>

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Results of our study reveal a discrepancy between the existing parental leave policy in Russia and people's attitude to its state regulation. The study shows that the population needs more flexibility in the parental leave system, including the legislative stipulation of paternity leave as an instrument of the state demographic policy and gender equality policy. The legislation in Russia allows fathers to use childcare leave fully or partially. The increasing number of fathers' complaints about the violation of their rights in recent years proves that more and more working men are willing to take childcare leave. Most often, this is due to the big number of children in the family and a desire to mitigate the mothers' burden. However, employers still take a negative stand on those male workers who decide to apply for parental leave. Most notably, employers very commonly do not specify the reason for rejecting the right for leave. Moreover, our content analysis results demonstrate that some men even face further pressure from the administration, including wrongful dismissals at the employer's initiative. Thus, a desire to take leave (i.e., to exercise a right) may become a reason for the outright discrimination against workers. Apart from that, lower courts often rule in favour of employers, which make employees appeal to higher authorities. We described only some cases of violating employees' rights; there might be even more of them because they are not always made public or challenged in the court. In the last 8 years, only 25 fathers claimed a violation of their rights on the [онлайнинспекция.рф](https://www.onlaininspektsiya.rf) website, which is not so many for such a long period. However, not all workers strive to assert their labor rights. Researchers argue that the level of legal awareness in Russia is low. According to the study conducted by the NAFI Research center and Amulex national legal service, which involved 1,600 people from 52 regions of Russia, the index of Russians' legal awareness in 2019 accounted for 47 percentage points (the maximum value being 100). A total of 22% of those surveyed claimed they had never encountered a violation of their rights (Rossiiane okhotnee otstaivaiut, 2020). Every fourth respondent did not take any action to protect their interests in case of a legal dispute. The major reason for that is the belief that the struggle for rights either results in nothing or even deteriorates the situation. We can only suppose that there are much more cases of denying the father's right to take leave. In Russia, the practice of asserting rights in this sphere is not popular, and if employers issue a denial, the decision is made within the family. Moreover, as potential employers' denials are strongly supported by popular stereotypes, even the process of fathers applying for leave may be to some point regarded abnormal by the family, not even mentioning the protection of the right for leave when denied.

Therefore, we can argue that the only flexibility element of the parental leave system stipulated in the legislation of Russia and some post-Soviet countries does not, in fact, provide any flexibility. In practice, the right for taking parental leave by the father or other relative of the child may be restricted by both the employer and the state. Accordingly, we argue that to address the problem, the attitude of the state and employers to the parental leave system and its regulation should be changed. In doing so, there may be used such instruments as the information policy, which would clarify parents' and other relatives' rights for leave, the image of the conscious and responsible fatherhood promoted in the society, and the integration of the labor market social institute into the state demographic policy.

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According to the international experience in this sphere, starting from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have been growing expectations by different cultures and societies that fathers will be more involved in their children's lives, whereas scientists have been increasingly studying the phenomenon of proactive paternity. There are certain political tendencies related to the phenomenon—Northern European countries pursue the policy of engaging fathers in the family life. Based on the idea of gender equality and family pluralism, the policy in these countries is built on the “use of lose” principle, when parental leave is taken by the mother and the father (Ellingsaeter, 2020; Kvande & Brandth, 2020). Rush (2011) opposes these neoliberal tendencies of de-patriarchisation to neo-patriarchal tendencies in the USA, where, on the contrary, patriarchal family is being protected against social and demographic changes. According to the sociologist, we can suppose that there emerge varieties of worlds of fatherhood policies.

Russia, too, has different models of paternity today. In our country, there are still marked tendencies for the “traditional paternity” (Chikalova, 2014); however, as Russian sociologists argue, recently there has emerged a new type of male parents, the so-called “new fathers”, who not only support the family financially, but also actively involve in childcare, express interest in their needs and the child rearing in general. For “new fathers”, family, children, and family relationship become increasingly valuable in their life (Ildarhanova & Gabdrakhmanova, 2019).

It should be noted that the Russian demographic policy has recently saw serious progress. Apart from increasing the amounts of benefits and new payments, the number of categories of citizens who the state support is targeted at has seriously expanded; it now includes families with children aged 3 to 7 (Ukaz Prezidenta, 2020), single mothers (Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva, 2021), mothers with 10 or more children (Ukaz Prezidenta, 2022). The Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation regularly introduces new initiatives aimed at improving the socio-demographic policy—these initiatives are not only financial, but also organisational. For example, on July 1, 2022, the Chamber held a round table entitled “*Dekretnyi otpusk kak mekhanizm podderzhki rozhdaemosti i rabotaiushchikh roditelei* [Childcare Leave as a Support Mechanism for Birth Rate and Working Parents]”, where experts claimed that the introduction of the flexible childcare leave mechanism would ensure that parents with children under the age of 1.5 years are eligible to choose the period of paid childcare leave while their benefit would be increased or reduced according to the duration of the benefit period as compared to that stipulated in the legislation (V OP RF predlozhili, 2022). Therefore, the initiative suggests that parents will have a choice between longer leave and smaller benefit and shorter leave and bigger benefit.

Another possible measure, which is discussed between demographers, is the modernisation of the childcare leave system by introducing non-transferrable paternity leave (Vinogradova & Poryvaeva, 2022). Both these measures have been available in European countries for a long time; however, in Russia, the question of their regulation has arisen only now, when the demographic crisis has deepened. As our results show, the Russian society is mostly ready for the legal regulation of new measures and for using them in their families.

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## Conclusion

On the one hand, our study shows that three different stakeholders of the parental leave policy seem to share a generally positive attitude towards fathers using their legally provided right for parental leave. In particular, men in Russia are quite positive about childcare leave—regardless of whether they have children or not, they are aware of the opportunity to take parental leave, and almost half of them are positive about it. Additionally, women are much more aware of the opportunity to take leave by the father than men. A little more than half of women believe that paternity leave should be stipulated in the Russian legislation as an obligation—and not only as an opportunity. More than a third of women claim that their families would use paternity leave. According to survey data compared between men and women, a substantial part of Russian families (both mothers and fathers) would use paternity leave if they could obtain a paternity quota. A small number of complaints against employers made by male workers may also be interpreted as the absence of the social conflict of interest in the parental leave sphere.

On the other hand, in fact, men take only 2% of parental leave in Russia. The content analysis of working fathers' complaints published on the [онлайнинспекция.рф](http://онлайнинспекция.рф) website demonstrated that there are instances when fathers do struggle with the infringement of their labor rights—employers often refuse to grant them childcare leave. Most often, employers omit the reason for the denial. Moreover, some workers may face further pressure from the management and be either dismissed or threatened to be dismissed if they request leave. The analysis of cases extracted from the Russian legislation and mass media showed that the existing opportunity for fathers to take childcare leave is thwarted by employers' sanctions or misunderstanding. Thus, there arise an institutional conflict between social institutes of family and labor market. The way this conflict will be addressed will predetermine the possibility to transform the parental leave system in Russia.

To further our research, we intend to reveal the attitude of parents entitled for parental leave to the existing distribution of parental functions during the period of leave, to identify factors of potential inclusion of fathers into the parental leave system, and to evaluate how the existing parental leave system may potentially affect reproductive intentions of the population in Russia.

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ARTICLE

## Factors Shaping the Reproductive Behavior of Young Families in Russia: Data Triangulation

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors that influence the reproductive behavior of young Russian families (heterosexual families consisting of two persons below the age of 35 with or without children). The analysis relies on the results of a mass questionnaire survey of young first-time married people ( $n = 893$ ) conducted in 10 Russian regions in 2019–2020, in-depth interviews with young married people ( $n = 50$ ) and an expert survey of managers and specialists working for social non-profits ( $n = 10$ ), both conducted in 2021. Based on the data of the mass survey, we found that there are differences in the values of young families with children and without children. Moreover, young couples may choose to postpone childbearing not only for financial reasons but also because of their marital attitudes and reproductive strategies formed in the process of socialization. Marital behavior has a great influence on reproductive behavior. The differences in the respondents' attitudes to parenthood are determined by their gender roles, experience of having and raising children or absence

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of such experience. We found that state social support does not have a significant impact on the reproductive behavior of young families in Russia. Expert assessments show that the current measures of social support for young families do not cover all the needs of these families and that there is a perceived need for a more comprehensive assistance model.

#### **KEYWORDS**

young family, demographics, reproductive behavior, marital behavior, average number of children born, social support for young families, thriving young families

## **Introduction**

The demographic decline that Russia is now facing is seen by the government as a challenge to national security. The alarming demographic trends are reflected in a number of indicators, including the average number of children per woman, which has been falling since 1960. It should be noted, however, that similar trends are characteristic of many other countries (Aries, 1980). States with shrinking populations are adopting a range of policies and measures to tackle this problem. There is a vast body of research literature on state measures to promote fertility (see, for example: Bergsvik et al., 2021; Bognar, 2019; Buttner & Lutz, 1990; Hoem, 2008; Tan et al., 2016).

The main question that this study seeks to address is as follows: How does social support for young families affect their reproductive behavior and which policy responses and interventions can be used to stimulate childbearing more effectively? This issue is particularly relevant to Russia because in order to achieve the goals of state policy (to stimulate population growth and human development), it is necessary to raise the fertility level. Other questions this study addresses are the value orientations of childless families and families with children and the factors that determine the reproductive strategies of young Russian families. The latter is especially important due to the fact that the majority of Russian children are born in marriage.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In the research literature, various factors affecting the fertility rate are discussed: for example, an increase in the educational level and employment of women (van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2002); an increase in the age of marriage and the birth of a woman's first child (Rindfuss et al., 2020); family and demographic policy (Feng et al., 2013); the socio-economic living conditions of the family (Bagirova & Ilyshev, 2009). The variety of concepts explaining the change in reproductive attitudes is determined by the complexity of the process of their formation and the difference in the values and cultural codes underlying the decision to procreate.

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Our understanding of young families is determined by the official documents of the Russian Federation, in particular Federal Law No. 489-FZ *O molodezhnoi politike v Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation] (2020), which identifies three types of young families—a full young family without children, a full young family with children, and a young single-parent family with children<sup>1</sup>. Measures of state support are targeted primarily at the families whose members are below the age of 35 (subsidies for the purchase of housing, lump-sum payments to women under 24 at the birth of a child, etc.). Despite these measures, however, the total fertility rate continues to decline (Osipov & Ryazantsev, 2014; Vishnevsky, 2019, p. 114).

In this study, the following factors that influence reproductive behavior will be considered: marital behavior (delayed marriage leads to delayed parenthood), marital and reproductive attitudes of young spouses' parents, material, psychological, and legal support for young families.

Conceptually, this study is based on the interpretive sociology of Max Weber.

## Research Methodology

In this paper, we are going to focus on the two types of young families specified in the Federal Law cited above: two-person families with and without children. Based on the theoretical concept of a thriving family (for more details see Rostovskaya & Kumchaeva, 2020), we have selected young families who are in their first registered marriage. A thriving family is understood as meeting the following criteria: demographic (full family with children, both spouses having functional relationships with their parents and other relatives), material (comfortable housing, access to quality health care, recreation and leisure opportunities, access to education for children, etc.), and psychological (healthy family relationships based on trust, open communication, shared interests, etc.). Leaving aside the demographic and psychological criteria, we focus on the material criterion, more specifically, on the state's efforts to improve housing affordability for young families and to offer them sufficient financial support.

The study uses triangulation mass survey data obtained as part of the first stage of the national monitoring survey *Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii* [Demographic Well-Being of the Population in Russian Regions] (from late 2019 to early 2020). It also uses the data obtained through in-depth interviews and an expert survey (2021, February–May), which comprised the second stage of the national monitoring survey.

Both stages of data collection were carried out in ten regions in the European part of Russia (the Central Federal District, the Volga Federal District, the Southern Federal District, the North Caucasus Federal District, the Northwestern Federal District, and the Ural Federal District). The regions were selected according to the rating of the socio-economic situation of the Russian regions in 2019: Moscow (1<sup>st</sup> place), Ivanovo Region (61<sup>st</sup> place), Volgograd Region (29<sup>th</sup> place), Vologda Region (28<sup>th</sup> place), Moscow

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<sup>1</sup> See also Letter from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation AF-163/06 *O Kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki v otnoshenii molodoi sem'i* [On the Concept of the State Policy in Relation to Young Family] (2007).

Region (4<sup>th</sup> place), Nizhny Novgorod Region (14<sup>th</sup> place), Sverdlovsk Region (7<sup>th</sup> place), the Republic of Bashkortostan (13<sup>th</sup> place), the Republic of Tatarstan (5<sup>th</sup> place), and Stavropol Region (30<sup>th</sup> place). Thus, the sample includes regions with different levels of economic development and the regions with diverse ethnic and religious makeup<sup>2</sup>.

The study comprised two main stages. At the first stage, the data from the mass survey of people in the chosen regions were collected and processed. Those respondents selected from the available database were members of young families under the age of 35 years inclusive and in their first registered marriage ( $n = 893$ ) (for more details see Rostovskaya, Zolotareva, & Vasilieva, 2022). At the second stage, 50 respondents from young families under the age of 35 were interviewed: 20 of them were childless and the other 30 were those with children. Afterwards, an expert survey was conducted, with one expert being chosen for each region (in total, 10 experts).

Respondents for the sample of qualitative research were purposefully selected from first-time married young people. The data we thus obtained have provided us with some valuable insights into the marital and reproductive behavior of young Russian families. For an expert survey, we selected managers and specialists from socially-oriented non-profit organizations whose main focus is on supporting families, women, and children in difficult life situations.

### **Reproductive Intentions, Deferred Parenthood, and Values of Young Families**

This study tested the relationship between the couple's intention to enter a registered marriage and their childbearing intention. This hypothesis was confirmed.

The influence of the attitudes towards marriage was also tested with the help of the following inverse question: on a 5-point scale, the respondents were asked to assess the significance of different factors affecting people's decision to enter into a marriage. "The desire to have a child in a registered marriage" was rated at 4.19 by childless young couples; by couples with children, at 4.36. The answer "marriage registration ensures the rights of a parent staying with children in case of divorce" scored 3.60 and 3.61, respectively. According to the results of the mass survey, compliance with the moral and social norms got lower scores, 3.21 and 2.27, respectively. Similarly, getting married in order to ensure that the relationship will be more long lasting got a low score that is 2.84 and 2.74.

It was revealed that the reproductive plans of young families (the desired and expected number of children) vary significantly depending on the age of the prospective parents, their socio-economic status, and parenting experience, etc. As many as 27.8% of young families have not yet decided whether they are going to have a child (first or second). The birth of the first or subsequent children is postponed by 27.7% of young families. For 45.8% put off having their first or subsequent children by two years; 31.1% by three years; 11.3% by four years; and 9.2% by five years. The proportion of men and women planning to have a child in 5 years' time differs significantly—4.5% and 13.4%, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the project Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii [Demographic Well-Being of the Population in Russian Regions], see [https://www.fnisc.ru/index.php?page\\_id=1198&id=10111](https://www.fnisc.ru/index.php?page_id=1198&id=10111)

**Table 1***Assessment of the Desired and Expected Number of Children, %*

Number of children	“How many children in total (including the ones you already have) would you like to have if the conditions were right?”			“How many children in total (including the ones you already have) are you going to have?”		
	Gender role		Total	Gender role		Total
	woman	man		woman	man	
None	0.8	2.8	1.7	1.1	3.0	2.0
1	5.6	6.5	6.0	11.6	15.3	13.3
2	48.1	44.9	46.7	54.4	47.0	51.0
3	31.9	27.8	30.0	18.5	17.3	18.0
4	2.7	2.3	2.5	1.7	1.8	1.7
5 or more	4.7	5.3	4.9	0.9	1.8	1.3
Don't know	6.3	10.4	8.3	11.8	13.8	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Our study has highlighted the main reproductive intentions of young families (see Table 1). The orientation toward a two- and three-child family is higher for women than for men. This can be explained by the fact that a man's desire to have a child (children) directly depends on his confidence in the material well-being of the family, in other words, for men there is a direct correlation between the family's income and the number of children. Women's attitudes are also related to the family's income but not so rigidly. Women are more focused on maintaining their health and the main factor that determines childbearing timing decisions is their physical and emotional state. As a result, in both gender groups we observe that the desire to have three or more children in practice is transformed into the expectation of two children and the desire of two children is transformed into the expectation of one child. The proportion of undecided people among men is higher. It was found that the older men are, the more prone they are to desire more children.

The significance of the factors determining the difference between the desired and expected number of children is somewhat different in young families who already have children and are just planning the birth of a child. The experience of parenthood determines people's attitudes towards childbearing. There is a growing proportion of respondents who consider themselves less hindered or not hindered by the lack of employment or career opportunities, large workloads and the inability to combine career with household work, the desire to make a career, the opinion of relatives, difficulties in accessing childcare (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Assessment of Hindrances to Having the Desired Number of Children, %*

“If you would like to have more children than you are going to, what and to what extent prevents you personally from having the desired number of children?”	Average number of children born					
	No			Yes		
	Greatly hinders	Hinders	Does not hinder	Greatly hinders	Hinders	Does not hinder
Difficult relationships in the family (with spouse, parents or in-laws)	3.4	6.8	57.3	6.0	8.0	56.8
No job	18.9	20.4	31.6	10.8	16.7	42.2
Large work load	14.6	24.3	28.2	8.9	25.8	36.8
I work far from home, I spend a lot of time commuting	8.3	16.5	48.5	6.7	8.9	54.6
Desire to make a career	9.2	12.6	49.0	3.5	15.0	53.0
Financial difficulties	29.1	27.2	18.0	23.3	29.1	21.5
Uncertainty about the future	24.3	26.2	24.8	18.6	31.1	21.5
Desire to spend more interesting leisure time	7.8	11.2	54.9	3.9	9.2	56.8
Desire to properly raise and educate the child (children) one already has	6.3	17.0	42.7	9.8	20.8	41.8
Health problems	7.8	17.0	39.8	5.7	17.0	46.1
Husband (or wife) having health problems	2.4	14.1	42.7	4.7	11.5	50.9
Housing difficulties	14.1	31.1	28.6	18.6	23.0	30.3
Fear that the birth of another child will infringe on the interests of the child (children) one already has	3.4	8.7	51.5	3.6	17.5	50.5
The husband (wife) doesn't want to have children (or more children).	6.3	13.1	42.7	4.4	12.1	49.6
It is difficult to arrange childcare, it is hard to get a place in a nearby kindergarten	6.8	19.9	33.0	7.3	18.2	44.4
Inflexible work schedule	8.3	16.5	44.2	6.7	18.2	45.6
It is difficult (for the wife) to combine work and household chores	8.7	25.2	29.6	6.3	20.8	43.2
There will be no one to leave the child with when I start (my wife will start) working	9.7	25.7	31.1	10.3	27.8	34.5
Relatives are still against the birth of another child (children)	2.4	4.4	57.8	1.7	4.7	63.3

*Note.* The percentages of those who answered “I don't know” or gave no answer are not given.

There are gender-related differences in the reasons people give for deferred parenthood, they are especially pronounced in the barriers that respondents choose as “greatly hindering” their decision-making process regarding childbearing. For instance, in the option “We don’t have a place of our own to raise the child in”, the average score is 32.8%, with 25.8% women and 40.2% men. Similarly, in the option “I need to find a better-paid job” with the average score 29.3%, the distribution is 25.4% women and 33.6% men. Other examples of gender-related differences include the following: the option “I am not financially prepared for this yet” 26.7% (19.2% women and 34.8% men); “the youngest child is still too small” 20.3% (22.5% women and 18.0% men); “I need to pay loans” 18.8% (13.0% women and 25.2% men); “raising a child is a difficult task, which requires a lot of effort and time” 18.4% (22.2% women and 14.2% men). These data lead us to the conclusion that a large proportion of young families reproduce the traditional family model where the husband is responsible for material well-being of the family and the wife is responsible for the child’s upbringing. Such situation is especially typical of families that already have a preschool child. As many as 9.9% of young families postpone parenthood because they have not completed their education and 9.4% delay childbirth because they want to “enjoy time for themselves”.

The reasons behind the decision to have a child also differ depending on the gender of the respondent: “married life is going well, you can have a child” 20.8% (16.1% women and 27.4% men); “we are now in a registered marriage” 19.5% (20.7% women and 17.7% men); “it is impossible to postpone further because of the age” 19.5% (20.7% women and 17.7% men); “we have enjoyed the no-kids lifestyle, now it is time to have a child” 17.4% (14.9% women and 21.0% men). Comparing the reasons for deferred parenthood and the reasons for deciding to have a child, it is clear that if the young family is not struggling financially and does not have a housing problem, then mutual understanding of spouses, registered marriage (it is especially important for women as a guarantee of their legal rights), psychological comfort in marriage (especially for men) become the most critical factors as well as their reproductive age.

Measures of state support that may have an impact on the birth of a child (see Table 3) received different assessments depending on young couples’ experience of parenthood: for families with children, the quality of medical care is more important; for families without children—the availability of child benefits. Traditionally, measures to assist young families in obtaining housing were rated highly (4.23).

**Table 3**

*Assessment of the Importance of Family Support Measures on a Five-Point Scale, %*

“To increase the average number of children born, additional measures of family support should include the following”:	Average number of children born		Total
	No	Yes	
Housing assistance	4.35	4.19	4.23
Improvement of the quality of health care	3.48	4.12	4.18
Raising child benefits (for children under 3)	4.20	4.16	4.17
Raising child benefits (for children under 1.5)	4.21	4.02	4.07

**Table 3 Continued**

“To increase the average number of children born, additional measures of family support should include the following”:	Average number of children born		Total
	No	Yes	
Raising maternity allowance (paid after the birth of a child)	4.10	4.02	4.04
Preferential mortgages for families with several children	4.03	4.0	4.01
Fostering access to high-quality preschool education	3.99	3.88	3.91
Lowering the retirement age for women with children	3.75	3.86	3.83
Improvement of the quality of consumer service	4.04	3.72	3.79
Promoting flexible work schedules for working parents	3.98	3.70	3.76
Child care assistance to families provided on a contractual basis	3.94	3.68	3.74
More leisure opportunities for families with children	3.88	3.67	3.72
Expanding remote employment opportunities for parents	3.83	3.56	3.62
Preferential loans depending on the number of children	3.55	3.57	3.56
No changes to the amount of child benefits but their extension until the school-going age	3.54	3.50	3.51

The life goals of young families with children are the material well-being (4.76), raising a child (4.76), good health (4.72), the opportunity to give children good education (4.70), possession of a good house (4.69), and being in a loving relationship (4.63). For childless couples, the order of importance is as follows: good health, good house, being in a loving relationship, and education for future children.

Young people’s answers to the question “What, in your opinion, is necessary to succeed in life?” have shown that their top priorities are good health and flexible skills—the ability to build relationships with other people, to adapt to change, to have talent, and to be able to work well and conscientiously. The value of family and children on the path to success is higher among the respondents with parenthood experience (4.07) than among the respondents without children (3.68). Similarly, the ability to work hard is evaluated higher by couples with children than by childless respondents (4.23 and 4.02 respectively).

Of the respondents, 67.3% agreed with the statement “a family is, above all, a lot of work and tolerance for each other”; 46.6%, “it’s not worth staying in a loveless relationship, even for the sake of children”; 38.3%, “a man should share household chores and child-rearing responsibilities with a woman”; 31.4%, “a family without children is not a real family”; 30.6%, “marriage must be registered; otherwise it is not a real family”; 30.4%, “a single person cannot be happy, the meaning of life is in the family.” Not surprisingly, young first-time married couples place a high value on the family.

The experience of parenthood has a significant impact on the respondents’ answers and changes their life goals. Some goals score higher because the respondents’ experience of parenthood makes them more meaningful: for example, “to have grandchildren”, 4.17 and 4.64, respectively; “to raise two children”, 4.01 and 4.26; and “gain respect from others”, 3.72 and 3.93.

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## Reproductive Strategies of Young Families: The Results of In-Depth Interviews

As the mass survey has shown, marriage is a significant factor in couples' decision to have a child. During our in-depth interviews with young spouses planning parenthood or already having children, we asked the following questions: How did you take the decision to register your marriage? How did you meet? Did you live together before getting married? Our survey has shed some light on the reasons behind young couples' choice of one of the possible strategies (short-term premarital cohabitation, long-term premarital cohabitation, and no premarital cohabitation) and their satisfaction with the results of this choice.

We detected a certain change in the respondents' assessment of cohabitation practices while they were preparing for the birth of a child: *"Yes, we lived together for a short period [that is, before the official marriage]. I don't quite approve of it, I wouldn't want them to do it [their future children]"* (man, 22 y.o., married, no children but is expecting a child, two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by Tamara Rostovskaya, Ekaterina Vasilieva, & Veronika Kholina—T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

The length of premarital cohabitation is determined by the (dis)approval of and/or support for such a practice on the part of the couple's inner circle:

*We got married in 2018, so it's been three years already and we have been together for five years. We started living together almost immediately. Before getting married, we lived with my parents for four years.* (Man, 25 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Nizhny Novgorod Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

*I have got married recently; it was a little over six months ago ... We dated for six months, then I invited her to live with me, then we were still living with my parents. We lived with my parents for 1.5 years, and then we moved out and lived separately for six months, and then decided to formalize our relationship. We lived in a civil marriage for a long time, then decided to formalize it.* (Man, 32 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, unfinished higher education, Tatarstan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Those of our respondents whose parents strongly disapprove of premarital cohabitation tended to avoid this practice:

*No, we had not lived together before marriage because since childhood we have been told that life together should begin only after marriage. We discussed this with my future spouse and decided that only after getting married, we would start a life together.* (Woman, 21 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

It is necessary to highlight the role of religious attitudes as a factor that influences marital behavior. The choice to live together before marriage largely

depends on the religion the respondent was born into (e.g., in Muslim families it is possible to conduct the *nikah* ceremony—the rite of marriage in the Muslim tradition, which allows a young couple to start marital relations before the state registration):

*We are representatives of the Islamic religion. According to tradition, first we concluded a Muslim marriage. This is the equivalent of an Orthodox wedding and after that we signed the marriage document at the registry office and began to live together. (Woman, 30 y.o., married, no children, the only child in the parent family, higher education, Vologda Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

In some cases, a young couple cannot start living together for objective rather than moral reasons:

*My husband and I both conscientiously approached the issue of creating a family. We discussed this repeatedly while we were living separately. Still, we believed that there was no need to get married at that time because we lived in different cities and so on and when the question of living together arose, we got married. (Woman, 22 y.o., married, one child, two children in the parent family, higher education, Stavropol Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

We found some gender differences in the way our respondents answered the question: “Which of the following views on the family do you agree with?”. 24.8% of women and 18.2% of men strongly agreed with the statement “Nowadays divorce is normal, it is nothing terrible”.

We also asked the respondents the following questions: “Have you dreamt of marriage?” and “What are your plans regarding marriage/children/their number?”

Some informants believe that parenthood has a higher value than marriage:

*I did not dream of marriage as such. I didn't have such a direct specific goal to get married sooner ... Since childhood, I have had a very respectful attitude towards children. I've always been very touched by the kids. I've nursed nephews, brothers, sisters, and anyone I could. I've always wanted a big family for myself. My husband and I are planning to have three children, at least. (Woman, 22 y.o., married, one child, two children in the parent family, higher education, Stavropol Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

*In fact, I didn't dream of a white dress from an early age, of a prince charming. No, there was no such thing ... Well, of course, I really want children. You can't predict it but I would like three children. I believe that every woman should become a mother and continue her family line. I have a very positive attitude to this, and I consider it everyone's duty. (Woman, 24 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Volgograd Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

Respondents who dreamed of a family (marriage, children) note that they are not going to postpone parenthood:

*Well, like all little girls, I dreamed that I would have a good family ... We'll see how it goes, of course, but we'd like to have two or three children.* (Woman, 21 y.o., married, no children, three children in the parent family (stepbrother and stepsister), university student, Bashkortostan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

*And we would like a big family, too. At about the age of 16, we thought that we'd like to have six children ... My older brother had a son when he was 28 years old. It's a little late for us.* (Man, 20 years old, married, no children, two children in the parent family, university student, Bashkortostan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

*Yes, since childhood I have dreamed of getting married in a beautiful white dress ... As for children, we plan two or three depending on the situation with work, the earnings and financial situation ... I love children very much. I want to have a lot of children, and I hope I will.* (Woman, 21 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

During the in-depth interviews, we sought to clarify the factors that influence the couples' decision about childbearing as well as the importance of state support measures for such decision-making. Respondents willing to have many children are ready to plan the birth of another child if the conditions are right. In each individual case, the desired conditions are different depending on the couple's situation (health, well-being, etc.):

*We are planning two children. However, if things go well, we want more children if there are no contraindications to pregnancy. I don't think we'll have only one, otherwise he may grow up selfish.* (Man, 22 y.o., married, no children (but is expecting a child), two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

*The ideal and optimal number of children in the family is two. If we had everything we needed, we would like to have no more than three children.* (Man, 22 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Moscow Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

*Well, I would like two, of course. We want more than one child but we'll see. Three children, yes, I wouldn't mind having three children [that is, if they earned more and had a three-room apartment].* (Man, 32 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, incomplete higher education, Tatarstan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Some informants do not believe that all the necessary conditions are achievable, so they deliberately limit the desired number of children to one or two:

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*If we had everything we need, we would like to have at least two children. We want to give our children everything, they shouldn't be deprived of anything they need in order to thrive, two children would be an ideal solution. (Woman, 30 y.o., married, no children, the only child in the parent family, higher education, Vologda Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

*Well, again, it seems to me that you need to give birth to at least one and see how you feel ... in general, whether you have enough strength for one child. If you are healthy enough to give birth to more than one, then why not? And the image of an ideal family, like, you know, in this TV commercial of a juice—a boy, a girl and everything. (Woman, 26 y.o., married, no children, the only child in the parent family, higher education, Nizhny Novgorod Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

The data obtained through in-depth interviews show that state support measures do not significantly affect couples' decision-making regarding the birth of their first child. However, there is a potential impact of state benefit schemes and programs on the birth of the third child, e.g., the effect of the so-called maternity capital benefit that applies to families that have had or adopted their second child (third, fourth, or any other subsequent child) since 2007. There are also baby-bonus schemes for families who have had their first child since 2020, January 1 and Regional incentive programs stimulating families to have more than two children:

*We have received the maternity capital benefit but we have not used it yet. The state support for families with three or more children significantly affects our desire to give birth to a third child. In the case of the first two children, measures of state/regional support did not affect our decision-making in any way. (Man, 35 y.o., married, two children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Moscow Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

*Yes, we've received the maternity capital benefit. Our decision to have children was not affected by state/regional support measures. In Moscow Region you are not entitled to social support benefits if you just have many children. There is a category "low-income with many children". Since we have many children but we are not low-income, we can't get these payments. We have maternity capital, but we need money for a mortgage or to build a house, which we don't have yet. Therefore, this certificate is not applicable yet. We do not understand how it can be applied in our case. We are on the waiting list to receive a certificate for a land plot. We are 2000+ in the queue; land plots are given to 10 large families in our area each year. (Woman, 32 y.o., married, three children, the only child in the parent family, vocational education, Moscow Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

First, the more children there are in the family, the more state assistance is required, and the more problems families are facing that they cannot solve on their own. Second, the more expensive housing is in the region where a young family lives

or the lower is the average wage level in the region, the fewer opportunities this family has to use the most effective family support—the maternity certificate. To claim the maternity capital benefit, you don't have to be a low-income parent.

State support for Russian families is largely focused on helping low-income families, which means that higher-income young families are left with an option of applying to socially-oriented non-profit organizations (SO NPOs).

### The Main Areas of Activity of Non-Profits Working With Young Families

The state system of support for young families is focused primarily on helping them solve their housing problems and thus on enhancing their well-being. The question we were interested in was as follows: Do family-oriented non-profits work with young families from categories other than low-income families?

The Russian government actively supports SO NPOs, including those focused on family and childhood support. These organizations' work focuses on helping families in difficult life situations, large families, and single parents, and female victims of violence. There is no specific work done for "young families" but specialists working in the social services market undertake to develop projects to promote family values among young people:

*These include awareness raising activities, creation of a favourable environment, work should be started from kindergarten—there is a mom, a dad, children, a family. In kindergartens this work is conducted, it is included in the educational standard. There are no such standards for school education yet, so it will be more difficult to organize such work. We have started working with grades 10–11 and 1–2 years of colleges; we have an interactive exhibition "Pro Birth". We are talking about responsible parenting, about the moral portfolio of an individual. (Expert, Volgograd Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

The second area is aimed at strengthening marriage and preventing divorces:

*Why do most young people get divorced? Because they are faced with the fact that they have to fight for happiness, that they need to work with problems, and family problems. We need to go through them somehow. Everything can't be going smoothly forever. And a happy family is characterized not by the absence of difficult moments, but by the number of difficult moments that you manage to successfully overcome. (Expert, Stavropol Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)*

As our expert survey has shown, the activities carried out by Russian SO NPOs to support young families are as follows:

- support for families in difficult life situations, including young families (financial problems, divorce, complicated pregnancy, abortion prevention, etc.);
- assistance in organizing children's leisure activities;
- legal advice on obtaining the required state assistance;

- raising awareness of available support;
- psychological counselling.

In addition to the above-described areas of work, non-profits also campaign for the legislative initiatives aimed at abolishing the “low income” criterion for receiving child benefits, optimizing the system of land plot allocation for large families, and introducing additional family tax benefits. Experts believe that taken together, these initiatives will form a comprehensive model of support for young families. Educational projects are being implemented to promote a positive image of large successful families. Experts negatively assess the effectiveness of those state measures that stimulate the practice of “fake divorces” when people arrange for a divorce to apply for single-parent benefits, because they see this practice as a threat to the model of a thriving family (Mintrud predstavil pravila, 2021).

Thus, non-profits can take up some of the work aimed at supporting young families. The main barrier to effective support on the part of the non-profits, however, is that young families are generally unwilling to reach out to these organizations for help or that they are unaware of this opportunity. As experts put it, in their practice, young families make just a few isolated cases.

## Conclusion

The results of the mass survey, in-depth interviews of young married people, and expert survey have demonstrated that the support system in Russia is focused on helping only low-income families and does not significantly improve the quality of life of young families with larger incomes. Therefore, the availability of such benefits does not have a significant effect on the fertility rate. Today’s young families either decide against having a second child or having more than two children or choose to postpone childbirth. Their behavioral strategies are not affected by the available family support programs implemented by the government.

Strategies of reproductive behavior of young families can be linked to the types of social action described by M. Weber: goal rational social action, value-rational social action, affective social action, and traditional social action. Thus, we can identify the strategy of rational reproductive behavior, the strategy of value-rational reproductive behavior, and traditional reproductive behavior. The strategy of rational reproductive behavior is determined by the family’s financial situation and health. It may also correlate with the fact that the couple has registered their marriage. If the couple attach a high value to family values and children, then they are more likely to choose the strategy of value-rational reproductive behavior. In this case, material considerations play a secondary role in their decision-making regarding childbearing. Finally, there is traditional reproductive behavior, which means that families tend to follow the tradition of having many children inherited from the parental family (or families). A hypothetical assumption can be made about affective reproductive behavior, which was left beyond the scope of this study. In this case, we may be talking about dysfunctional families.

We found that following the birth of the first and subsequent children, families’ behavioral strategies change. As a rule, the birth of the first child correlates with the

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strategy of value-rational reproductive behavior; the birth of the second child, with the strategy of rational reproductive behavior. The conscious choice of having many children is linked either to value-rational reproductive behavior or traditional reproductive behavior. These strategies, in their turn, also correlate with the types of marital behavior: after marriage is officially registered, the mechanisms of behavior rationalization are activated.

The main factors shaping the reproductive behavior of young people are gender, age, marital attitudes, children, influence of parental families. Our study has also brought to light the relationship between marital and reproductive behavior in young families as well as the models of marital and reproductive behavior determined by the attitudes rooted in the parental families of the young spouses. There are resources to increase the fertility rate: for example, to offer young families expanded social support by abolishing the “low income” criterion. In this case, young families may be more motivated to have the desired number of children. There will possibly be shifts in the timing of childbearing, especially for couples planning their first pregnancy.

We have also found some gender-related differences in young people’s decision-making regarding childbearing: since men are generally more concerned about the family’s finances, it would make sense to offer systematic support to young families so that fathers could feel more confident that they would be able to maintain the family’s quality of life if the couple decides to have more children.

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ARTICLE

## “Lost” Russian Media Generations in a Changing Social and Digital Environment

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the concept of “digital” media generations, their formation, and the phenomenon of “lost” generations from the perspective of media-focused and anthropological approaches. The restrictions on social media and some media access following the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine in 2022 has resulted in a turbulent media environment detrimental to the subjective well-being of Russian “digital” media generations, especially young adults. Analysis of the reasons behind the emergence of “lost” generations in the history of Russia and other countries allows us to conclude that geopolitical factors such as wars, economic shocks, and major epidemics can lead to generational “loss”. From the perspective of digital divide theory, it may be said that we are now dealing with a new kind of digital inequality. The discreteness of the media flow, whose continuity is crucial primarily for “digital” media generations and their media identity, has created a unique combination of factors contributing to further exacerbation of the digital divide. To minimize the destructive consequences of emerging media transformations, it is important to ensure comprehensive media and information support for Russian “digital natives”, along with socio-political and psychological assistance.

### KEYWORDS

media generation, “digital” media generation, formative years, “lost” generation, digital divide, behavioral patterns, traumatic events

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## Introduction

The pervasive effects of digitalization and digital technology involve transformations in the practices of information transfer and media content use. In her study of communication processes in the digital age, A. Gureeva (2016) argues that global mediatization and technologization have led to the creation of a unified media social space, allowing society to have a continuous information and communication experience (p. 203).

In 2021, a research team led by the Russian psychologist E. Zeer demonstrated that the digital information field imposes on people a new lifestyle that is uncharacteristic of the previous industrial civilization (Zeer et al., 2021).

The Internet has now become not only one of the main agents of socialization, but has also engendered a new phenomenon—the digital personality or persona. The digital personality, reflecting Internet users' individual traits and habits, has emerged as a result of more and more personal data being found online. Thus, the Internet has acquired the characteristics of a cultural tool used to create new cultural practices, phenomena, and meanings, all of which requires reflection in interdisciplinary research (Ershova, 2019, p. 51).

As digital media are increasingly woven into the fabric of young people's lives, they are laying the foundation for what can be referred to as their digital lifestyle (Delgado, 2016; Dunas & Vartanov, 2020; Third et al., 2019). A digital lifestyle means not only digitalized media behavior, globalized streaming media use, interactive cultural digital practices, and symbols of communication, but also new vulnerabilities, traumatic communication experiences, and exposure to potentially traumatic media content, all of which can affect the subjective well-being of Internet users.

Well-being is considered a significant indicator of mental health and an important factor of individual adaptation to changing external environments. In general, it is one of the key indicators of social stability and progress. The deterioration of well-being caused by the traumatic experiences of "digital natives", such as lifestyle loss in relation to the disruption of sustainable generational media patterns, may result in these generations' becoming "lost" media generations.

Generational media losses, which have both social and value dimensions, acquire new meaning and saliency in situations characterized by limited media access. The example of such a situation is the blocked access to some digital media in Russia following the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. In this regard, it is important to examine the destructive influence of digital media transformation on the well-being of Russian "digital" media generations and to search for means and ways to minimize this influence.

This study meets the priorities of the Program of Fundamental Research in the Russian Federation for the Long-Term Period for 2021–2030; more specifically, it addresses social research reflecting the socio-cultural transformation of Russian society in the digital age and factors shaping the exploration, transformation, (re) production, and symbolization of the spatial and environmental conditions of people's lives in the digital age.

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## Theoretical Framework

### ***Media Generations in the Digital Age: Conceptualization of “Digital” Media Generations***

To describe a media audience in generational terms conceptually, this study relies on a media-focused approach that foregrounds the media–audience relationship and related issues. In this case, a point of departure for conceptualizing media generations is provided by the seminal works of the Canadian philologist and media culture expert Marshall McLuhan, who wrote extensively on the role of media in life, media’s centripetal effect on the development of communications, and their role in civilizational transformations that lead to the emergence of technogenic civilizations.

McLuhan believed that media (or communication media) are technological extensions of human being and that the form of a medium is more important than the content it communicates—or as his famous phrase goes, “the medium is the message”. What McLuhan means is that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message and determines the impact of media exposure on people’s consciousness; the media through which we choose to communicate becomes a message in itself (McLuhan, 1962, 2003, p. 25).

The German media theorist N. Bolz has developed McLuhan’s ideas and points to how generational differences are determined by the impact of media. In his view, the generation a person belongs to is now largely dependent on their belonging to a certain information culture. “There are no ‘common’ media anymore; instead, there are different media corresponding to different value systems. People separated by demographic, political, and cultural boundaries also inhabit different information worlds” [trans. by Ekaterina Purgina—E. P.] (Bolz, 2011, p. 15). The Australian social researcher Mark McCrindle, who developed a theory of generation change caused by rapid technological advances, remarks: “While people of various ages are living through the same events, the age at which one is exposed to a political shift, technological change or social marker determines how embedded it becomes in one’s psyche and worldview ” (McCrindle, 2014, p. 3). These changes during the sensitive period of a person’s adulthood influence the formation of life values, and ultimately their life path.

Events connected with technological advances and the ensuing transformations of people’s lives and worldviews feature prominently in biographical accounts. Media have proven to be a powerful force changing the basic structure of daily life. They enter daily routines and reformat them in accordance with their own agenda (Altheide, 1985, p. 105). This is one of the reasons to consider a media generation as a subject *sui generis*.

The ways and purposes of media use may differ, and these differences largely stem from differences in the newly emerged media platforms themselves. Therefore, it may be concluded that what distinguishes one media generation from another is the preference people give to this or that medium in a certain historical period. The essential nature of a media generation is manifested in the priority and sustained use of technologically defined media.

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A media generation can thus be defined as the entirety of media audiences sharing a similar information communication environment and similar media preferences and practices. The development of a media generation and its behavioral patterns are determined by formative experiences (socialization in adolescence) that result in age cohorts sharing a common generational fate in a specific socio-cultural environment.

It is quite clear that *generation* and *media generation* are not interchangeable concepts. However, they do have a number of significant features in common, including the role of the formative period, generation entelechy, and others. What distinguishes the concept of media generation from that of generation is that at the core of a media generation is people's enduring preferences in media use.

The most famous study of media generations is the large-scale international research project "Global Media Generations 2000", based on qualitative cross-cultural research on media memories in twelve countries. The starting point was the memory of media usage during childhood in the experiment's age cohorts. The researchers were particularly interested in all the media relevant to the respondents' individual media biography. The study identified three media generations: the "print-media generation", the "black-and-white-TV generation", and the "multi-media generation" (Project Global Media Generations, 2000).

Russia, however, was not included in this survey. The project founder Ingrid Volkmer (2003) argues that each generation perceives and constructs its own media world:

Media events are stored away in our brain along with all the other events happening in our lives and years later our memories of them are only selective and merged with personal-life experiences. Apparently, the mass media form mutual worlds of knowledge for generations of people. (p. 302)

This can be explained by the fact that each generation has its own preferences regarding media types and their attributes, and these media determine the consciousness of their audiences by creating the largest emotional appeal (Bolin, 2014, p. 111).

Following McLuhan's logic, we can also conclude that digitalization has again changed communication media, including mass media. In comparison with analogue media, digital media present information in a more compressed form. As a result of digitalization, information can be used in non-linear ways, as everything is always instantly available and data are easy to copy and spread. Digitalization has expanded our opportunities and led to the emergence of a new digital lifestyle, where virtual and real worlds not only co-exist but also interact and impact people's behavioral patterns. L. Manovich (2012) shrewdly observes that there are more differences than similarities between traditional and digital media. From the perspective of technological determinism, it can be said that in the age of digitalization, software determines the communication and content users create and share (Manovich, 2014).

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As Volkmer (2003) puts it,

in the youngest generation the media shape “worldviews”, not only locally and globally, but also in terms of “analog” and “digital” knowledge. Whereas the oldest generations revealed “analog” knowledge, defined their worldviews according to national and cultural specifics, and described media-related memories in great details. The youngest generation shares a great variety of superficial media-related knowledge, when asked to describe this in-depth, they hardly know contexts and facts and use a somewhat “universal” code. (p. 16)

In light of the considerable differences between the pre-digital and digital periods in the development of media, it makes sense to conceptualize and identify specific media audience groups, such as the “analogue” and “digital” media generations, as well as a transitional (“digital borderline”) generation sandwiched between them (Sumskaya & Solomeina, 2022). H. Becker (2000) has referred to such transitional generations as “borderline generations”. G. Codrington (2008) proposed another term—*cusp*, “the group of people who fall into the overlap between two generations” (p. 8). He also remarks that “most cuspers tend combine the main characteristics of neighbouring generations, but do not resemble their typical representatives” (p. 8).

Of particular relevance to this study is the concept of a “digital” media generation, as opposed to “analogue” or “digital borderline” generations. The generations of people whose formative period coincided with the development of the Internet and digitalization are commonly referred to as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001).

H. Becker’s “pattern of generational emergence” is pivotal to this study. According to Becker (1992), the specificity of a generation is determined by the events that happened during its formative period, the state of the media, prevailing patterns of socialization, and systemic and biographical characteristics.

According to the international project “Global Digital”, Russia’s Internet penetration rate stood at 85% (124 million people) as of January 2021. The number of social media users in Russia was equivalent to 67.8% of the total population, with young people (under 44) accounting for over 90%. The average Russian had over 7 social media accounts. YouTube<sup>1</sup> ranked at the top of the list of the most popular social media platforms by user number. Young users prefer to consume all their information from the Internet, primarily social media (Kemp, 2021).

All of the above gives us reason to believe that Russia has its own “digital natives” and “digital” media generations. A detailed analysis of digitalization processes in the Russian media industry and people’s media practices has shown that due to the accelerated generation change caused by sweeping technological advances, there have been at least three “digital” media generations so far. The first “digital” media generation consists of people born between 1983 and 1997 (this partially overlaps with Millennials in the American generational conception), the second generation are people born between 1998 and 2006 (partially overlapping with the Zoomers), and representatives of the third Russian “digital” media generation are now pursuing

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<sup>1</sup> YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

secondary education and are going through the most active phase in their formative period (Sumsкая, 2023).

One of the characteristic features of modern Russian youth is their self-identification as a digitally-savvy, innovation-oriented generation. For young people who have grown up surrounded by technology, it is natural to live a life immersed in a continuous digital flow; they are living in a fast-paced world where the moment is the main unit of time and events are recorded in the form of short reel chronicles.

“Digital natives” have their own preferred practices, strategies, and channels of communication. One of the distinctive features of communication in the digital age is that subjectivity is tied to the technologies a person uses, i. e., “computer programs transform the forms of communication and perception of any symbolic production, including information about events and news” (Drozdova, 2017, p. 159, trans. by E. P.). Another remarkable feature stems from the network nature of digital media communication, which is profoundly different from traditional mass media (Lavrenchuk, 2010, p. 69). Such communication as a type of social interaction is decentralized, as it has no central point of control. Individual participants use social media platforms to unite and form online communities based on common interests and shared values.

Theoretical insights into the lives of “digital natives” in the information stream are supported by the author’s own research. In-depth interviews conducted with a sample of 40 respondents (from November 2021 to January 2022) showed that absolutely all the respondents were registered in various social media. The ranking of the most popular social media platforms is as follows: Instagram<sup>2</sup> 38 people, VK<sup>3</sup> 36 people, Telegram<sup>4</sup> 32 people, Facebook<sup>5</sup> eight people, and TikTok<sup>6</sup> eight people (Sumsкая, 2023). All of the interviewees use messaging services, primarily VK, WhatsApp<sup>7</sup>, Telegram, and Instagram.

The main source of national and international news is the Internet: to get their news, 25 respondents use social media, 12 respondents read online versions of newspapers and information agencies, and three respondents watch YouTube. Meanwhile, all 40 respondents watch videos on YouTube for personal and professional purposes (Sumsкая, 2023).

The youngest representatives of the “digital” media generations (especially the second and third) have influencers of their own, some of whom are barely known

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<sup>2</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the US and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

<sup>3</sup> VK (short for its original name VKontakte) is a Russian online social media and social networking service. <https://vk.com> VK™ is a trademark of VK.com Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> Telegram™ is a trademark of Telegram Group Inc., its operational center is based in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>5</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

<sup>6</sup> TikTok is a trademark of ByteDance, registered in China and other countries. TikTok has suspended all new posting and live-streaming for users in the Russian Federation.

<sup>7</sup> WhatsApp is a trademark of WhatsApp Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

outside their online communities. The “digital” media generations are prone to prosumerism: they are ready to create their own media content and share their views in their group, “here and now”: they prioritize values of personalization, self-realization, and the right to self-identification.

“Digital” media generations are accustomed to random, non-linear, and decentralized communication. They use social media for self-expression, as well as to synchronously build multiple horizontal intra- and, if they wish so, intergenerational connections. In other words, social media promote extensive social engagement. The influence of social media, together with the major events and experiences that shape people’s worldviews, form the foundation of generational *entelechy*.

It is important to note that the priority media consumption of “digital” media generations is, of course, media created in the digital age and in HD quality. For example, in 2021, Russia’s own studies of media consumption by Russian “digital” media generations showed a demand for such online media as *RNA Novosti*, *RNA URA.RU*, *Lenta.ru*, *E1.ru*, *Gazeta.Ru*, *Znak.com*, *The Village*<sup>8</sup>, *Meduza*<sup>9</sup>, and others. “Digital” media generations also prefer to consume these media in the personal news feeds of their social networks. Among print media, glossy magazines are the most popular among Russian digital natives.

In terms of television content, foreign TV channels operating in the Russian market in cable and satellite packages (such as *Discovery*, *National Geographic*, *Euronews*, and others) are of interest to “digital natives”. Of Russian TV channels, *Pyatnitsa* [Friday], *TNT*, and the *Dozhd*<sup>10</sup> [Rain] online TV channel were the most popular (Sumskaya, 2023).

The cognitive and sensuous sphere in the life of “digital” media generations also has its own peculiarities. The digital media environment is an extension and development of the electronic environment, which, according to McLuhan, has become yet another technological extension of the human organism, as it gives humans an immersion of the senses and changes our cognitive processes. This strengthens the need for emotional and sensuous experiences and makes people more prone to empathy.

This happens because the digital environment prioritizes our response to the representation of an action rather than the representation itself: it triggers emotional reactions, inducing total involvement in all-inclusive oneness (McLuhan, 1964). R. Williams (1965) argues that each new generation has its own structure of feeling that does not come “from” anywhere: in other words, it does not result from intergenerational transmission, but “the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting ... feeling its whole life in certain ways differently” (p. 65). Even political content in social media targeted at “digital” media generations is now permeated by sensory imagery (Zavershinskiy & Koryushkin, 2022, p. 50).

<sup>8</sup> По решению Роскомнадзора, издание «The Village» полностью заблокировано в России.

<sup>9</sup> По решению Роскомнадзора, издание «Медуза» полностью заблокировано в России как средство массовой информации, выполняющее функции иностранного агента и как нежелательная организация.

<sup>10</sup> По решению Роскомнадзора, телеканал «Дождь» полностью заблокирован в России как средство массовой информации, выполняющее функции иностранного агента.

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Russian “digital” media generations are characterized by a high level of impulsivity and the prevalence of visual thinking.

The cognitive sphere of such media generations is shaped by the so-called Google effect, denoting the tendency to forget the information that is readily available online—in other words, what is remembered is largely not the information itself, but the place where it can be found (e.g., online). This might be the reason why Ivan Krastev (2016) describes contemporary young adults as “a generation that ‘google’ history for facts, but it cannot reconnect with the experience of the previous generations” (pp. 58–59). These two media generations have two distinctive characteristics. On the one hand, happiness is higher on the agenda of these generations in comparison with their predecessors. These people grew up in a relatively trouble-free period in Russia’s development, when digital media and technological advances evolved at a rapid pace and became quickly engrained in their daily lives. These generations have not had the need to resort to survival strategies and, in R. Inglehart’s terms, can thus be described as “postmodernist”, with the corresponding goals and values. Their distinctive feature is a high level of life satisfaction and adherence to the motto “live in the moment and be happy”. Before February 2022, Instagram<sup>11</sup> was one of the platforms that essentially told an optimistic narrative, portraying the world in the best possible light. Instagram is commonly described as a “happiness platform”, intended to capture and share life’s happy moments—over 90% of the content posted on Instagram is meant to emphasize positive emotions. Instagram users construct their virtual biographies as visual projects of a “happy life”. A. Drozdova (2017) comments: “Such basic anthropological foundations as ‘live beautifully’, ‘live with pleasure’, ‘be happy’ turn into manifestations of the aspiration for aesthetic pleasure as a sensual perception of the world” (p. 194; trans. by E. P.). Instagram gives people ways to pursue this aspiration in their daily lives.

Another important feature of “digital” media generations is their high levels of anxiety stemming from increased dependence on digitally mediated communication. A large-scale survey of young Russian adults has found that fear is a distinctive characteristic of this generation, threatening its social well-being:

The digital fears of young people reflect the anticipated, perceived threats and anxieties concerning the future of society. Therefore, the fears that drive post-modernist society have a radically different structure determined by growing uncertainty, increase in the number of forces out of human control, and changes in the attitudes to the idea of progress. Fear of the future can transform the socio-cultural foundations of society, even to the point of destroying them. (Abramova et al., 2022, p. 71)

The list of post-modernist fears includes fear of the unknown and an inability to make plans, fear of losing a sense of purpose in life, and fear of the future and

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<sup>11</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the US and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

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situations beyond one's control. So-called digital fears include the fear of being offline, the fear of missing out, associated with the desire to stay continually connected, and the fear of being uninformed or the feeling of apprehension that one is not in the know, which causes dependence on digital systems.

Last but not least is the fear of digital discrimination, perceived as inequality of access to information sources and technologies and anxiety about falling behind on technology and thus losing the competitive edge. Such digital inequality is commonly referred to as the "digital divide" or "digital gap" (Norris, 2001; Ragnedda & Ruiu, 2017; Vartanova, 2018). The high level of anxiety among young people "may point to the negative scenario of further social development in which the upcoming generation may turn out to be neurotic and despondent" (Abramova et al., 2022, p. 68; trans. by E. P.). Russian "digital" media generations are heavily influenced by technological change and innovation, which is still largely driven by Western countries. In this regard, A. Pletnev (2020) makes the following observation: "Generation Z, whose online presence led to their socialization under the constant influence of the Western continent, more than any other generation resembles their Western peers" (p. 116; trans. by E. P.). V. Radaev (2019) uses data from population-based studies from 1994 to 2016 to show that young Russian people demonstrate significant similarities in their behavior models with their Western peers: they get married later in comparison with previous generations, they are more interested in sport, they consume less alcohol, and are oriented towards maintaining a good work-life balance (p. 167). They are also more prone to downshifting their careers and exploring the diversity of paths to self-realization. They value their individuality and uniqueness and are oriented at building self-awareness to develop their potential. They are used to being exposed to a continuous flow of digital information and thus feel a lot freer and more flexible than previous generations.

The latest results of the World Values Survey (Haerper et al., 2022) show that young Russian adults (aged 18–29), like their Western peers, value freedom more than equality; the significance of freedom for young people is much higher than for older generations. Young Russian people, like their Western peers, also adhere to such values as environmental awareness, tolerance, and a healthy lifestyle. Interestingly, Russian respondents, comparing their living standards with those of their parents when they were their age, point out that their well-being is much higher than that of their parents in the same period of life. This is yet another sign that Russian youth is an integral part of post-modernist society.

Some of the respondents' values were obviously determined by their culture and their country's economic circumstances. For example, 41% of Russian respondents attach a great significance to having a good job, which is true only of 11.4% of their American peers. 60.6% of young Russian adults reported having a strong fear of job loss, while for their American peers this figure is significantly lower, at 43.3%. As many as 70.1% of young Russian adults are ready to fight for their country, while only 39.6% of their peers in the USA and the Netherlands are ready to do so.

Despite the significant differences between young people across the world, there is one thing that they have in common: their news experience is dominated by digital

media and social media. Until recently, they have all been using transnational media (Haerpfer et al., 2022).

The way “digital” media generations construct their network communications is different from more linear methods of information dissemination in the “pre-digital” age. Another important difference lies in new generations’ attitudes to the cultural values of the older generations. In Russia, members of older generations, especially those living in rural areas, tend to support patriarchal values more strongly: these values include the dominant vertical communication model (the family type, father–son confrontation), which is also adopted by traditional Russian media (Makhovskaya, 2019, p. 108).

Taking this point a bit further, it may be supposed that Russian institutional media, especially those that established their editorial policy in the “linear”, pre-digital period, continue adhering to this vertical communication model, claiming the authority of the father figure to instruct their audiences on what they should or should not do.

These communication principles, means, and values differ quite obviously from those that determine the communications of Russian “digital” media generations, especially the youngest ones, almost entirely integrated into global digital network communications. It can be concluded that the effects of “post-24 February” events in Russia, when viewed from the perspectives of technological determinism and cultural anthropology, first, have dramatically disrupted the Russian digital media environment and, second, brought about some major transformations in the cultural value system.

In the future, these factors may be conducive to the emergence of “lost” generations, as they influence young people’s sense of self, well-being, and media habits and engender a feeling of the loss of normalcy.

### ***Conceptualization and Interpretation of the “Lost” Generation***

The anthropological approach to generations defines them not only as “a kinship term referring to discrete stages in the natural line of descent from a common ancestor” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 25), but also showcases their human-centered characteristics, emphasizes their biography-forming events (which greatly influence generational self-fulfillment in a transitional society), and their ability to achieve their destiny in a situation of large-scale multifarious informational pressure (Izotova et al., 2017, p. 55).

The term “lost generation” (*Génération perdue*) was coined by the American writer and poet Gertrude Stein to denote the trauma endured by the people who reached adulthood during World War I. This term was later popularized by the American writer and war correspondent Ernest Hemingway in his autobiographical novel *The Sun Also Rises* and the German writer Erich Maria Remarque in his anti-war autobiographical novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* [All Quiet on the Western Front], and other American and European writers. They lived through the shock of the First World War at a young age and reflected this in their writings.

During the war, members of the Lost Generation endured a deep moral and physical suffering for which they had been totally unprepared. Traumatized by war,

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disillusioned and bitter, they developed similar life views, sealing their generational fate. They failed to reintegrate into civilian life and identified themselves as the “unaccounted-for victims of war”. Upon their return to civilian life, they found that they had lost their former ideals and understanding of normalcy.

Quite interesting in this regard is the seminal essay by the Austrian sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928/1952) *The Problem of Generations*, written almost a century ago but still remaining a ubiquitous reference in scholarly work on generations. This essay summarized Mannheim’s reflections about the consequences of World War I, including the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This historical context sheds light on Mannheim’s idea that the “early impressions” and experiences one is exposed to in adolescence—the period of maximum social sensitivity—contribute to the crystallization of one’s basic personality structure and coalesce into a “natural view of the world” that remains relatively stable throughout a person’s life, reflecting the “stratified” consciousness of each particular generation (p. 179). Mannheim argued that the formative experience of the adolescence period provides the foundation for each generation’s unique world view, which may become a major driving force in people’s lives and determines generational unity—the “spirit of a generation”. This unity, however, is not monolithic: despite an identical experience and thought patterns shared by representatives of the same generations, these patterns may manifest themselves differently in people’s practical activities and thus form intragenerational fractions.

In other words, each generation has a “layered consciousness”, “subjective centers of life orientation”, or “generational nodes” that circumscribe generational experience and determine the types of actions that are historically relevant. “The spirit of a generation”, or generational “entelechies”, finds its most articulate expression in the generation’s elite, which implies that not everyone who formally belongs to a generation shares in its spiritual dimension (Mannheim, 1928/1952). Mannheim called himself a typical representative of the Lost Generation. In the aftermath of World War II, the problem of lost generations again gained urgency in Western countries for obvious reasons. In different countries, these generations in relation to their world view came to be known under different names: for example, in the UK they were called the “Angry Young Men”, in the USA the “Broken Generation”, and in Germany the “Generation of the Returned” (Gilenson, 1975).

The devastation left by World War II, its enormous human and material costs, led the renowned American political and social scientist Ronald Inglehart (1977) to develop a model of generational change based on the scarcity hypothesis and socialization hypothesis. R. Inglehart highlighted the massive intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist priorities that occurred from 1970 to 1988, distinguishing between the older “materialist” (those born before the end of World War II) and younger “post-materialist” birth cohorts (born at the end of the war or in the post-war years).

The Dutch sociologist Henk Becker (1992), relying on Inglehart’s findings, proposed his own generation typology, which has a supranational character and is applicable to all Western European countries. He defined the generation of people born between 1955 and the 1970s as the Lost Generation, pointing out that the

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trauma this generation endured was not connected to the war but to other factors. In his view, the formative period of the Lost Generation coincided with the global economic recession of the seventies and mass youth unemployment, which strongly affected the subjective well-being of its representatives (pp. 221–222).

The aforementioned generations were lost not because of their traumatic war experience but due to a different kind of trauma. As Prager (2003) puts it, “the traumatic moment yields thoughts and actions that continually re-create in mind the experience of danger and helplessness” (p. 177). This feeling of inescapable helplessness can trigger the feeling of being lost. The French anthropologist François Héran (2014) argues that not only wars, but also, for example, epidemics lead to missing births and irreparable losses, creating “depleted cohorts” (pp. 3–4), and are thus significant factors in the emergence of lost generations.

American scholars have demonstrated that the consequences of economic recession, including economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (von Wachter, 2020), include long-term financial uncertainty, reduced job prospects, and lower subjective well-being, thus contributing to the emergence of lost generations (Steuerle et al., 2013). The most vulnerable social groups in this case are thought to include young people who have just entered the labor market and (or) lost their income. There is evidence that in the USA, COVID-19 containment measures led to “staggering increases in unemployment” (von Wachter, 2020, p. 588).

By experts’ estimates, it may take over ten years to overcome the consequences of the world crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which undoubtedly has taken its toll on the mental and physical health of individuals, on their subjective well-being. All the above gives scholars sufficient grounds to identify this generation as a lost one.

The results show that young adults (18–35) have been most severely hit by the pandemic, manifesting deteriorating mental health, increasing pessimism, hostility, and worries about unemployment and the economy (Lampert et al., 2021, p. 4). The British scholars K. Pritchard and R. Whiting (2014) demonstrate that for the lost generation, struggling to find well-paid jobs and facing the risks of unemployment, the notion of being lost translates to an individual and group position of hopelessness with negative consequences.

In Russia, the problem of lost generations has attracted the attention of researchers in different fields, namely, social, culture, political studies, and pedagogy. For instance, Kh. Sadykova (2015) defines a lost generation as a group of individuals who have failed to realize their abilities for a number of objective reasons. The psychosociolinguist E. Shamis believes that the main reason behind the emergence of such lost generations is the “incomprehensibility of the future” (Poletaeva, 2019).

A. N. Petrov (2008) argues that an intense traumatic experience can cause intrusive thoughts, persistent feelings of helplessness and insecurity. Dramatic economic, institutional, social, and cultural changes, the resulting economic downturn, increasing uncertainty about the future, social and economic marginalization, and growing unemployment disrupt social well-being and produce lost generations (pp. 285–287).

Russian scholars have identified the anthropological phenomenon of lost generations either by following participants' subjective self-descriptions or by presenting an interpretation from a detached point of view.

Table 1 presents a summary of the evidence collected through qualitative studies (in-depth interviews) and quantitative studies (large-scale sociological surveys) in Russia. The data comprises generation time spans, the unique factors that affected these generations, and the causes of generational trauma they may have suffered.

**Table 1**

*"Lost" Generations in Russia (Based on Russian Evidence)*

Generation (birth years)	Determining factors	Result
In-depth interview		
Elite pre-revolutionary generation (born in the 1900s)	Members of this generation received their "school certificates with the imperial eagle" (Semenova, 2001, p. 264) but were "crippled in the turmoil of the Revolution" after 1917	Unable to adjust to the new social order and interiorize the values of Soviet Russia
Mass generation of the "socialist project" (born in the 1950s)	Their formative years were spent in the Soviet Union while their middle adulthood years coincided with perestroika (Semenova, 2001, p. 264)	Unable to accept materialist values and the "struggle for survival" imperative
Generation of "superfluous people" (born in the 1970s)	Their adolescence coincided with the late Soviet period and the beginning of professionalization, with perestroika (Anipkin, 2018, p. 294)	Struggled to adapt to new social conditions, interiorize the values of a market society, and are facing meager career prospects
Sociological survey		
Cold War generations (born in the 1950–1970s)	The policy of isolationism and censorship of the Soviet period (Levada, 2001, p. 8)	Struggle to adapt to life in an open society, devoid of ideologically charged propaganda
First non-Soviet generation ("generation of fast buttons") (born in the 1980s and 1990s).	An outmoded system of education, which was meant to provide labor for industrialization (Miroshkina, 2017, p. 14)	The system of education inherited from the Soviet period impeded the development of independent learning skills in members of this generation, putting them at a disadvantage in the era of digital technologies and the network society
First post-Soviet generation (born in 1985–2000s)	Members of this generation tend to remain apathetic and unengaged in political and social issues	Members of this generation prefer to conform and go with the flow rather than take an active stand. Even though members of this generation tend to build successful administrative careers, they are often described as the "generation of the infantile and the aggressive" (Pastukhov, 2015)

Generation (birth years)	Determining factors	Result
“Disappointed” generation (born in 1982–2000s)	This generation has difficulties with self-identification, as its formative years coincided with the period of the country’s relative economic prosperity. The introduction of the Unified State Exam discouraged the development of critical thinking skills in children, which is why the search for the answer to the “Who we are” question took longer than for other generations (Radaev, 2019, p. 183)	Diminished resilience and stress resistance, immaturity, difficulties with self-identification

As the cited studies show, at least four Russian generations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can qualify as lost. The largest amount of data deal with the youngest generation, whose formative period coincided with the turn of the millennium. This scholarly focus is justified because young people act as the drivers of change in any country.

The Russian sociologist V. V. Semenova (2005) adopts the perspective of cultural anthropology to discuss the self-representations of people from different generations, pointing out that, first, generations associate themselves with a particular social time (historical and individual) and, second, each of them positions themselves in society as “victims of social processes” (p. 90; trans. by E. P.). She found that respondents of all the age groups in question manifest a “state of expressive suffering”: for example, “war victims” among the representatives of older generations, “perestroika victims” and “the abandoned and deceived” in middle-age groups, and those “hung out to dry” and “forgotten by their country” in younger groups. Semenova comes to the conclusion that the willingness to sacrifice oneself appears to be one of the core characteristics of the archetype of Russian people. In this archetype, patience, suffering, and humility are both a means and an outcome of inner ascetism, resulting from “one’s ordering of soul. It is inherent in Russian culture and without it no subjectivity, no respect, and no esteem exist (Semenova, 2005, p. 90; trans. by E. P.). In our previous studies we have demonstrated that the willingness to self-sacrifice and humanist values constitute the core of the “spiritual staples” of Russian people (Sumskey & Sumskey, 2019).

Thus, following Semenova’s findings published almost 20 years ago, the generations that are lost, in fact, reproduce the archetypal qualities of self-sacrifice and appreciation of suffering. Hence, recurrent symbolic stimuli—traumatic events—enable Russian citizens to enjoy viable self-actualization and claim their experience of suffering to be a “unique destiny”.

On the other hand, the American scholar Jeffrey Prager (2003) argues that traumatic experiences may be transmitted from one generation to another. Citing Robert Pynoos’s work, Prager explains that the children of parents who suffered “inassimilable life experiences” may have greater difficulty feeling secure in the world or establishing “an assertive stance or independence” because their parents have transmitted their anxiety and insecurity “verbally, through unusual anxious

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behavior, and by means of imposed behavioral avoidance that limits developmental opportunities” (p. 178).

Following this logic, it may be assumed that victimhood is transmitted to each Russian generation through the recreation of negative memories and the feeling of helplessness. From this perspective, victimhood is considered not as an archetypal quality of Russians, but rather as a continuously reproduced tragic twist of events, which turns almost every generation into a lost one. As the reasons behind the emergence of each lost Russian generation are different (see Table 1), the situation is best described with the Russian proverb “you never know whether you will gain or lose”. In any case, the result is fairly similar, at least judging by the results of the cited studies.

In sum, long-lasting uncertainty and the unpredictability of events, drastic negative change, and traumatic experiences are detrimental to people’s subjective well-being because the latter implies independence, confidence, and self-actualization, i.e., the realization of a person’s full potential (Pushina, 2012, p. 184). R. Inglehart highlights that subjective well-being starts to prevail among other components in the value system due to increased economic and physical security and the sense of order, stability, and predictability (Inglehart, 1997, p. 9). In this case, the key markers of subjective well-being are satisfaction with life and work, pay satisfaction, economic optimism, and happiness (Radaev, 2019, p. 110) and a sense of purpose and meaning to life (Steptoe et al., 2015). Consequently, a long period of ill-being leads to resentment, a feeling of inadequacy and of being deprived of any prospects in life (Karapetyan & Glotova, 2018; Zotova & Karapetyan, 2018), social and political alienation, and the feeling of not fitting in.

The digital age has added one more factor to this list the level of perceived knowledge. The uncertainty and lack of reliable information has a negative impact on people’s well-being: lower perceived knowledge is associated with a weaker sense of control, which means that people start seeing the situation as more dangerous (Yang & Ma, 2020).

Thus, geopolitical factors such as wars, economic upheavals, and major epidemics can lead to generational loss, as they adversely affect people included in these events with negative consequences. In today’s developed media society, a factor such as abrupt and prolonged restriction of audience groups in media use, subject to their previously stable media patterns, can lead to lost media generations. This is true at least for the elite part of the media generation, i.e., the most advanced users in the digital media environment.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Russian “digital” media generations have thrived in virtual environments. This abandonment of traditional mass media of the pre-digital age in favor of the digital media environment once again confirms McLuhan’s famous aphorism that “a new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them” (2003, p. 197).

One of the key features shared by representatives of “digital” media generations in this context is that they give clear preference to horizontal over vertical communication, as well as prioritizing freedom of choice in selecting sources of information and freedom of communication over restrictions and censorship.

In the spring of 2022, after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine some social networks were blocked for Russian users. Afterwards, information began to emerge that many of the glossy magazines (Cosmopolitan, Elle, Harper’s Bazaar, Men’s Health, Vogue, GQ, Glamour, Esquire, Tatler and others) so important to the postmodern “digital” media generations were leaving the Russian market. This was followed by the blocking of the Russian TV channel *Dozhd* [Rain], the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* [Echo of Moscow], and significant changes to the program content of the popular Russian “digital” media generation TV channel *Pyatnitsa* [Friday]. Some online digital media, including *The Village*, *Meduza*, etc., were blocked. *Colta.ru*<sup>12</sup> and *Znak.com*, popular with “digital” media generations, along with Yuri Dud<sup>13</sup>, Alexey Pivovarov, and a number of other generationally significant opinion leaders were put on the list of foreign agents. At present, the European and American rights holders of Discovery, Animal Planet, National Geographic, Viasat History, Viasat Nature, Disney, Euronews, and other TV channels have ended cooperation with Russian cable and satellite TV operators. The departure of Western media from the Russian media market can be seen as a result of propaganda. However, it is important to note that these media have been evaluated by the “digital” media generations as being in demand.

So, these measures have had a traumatic effect on “digital natives”, who are accustomed to the integrity and continuity of information flow, which is in a certain sense the symbolic capital of these generations. The negative emotions regarding the social media crackdown were frequently expressed online by the representatives of “digital” media generations. Many of the people troubled by the social media bans were employed in the Internet sphere.

Moreover, the content propagated by the Western media (Simons, 2022a, 2022b) has influenced the value-based meaning-making process and subjective well-being of younger Russian “digital” media generations. Quite illustrative in this respect are the creative manifestos issued after 24 February, 2022 that show very strong, varied, and often contradictory responses to these events. For example, Little Big<sup>14</sup>, a self-described Russian “punk-pop-rave band”, released a video called “Generation Cancellation”. The Russian rock band *Nogu Svelo*<sup>15</sup> made the video “Generation Z”.

The opposing view was expressed by Russian composer and singer Oleg Shaumarov, who released the patriotic songs *Ia russkii* [I am Russian] and *Moia strana* [My Country] about the world of Russian people. The singer-songwriter Shaman (Jaroslav Dronov) launched a video challenge on social media with his patriotic

<sup>12</sup> По решению Роскомнадзора, издание «Colta.ru» полностью заблокировано в России.

<sup>13</sup> Признан иностранным агентом Министерством Юстиции РФ.

<sup>14</sup> Основатель группы Little Big Илья Прусикин Министерством юстиции РФ признан иностранным агентом.

<sup>15</sup> Основатель группы "Ногу свело" Максим Покровский Министерством юстиции РФ признан иностранным агентом.

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hit *la russkii* [I am Russian]. This video appealed to the target audience (young adults included) with a tempo-rhythmic structure and expressivity (in Stanislavski's system) that has come to represent national identity, thus epitomizing the current aspirations of the Russian people, connecting projections of the past and future, and fitting successfully into the ideological campaign built around the heroic narrative (Zavershinskiy & Koryushkin, 2022, p. 51).

It should be noted that as the World Values Survey showed, 72.1% of Russians in the 18–29 age group reported the possibility of war involving Russia among their biggest fears. A similar attitude was expressed in relation to terrorist attacks and the possibility of a civil war (Haerpfer et al., 2022). The above-described digital fears and anxiety about the possibility of war came true in the spring of 2022.

The results of the first mass interview-based survey encompassing a nationwide representative sample give us some idea about Russian people's attitudes to the blockage of some social media platforms and news outlets. The results have shown that most respondents from the 18–24 age group reported having regular trouble with accessing digital media content (Internet, Sotsial'nye Seti i VPN, 2022), in relation to which they express not nostalgic reminiscences about their past media experience or bitter sweet memories of their past media habits (Bolin, 2014, p. 109), but distinct anger and indignation at being unable to pursue their old life style (enjoying free access to social media platforms and online communication) and at the loss of normalcy.

However, according to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), only 11% of their respondents are ready to advocate for a free and open Internet (without censorship or content blocking), while 82% believe that Internet censorship is necessary to block violent content or content that incites hate. Every second Russian believes that it is necessary to develop a digital environment connecting different countries of the world (Internet: Vozmozhnosti ili Ugrozy, 2021). The same survey conducted in 2022 showed that 79% of young people report feeling stressed—this figure is much higher than for older age groups (Stress— I Kak s Nim Borot'sia, 2022).

A month after the launch of the special military operation in February 2022, political experts on Russian federal TV channels described the situation unfolding in the global media space as the First World Information War. Four months later, this topic was picked up by many Western leaders, who started speaking of a global media war. There is some truth to this. The cognitive skills of Russian “digital” media generations make them unable to fully and objectively reflect upon these events, especially since, as was discussed above, their socialization involved close interaction with their Western peers within an integrated digital environment.

From the perspective of digital divide theory, it may be said that we are now dealing with a new kind of digital inequality. The discreteness of the media flow, whose continuity is crucial primarily for “digital” media generations and their media identity, has created a unique combination of factors contributing to further exacerbation of the digital divide. Digital communication requires a high degree of computer competence; the absence of access to generationally familiar social media and digital media

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provokes anxiety and a feeling of vulnerability in members of media generations. Restrictions on social media and digital media access produce a perceived inequality of opportunity, as none of the previous generations were so fully integrated into the digital media environment as young Russian “digital natives”.

Moreover, it should be noted that previous media generations had already gained some experience of responding to major stress-inducing events. For instance, people from the “analogue” media generation, born in the Soviet period, still adhere to the “ordinary Soviet person” anthropological model: they choose TV news or other TV programs as their main news sources. The “digital borderline” media generation, which lived through the reforms of the 1990s and the early “naïve” period of the publicly available Internet, can use both traditional and digital media, which is why they slide easily into the established behavior model of looking for ways around the restrictions. “Digital” media generations do not yet have ready-made strategies or models for responding to such situations. For them, the Soviet era and *perestroika* belong to an imaginary past, which puts them in the most vulnerable position.

This complex process was described by R. Inglehart (1997), who pointed out that

normally, culture changes slowly; but it does eventually respond to a changing environment. Changes in the socioeconomic environment help reshape individual-level beliefs, attitudes, and values through their impact on the life experience of individuals. Cultures do not change overnight. Once they have matured, people tend to retain whatever worldview they have learned. Consequently, the impact of major changes in the environment tends to be the most significant on those generations that spent their formative years under the new conditions. (p. 16)

It is now crucial to support the “digital” media generations by compensating for shrinking opportunities of generational media communication and creating alternative digital media platforms, which can be used for self-fulfillment and to help these people strengthen their civilizational identity in the ongoing ideological global confrontation.

The events of recent months show that attempts to create Russian clones of popular platforms such as Instagram<sup>16</sup>—*Rossgram*, *Now*, *Grustnogram*, *Musicgram*—though interesting, have so far remained rather unconvincing. Another actively promoted project is the social media platform *ЯРУС*, which is supposed to become an alternative to the banned platforms and YouTube. This application has been downloaded from the Google Play Store over 1 million times.

During 2022, the Telegram messenger’s audience almost doubled from 2021 to around 40 million Russian users (Keffer, 2023). However, it is important to note that Telegram still lacks the sought-after visualization features that Instagram had. Although many Instabloggers and TikTokers continue to move their audience to Telegram, they have not been able to replenish previous audience volumes.

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<sup>16</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the US and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

The top Russian media platform VK provides a viable alternative to Facebook and other banned social media: in March 2022, 300,000 new e-commerce entrepreneurs moved to VK and started experimenting with the platform's tools for relaunching their business. Throughout the spring and summer of 2022, VK has been working on expanding the platform's capabilities and functionality. In March, the company launched a VK video app for smart TV. In April 2022, the number of daily active users of VK was 47.2 million in Russia alone and over 100 million across the world (VKontakte podvela itogi, 2022).

In the summer of 2022, some replacement for foreign glossy magazines appeared on the Russian media market. This is how the Russian glossy magazines *VOICE*, *Symbol*, *Men Today*, and several others came into being. Russian *Traveler TV* channel has been launched. Perhaps soon we will hear about new initiatives in these areas.

The government has launched several large-scale state initiatives such as the Federal Law No. 261-FZ *O rossiiskom dvizhenii detei i molodezh* [On the Russian Movement of Children and Youth] (approved by the Federation Council on 8 July 2022) aimed at propagating patriotic values among the youth. It is, however, still unclear how these initiatives will be perceived by the oldest "digital" media generations, whose behavioral models may be less flexible.

These measures are expected to provide the necessary support for Russian "digital natives", help them preserve their right to personal sovereignty, and restore generational daily media rituals. They also have the potential to mitigate the negative effects of the already visible cultural intra- and intergenerational value gap, contribute to these people's self-actualization and self-realization, and ensure these generations' capacity to live in a comfortable, sustainable, and contiguous digital environment.

It can be supposed that the absence or inefficiency of such measures, along with the continued ban on news sources and media platforms that leave "digital natives" without any viable alternatives or objective conditions for self-fulfillment may result in the emergence of a new lost media generation. But there is still a chance to prevent this.

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<sup>17</sup> По решению Роскомнадзора, «Левада-центр» признан в России средством массовой информации, выполняющим функции иностранного агента.

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<sup>18</sup> *Novaya gazeta* has suspended its online and print publications in Russia.

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ARTICLE

## The Impact of Digital Divide on Household Participation in Risky Financial Investments: Evidence From China

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### ABSTRACT

The digital divide has now become a worldwide problem and has the potential to lead to greater inequality. This paper empirically analyses the impact of the “digital access divide”, “digital use divide” and “digital inequality divide” on household participation in risky financial investments using micro data from China. The results show that all three digital divides have a positive and significant impact on the probability of households participating in risky financial investments; in addition, the digital divide between urban and rural areas and between households is also significant. Finally, the authors propose strategies for bridging the digital divide based on China’s national context, such as building a national cultivation and evaluation system of digital literacy, reducing the family’s parenting burden, improving the investment environment for residents, developing the power resources of the younger elderly, and promoting intergenerational digital feedbacks.

### KEYWORDS

digital divide, financial investment, household asset allocation, internet finance, digital inequality

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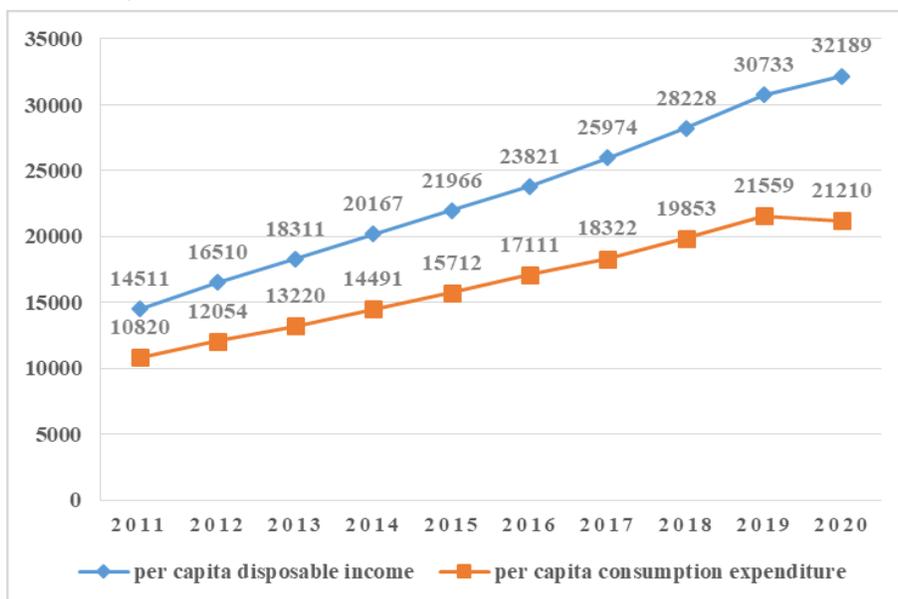
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### Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy, the per capita disposable income of Chinese residents has increased from 14,511 yuan in 2011 to 32,189 yuan in 2020, an increase of 2.22 times, but less than 110% of GDP growth. The per capita consumption expenditure increased from 10,820 yuan in 2011 to 21,210 yuan in 2020 (Figure 1). In 2020, due to the impact of the epidemic, the growth rate of disposable income decreased significantly. Secondly, the median and average proportions of residents' disposable income increased from 85.37% in 2013 to 87.78% in 2015, and then began to decline continuously until 85.56% in 2020. Although the ratio declined significantly in 2020 due to the impact of the epidemic, it has been declining year by year since 2015 (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This data shows that the divide between the rich and the poor has gradually widened since 2015, a trend exacerbated by the epidemic.

**Figure 1**

*Change Trend of Per Capita Disposable Income of Chinese Residents  
(Unit: RMB yuan)*



Note. Data source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

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However, according to the Wealth Trend of Chinese Families under the Epidemic: A Survey Report on Chinese Family Wealth Index (Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, 2020) released in June 2021, the overall wealth income of Chinese families in 2020 was in good condition, with wealth growing faster than income growth and job stability recovery. There are four main factors influencing the change of Chinese household wealth: housing assets, financial investment, industrial and commercial operation, and disposable cash. Among them, real estate and financial investment are the main factors leading to the increase of household wealth, contributing 69.9% and 21.2% respectively, while other—disposable cash and industrial and commercial operations—contribute less than 10%. At the same time, the online investment intention of Chinese households increased quarter by quarter, with young households having the highest online investment intention, though the online investment index of the elderly also increased significantly (Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, 2020). Considering the Chinese government's policy background of "housing not speculation" and the implementation of long-term adjustment mechanisms such as the comprehensive pilot of real estate tax, it is obvious that Chinese residents should change their investment mode. So, which investment method should Chinese residents choose? According to the experience of developed countries and the current situation of increasing household wealth in China, an effective way is to reduce the proportion of housing investment and increase the proportion of financial investment. In the rapid development of digital economy today, it is obvious that online financial investment is the general trend.

According to the 47<sup>th</sup> Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by the China Internet Network Information Center, the number of Internet users in China increased from 688 million at the end of 2015 to 989 million at the end of 2020, and the Internet penetration rate increased from 50.3% to 70.4%. Average rates for fixed broadband and mobile phone data dropped by more than 95% from 2015, and average Internet speeds increased by more than seven times (China Internet Network, 2021). However, there is still a large digital divide between urban and rural areas, digital infrastructure construction between different groups, Internet access rate and Internet usage frequency. Then, what is the impact of digital divide on the wealth income of Chinese households? In view of this, this paper empirically studies the impact of digital divide on the participation probability of Chinese households in risky financial investment.

## Literature Review

With the rapid development of digital economy in the world, Internet information technology has penetrated into all walks of life, changing our way of life, production, and consumption, and also bringing a huge impact on the financial industry. With the help of Internet coupling, traditional financial investment is upgraded to a new financial model—Internet finance (Lin et al., 2001). Internet finance is a new financial business model in which traditional financial institutions and Internet enterprises use Internet technology and information and communication technology to realize

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capital financing, payment, investment and information intermediary services (Xie et al., 2015). It breaks through the breadth, depth, and regional scope of coverage of traditional financial implementation carriers (Merton & Bodie, 1993) and reshapes the global financial structure (Claessens et al., 2002). It breaks the monopoly position of traditional financial operation mode (Shahrokhi, 2008) and greatly reduces transaction costs of enterprises, which facilitates financing for enterprises (Jiang et al., 2022). It also provides convenient conditions for daily consumption and financial investment of ordinary people (Mao, 2021).

In essence, Internet platform and financial function are the two most important elements of Internet finance (Wang et al., 2016). In order to give full play to the financial function of Internet finance, access and use of the Internet are its basic conditions. However, UN survey data show that almost half of the world's population (about 3.7 billion people) is still "offline" and will largely evolve into new global inequalities (Guillén & Suarez, 2005). Therefore, digital divide has also aroused the concern of scholars and policy makers. Some scholars have taken a global macro view, they considered computer popularization (Chinn & Fairlie, 2004), per capita income (Bali moune-Lutz, 2003), urbanization process (Wong, 2002), social system (Zhao et al., 2007), and democratization level (Nam, 2010; Norris, 2001), Gini coefficient (Fuchs, 2008), foreign investment and level of science and technology (Pick & Azari, 2008) are important factors influencing the widening of digital divide. It is also divided into three levels according to the evolution sequence. The first level of digital divide is "digital access divide", the demographic group difference between telephone, personal computer, and Internet owners and those who do not own (NTIA, 1999). The second level is "digital usage divide" indicating that with the rapid popularization of computer hardware technology and information software technology, digital divide gradually transforms into group differences in the use degree, content and skills of digital resources (Attewell, 2001). Third-level digital divide is "digital inequality divide". That is, the inequality of benefits caused by the difference in digital dividend brought by the application of information and communication technology (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Scheerder et al., 2017).

While Internet information technology has brought great changes to the development of financial market, it also has a certain impact on household asset allocation. On the one hand, the changes in the way of financial transactions brought by the Internet weaken the time and space restrictions of transactions and lower the threshold of investment in the financial market (Bogan, 2008; Yin et al., 2015), which enables more families to participate in financial asset investment (Du et al., 2018; Xu & Jiang, 2017; Zhang & Lu, 2021). Moreover, as a carrier of information dissemination, the Internet is characterized by fast and large dissemination of information, which has a certain impact on residents' financial literacy and "information asymmetry" in venture capital (Dong et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2014), which can then influence the proportion of household financial risk assets investment (Wang et al., 2019; Yin & Zhang, 2017). On the other hand, under the influence of the three digital divide, some families are excluded from the digital financial system due to the difference in Internet access, Internet use frequency, Internet knowledge, and information resource utilization efficiency of different families

(Liu & Luo, 2019). And the possibility of further widening the divide between the rich and the poor has emerged (Luo & Cha, 2018; Su & Han, 2021).

In summary, scholars have shown that the widespread use of digital technologies has led to the rapid development of the digital economy and the rapid transformation of the global economy, which in turn has changed the way households live, produce, consume, and invest. However, the significant differences in Internet usage among different groups of people (or households) have led to a three-tiered digital divide, which has exacerbated social inequalities. While some scholars have studied the impact of the digital divide on households' economic development, most of these results have examined one or two dimensions of the digital divide alone, and there is very little research that progressively discriminates between the three layers of the digital divide on households' risky financial investment participation. Therefore, this paper selects China, a developing country with a significant digital divide, as the subject of this study and uses its micro-survey data to empirically investigate the impact of household participation in risky financial investments in a hierarchical manner.

### **Mechanism Analysis and Hypothesis Proposal**

At a time when digital transformation is in full swing in all industries, few investors sit in the lobby of a financial exchange and look at the investment information rolling on the big screen, and make their own rational investment. The vast majority of investors rely on Internet-connected computers or smartphones to access a wealth of investment information and make sound investment judgments. However, access to the Internet is the primary condition for residents to participate in Internet financial activities. From the reality of the situation at home and abroad, there are still a large number of families do not access the Internet, the use of the Internet to obtain investment information and income is out of the question. Therefore, the authors put forward Hypothesis 1 of this paper.

**Hypothesis 1:** Digital access divide significantly affects households' participation in risky financial investment.

After Internet access, on the one hand, residents can carry out financial investment activities with the help of the Internet without having to spend a lot of transaction costs. On the other hand, residents can search for desirable financial products with reasonable returns in the vast Internet world to enhance financial availability. Moreover, the use of Internet instant messaging software can strengthen the connection between residents and relatives and friends and promote the stability (or growth) of social capital. Therefore, the authors put forward Hypothesis 2 of this paper.

**Hypothesis 2:** Digital use divide significantly affects households' participation in risky financial investments.

In the Chinese and Russian universities where the authors teach, some students often use the Internet to play games, watch movies, listen to music, read novels, browse short videos and other recreational activities. While some college students often use the Internet to watch current events to broaden their horizons, learn cultural knowledge to improve their ability. Over the course of a few years, it is obvious which college students addicted to online entertainment will become better than those

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who keep improving themselves. Similarly, if one family often uses the Internet for entertainment and another for business, it is obvious which family can realize the increase of family wealth through the Internet. Therefore, the direction and frequency of Internet use by different families will affect the investment decisions of risky finance of families to a certain extent, thus widening the divide of financial returns. Therefore, the authors put forward Hypothesis 3.

**Hypothesis 3:** Digital inequality divide significantly affects households' participation in risky financial investments.

In the process of China's urbanization, a large number of people flood into cities, and a large amount of infrastructure and capital are invested in urban construction, while the rural areas have relatively little change. As a result, urban and rural areas cannot be compared in terms of hardware or software, and digital divide is becoming increasingly significant. Accordingly, the authors put forward Hypothesis 4 of this paper.

**Hypothesis 4:** Digital divide between urban and rural areas leads to the difference in probability of urban and rural households participating in risky financial investment.

In China, raising children and supporting the elderly are major financial burdens for families. In recent years, the consumption structure of Chinese households has also undergone significant changes under the influence of the digital economy, with an overall upward trend in spending on education, healthcare, housing, and retirement. This change has not only squeezed the scope for household financial investment, but has also had a negative impact on household fertility intentions (Figure 2). It can be seen that household burden will seriously affect household investment behavior. Accordingly, the authors propose Hypothesis 5 of this paper.

**Hypothesis 5:** Family burden difference significantly affects family participation in risky financial investment.

## Data Processing and Empirical Analysis

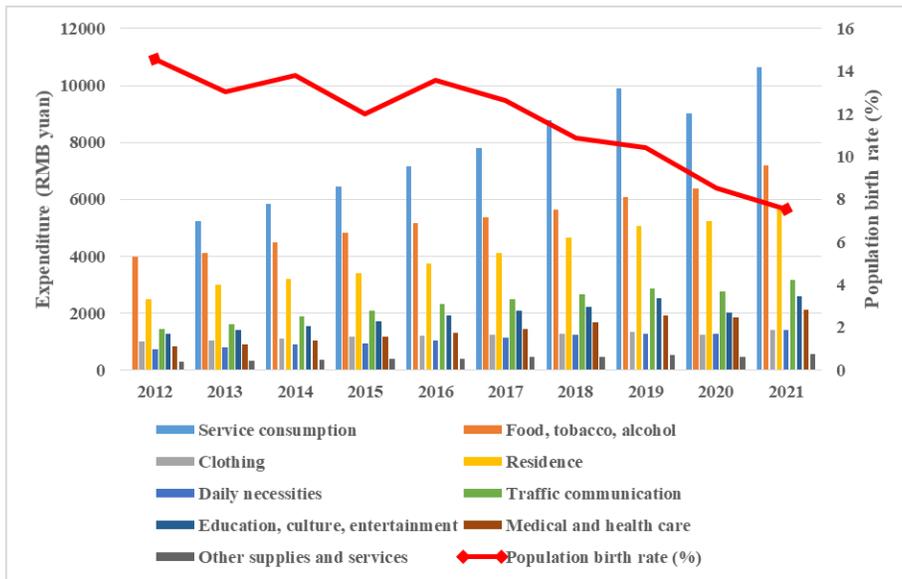
### Data Sources

To study the impact of digital divide on household risky financial investment requires comprehensive micro-survey data. The authors select the micro databases in China, and finally select the database of The Chinese General Social Survey of Renmin University of China (CGSS) in 2017 as the data source of this paper (CGSS, 2017). CGSS2017 database for residents of China's 31 provinces (municipalities directly under the central government) the usage of Internet has carried on the detailed investigation, the data collected from the micro level to a more intuitive reflect the status of investigation object is the risk of financial investment, individual, social, and economic characteristics, effective data samples for a total of 12,582 copies. According to the needs of the study, the authors selected the related dependent, independent, and control variables, and eliminated the missing values and invalid samples of the selected variables. A total of 3,110 groups of samples were obtained.

**Variable Selection**

The core of this paper is to verify the impact of digital divide on risky financial investment participation. We learned from the variable selection experience of existing research results and selected dependent variables, independent variables and control variables respectively in CGSS2017 database based on China’s national conditions (see Table 1).

**Figure 2**  
*Trends in China’s Household Consumption Structure and Population Birth Rate, 2012–2021*



Note. Data source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

(a) Dependent variable. The authors found “Is your family currently engaged in the following investment activities?” in CGSS2017 database. The survey includes data on risky investments such as stocks, funds, bonds, futures, warrants, and foreign exchange. By comparing the data, the authors find that stock is the most popular risky investment item among Chinese residents, and the relevant questionnaire is relatively complete. Finally, the risky financial investment is determined as the core dependent variable of this paper and named as “Stock investment”, whose value rule is: the non-participating financial investment = 0, the participating financial investment = 1.

(b) Independent variables. According to the previous literature review, there is still no consensus on the three digital divide in academic circles. The authors summarize the three digital divides according to the existing literature: “digital access divide”, “digital use divide” and “digital inequality divide”. On this basis, the authors selected “Is your home connected to the Internet?” in the database of CGSS2017. Survey item data measured the impact of household digital access on risky financial investment

participation, named “Access divide”. Next, the authors selected “How often have you used the Internet in the past year?” named “Use divide”, the survey item data measured the influence of number use on risky financial investment participation, and, finally, selected “How often have you used the Internet for business transactions in the past year?” The survey item data measured the influence of household digital transaction status on risky financial investment participation, named as the “Inequality divide”.

(c) Control variables. This paper refers to the research results of other scholars on family risky financial investment, and combines the demographic characteristics of the respondents: Gender, Age and Age2 (used together with the variable “Age” to judge whether there is a “U” trend or an inverted “U” trend with increasing Age), Health status and Marital status, and Education level. Family economic status is an important factor affecting family financial investment. So, the authors select “What is your annual personal income?” The data item “Income” is also used as a control variable in this analysis. For the convenience of statistical analysis, we take logarithm of it.

In a family, it costs a lot of money to raise children, so the Number of children will affect the family’s expenditure and investment decisions. Therefore, we take “Number of children” as a control variable. The family enjoys a certain amount of social security policy is an important backing of family investment, which can provide basic security for them. Therefore, the authors select the question “Do you participate in the public medical insurance?”, “Whether to participate in the public pension insurance?”—Medical insurance and Pension, respectively. In addition, China has been urbanizing very fast in recent years, with an average urbanization rate of more than 60%. A large number of people live in cities with large concentrations of enterprises, hospitals, financial institutions, education and training institutions, and Internet services. In order to verify the difference between urban and rural areas in household risky financial investment, the authors also take “Living in a city” as a control variable and names it “Living place”.

## Model Setting

The core of this paper is to study the impact of three digital divides on households’ participation in risky financial investment. Since the dependent variable “Stock Investment” is a dummy variable selected by the binary value (non-participation = 0, participation =1), Probit model is selected for regression analysis. Its basic function is expressed in (1).

$$risk_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 divide_i + \beta_2 X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (i = 1, \dots, n) \quad (1)$$

In equation (1),  $risk_i$  denotes household risky assets and is the explanatory variable,  $divide_i$  is the explanatory variable,  $X_i$  is the control variable,  $\varepsilon_i$  denotes the disturbance term,  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  are the parameters to be estimated, and  $i$  denotes the respondent household. After substituting the control variables into the equation, the function is expressed as equation (2).

$$risk_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 divide_i + \beta_2 gender_i + \beta_3 age_i + \beta_4 age2_i + \beta_5 edu_i + \beta_6 marital_i + \beta_7 health_i + \beta_8 income_i + \beta_9 med-insurance_i + \beta_{10} pension_i + \beta_{11} isurban_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (i = 1, \dots, n) \quad (2)$$

## Empirical Analysis

First, we perform a descriptive statistical analysis of all selected data variables. The specific results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

Variable type	Variable name	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent Variable	Stock investment	3110	0.083	0.275	0	1
Independent variables	Access divide	3110	0.744	0.436	0	1
	Use divide	3110	2.965	1.700	1	5
	Inequality divide	3110	2.173	1.389	1	5
Control variables	Gender	3110	0.494	0.500	0	1
	Age	3110	47.068	13.971	18	70
	Age2	3110	24.106	12.875	3.24	49
	Health status	3110	3.509	1.088	1	5
	Marital status	3110	0.803	0.398	0	1
	Education level	3110	5.300	3.176	1	13
	Income	3110	9.995	1.259	4.605	16.111
	Medical insurance	3110	0.718	0.450	0	1
	Pension	3110	0.922	0.269	0	1
	Living place	3110	0.633	0.482	0	1
	Number of children	3110	1.540	1.031	0	10

Then, the Probit model was used for regression analysis of digital access divide, and the results were shown in Model (1) in Table 2,  $p = .001$ , with a marginal effect of 0.110. After controlling the digital access variables as access status (value 1), the Probit model was continued to be used for regression analysis of the digital use divide. The results showed that in Model (2) in Table 2,  $p = .000$  and its marginal effect was 0.024. Finally, after controlling the use of digital variables in the use state (value > 1), the Probit model was continued to be used to regression the digital inequality divide, and the results showed that in Model (3) of Table 2,  $p = .000$ , and its marginal effect was 0.027. On the whole, the three digital divide has a significant positive correlation with household participation in risky financial investment. That is, the first three hypotheses proposed by the author are all valid.

From the marginal effect of Model (1), for every 1-unit improvement in digital access, the probability of households participating in risky financial investments increases by 11%. From the marginal effect of Model (2), the probability of households'

participation in risky financial investment increases by 2.4% for every 1 unit increase in the frequency of number use. From the marginal effect of Model (3), if the frequency of business activities using the Internet increases by 1 unit, the inequality probability of households' participation in risky financial investment increases by 2.7%. By comparing Model (1) to Model (3), it is found that whether digital access has the greatest influence on the probability of household participation in risky financial investment.

Also, Age and Age2 showed positive correlation and negative correlation in the three models, that is, with the growth of residents' age, the possibility of participating in risky financial investment showed an inverted "U" shape trend of increasing first and then decreasing. The higher the education level and income of the respondents, the higher the probability of their households participating in risky financial investments. Having health insurance increases the probability that households will participate in risky financial investments, which may be related to the immediate reimbursement of health insurance. Urban residents are more likely to participate in risky financial investment than rural residents, which indicates that digital divide between urban and rural areas in China leads to a large divide between urban and rural households in the field of risky financial investment, and also proves the validity of the authors' Hypothesis 4. The more children there are in a family, the lower the probability that the family will participate in risky financial investment. This proves that the authors' Hypothesis 5 is established, and also proves the reason why there is no baby boom after the Chinese government liberalizes the "two-child" and "three-child" policy.

**Table 2**  
*Household Risky Financial Asset Investment Participation*

Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)		Model (4)	
	$p >  z $	Marginal effect						
Access divide	0.001	0.110						
Use divide			0.000	0.024				
Inequality divide					0.000	0.027		
Proportion of working with computer							0.001	0.001
Gender	0.110	0.017	0.073	0.025	0.089	0.027	0.108	0.026
Age	0.001	0.010	0.002	0.012	0.001	0.015	0.001	0.016
Age2	0.022	0.007	0.037	0.009	0.037	0.010	0.033	0.000
Health status	0.119	0.009	0.089	0.013	0.170	0.012	0.080	0.016
Marital status	0.489	0.011	0.673	0.009	0.601	0.013	0.893	0.003
Education level	0.000	0.009	0.000	0.009	0.001	0.010	0.001	0.010
Income	0.000	0.051	0.000	0.066	0.000	0.071	0.000	0.075
Medical insurance	0.028	0.041	0.025	0.055	0.061	0.051	0.046	0.059

**Table 2 Continued**

Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)		Model (4)	
	$p >  z $	Marginal effect						
Pension	0.692	0.011	0.818	0.009	0.981	0.001	0.751	0.014
Living place	0.002	0.077	0.005	0.097	0.007	0.104	0.013	0.101
Number of children	0.000	0.035	0.002	0.039	0.003	0.044	0.002	0.045

In order to verify the robustness of the model, the authors selected the question “What percentage of work per week do you use a computer?” in the CGSS2017 database, named “Proportion of working with Computer”, and conducted regression analysis based on Model (3). The results are shown in Table 2, Model (4). Both independent variables and control variables maintain the same significant correlation with the previous three models. This shows that the model set in this paper is very robust.

According to the regression results of the four models in Table 2, under the influence of digital divide, Chinese urban residents have a higher probability of participating in risky financial investment than rural residents. In order to verify the heterogeneity of the two, we control the variable of “Living Place” and conduct regression analysis on the basis of Model (3). The regression results of the survey objects living in cities and rural areas are respectively output in Model (5) and Model (6) in Table 3. The results show that the digital inequality divide has a significant positive correlation with the probability of urban residents participating in risky financial investment, but not with rural residents. The probability of urban residents participating in risky financial investment increases by 3.2% when the frequency of urban residents using the Internet to carry out business activities increases by one unit. This shows that the huge digital divide between urban and rural residents in China has led to unequal investment returns.

Since the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus at the end of 2019, the rapid development of “Internet plus Education” in the deep integration of Internet technology and education has promoted revolutionary changes in the education system, making it more flexible and effective. And judging from the present, “Internet + education” is based on the Internet infrastructure and innovation factors, constructs the new education ecology and service mode, the new education ecological across the boundaries of the school and class, constructing open education service system, can satisfy the social knowledge and learners’ demand for education of new information age. In this context, the authors multiplied the variable of “Inequality divide” and the variable of “Education level” to obtain the interaction term “Internet + Education”, and conducted regression analysis based on Model (3), the results of which are output in Model (7) in Table 3. The results show that “Internet + Education” has a significant positive impact on the probability of family participation in risky financial investment, and the probability of family participation in risky financial investment increases by 0.3% when the frequency of learning knowledge through Internet increases by one unit.

**Table 3**  
*Robust and Heterogeneous Regression Results*

Variable	Model (5)		Model (6)		Model (7)	
	$p >  z $	Marginal effect	$p >  z $	Marginal effect	$p >  z $	Marginal effect
Inequality divide	0.000	0.032	0.098	0.003		
Internet + Education					0.001	0.003
Gender	0.111	0.025	0.827	0.001	0.106	0.026
Age	0.002	0.014	0.442	0.002	0.001	0.017
Age2	0.041	0.010	0.634	0.001	0.022	0.000
Health status	0.186	0.011	0.006	0.004	0.079	0.017
Marital status	0.475	0.017	0.222	0.008	0.715	0.009
Education level	0.000	0.010	0.028	0.002	0.967	0.000
Income	0.000	0.073	0.197	0.004	0.000	0.074
Medical insurance	0.018	0.071	0.643	0.003	0.050	0.057
Pension	0.696	0.017	0.704	0.003	0.893	0.006
Living place	(omitted)	0.000	(omitted)	0.000	0.010	0.105
Number of children	0.005	0.040	0.095	0.006	0.003	0.046

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The regression results of the seven models above show that digital divide has a significant impact on the participation probability of household risky financial investment, which will lead to more income inequality and widen the wealth divide of residents. The difference of digital divide between the young and the old is reflected in the participation probability of household risky financial investment, showing the difference of investment income caused by digital divide between the generations of residents. In the era of digital economy, residents with a certain level of education will be more easily access to more information resources through the Internet, and thus obtain more benefits. The multiple digital divides formed by the divide in economy, education, infrastructure, social security and other aspects between urban and rural areas in China has seriously severed the equal opportunities for urban and rural residents to benefit from the Internet, thus seriously affecting the living standards of urban and rural residents, and even bringing about a greater crisis. Today, the aging of China's population continues to deepen, the government's fertility policy has failed to show the incentive effect, and many families are unable to carry out more investment activities in the face of heavy pressure of child-rearing.

Using micro-survey data from China, this study empirically analyses the impact of the digital divide on household financial investment behavior at three levels: digital access, digital use, and digital inequality, respectively. To a certain extent, this thesis fills a gap in research in the related field, and thus provides a research perspective

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and theoretical methodological reference for subsequent researchers. However, the micro-survey data for China is country specific and does not correspond to all countries. It is suggested that other scholars can use data from different countries to further validate the findings of this paper.

In addition, given the dual pressures of China's digital economy and an ageing population, the authors make the following recommendations.

(a) Bridge digital divide between urban and rural areas. Facing the information divide between urban and rural areas in China, we should first increase infrastructure construction and accelerate the informatization of rural areas. Then, it is necessary to break the bottleneck of blocked information, scattered resources, and poor communication in rural areas, integrate all kinds of scattered resources with the help of the Internet, and then accelerate the interconnection of technical and human resources between urban and rural areas. Online life skills and production skills training should also be carried out for farmers (such as e-commerce training, online agricultural technology training, etc.).

(b) To build a nationwide digital literacy cultivation and evaluation system. Drawing on foreign experience and combining with China's national conditions, the cultivation system of improving the digital literacy of the whole Chinese people is constructed by adopting sections (teenagers, adults, and the elderly), grading (general application, technical promotion, innovation, and creation), and classification (normal group, special group). In addition, an evaluation system of national digital literacy is constructed from the aspects of digital acquisition, use, security, ethics, evaluation, interaction, sharing, production, and innovation.

(c) Reduce the burden of family rearing. On the one hand, the government should formulate more favorable individual income tax payment policies for families. On the other hand, to provide families with more GSP child care institutions. In addition, there will be more incentive maternity leave and financial subsidies to encourage people to have two or three children.

(d) Improving the investment environment for residents. The government should formulate more scientific financial market supervision policies to create a good market environment for residents' financial investment, and guide residents to carry out financial investment reasonably through public opinion. Enterprises should also use the Internet to develop more new products and services and expand financial investment channels for residents.

(e) Developing human resources for the young and the elderly. First, actively promote the professional and hierarchical development of education for the elderly, improve the education level of the elderly group, and enhance the digital quality of the elderly group with the help of the Internet. Second, the construction of the elderly human resources big data information database, the establishment of the elderly group re-employment platform integrating employment consulting, job introduction, employment training, employment tracking services, and other functions, to provide data support for the elderly group re-employment. Third, we will improve supporting policies and measures to encourage enterprises to hire retired young people.

(f) Promote intergenerational digital feedback. On the one hand, we can learn from the community volunteer service mechanism to encourage college students to go into the community and teach the elderly how to use digital products. On the other hand, children should patiently help their parents to learn digital skills and get familiar with digital security knowledge, so as to speed up their parents' adaptation to the pace of life and production in the digital economy era.

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ARTICLE

## The Dark Triad and Non-Normative Collective Action in the Save KPK Movement in Indonesia: The Mediation Effect of Contempt

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the role of group-based contempt and the Dark Triad of personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in the intention to participate in non-normative collective action in the Save KPK (Save the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission) movement. The data was collected via the distribution of an online questionnaire and on-campus recruitment of university students. A total of 409 students were involved as the participants through a purposive sampling strategy. The multiple regression tests found that only the variables group-based contempt and psychopathy significantly could predict non-normative collective action, albeit partially; the other Dark Triad variables (Machiavellianism and narcissism), in this case, were found to be insignificant. A path analysis model showed that Machiavellianism and psychopathy could significantly predict non-normative collective action under the mediation of group-based contempt. Narcissism was found to have

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no significance. This study results, by considering the Dark Triad and emotional factors, help people understand why and how individuals or groups of students commit violence.

#### KEYWORDS

non-normative collective action, group-based contempt, Dark Triad, Indonesia

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## Introduction

Demonstrations or protests can be carried out either peacefully or violently (Shadiqi et al., 2018). Non-normative collective action refers to behaviors that harm others and their rights (Wright et al., 1990). This study would focus on cases of violent collective action that occurred in Indonesia in relation to the Save KPK movement. In order to eliminate corruption, *Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* [Corruption Eradication Commission, KPK] was established in 2002 by the government of the Republic of Indonesia based on Indonesian Law Number 30 of 2002 concerning the Corruption Eradication Commission (Sosiawan, 2019). As a state institution, it has executive power in performing its functions and authorities and is independent and free from the influence of any power (Sosiawan, 2019).

Ironically, many efforts were made, especially by the two main state institutions, namely *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* [People's Legislative Council] and the Indonesian National Police, to thwart the KPK (Pruwanto, 2021). In 2009, the term "Cicak vs Buaya" ("Lizard vs Crocodile") emerged among the public, describing the fierce feud between the KPK and the Indonesian Police. Such case triggered a civil society movement in Sumatra Barat to support the KPK against those attempting to weaken it (Pruwanto, 2021). Another conflict between the KPK and the police occurred in 2012 when Police Commissioner Novel Baswedan, a former KPK officer, was arrested in 2012 after committing a crime in Bengkulu in 2004 (Margianto, 2012). This case raised social tension within society during that period (Juditha, 2014). Additionally, it also encouraged society to support the KPK by occupying the KPK's building and

establishing social media forums to freely give their opinion about “the criminalization of the KPK,” namely, the weakening of the KPK by arresting its officers based on fabricated criminal cases (Juditha, 2014). Through this initiation, the Save KPK movement in 2014 was created as a form of societal support for the KPK. The main supporters of the Save KPK movement were students who joined workers and civil society activists (Gelombang demo mahasiswa, 2019). Then, in 2015, another conflict occurred. One of the KPK officers was named as suspect by the Police Criminal Investigation Unit of the Republic of Indonesia. This case gained public attention because of the violation of the Operational Procedure Standards committed in the arresting process (Prasetia, 2021). The conflict occurred again in 2019.

Sometimes, the Save KPK movement in Indonesia was done violently. In 2019, in Sumatra Utara, Indonesia, some students destructed and burned police cars and other vehicles (Noris, 2019). In the same year, in Bandung, 92 Indonesian students were injured due to clashes with the police (Dinillah, 2019). The most recent one occurred in 2021, in Kalimantan Selatan, a physical contact between Indonesian students and the police sparked a riot and left four people injured (Hadi, 2021). In 2022, no similar events to weaken the KPK were noted. Juditha (2014) stated that corruption is the most crucial issue or case to eradicate in Indonesia. Since the KPK was formed to perform such eradication, the Indonesian people are always trying to support it and protect it from being weakened by other institutions or parties. They express their support in any way, either through peaceful or violent actions.

Collective actions are divided into two categories, namely normative (peacefully without violence) and non-normative (non-peacefully with violence) (Tausch et al., 2011; Thomas & Louis, 2014; Wright, 2009). Non-normative actions include demonstrations and protests accompanied by violence such as terrorism, riots, and group fights (Shadiqi, 2021). Most of the actions in the Save KPK movements were non-normative, such as those that just happened in 2019 and 2021. On the other hand, some actions were done normatively. A collective action that was initially done peacefully can turn into anarchy when mediation does not work, bringing the protesting individuals or groups to commit violence (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). Many factors can predict collective action, such as emotion, which was one of the focuses of this study. Apart from emotion, interesting factors to observe was personality traits. For this reason, this study specifically examined the role of the Dark Triad of personality traits that is more related to acts of violence. This study would show the respective role of Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and group-based contempt in non-normative collective action in the Save KPK movement. The literature review section would show the clarification of arguments, reasons for choosing the variables, and the hypothesis statements.

### ***Group-based Contempt and Non-normative Collective Action***

Emotions in predicting collective action can be divided into two types, namely self-based and group-based emotions (Shadiqi et al., 2018). The theory of group-based emotion originates in Intergroup Emotion Theory (IET) (Mackie et al., 2000). This study focused on group-based contempt, which is a series of emotional experiences of a

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person or group to demean another person or group as a process of social grouping. This emotion makes a person or group not want to understand others (Becker et al., 2011; Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Therefore, group-based contempt can predict the occurrence of non-normative action (Becker et al., 2011; Shadiqi et al., 2018; Tausch et al., 2011). Shadiqi et al. (2018) conducted research on Muslim students in Indonesia to prove that emotions, such as group-based negative (contempt) emotions, can predict non-normative collective action. Shadiqi et al. (2018) also conducted research on collective action in Indonesia by collecting data through online surveys and self-reports and found that group-based contempt could significantly predict non-normative collective action on the issue of Palestinian solidarity action. Tel (2012) who conducted an online survey in the Netherlands and Germany obtained inconsistent results: no significant relationship between contempt and acts of violence in the context of injustice and structural disadvantages experienced by Kurds living in European countries. The inconsistencies found interested us to re-examine the effect of group-based contempt. Our hypothesis with respect to this was as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Group-based contempt plays a role in non-normative collective action.

### ***The Dark Triad of Personality on Non-normative Collective Action***

The term “Dark Triad” was originally coined by Paulhus and Williams (2002). It refers to three social hostility personalities that seem similar to social “bad characters” with tendency of self-promotion, emotional coldness, two-facedness, and aggression. Comprehensively, Machiavellianism means amoral manipulative manner, narcissism means self-glorification, and psychopathy can be interpreted as a personality of an individual with no empathy, impulsive, and willingly taking risks to achieve personal goals (Glenn & Sellbom, 2015). In addition, as time went by, Jones and Paulhus (2014) developed those three components to be The Short Dark Triad (SD3).

#### *Machiavellianism*

The concept of Machiavellianism was first explained by Christie and Geis (1970) and named after Italian diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli whose treatise talked about a political approach that later was known as the orientation of “aim justifies all means.” Machiavellianism has different features, yet strategic manipulation, lack of conventional morality, and cynical view toward the world are the most specific characters (Christie & Geis, 1970). One of the Dark Triad of personality traits, Machiavellianism, can be identified through three facets: (a) Machiavellians are characterized by their manipulation skills in their interaction with others, (b) they have a negative view of other people, and (c) they have moral outlook that puts expediency above principle (O’Boyle et al., 2012). In an online study by Pailing et al. (2014) involving 159 adults, Machiavellianism functioned as a predictor of self-reported violence. Duspara and Greitemeyer (2017) who performed an online survey in Austria by inviting participants through social media found that extreme political action with Machiavellianism had a negative association with the issues of political orientation and extremism during the presidential election, with low level correlation coefficient.

### *Narcissism*

The concept of narcissism varies among writers and originally refers in Greek Mythology to Narcissus, a young hunter who was obsessed with his beauty and majesty until he arrogantly underestimated concern and love from others (Muris et al., 2017). A person with a narcissistic personality often exaggerates achievements, blocks criticism, refuses to cooperate, and only seeks interpersonal and romantic relationships with individuals who admire them (O'Boyle et al., 2012). According to Kernberg (1989), Morf and Rhodewalt (2001), the second type of the Dark Triad, narcissism, is an excessive self-assessment that is characterized by fantasizing about success, admiration, and the desire to get noticed and loved by others. Pavlović and Wertag (2021), who performed an online survey in Croatia, explained that narcissism was a strong predictor of support for extremism mediated by proviolence in men but is insignificant in women. A meta-analysis by Jahnke et al. (2021) found no significant effect of narcissism on political violence among adolescents and young adults. Individuals who have a high level of narcissism will choose to be involved in politics but for self-improvement only (Rogoza et al., 2022).

### *Psychopathy*

In 1941, psychopathy was introduced by Cleckley as a clinical construction that later indicated the purpose as a subclinical personality (Ray & Ray, 1982). The last Dark Triad of personality traits, psychopathy, is a much broader construct and is often described as a "constellation" of interpersonal, affective, and behavioral traits (Glenn & Sellbom, 2015). It is characterized by a lack of concern for oneself and others, as well as social regulatory mechanisms, impulsivity, and a lack of shame when harming others (O'Boyle et al., 2012). As the two other elements of the Dark Triad, it also reflects antagonistic behavior toward others (Trahair et al., 2020). It can be a strong predictor of extremism, terrorism, and radicalism (Chabrol et al., 2020; Pavlović & Franc, 2021). Among the three dark personality traits, psychopathy was found to be strongly associated with non-normative collective action in online studies in Poland (Study 1) and Britain (Study 2) (Rogoza et al., 2022) because it is the darkest or most violent trait of personality.

Gøtzsche-Astrup (2021) performed an online study in the U.S. and found that the Dark Triad of personality traits could strongly predict the intention to engage in political violence. The inconsistent findings of previous studies did not fully explain the role of the Dark Triad in non-normative collective action in particular. This created strong motivation in this study to re-examine the relationship of the Dark Triad of personality traits with non-normative collective action. The hypotheses proposed were:

**Hypothesis 2:** Machiavellianism is positively related to non-normative collective action.

**Hypothesis 3:** Narcissism is positively related to non-normative collective action.

**Hypothesis 4:** Psychopathy is positively related to non-normative collective action.

The self-reported study by Horan et al. (2015) showed the involvement of contempt within the Dark Triad of personality traits in the communication during a conflict. Moreover, Pavlović and Franc (2021) explained that emotions can interact with the dark triad. Roşca et al. (2021) who conducted a survey in Romania showed that emotions could mediate the relationship between dark personality traits and risk-taking behavior at work. In this study, we combined four predicting variables in multiple linear regression and path analysis models for the mediating effect of group-based contempt among Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy on non-normative collective action in the Save KPK movement.

The following hypotheses were proposed:

**Hypothesis 5:** There is a simultaneous role of group-based contempt, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy in non-normative collective action.

**Hypothesis 6:** There is a role of Machiavellianism in non-normative collective action mediated by group-based contempt.

**Hypothesis 7:** There is a role of narcissism in non-normative collective action mediated by group-based contempt.

**Hypothesis 8:** There is a role of psychopathy in non-normative collective action mediated by group-based contempt.

The main research question in this study was: How are the dynamic of correlation between group-based contempt and the Dark Triad of personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and the mediating effect of group-based contempt in predicting intention of non-normative collective action in the Save KPK movement-related issues? Thus, this research aimed to explain the involvement of group-based contempt and the Dark Triad of personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in predicting intention of non-normative collective action in the Save KPK movement-related issues.

## Method

This study used a quantitative approach through a cross-sectional survey that was conducted using questionnaires distributed online and on-campus to collect the main data. The online data collection was carried out using SurveyMonkey, which was distributed through social media platforms to the Indonesian college students. We added the main data with the paper-and-pencil administered questionnaires, which were distributed to the students of Department of Psychology of Faculty of Medicine of Universitas Lambung Mangkurat. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Medicine of Universitas Lambung Mangkurat [667-668-669/KEPK-FK ULM/EC/IV/2022].

### Participants

The purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the participants. In this study, we involved students as the research sample because many actions in the Save KPK movement were carried out by Indonesian students. The pilot study took place on June 4–5, 2022, where data from 55 college students were

collected to determine the quality of the measurements. The data of 409 students as the participants were collected from June 6 to 12, 2021. From both online and paper-and-pencil-based questionnaires, we could collect the sample from 17 of 38 provinces and 70 of 3,107 universities in Indonesia. Initially, the sample number was 905; however, 496 of them were then excluded from the analysis because of their incomplete data fulfillment, outliers, duplicate cases, missing values, and their non-careful answers (through attention check questions). In detail, the sample comprised 327 and 82 online and offline respondents, respectively. The mean age was 20.11 years ( $SD = 1.336$ ), ranging from 17 to 28 years. By gender, they were 83 (20.3%) male and 326 (79.7%) female.

### **Measurement**

In this study, a cross-cultural adaptation process for the Dark Triad scale was carried out referring to Beaton et al. (2000). Meanwhile, the other two instruments (non-normative collective action and group-based contempt) already had the Indonesian version, thus requiring no adaptation process. Content validity was also conducted using face and logical validity by the research team, and there was a legibility test stage with a small representative sample ( $n = 10$ ). This measurement included an attention check question to see the concentration and seriousness of the participants in answering the questionnaire. At the beginning of the survey, after the participants read the information and agreed to informed consent, we added 1 narrative paragraph about the information on the Save KPK movement, aiming to make all participants understand the research context.

#### *Non-normative Collective Action*

The non-normative collective action scale was used to measure the intention of violence in the context of the Save KPK movement. This study used the scale proposed by Tausch et al. (2001) that consists of 6 items adapted to Indonesian by Shadiqi et al. (2018). This scale had satisfactory reliability with a Likert-scale response ( $\alpha = .741$ , 7 points, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The examples of the items included "Burning used tires", "Blocking highway", "Throwing stones or bottles when protesting", "Attacking police officers", "Attacking the party deemed responsible", "Doing vandalism and burning symbols of the parties who created problems with the KPK".

#### *Group-Based Contempt*

The group-based contempt scale in this study was intended to measure individual emotions and refers to contempt against any other group. This measurement was developed by Tausch et al. (2011) and Becker et al. (2011) and then adapted by Shadiqi et al. (2018) into Indonesian language and culture with a reliability value of  $\alpha = .854$ . This instrument consisted of 12 items with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). An example of the items was "As part of a group, I hate those who try to destruct the KPK institution".

### *Machiavellianism*

The Machiavellianism scale was used to reveal an individual's tendency to manipulate others for personal benefits. This scale used The Short Dark Triad of Personality Scale (SD3) by Jones and Paulhus (2014). The response scale used in this instrument had a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*). This scale had a reliability value of .615, the remaining 4 and 5 items were eliminated. An example of the items was "I manipulate cleverly so that I get what I want".

### *Narcissism*

The narcissism scale was used to assess an individual's behavioral tendency in pursuit of satisfaction for pride or selfish admiration for their attributes. This instrument used SD3 by Jones and Paulhus (2014) that had a reliability value .669, and the remaining 6 and 3 items were dropped. The response measurement had a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*). An example of the items was "I insist on getting the respect I deserve".

### *Psychopathy*

The psychopathy scale was used to reveal an individual's tendency to respond impulsively, lack remorse when making mistakes, and tend to harm others. This scale used SD3 by Jones and Paulhus (2014). The response scale used in this instrument had a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*). Furthermore, the scale had a Cronbach's reliability value of .534. The remaining 4 items were used for this study and 5 items were dropped. An example of the items was "I like to take revenge on those in power".

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the statistical software IBM SPSS and an add-on module AMOS. After all the instruments were tested for reliability, the variable scores were calculated from the average. The statistical analysis started with the assumption tests (residual normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity), followed by descriptive and Pearson correlation tests. In addition, hypothesis testing was carried out using multiple linear regression and path model analysis tests. To evaluate the significance level of the hypothesis analysis, we used the *p*-value score and the confidence interval for  $\beta$ . The path model analysis used 5,000 bootstrap samples.

## **Results**

### ***Preliminary Analysis***

Initially, a z-test was applied for normality test using skewness and kurtosis. It was found that the data were normally distributed. In other assumption tests, the data met the criteria for the linearity test between the predicting and mediating variables and the criteria. All the predicting variables were not found to have multicollinearity. Other assumption tests also did not find any indication of heteroscedasticity problems.

**Table 1**  
*Pearson Correlation and Descriptive Statistics*

	$\alpha$	Scale	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Non-Normative Collective Action	.741	1–7	1.885	.708	—	.309***	.211***	.060	.314***
Group-Based Contempt	.854	1–7	3.366	.816		—	.264***	-.008	.261***
Machiavellianism	.615	1–5	2.674	.641			—	.049	.466***
Narcissism	.669	1–5	2.783	.529				—	0,097
Psychopathy	.534	1–5	2.306	.538					—

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Before testing the hypotheses, a bivariate correlation test was conducted to determine the initial description of the relationships between the variables (see Table 1). The results showed a significant relationship between group-based contempt ( $r = .309, p < .001$ ), Machiavellianism ( $r = .211, p < .001$ ), and psychopathy ( $r = .314, p < .001$ ) with non-normative collective action. Furthermore, it was found that there was a significant relationship between Machiavellianism ( $r = .264, p < .001$ ) and psychopathy ( $r = .261, p < .001$ ) with group-based contempt. Other results showed different findings, such as that narcissism was not significantly related to group-based contempt ( $r = -.008, p = .869$ ) and non-normative collective action ( $r = .060, p = .227$ ). Likewise, Table 1 shows that the average score for intensity of non-normative collective action in our research sample tended to be low. In the meantime, the average score of other variables tended to be moderate.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis testing in this study used two analytical techniques, including multiple linear regression analysis and path analysis model. The results of the multiple linear regression test (see Table 2) partially showed that (H1) group-based contempt significantly predicted non-normative collective action ( $B = .207, \beta = .239, SE = .042, t = 4.966, p < .01$ ); Hypothesis 1, therefore, was accepted. Psychopathy significantly predicted non-normative collective action ( $B = .302, \beta = .230, SE = .069, t = 4.371, p < .01$ ); hence, (H4), was accepted. Furthermore, the analysis results said that group-based contempt, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (simultaneously) significantly predicted non-normative collective action ( $F(4,404) = 18.709, p < .001$ ); Hypothesis 5, therefore, was accepted. The results of other partial multiple linear regression analysis showed that (H2) Machiavellianism ( $B = .043, \beta = .039, SE = .058, t = .749, p = .455$ ) and (H3) narcissism ( $B = .050, \beta = .038, SE = .062, t = .819, p = .413$ ) partially did not significantly predict non-normative collective action; Hypotheses 2 and 3, therefore, were rejected.

**Table 2**  
Multiple Linear Regression Test Results

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	SE	$\beta$			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	.235	.246		.957	.339	-.248	.718
Group-based Contempt	.207	.042	.239	4.966	.000	.125	.289
Machiavellianism	.043	.058	.039	.749	.455	-.070	.157
Narcissism	.050	.062	.038	.819	.413	-.071	.171
Psychopathy	.302	.069	.230	4.371	.000	.166	.438

$R = .395, R^2 = .156, Adjusted R^2 = .148, F(4, 404) = 18.709, p < .001$

In the path analysis model, based on Figure 1, the model fits well on the criteria  $X^2/df = .627, CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.018, RMSEA = .000, NFI = .994$ . Additionally, Machiavellianism ( $B = .231, \beta = .182, SE = .068, t = 3.411, p < .01$ ) and psychopathy ( $B = .273, \beta = .180, SE = .081, t = 3.373, p < .01$ ) significantly predicted group-based contempt. Machiavellianism and narcissism did not have a direct effect on non-normative collective action. The path model analysis confirmed Hypothesis 1 that group-based contempt significantly predicted non-normative collective action ( $B = .211, \beta = .243, SE = .041, t = 5.154, p < .001$ ). Based on these results, it was found that H6 said that the indirect effect of group-based contempt significantly mediated the relationship between Machiavellianism and non-normative collective action (*indirect effect* = .049, *BootSE* = .020, *CI 95% of B* = [.015, .093],  $p < .01$ ); Hypothesis 6, therefore, was accepted. Also, H8 expressed that group-based contempt significantly mediated the relationship between psychopathy and non-normative collective action (*indirect effect* = .058, *BootSE* = .019, *CI 95% of B* = [.022, .097],  $p < .01$ ); therefore, Hypothesis 8 was accepted. The group-based contempt mediating effect was not significant on the relationship between narcissism and non-normative collective action (*indirect effect* = -.011, *BootSE* = .016, *CI 95% of B* = [-.043, .019],  $p = .468$ ); so, Hypothesis 7 was rejected.

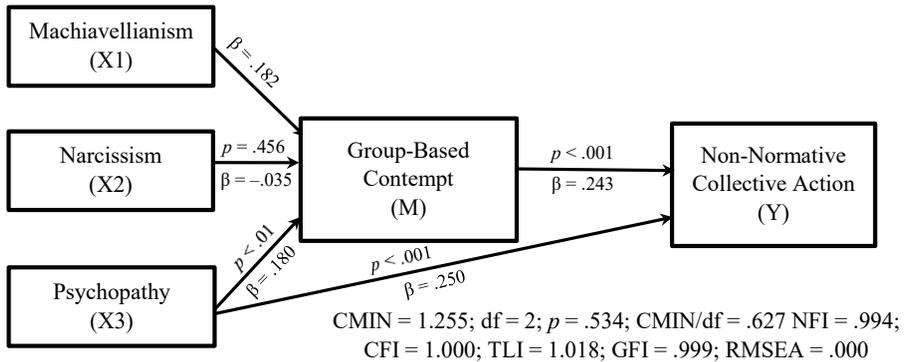
**Table 3**  
Mediation Analysis Results of Intention to Do Non-Normative Collective Action (Y)

	Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ )				Indirect Effect	
	Path a (X→M)	Path b (M→Y)	Path c (Total eff.)	Path c' (Direct eff.)	Estimates ( $\beta$ )	Confidence Interval 95% of $\beta$ (Bootstrapping)
Path 1						
Machiavellianism (X1)	.182**		.044	.000		
Contempt (M)		.243***				
X1→M→Y					.049**	.015, .093

	Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ )				Indirect Effect	
	Path a (X→M)	Path b (M→Y)	Path c (Total eff.)	Path c' (Direct eff.)	Estimates ( $\beta$ )	Confidence Interval 95% of $\beta$ (Bootstrapping)
<b>Path 2</b>						
Narcissism (X2)	-.035		-.008	.000		
Contempt (M)		.243***				
X2→M→Y					-.011	-.043, .019
<b>Path 3</b>						
Psychopathy (X3)	0.180**		.294***	.250***		
Contempt (M)		.243***				
X3→M→Y					.058**	.022, .097

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

**Figure 1**  
Path Analysis Results



### Discussion

The multiple linear regression test found a significant association between group-based contempt and non-normative collective action (Hypothesis 1 was accepted). It means that someone who scores high in group-based contempt tends to engage in non-normative collective action. This finding was in line with those found by Becker et al. (2011), Tausch et al. (2011), and Shadiqi et al. (2018) who emphasized that groups involving group-based contempt can trigger non-normative collective action. In the study by Koomen and van der Pligt (2016), contempt was more closely related to a lack of desire to reconcile. Also, Becker et al. (2011) explained that groups that do contempt tend to be involved in radical actions. Both studies explained how contempt against outside groups can lead people to engage in violence.

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The results showed that Machiavellianism does not have a direct role in non-normative collective action (Hypothesis 2 was rejected). Our results aligned with what Rogoza et al. (2022) found: Machiavellianism is not significantly related to non-normative collective action. Individuals who tend to be Machiavellian prefer not to engage in non-normative collective action because they do not believe that doing so will provide them with real benefits (Rogoza et al., 2022). Dahling et al. (2009) also found that a Machiavellian does not have trust in other people but has a strong desire for having power to manipulate things immorally to achieve personal goals. Machiavellians can maintain their reputations by avoiding conflicts that harm them and focusing on what is beneficial to them and useful in the future (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Machiavellianism only plays a cognitive role or, in other words, does not directly contribute to violent action (Chabrol et al., 2020). Previous studies also expressed that students who tend to be Machiavellian choose not to be involved in violence in actions related to the Save KPK movement. However, Machiavellianism is only involved in manipulating others to commit violence in demonstrations.

Furthermore, the results showed that narcissism does not have a significant role in non-normative collective action (Hypothesis 3 was rejected). According to Baldwin et al. (2018), collective action emerges as a result of a group decision in solving a common problem, thus contrary to the characteristics of the narcissistic personality, namely feeling excessively impressed with oneself and not considering others (Rizal & Handayani, 2021). Furthermore, the meta-analysis made by Jahnke et al. (2021) found no significant effect of narcissism on ideology-based political violence in adolescents and young adults. Narcissism, indeed, plays a role in non-normative collective action in politics. However, it is supported by ego-boosting (Rogoza et al., 2022). In this study, students with a narcissistic personality tended to take collective action not because of a common goal but, rather, for their interests. This is one of the reasons why narcissism has no significant role in non-normative collective action.

There have been very few studies on the relationship between psychopathy and non-normative collective action. The studies by Chabrol et al. (2020), Pavlović and Franc (2021), and Duspara and Greitemeyer (2017) that discussed non-normative collective action explained that psychopathy is one of the strong predictors for political acts of extremism, terrorism, and radicalism. Our study (with the accepted Hypothesis 4) found that individuals with psychopathy tended to act impulsively and had no shame and regret when harming others. In this study, psychopathy was found to have a strong influence both through mediation and direct effects. Individuals with high psychopathy scores seemed to lack social regulation and tend to be impulsive when they wanted to harm others (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Besta et al. (2021) also found that those with high psychopathy scores tended to group with people with norms that justify violence. That way, individuals who commit group-based contempt and have high psychopathic scores will be more likely to create chaos when taking collective action. Rogoza et al. (2022) and Besta et al. (2021) also explained that individuals who are severely psychopathic are more willing to engage in collective action and provide empirical confirmation that they do it to express their anti-social worldview. Moreover, it is the darkest personality trait and the most sadistic among Machiavellianism and narcissism.

The multiple regression analysis simultaneously, we found that group-based contempt and the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) have a significant role in collective violence action (Hypothesis 5 was accepted). This finding was supported by Gøtzsche-Astrup's (2021) research that found that the Dark Triad—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—could predict political violence. Shadiqi et al. (2018) also explained that group-based contempt can predict non-normative collective action. To put it another way, when an individual has high scores in group-based contempt and the three elements of the Dark Triad simultaneously, then they have an enormous tendency to conduct collective violence action. However, no empirical explanation is found about that group-based contempt and the three elements of the Dark Triad can simultaneously predict collective violence action; most of research only explained their roles partially. For this reason, this research added another alternative of findings that demonstrated the collective role of group-based contempt and the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in non-normative collective action in the Save KPK movement-related issues.

The path analysis model showed that group-based contempt could mediate the relationship between Machiavellianism (Hypothesis 6 was accepted) and psychopathy (Hypothesis 8 was accepted) with non-normative collective action. On the other hand, group-based contempt did not (Hypothesis 7 was rejected) mediate the relationship between narcissism and non-normative collective action. In line with the study by Schriber et al. (2017), contempt can be associated with Machiavellianism and psychopathy as well. This is why individuals with Machiavellianism or psychopathy do not feel remorse when they cause harm to others such as insulting other people. This finding was supported by Pavlović and Franc (2021) who found that individuals with high scores in dark personalities can experience a mixture of emotions like anger, condescension, and disgust, which can encourage them to commit violence to achieve their goals.

Furthermore, narcissism (Hypothesis 7 was rejected) cannot predict non-normative collective action through group-based contempt mediation. Individuals with narcissism are self-focused and oriented, in contrast those with group-based contempt and non-normative collective action that always move in groups. Campbell et al. (2010), Kernberg (1989), and Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) expressed that individuals with narcissism are categorized as self-focused, having an egocentric admiration toward themselves, and having the desire to be cared and loved by others, which negatively affect their relationships with others. Rogoza et al. (2022) also suggested that narcissism actually plays a role in political non-normative collective action (violence), yet mediated by ego-boosting. In contrast, our research used group-based contempt to mediate narcissism toward non-normative collective action. In other words, group-based contempt cannot drive an individual with narcissism to conduct violation while ego-boosting can support them to do so.

Since this study focused only on students and the majority gender was female, further research needs to expand the scope to a wider population. This study, also, was limited to correlational explanations. Subsequent research, therefore, needs to consider several approaches, such as longitudinal and experimental studies. This research also had weakness in its measurement quality (SD3) because Cronbach's alpha was

below .70. Hasanati and Istiqomah's (2019) research in Indonesia found several factor loading items from low SD3 measurement results, which made it possible for SD3 measurements to be sensitive and made respondents faking good when answering the scale-based questions. The structure of the SD3 measurement model needed to be evaluated further using factor analysis. Siddiqi et al. (2020) offered a two-factor model of SD3 by combining Machiavellianism and psychopathy in one factor and narcissism in another. Future researchers need to carefully observe the application of measurement and evaluate the instruments used (e.g. analysis factor). We conducted the cross-cultural adaptation process in measuring SD3 in Bahasa Indonesia through the instrument adaptation procedure introduced by Beaton et al. (2000). We also recommended that other researchers adapting cross-cultural instruments select other alternatives for instrument adaptation procedures, such as the International Test Commission (ITC).

## Conclusion

Partial multiple regression analysis found that only group-based contempt and psychopathy significantly predicted non-normative collective action; narcissism and Machiavellianism did not do so significantly. However, collectively, group-based contempt and the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) could predict collective violence action. Furthermore, the results of the path analysis model found that Machiavellianism and psychopathy were significantly related to non-normative collective action under the mediation of group-based contempt. The implication of this research is that the government needs to undertake counseling (Anidar & Ikhwan, 2017) and psychoeducation programs (Pilet, 2002) for university students or colleges regarding emotional management, namely shifting to a more positive emotion, and personality development by changing personal habits and having a sustainable performance to decrease violent action (Langer & Laurence, 2010). In addition, future surveys should use different data collection techniques and contemporary methods and broaden the scope of the study.

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ARTICLE

## Markers of Sensory Well-Being in the Learning Environment for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders

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### ABSTRACT

The article describes the results of interdisciplinary research focusing on the concept of sensory well-being and its application to construct sensory-friendly learning environments. The article analyzes the relationship between sensory characteristics of a learning environment and its impact on children's well-being and progress. It is shown that the current standards for learning environments in Russian schools fail to meet the sensory needs of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The study relies on the case study method to compare the sensory needs a student with ASD and the characteristics of the classroom environment where she studies. The assessment encompasses auditory, visual, olfactory, tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive modalities. Based on the data obtained, the authors formulate a set of markers that can be used to build a sensory-friendly learning environment. These markers can be used by specialists when designing new or renovating the already existing environments at schools and other educational institutions.

### KEYWORDS

sensory well-being, learning environment, educational environment, markers, autism spectrum disorders, hypersensitivity, design-technology

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## Introduction

People with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may face challenges in communication and social interactions and experience behavior problems, which may vary significantly from one individual to another. Moreover, these individuals frequently have sensory hypersensitivity (Happé, 1994; Morozov, 2014). As F. Happé (1994) puts it, these children reacted very violently to certain sounds such as the sound of the vacuum cleaner, noise of the elevator, and even wind blowing. What is more, some of them had difficulty with food intake or unusual food preferences. In addition, there is something that parents and specialists pay less attention to—ASD children’s hypersensitivity to external factors, to the emotional structure and physical characteristics of their environment. The existing disorders of sensory processing and higher integrative functions in children with ASD should be considered when analyzing their sensory profile, including the information obtained from parents and teachers (Fernández-Andrés et al., 2015). There is evidence that the most affected sensory modalities in children with ASD are auditory and tactile (Fernández-Andrés et al., 2015).

For people with ASD, the external environment comprises not only their physical surroundings but also other people. The environment can have a strong influence on them, and this influence can be either positive or negative. They, however, may have trouble communicating the emotions induced by the environment. Autistic people may exhibit a variety of atypical sensory characteristics, for example, they may be intolerant to certain sounds, or they may display heightened sensitivity to contact with a particular surface or have unusual smell sensitivity. These characteristics should be given due consideration when designing physical environment for people with ASD, first and foremost, their physical learning environment. What makes this task especially pertinent is the increasing incidence of autism spectrum disorders, with some evidence suggesting that an estimated 1 in 68 school-aged children have been identified with ASD (Kim et al., 2011).

The fact that we are dealing with two dynamic and highly individualized systems—an individual with ASD and their environment—hampers the study of the already existing environments and the construction of new ones. It may be tempting to apply a reductionist approach, especially since classical science, including psychology, tends to gravitate towards typification (rather than individualization). The same approach is found in the works written by scholars of architecture and design—their methods often follow the modernist paradigm with its preference for solutions based on standardization and economies of scale (Salingaros, 2014). Therefore, an autistic person finds themselves in a situation where their rapidly changing mood and emotional state is in conflict with the qualities of the learning environment determined by a set of formal guidelines and principles. The latter, in their turn, are based on the understanding that the learning environment should have certain obligatory parameters and that these parameters should remain unchanged as well as the reactions of those who occupy this environment. This contradiction impedes the learning progress of children with ASD. It also partially explains the active controversy surrounding the effects of digitalized sociocultural environments that emerged in the 2010s and 2020s on people with ASD.

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Hence, the *hypothesis* that this article seeks to test is as follows: in order to create a more autism-friendly environment or in order to assess the “autism-friendliness” of the already existing environment, it is necessary to apply a system of markers that measure its potential effects on ASD individuals’ sensory well-being. “Sets” of markers used by a designer or an expert can help create a new positive environment or modify an old environment in such a way that it would have a positive influence on the sensory wellness of a child with ASD.

Thus, taking the concept of sensory well-being as a point of departure, in this paper we aim to identify and describe the test markers that could be used to promote the creation of environments that would be conducive to ASD children’s learning and thriving.

## Methodology

The study of sensory issues necessitates an interdisciplinary approach based on the synthesis of psychological and architectural discourses (Alisov, 2009).

In research literature, one of the key concepts in the discussion of learning environments is “enabling physical environment”, understood as an environment providing a rich and varied space conducive to exploration (Novoselova, 2001). In her discussion of what constitutes enabling physical environment for children, Novoselova describes different types of “enrichment activities” and identifies those components of such environment that make it conducive to learning (Novoselova, 2001, p. 25).

The ideas of holism, that is, the priority of the whole as opposed to its parts taken separately, is essential to the analysis and expert assessment of the sensory environment of educational establishments. Thus, we adopt a cognitive approach that sees an individual as an integral element of the learning environment: this perspective stresses the environment’s influence on people’s mental state and thinking rather than the types and results of activities. This study draws from the ideas of sensory integration of A. J. Ayres, who studied the connection between sensory information processing and behavior and education of different categories of children (Ayres, 2005; Bundy & Lane, 2020; Kranowitz, 2005).

The above-described theoretical framework determined the research design, strategies and questions of this study: we analyzed the sensory characteristics of a girl with ASD; we built a sensory “profile” of a typical classroom in a Russian school implementing the so-called adjusted basic education program (ABEP), which makes it suitable for children with ASD.

## Positive Influence of the Environment on Children’s Mental Activity

Speaking about the environment as a whole, experts often consider it in a rather narrow sense, e.g., by focusing on social relations or psychological atmosphere (Symaniuk, 2005). To analyze a sensory (un)friendly environment, however, it is necessary to adopt a more comprehensive perspective, considering a diversity of factors.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, German scholar F. Froebel (1782–1852) developed the concept of kindergarten (literally “children’s garden”), which was a novel institution

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at that time, and formulated the idea of a connection between the characteristics of the physical environment and children's development. Froebel likened educators to gardeners, seeing their role not only in upbringing but also in creating a good "soil" for children's development. Following the traditions of German humanitarian knowledge, Froebel prioritized the role of the intellectual component in children's development. The "garden" metaphor he uses also accentuates dynamism as a key feature of the learning environment.

The inconsistency inherent in Froebel's approach lies in the fact that he, on the one hand, postulated that the physical properties and elements of the environment should encourage free play and creativity (e.g., "Froebel gifts"—a set of six geometrical 3D toys which can be interacted with), and, on the other hand, he believed that the learning environment should be static—it should be carefully designed and prepared. Froebel's ideas gave rise to many theories and methods, including the methods of M. Montessori (2009), whose classes supported all kinds of children, including children with disabilities. Montessori's idea—to organize the environment which corresponds to the needs of an *active child*—is still relevant today as it connects the processes of perception and learning.

R. Steiner (1861–1925), who was not only an educator but also an architect, came closest to the understanding of the environment as dynamic and, at the same time, structured. He emphasized the psychological comfort of a child that was determined by, first and foremost, the sensory characteristics of the environment. In particular, he designed the Goetheanum, the world centre for the anthroposophical movement (he actually created two buildings—the First Goetheanum, which was destroyed by fire in 1923, and the Second Goetheanum). Steiner's Goetheanum was conceived as a space which activates human thought. Commenting on this building, Steiner highlighted the direct connection between the environment and the human sensory system, indicating that as a creator he did not employ any symbols or other conventional elements but calculated the direct impact of the interior of the building on the human condition.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the idea of learning environments was developed by representatives of organic architecture (from F. L. Wright to I. Makowitz, M. Budzinski, T. Alberts, S. Calatrava), adaptive architecture (A. Duany, M. Mehaffi, etc.), adherents of the ecological approach (F. Hundertwasser), universal and inclusive design, and sustainable design. Some of them pay more attention to the calculation of desired forms (Fibonacci numbers, "golden ratio", the Sierpiński triangle), others—to their impact on the human condition. It is worth mentioning an interesting and influential idea of the Japanese music teacher S. Suzuki (1898–1998), who raised a whole generation of performers and who believed that the integrity of the environment is a necessary condition for a balanced and versatile development of a human being.

An outstanding project that is worthy of a separate discussion is the 1300-square-foot *Sensory Arts Garden* that was opened in 2017, in Jupiter, Florida, USA, at the Els Center for Excellence by Els for Autism Foundation, hosting programs and services for people with ASD, their parents and therapists (Wagenfeld et al., 2019). The Center is aimed at helping people with ASD realize their potential so that they could lead positive, productive, and satisfying lives. The design of the garden is based on the

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interdisciplinary research of designers, educators, psychologists, and musical therapists. In this garden, every detail, the location of plants, materials, furniture, and spaces are carefully considered; its environment balances stimulating and soothing sensory experiences, helping relieve stress and anxiety as well as support all human senses.

Another unique feature of the Sensory Arts Garden is its planting strategy based on the fusion of salutogenic design principles which are health-promoting and indicative of the deep understanding of the needs of people with ASD. The trees were selected based on the structure of branches, the form of the shadow, and visual, olfactory, and tactile characteristics. The planting pattern meets the need for consistency, which is extremely important for people with ASD. Careful plant selection and their location not only ensure security and minimize negative sensory reactions but also allow the staff and family members to discretely observe the children.

Safety and security are the core principles of design, details, and choice of materials for the Garden. Importantly, while keeping the balance of the elements in line with the needs of children with ASD, the Garden's creators also made it appealing to the general public. The Garden gives children an opportunity to feel safe and at the same time to experience being a part of something bigger without getting overwhelmed. Children have an opportunity to find their favorite places in the Garden and go back there every day to interact with these spaces, studying their subtle changes. Moreover, the Garden is a place for outdoor education and thus it meets the needs even of those children who find it difficult to interact with their peers or teachers within the classroom environment. Children can study on their own by using laptops or can do their classwork with a teacher's assistance, including music, yoga, and reading classes. The Garden allows everybody to interact with nature on their own terms and at their own pace. It gives various opportunities for participation; everybody can find something of interest in the Garden.

Thus, as of today, there has been accumulated sufficient amount of evidence that can be used to build a positive environment for people with different needs, including people with disabilities. There is a general consensus that a specially tailored environment can have a positive impact on ASD people's emotional and cognitive development. There is, however, still a perceived lack of specific markers to measure the effects of such environments on sensory well-being.

## **Environmental Approach to Creating Sensory-Friendly Environments**

The environmental approach of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries may offer us some valuable insights into the environment as a dynamic phenomenon that does not exist outside human perception.

In pedagogy and psychology, environment is understood as a natural or social context or surroundings in which a person operates. Its pedagogical potential is often taken as a given rather than something that needs to be questioned or proven; for example, Rubtsova (2013) mentions "environment as a factor of education". Therefore, for the purpose of our study, we need to turn to the theory of architecture and design,

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more specifically, to the environmental approach, which emerged in the early 1970s, at the same time as the study of “atmospherics” (the discipline of designing commercial spaces). In the Russian research literature (Gutnov & Glazychev, 1990; Ikonnikov, 1979; Kaganov, 1999; Zabel’shanskii et al., 1985), the environmental approach is often associated with urban dynamics, that is, the study of the changing elements constituting urban environment. This approach was not implemented in architectural practices (Tatarchenko, 2018, p. 2). The environmental approach has brought to the fore the flexibility, integrity, and dynamism of the environment.

The comprehensive approach proposed by Russian designer and urbanist Vyacheslav Glazychev (1940–2012) is of special interest here: he believed that urban planning should be integrated with the process of active communication with urban communities and specific groups of citizens, resulting in roadmaps, programs, and strategies (Gutnov & Glazychev, 1990). In other words, the core of urban environment is the complex, multi-faceted relationship between the physical environment, its elements, and various groups of citizens.

The comprehensive approach developed by Glazychev enabled urban scholars to transcend the oversimplified interpretations of the environment as a substance or space; the environment came to be understood as “the surroundings mastered by man, transformed by his consciousness and becoming an integral whole with him” (Tatarchenko, 2018, p. 10). The key aspects of the environment that are important for our study are physical, social, psychological, sensory; emotional-psychological, esthetic, and rational properties, which can be targeted separately to achieve the desired pedagogical effects.

While simplistic generalization and reductionism are still the prevalent approaches to the environment, in our view, it would be more productive to see it not as a filled space or substance, but instead to zoom in on those characteristics of the environment that are important for making it autism-friendly.

## Learning Environment Requirements in Russia

Any learning environment is a synthesis of the parameters set by formal policies and guidelines, with individual characteristics, often resulting from spontaneous efforts of the participants in the educational process. Therefore, in order to set the markers of a positive, autism-friendly learning environment, we are going to start with the formal requirements applied to school learning environments in Russia.

The key *technical* requirements regarding the sensory parameters of the educational environment are reflected in the official document entitled *Sanitarno-epidemiologicheskie trebovaniia k organizatsiiam vospitaniia i obucheniia, otdykha i ozdorovleniia detei i molodezhi* [Sanitary-Epidemiological Rules and Regulations for Organizations of Education, Recreation and Wellness for Children and Youth; hereinafter—*Sanitary Rules and Regulations*] (Postanovlenie, 2020). Since humans are inseparable from their environment and the physical parameters of the environment affect people’s mental state, the fulfillment of these requirements creates a universal material foundation of any sensory environment. Among other

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things, this document specifies the space standards, that is, floor space per child, to prevent cramped classrooms or corridors. These standards, however, do not address those characteristics of school environment that can make it visually overwhelming, fractional, or aggressive (these characteristics are reflected in the markers we are going to describe further in the article).

The requirements regarding school *furniture* in the Sanitary Rules and Regulations are not entirely consistent and deal with different aspects of furniture. For example, it is possible to use multi-functional (transformable) furniture, depending on the size and height of children, their physical development, and whether they have any respiratory, hearing, and visual impairments. The usage of stools and benches instead of chairs is prohibited. The use of color markings on the side exterior surface to indicate the size of furniture is recommended. Color cues can be used to enhance the learning environment, e.g., to designate specific zones, to aid way-findings, etc.

The characteristics of *surfaces* (walls, floors, ceilings, furniture surface materials) are outlined, taking into account the interrelation of the various components of the environment. For example, it is recommended to use finishes which create a matt surface in light shades with strictly defined reflection coefficients from the surfaces. The area of decorative elements with a bright color palette must not exceed 25% of the total wall surface area of the room—but the brightness parameters and specialization of the room are not stipulated.

The Sanitary Rules and Regulations also contain requirements regarding natural and artificial *lighting*: it is required that there should be natural lateral, overhead or two-way lighting, and artificial lighting levels of at least 300 lux in classrooms and 400 lux in workshops. Light fixtures should be equipped with diffusers with the possibility of using fluorescent lamps.

In general, like any instructions or regulations, the Sanitary Rules and Regulations focus on the health and safety of children in an educational setting and provide averaged indicators. They do not take into account the individual sensory characteristics of students, which may to some extent be explained by the modernist methodology and its reductionist approach underpinning these documents. The absence of explanations or references to any scientific sources makes documents of this kind hard to remember. Despite their importance and necessity, they cannot serve as a basis for quick, practical adjustments that would allow an educational institution to create and maintain a healthy sensory environment.

Similar issues apply to the main educational programs. For example, the *Primernaia adaptirovannaia osnovnaia obshcheobrazovatel'naia programma nachal'nogo obshchego obrazovaniia obuchaiushchikhsia s rasstroistvami autisticheskogo spektra* [Adapted Basic Education Program—ABEP] (Primernaia adaptirovannaia, 2015) approaches a learning environment from the didactic perspective, ignoring the technical requirements. This results in certain contradictions between these two documents, making it difficult for schools to develop a consistent strategy of building an environment conducive to children's sensory well-being. The ABEP requires that schools should create an environment that would enable ASD learners to perceive the maximum amount of information from audio-visual sources, which means that there

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should be conveniently located and accessible stands with visual materials about in-school rules of conduct, safety rules, timetable, event announcements, etc. There is, however, no requirements concerning the quality of design of these materials, such as fonts and sizes, the proportions and colors used, and so on.

The workspace requirements described in the ABEP also specify that ASD students should be able to choose their own desk and partner. According to the ABEP, ASD children can use special supplements, didactic materials, and workbooks, printed or electronic, contributing to the correction of deficiencies in students' psycho-physical development and helping them make a better general progress. The program provides a long list of games, manuals, objects, and equipment, but no information about their sensory characteristics is provided. It should be noted, however, that such things as "stuffed animals", "accessible musical instruments", and even "a washbasin" can be both neutral for a child with ASD or can have a negative effect on them, if they make the environment incomprehensible and create sensory overloads. The ABEP itself does not contain any guidelines or restrictions of this kind, which in practice leads to the environment becoming cluttered and messy. Paradoxically, things meant to harmonize the learning process may have a negative impact on the learners if these things are not properly organized.

The ABEP does not mention such characteristics as systematicity and coherence of the environment, which can hardly be surprising, since they are not directly related to the Program's objectives. On the practical level, however, it is essential that these characteristics should be ensured, at least, it makes sense to keep out of sight those objects that are not used in the learning process. These items should be kept in containers or drawers in a strictly defined place. It is desirable that these containers should have labels, containing visual and verbal information as to what is inside. The same applies to the walls, which need to be kept free of any visual distractors to avoid bombarding learners with unnecessary information.

If the environment is fractional or chaotic, the child's brain finds itself in a state of multitasking, having to process lots of new (sometimes almost useless) information about all the configurations around it, to decide on the necessary actions: how to avoid an obstacle, how to avoid an unpleasant experience, what to choose as the most preferable option, etc. The effort of rapidly switching from one task to another leads to an increase in dopamine, a biologically active substance that is a neurotransmitter responsible for transmitting signals from the brain to the central nervous system. The body do this through self-regulation (Uchenye vyiasnili, 2022).

Distracting items in the classroom may disrupt learning, making it hard for students to maintain their attention. In other words, in such classroom environment, a child is able to pay only superficial attention to things and phenomena. A good illustration is provided by Figure 1, showing a fragment of a wall in a music classroom with a disparate collection of postcards, some of them overlapping, which disrupts the rhythm in the design and creates a sense of chaos.

For children with ASD and intellectual disabilities, the ABEP recommends to use special textbooks, copy-books, printed workbooks, literacy kits, audio recordings, slides, desktop theater, etc.; however, their sensory characteristics are not specified.

**Figure 1**

*Decoration of a Music Classroom in a School in Yekaterinburg, Russia*



Note. Source: T. Yu. Bystrova (2020).

Students with ASD and severe multiple developmental disabilities must be provided with unhindered access to the infrastructure of the general education organization (O sotsial'noi zashchite, 1995) in accordance with the requirements of a barrier-free environment. It is necessary to use special aids and technologies for children with different disabilities, such as individual technical means of movement (wheelchairs, walkers, stand aids, etc.). These objects are never designed as a coherent system. Each of them is usually designed in its own style, color, etc., their proportions and configurations contrast with each other, creating an extra sensory burden.

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Special areas are created in the classroom, including areas for recreation and free time. The ABEP specifies that recreation areas should contain the following items: a carpet and/or magnetic boards, flannelgraphs, tactile materials, etc.; there is no mention of the type and sensory characteristics of the objects and materials. Areas for self-care, hygiene procedures should be provided.

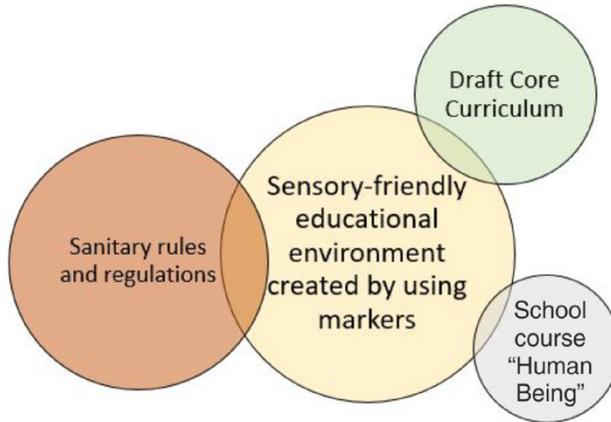
The classroom may contain aids for non-verbal (alternative) communication; graphic/printed pictures (thematic sets of photographs, drawings, icons, etc.; these visual materials can be used to create individual communication albums); alphabet boards (tables of letters, cards with printed words for practicing “global reading” comprehension); electronic aids (magnetic-tape recording devices, electronic communicators, a tablet or a personal computer with appropriate software). No specific requirements are set regarding graphics, tactile characteristics, level and features of sound design etc.

Among the courses offered by schools to children with multiple disabilities, there is the course “Human Being”, which is aimed to create a general understanding of the human body and behavior. This course, among other things, includes the information about the senses. It is considered particularly important since it helps enrich the life experience of ASD students, stimulating their positive reactions to the surrounding world.

There is a general consensus among researchers and practitioners working with ASD children about the importance of educational environment: adaptation to the consistently changing environment leads to the improvement of social interaction skills, communication, and adaptability in children with ASD (Khaustov, 2009, p. 1). Khaustov argues that learning space should be adjusted for the functional purpose of the rooms and the nature of specific activities. It is necessary that orientation, communicative and social-behavioral cues and means of communication should be provided. Daily routines should be organized with the help of visual cues; children should always have access to psychological support. Peeters explains how to make not only space but also time more “visual” for ASD children through the use of visual cues, which helps them get answers to the questions about the time of certain events, their duration, ways to perform this or that task, etc. (Peeters, 1997).

Kranowitz describes a strategy for organizing classroom activities to take account of ASD children's sensory characteristics and needs. The author writes about the need to reduce sensory overload (tactile, visual, auditory), but she also suggests using intuition to feel what kind of sensory stimulation disturbs the child (Kranowitz, 2005) and not rely entirely on the results of psycho-diagnostic tests. She also points out the need for comfortable furniture, clean sheets of paper, and a blackboard to improve visual perception of what is written. Kranowitz stresses the importance of having a schedule, prescribed order in the classroom, requirements for organizing the movement of children, and planning breaks in the middle of the lesson and between them.

The “formula” of a sensory-friendly learning environment can be derived by looking at the partial (and rather insignificant) overlap between the requirements found in different normative documents (Figure 2). For example, the Sanitary

**Figure 2***Sensory Well-Being Requirements in Legal and Regulatory Documents*

Rules and Regulations and the proposed markers have a common *technical* foundation, but the former document prioritizes the technical aspect while our methodology focuses on the impacts that technical and material objects have on children’s sensory well-being. The above-mentioned school course “Human Being” expands children’s horizons but the course program provides no flexible methods of evaluating the learning environment (e.g., sets of markers) and has to be supplemented with hands-on guidelines, possibly partially algorithmized. The ABEP provides a general outline of the characteristics of materials and objects and only hint at the possible direction(s) that analysis of a particular educational environment may take. All material and technical support requirements must be focused not only on the child but also on other participants of the educational process in order to make the process more individualized.

Our analysis shows that the legal and regulatory documents recommend the creation of a safe learning environment for children without providing any specific guidelines regarding the sensory aspect of such environment.

An important concept in this respect is sensory well-being, which is underexplored in the Russian segment of the research literature on this topic. In international literature, however, this term is mentioned more frequently but is not always clearly defined (see, for example, Gentil-Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Haigh & Mytton, 2016; Nanda et al., 2019). In this paper, **sensory well-being** is understood as an aggregate indicator of the optimal physical, emotional and psychological condition of an individual. The term “sensory well-being”, in our view, can be applied to shed light on the particulars of the six-factor model of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1996). Sensory well-being can be considered within the framework of K. Ryff’s environmental mastery. In addition, sensory well-being, like well-being in general, is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic system that tends to change over time.

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## Markers of Sensory Well-Being: Overview

Unlike the more stable “properties”, “qualities”, or “characteristics” of environment, “markers” are understood here as dynamic elements of the environment. A marker is defined as a sign, an indicator of something (Neliubin, 2003). In medicine and psychology, marker is a substance or measurable parameter used to diagnose a particular disorder or condition. A marker is also defined not as a quality but as a *signal which identifies (that is, marks) a function or a quality* (Marker, n.d.). Thus, markers can be also viewed from the semiotic perspective, for instance, a marker is defined as a “sign that serves as a symptom of something” (Zhmurov, 2012).

Since this paper focuses on the relationship between an ASD individual and their environment, we consider it productive to use the term “markers of sensory well-being” to promote a more holistic approach to this problem, based on the understanding that the human body and psyche are not only interconnected but also dynamic (Freud, 1990). The latter is determined by the connection between the components of the human body and mind with the external environment. The possibility of such an interpretation is indirectly supported by the concept “atmospherics” of the environment, introduced in the early 1970s by F. Kotler. This term was initially used in marketing texts to denote one of the factors shaping consumer behavior (Turley & Milliman, 2000). The results of consumer behavior research were considered in later studies on the sensory parameters of design that contribute to people’s well-being and productivity (Keeling et al., 2012, p. 8).

Among other things, a more comprehensive view of an autism-friendly learning environment and its characteristics is necessary because of the very nature of autistic spectrum disorders, which have unique manifestations in each particular case. To date, there is no methodological framework that would encompass the multitude of interconnected individual reactions to the environment. What we can do, however, is to stop looking at the environment as a static and abstract construct. In this light, a marker of sensory well-being corresponds to those elements of the environment that contribute to its positive influence on the individual and can be used by experts (but also educators and parents) to evaluate the environment. The flexibility of the proposed methodology stems from the fact that the set of markers can be adjusted for the individual needs of each subject. We believe that in order to evaluate all combinations of all the elements, the use of specialized software and applications is required, which constitutes an avenue for further research.

When designing a sensory safe environment, it is important to take into account universal characteristics such as proportion, scale, and symmetry (Alexander, 1979; Mehaffi, 2022). The role of these characteristics has been discussed in our previous research (see, for example, Bystrova et al., 2019; Bystrova & Tokarskaya, 2022). Therefore, we are going to provide only a brief overview of these parameters. It should be noted that these characteristics can be found not only in artificially created environments but also in any living objects and structures, which is why they have a positive effect on people’s mental well-being. These parameters include not only technical and stylistic patterns but may also include features determined by local traditions and culture, landscape, the availability of certain materials, and so on.

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The living world and the “living” architectural environment have a complex multilevel structure, where the proportions of objects are arranged in certain numerical sequences (Fibonacci sequence, the “golden ratio”) and follow the laws of tectonics. Elements are variable and symmetries lack absolute precision. Perceiving these elements and the relationships between them, the human brain works actively, while cluttered or monotonous environments, on the contrary, drain our cognitive resources. The human sensory system has evolved by tuning itself to connect with other life forms, which means that natural geometry optimizes the state of the body and emotions.

Consequently, the system of markers of sensory well-being includes both general and more specific parameters, that is, those related to the characteristics of a specific person or group of people. This means it is important to personalize and individualize the environment. In other words, each classroom should have its own individual design. Specialists working on the construction of a sensory friendly learning environment should be ready to adjust it to the individual needs of its occupants while keeping the minimum of the basic characteristics required for this type of environment. In this case, it may be concluded that formal requirements and actual markers of a sensory-friendly environment are interconnected and may be used together to create an environment conducive to learning, socialization, communication, etc. As stated above, however, the formal guidelines and requirements do not specify measures of ensuring the consistency of a learning environment, do not set the priorities in the organization of a learning environment, and, finally, they do not take into account the individual characteristics of the environment itself or its components.

In order to *identify the markers of sensory well-being for ASD children*, we suggest the following principles:

- Keep in mind that markers do not provide a one-size-fits-all, universal solutions. What can be good for a short-term stay can be destabilizing when a student stays in the environment for a long time.
- There are no rigid rules regarding the use of markers; a marker can be chosen or adjusted depending on specific goals, purposes and characteristics of the environment.
- A marker is a part of a system, it cannot be considered in isolation from other parameters and markers.
- A considerable role in the assessment is played not by the qualitative values of markers per se but by their ratios, proportions and relationships with each other.

Since repetitive actions, disruptions of social interaction, sensory perception, and communication are characteristic of all children and teenagers with ASD, we can say that the dominant feature of the educational environment for a child with ASD is its *stability*. This means that repeatability, stability, and consistency are its most significant characteristics.

One of the possible avenues for future research could be the development of a set of qualitative indicators to measure those parameters of the learning environment that are crucial for its sensory friendliness. To this end, coordinated work of a multidisciplinary team of specialists will be required.

There are seven main components of the sensory sphere—visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory sensations, vestibular sense of balance, and proprioception (the

body's ability to sense action, movement and location) (Heath et al., 2021). For each of them recommendations may be formulated regarding the improvement of the learning environment. Let us look at each of them in more detail.

The *visual aspect* corresponds to the presence of at least three sizes of objects in the environment—large, medium, and small. Through visual perception, humans can also distinguish biomorphic forms, color zoning, rhythmically organized elements and patterns. Since fluorescent colors can strain the eyes and be distracting, it is recommended to give preference to natural colors. It also makes sense to use colors and lines to designate specific areas with the classroom space, e.g., the individual study spot for a child with ASD (Figure 3), their space when working at a communal table, etc. Visual contact with nature, for example, in nature corners organized in classrooms is also beneficial for the emotional state of most people (Frumkin, 2003).

### Figure 3

*Use of Color in a Classroom to Designate an Individual Spot for Each Student*



Note. Source: <https://educationandbehavior.com/how-to-set-up-the-classroom-for-students-with-autism/>

The *auditory aspect* means the absence of objects which make harsh, loud, or scary noises, constantly rustling or humming objects. It is also recommended to wear noise-canceling headphones or listen to music through headphones. The overall level of noise should be reduced and it may also make sense to create a soundproof space (or a room) for privacy. Curtains on the windows can be considered positive markers as long as the children do not manifest any negative reactions to them.

The *tactile aspect* implies that there should be different surfaces and textures in the classroom, including some natural surfaces. It may also be helpful for students to

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wear comfortable clothes made of fabric that is non-irritating to the skin. Children can also use weighed sensory aids during classes (knee pads, belts, collars, blankets). Measures should be taken to exclude or reduce the possibility of unwanted tactile contact. When working with children individually, the teacher should avoid towering above students but instead sit or squat to be at the eye-level with them. It is also recommended that children with ASD should be wearing hoodies to prevent sensory overstimulation.

The *olfactory* aspect may include keeping the air fresh, free from any technogenic odors or intense smells.

*Taste sensations* mean that it is important to take into account the child's taste preferences not only in the organization of meals but also in choosing foods to be used as classroom rewards.

*A sense of balance* means the need to create an ergonomically organized, user-friendly workplace: it should be comfortable and encourage a child to keep a good posture and stay focused.

*Proprioception* means that there should be approximately 1-meter distance between classroom occupants. Another positive marker is having vertically oriented images, furniture items, etc. in a classroom.

Educational establishments may also use objects containing water (for example, small pools), access to which will be regulated. Sensory rooms with special equipment and sensory zones in the classroom, such as dry pools, trampolines, and swings, can be used. Creating natural zones with plants which are pleasant to touch (lemon verbena, clerodendrum, soft cacti, etc.) and an opportunity to interact with animals is also beneficial. In addition, to promote inclusion in school, it is important that school counselors, teachers and other staff should provide opportunities for students to meet and get to know each other better.

It should be noted that many children with ASD struggle to filter the sensory input. They can suffer from a “sensory overload”, which makes some types of sensory information unbearable. Sensory overload has both emotional and physical consequences. It can cause anxiety, fear, panic, and the feeling of helplessness, which often lead to disengagement or hysteria. Physically, there may be sensations ranging from a child feeling mildly ill to experiencing unbearable pain. There may be digestive problems, excessive sleepiness, insomnia, and fever.

Signs of sensory overload include nervousness, rapid fatigue, crying, shouting, quick mood swings, trying to “shut off” the overloaded channel (avoidance, turning away, covering ears with hands, etc.), sudden “switching off”, falling asleep. In such cases, it may be necessary to use the so-called “sensory diet”. This term, proposed by Patricia Wilbarger, means a meticulously structured individual plan of activities and procedures which ensure the introduction of sensory stimuli which are necessary for a particular child in order to stay organized during the day taking into account his unique set of needs (Wilbarger & Wilbarger, 2002). On the whole, it is important to modify the environment in such a way so as to eliminate or weaken the triggers (traumatizing stimuli) for people who are in it.

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## Discussion

### ***Analysis of the Learning Environment at a Russian School and Its Sensory Characteristics***

For our analysis, we chose the learning environment in one of the Russian schools catering for children with ASD and mental retardation. This school is attended by Olga V., whose sensory characteristics are described below. The class may include children aged 12–14. Such difference in age in the same class is due to the fact that parents often delay their children's starting age for school because they believe that extra preparation is necessary.

Looking at the classroom in Figure 4 and its markers, it is impossible to identify the age and condition of those school children who study in it. Not only is the environment unlikely to contribute to their learning progress, but it also probably interferes with their mental activity, especially if we assume that the class includes not only neurotypical children but also children with special needs.

#### **Figure 4**

*Fragments of the Classroom for Children With ASD*



*Note.* Source: authors.

Let us take a closer look at those aspects of this learning environment that need correction.

*Visual impressions* in this learning environment would in all likelihood be fractional and chaotic as the environment looks overloaded with disparate elements,

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some of which are completely unnecessary. In addition, there is no intermediary level between the large and small elements (Tokarev, 2020), which can derail students from concentrating on the tasks at hand. The majority of the objects have matte surfaces, which is good. However, the color combinations are random and far too numerous (e.g., pink walls–orange chairs). Perhaps, the teacher tried subconsciously to compensate for the monotony of the beige interior, which consists predominantly of square and rectangular elements, but did not realize that the excess of color can be overwhelming for her students. No colour cues are used to designate specific zones in the classroom, which makes orientation difficult.

As far as *lighting* is concerned, there is an overlap of natural and artificial light.

As for the *auditory* aspect, the objects in the classroom muffle noises and reduce the volume of the speaker's voice, which should have a positive emotional impact on the learners. However, the noises and rustles of the plastic blinds can be tiring for children.

The *tactile* aspect of the classroom environment also requires some adjustments: there is a lack of natural materials and excess of synthetic materials and surfaces. Unlike synthetic materials such as plastic, natural materials with diverse textures encourage children to observe more closely and stimulate creativity; they are ideal for sensory play. Moreover, a large number of plastic and metal objects create an atmosphere which can be called technogenic and may have undesirable effects on children's *olfactory* systems. On the other hand, the class is regularly aired and there are plants, which partially compensate for the abundance of artificial materials.

No comments can be made regarding the *taste sensations* associated with this classroom.

Children's *sense of balance* may be disturbed by the presence of a big exercise ball on top of the bookshelf (see Figure 4). Moreover, the space has no stable horizontal or vertical lines. The constantly moving vanes of the window blinds may cause a feeling of dizziness in a child.

*Proprioception* can be hindered by many protruding corners (e.g., a cabinet standing next to the blackboard, desks pulled together, etc.). When the teacher and children move around the classroom, for example, during a recess, their routes may overlap, which is not conducive to tactile comfort (Heath et al., 2021, p. 42).

An overview of the key features of the classroom environment shows that the current standards regulating the design of classrooms do not take into account the constantly changing needs of ASD children. In contrast to real-life situations, these standards are underpinned by the idea that the features of the environment and the reactions of its occupants should remain virtually unchanged.

Thus, in order to adapt the classroom environment to the needs of ASD learners, the teacher might be inclined to bring in some new elements and change the configuration of the classroom space but if they lack the necessary expertise to construct a sensory-friendly environment, their efforts might bring some dubious results, e.g., overwhelming or cluttered environment (Koolhaas, 1995).

Therefore, it is necessary to create the standards that would make the teacher (or another professional) entitled to change the environment and create markers of sensory well-being for specific category of students or for individual students.

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### ***The Case of an ASD Student in a Learning Environment***

In order to build a comprehensive understanding of the sensory impacts of the learning environment, we need to keep in mind the integral nature of human perception where all the aspects are inextricably connected with each other. It should, therefore, be emphasized at these point that the proposed division of the environment's properties into seven modalities is tentative and is made for the purposes of this analysis.

In the last decades, there have been some dramatic changes in our understanding of the processes of sensory perception and processing caused by a variety of factors, such as the accelerated pace of life, urbanization, standardization, the spread of mass culture, and the corresponding pragmatic shift in aesthetics.

It should be noted that there are different methodologies to study people's sensory characteristics such as the Sensory Profile (Short Sensory Profile, W. Dunn), Sensory Processing Measure (SPM-2), Sensorimotor History Questionnaire for Parents of Young Children (Kermack), SIPT (Sensory Integration Praxis Test), and some others (see, for example, Bundy & Lane, 2020; Kranowitz, 2005).

This study includes an expert assessment of the sensory profile of a 14-year-old ASD student Olga V. The assessment covered seven modalities and was conducted through the application of the Short Sensory Profile questionnaire developed by W. Dunn. Our goal was to examine the influence of the classroom environment on the student's sensory well-being. We also interviewed the student's parents and educators who worked with her.

**Olga V.** Date of birth: 01.12.2009.

*Visual system:* the child turns lights on and off, likes commercials and brightly colored cartoons with lots of action.

*Auditory system:* the child likes toys that make certain sounds.

*Tactile system:* the child constantly fidgets with something (sticky materials, sand, soft toys, a high pile carpet, brushes); she likes the sensation of being rubbed with hands.

*Olfactory system:* the child sniffs everything she comes across.

*Taste system:* the child adores food with a pronounced taste.

*Vestibular system:* the child is constantly in motion, seeking constant "excitement", she rides on swings, merry-go-rounds, jumps on the trampoline for a very long time.

*Proprioceptive system:* the child stomps frequently, likes to be hugged tightly, massaged, squeezed forcefully; likes to be in confined spaces.

It should be noted that the girl demonstrates hypersensitivity, she is always in "search of sensations" and needs constant stimulation.

### ***Marker-Based Assessment of the Learning Environment***

By combining the results of our classroom analysis with the girl's data, we developed a personalized set of markers that could be applied to assess how well this environment is suited for this child's individual needs, her learning and leisure activities.

In order to make the environment more positive for her, the following adjustments should be made. First, more muted, calming colors should be used, especially for desks and chairs. It is necessary to get rid of the visual clutter, such as the excessive objects on the teacher's desk or the unnecessary visual materials on the blackboard wall. Closed

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blinds (preferably ordinary curtains) are needed for the lesson. The materials used for the lesson can be sufficiently bright to act as stimuli, but they should not contrast with other elements. Natural light or homogeneous warm artificial light should be used, the two types of light should not be mixed because it causes additional sensory stress.

When relaxing, Olga V. is more mobile, she likes moving around the classroom. Therefore, she should be provided with more diverse visual experiences, e.g., at the far wall of the classroom there may be placed toys or books in brighter colors, of different textures and sizes. Classroom zones can be designated with different shades of color (less saturated—more saturated).

The *tactile properties* of surfaces and objects can echo their visual characteristics. What should be avoided is the use of plants with prickly sharp leaves and the excess of artificial materials with uniform smooth surfaces.

As for the *auditory* aspect of the environment, we would recommend to eliminate the monotonous rustling sound of blinds.

*Proprioceptive and vestibular system.* The arbitrary positioning of the teacher's desk and other pieces of furniture means that the classroom lacks a clearly defined structure, which may be disorienting for the ASD child's proprioceptive and vestibular system.

Thus, it can be concluded that the girl's sensory needs are not fully met by the learning environment and that some serious adjustments are needed to make this environment for autism-friendly.

## Results

There is now a growing awareness of the need for a more personalized, flexible learning environment to foster each individual child's interests and strengths. Such environments can be approached from a variety of perspectives—medical, architectural, engineering, pedagogical, ergonomic and so on. As today's schools are becoming more inclusive and there is a diversity of forms of learning to choose from, learning environments are becoming more complex. The situation is even more challenging if we are dealing with the needs of a child with autism spectrum disorder, for whom certain sounds, textures, smells and types of light can be overwhelming.

Digitalization makes the problem even harder. Augmented reality tools or constant switching between online and offline modes of learning make schools and parents practically incapable of considering all the characteristics of objects and environments used in the process of education. To address this problem, we need not only to create new objects but also, more importantly, to rethink, reconfigure and adjust the characteristics of the already existing ones. The principles of systemic design, which were developed over half a century ago and are still relevant today, can help make learning environments more sensory-friendly.

In our analysis of the theory and practice of creating sensory-friendly environments, we have shown that the necessary balance of all elements can be achieved only if there is a comprehensive, rational and dynamic vision of such an environment. Creation of a more individualized learning environment requires the adaptation of the current Sanitary Rules and Regulations to encompass learners' sensory needs.

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Due to the absence of a comprehensive study on this topic, we used the data provided by the *Vserossiiskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut tekhnicheskoi estetiki* (All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Industrial Design—VNIITE)—the chief Russian design research institute—and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). We also used the evidence provided by specialists involved in designing sensory-safe environments in museums (Hoskin et al., 2020; Magkafa, 2022; Steinberg et al., 2022); by the Russian design company Art.Lebedev Studio. Their findings were adapted to the reality of modern Russian schools, which allowed us to formulate a set of recommendations for making learning environments more sensory friendly.

The concept of sensory well-being and its markers may provide some valuable insights into what constitutes sensory friendly learning environment and ways to adjust a learning environment to the specific needs of students and groups of students.

## Conclusion

This article raises the question of how a learning environment contributing to ASD children's sensory well-being (that is, a sensory safe environment) can be organized. ASD learners have specific sensory needs, which often hinder not only effective learning but also their social adaptation in general. The effectiveness of education for this category of children will be higher in a sensory safe environment. Such environment can be seen as part of an autism-friendly environment (Autizm. Druzheliubnaia sreda, 2016) and will help improve their motivation to learn.

The proposed marker method can be used for an individualized assessment of the sensory characteristics of a learning environment, its autism-friendliness, and the possibility of adjusting a learning environment to ASD students' sensory needs.

The sensory characteristics of a learning environment should not be seen as a given but rather as something that is continuously changing and can be altered if necessary. It is also important that people responsible for constructing and maintaining the learning environment should have enough expertise to adjust it to the individual needs of students and to the goals of the learning process. This, in its turn, creates the need to raise the awareness of this problem among the educators and other specialists, but, unfortunately, so far, no such efforts have been undertaken.

A promising avenue for further research could be to develop a model that could be used by architects, designers and educators to create a sensory safe educational space based on the proposed set of markers. The proposed approach can be relevant not only for learning environments for children with ASD but also for normatively developing children as well as for constructing sensory safe environments for more general purposes.

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ARTICLE

## “Discovery of Hinduism” in Religious Thought of the Bengal Renaissance

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to represent “Discovery of Hinduism” as a specific phenomenon of religious thought in the Bengal Renaissance of modern India. The phenomenon is a part of “Discovery of India” (Jawaharlal Nehru’s term) by Indian intellectuals, who thought on their country, society, civilization, history, and its future. The term “Hinduism” borrowed from the British missionaries and orientalists became convenient for the Bengal Renaissance intellectuals to think and comprehend their own native religious tradition. Based on the works by the Bengal Renaissance thinkers, the paper presents their role in creating the notion “Hinduism” as the term for all group of Indian religions, as well as in interpretation of it as one whole religion. The discovery of Hinduism began from the works by Rammohun Roy, who presented its image—tracing its origins back to monotheistic ideal of the Vedas. The discovery of Hinduism process can be divided into two phases: (a) invention of “monotheistic” image by the Brahma Samaj, 1815–1857; (b) the perception and understanding of Hinduism at the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century as “unity in diversity” and constructing of its concept by Neo-Hindu thinkers (Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, etc.). They created an image of Hinduism as a system of universal meanings and values and the core of social life and culture as well as the foundation cultural and political identity. The discovery of Hinduism by all Bengal intellectuals had many important consequences, one of which is positive and humanistic concept of Hinduism not only for their co-religionists and compatriots, but also for the outer world, primarily for the West. Discovery of Hinduism is an integral part of the history of thought, the kind of attempt “to gather India” in religious, social, and cultural spheres for public consciousness and mind.

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**Introduction: “Discovery of Hinduism” as a Phenomenon**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, religious life in India encountered three challenges: firstly, Christian missionaries' activity and their criticism of Indian indigenous religious beliefs and practices; secondly, the fact that these beliefs and practices were designated by the term “Hinduism”; and, thirdly, attempts to study Indian religions by European theologians and orientalists. The first challenge was intended to question heathens' beliefs and to convert them into true faith. The second was the challenge in religious consciousness and affiliation sphere, as in Indian Subcontinent there existed a multitude of heterogeneous religious traditions, beliefs, and cults with no integral doctrines and common practices, and, consequently, there was no general religious identity. The third challenge was that the scientific analysis of Indian religions' origins was understood as “Vedic”, which did not correspond with contemporary religious practices of Indian natives.

In different regions of India among local elite strata two responses appeared in that period: orthodox Brahmanic and creative. Owing to British colonial rule the influence of Brahmins in society was restored after a serious decline in pre-colonial period, and the Brahmin elite proposed their own interpretation of Hindu society, law, and religion to British rulers (Bayly, 1988, pp. 156–158). The Brahmins' response was orthodox in the sense of advancement of Brahmanism as exemplary religion and cultural system united by Brahmins in the whole. The Brahmanic interpretation of Indian religious traditions was accepted by British government as true and actual, and was used for social, administrative, and, later, political purposes. Essentially, such interpretation equated Hinduism and Brahmanism.

New stratum of educated intellectuals who were included into Indian-Western dialogue of cultures began to give their creative response to the West-generated religious challenge in slowly modernizing societies of three regions—Bengal, Maharashtra, and Tamilnadu. In the sphere of religious thought the intellectuals started answering the three aforesaid challenges in different forms. The earliest and very significant were the works by religious thinkers of the Bengal Renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who literally “discovered” Hinduism for their own co-religionists and created many-sided image of the native religious tradition.

The Bengal Renaissance was the epoch of national-cultural awakening in the most developed province of India—the region, which had become a meeting-space for Indian and Western dialogue of cultures (for more details see Dasgupta, 2007, 2011; Justyński, 1985). Began by Bengal intellectuals and reformers, the renaissance process embraced religious, social, political, and cultural spheres and was the attempt to understand India in juxtaposition with the West and to propose the ways of society's integration in

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modern world as well as cultural development. Subrata Dasgupta (2007) offers a cogent interpretation of the Bengal Renaissance as “a genuine *cognitive revolution*” by “small but remarkable community of individuals” (p. 2)—in creation of new cognitive identity, shaping the Indian mind in its own time and beyond (pp. 235–245). The significant part of that cognition—revolutionary in its own way—was the comprehension of native Indian religious tradition. For a more accurate description of the process and results of the one, a term “Discovery of Hinduism” can be proposed—by analogy with Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous term “Discovery of India”.

Discovery of Hinduism is conventional designation for the way how Bengal religious thinkers respond to spiritual and intellectual challenge in the face of their tradition. In a broad sense, for intellectuals the religious life as well as religious thought and studies were parts of aspect in their own self-understanding in dialogue with the West, its society and culture, in determination of their own cultural Self in interaction with the Other. The religious aspect of self-understanding was so important that the whole Bengal Renaissance epoch began from religious thought with social, cultural, and political spheres being included in the thought and practice a little bit later.

Generally, the discovery of Hinduism began from a philosopher, reformer, and “father of modern India” Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), who responded to all three challenges. First of all, he appropriated and assimilated from Europeans the comfortable and general term “Hinduism”. According to the research of Russian indologists Sergey V. Pakhomov and Matvey M. Fialko (2013), the term “Hinduism” was first used in a personal letter by Charles Grant, a Scotland missionary of Evangelical Church in 1787. Another missionary C. Buchanan used the term in his book *Christian Researches in Asia, With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures Into the Oriental Language* (1811). In Serampore Baptist Mission the term was actively used by William Ward. It is interesting that W. Ward was happened to be in the group of missionaries interacted from 1815 with Rammohun Roy and, possibly, he appropriated the term “Hinduism” from them. He applied the term actively in his works, calling his own religion “Hinduism” (Roy, 1982, Vol. I, pp. 73, 90, 179; Vol. IV, pp. 901–904), “Hindu religion” (Vol. I, pp. 3, 4, 90, 179; Vol. IV, pp. 905–908), and “Hindu faith” (Vol. I, p. 74), and also introduced and used derivative terms, such as “Hindu theism”, “Hindu worship”, “Hindu mythology” (Vol. I, p. 66, 68), “Hindu theology, law, literature” (Vol. I, pp. 3, 36, 45, 89), “Hindu idolatry” (Vol. I, pp. 5, 66), “the Hindu sacred texts” (Vol. I, pp. 35, 90), and “Hindu community” (Vol. I, p. 21). Before Rammohun’s time the native religions in India had no terms for marking their faiths and beliefs as well as for naming their identity.

From Rammohun Roy and on, the term began to be applied to whole complex of Indian religions and to be filled by meanings and enriched in its content. Besides, it was Rammohun who initiated a dialogue and the controversy with Christian Baptist missionaries and developed the vindication of his religious tradition and having proposed the first interpretation of Hinduism—not only for missionaries, but for his co-religionists and British orientalist (as for H. H. Wilson, consulted with him on religious tradition) (Robertson, 1995, pp. 59–60). Also, Rammohun started the tradition of thinking on native religion and its interpretation for Indians, Westerners, and all Humankind.

Thus, discovery of Hinduism in Bengal religious thought could be divided into two phases: the first one embraces the creation of “monotheistic” image of Hinduism by Rammohun Roy and the Brahmo Samaj followers; during the second phase a many-sided and all-embracing image of Hinduism is developed by Neo-Hindu thinkers such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (Chatterjee), Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose.

### Rammohun Roy and Monotheistic Image of Hinduism

The first phase began from religious thought and reformatory activity of Rammohun Roy. A genesis of his conception of Hinduism was determined by his idea of true religion as spiritual and ethical monotheism, presented firstly in his tract *A Gift for Monotheists* (1804), as well as by a number of religious influences—Islam, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and Christianity (Zaidi, 1999). A dialogue of religions in his personal consciousness along with an exegesis of Vedic texts allowed him to invent an “ideal” Hinduism, presented as “forgotten” and even rejected by his co-religionists—in comparison with popular religions and cults of many deities in India. R. Roy (1982) considered the latter declined and amoral form of faith burdened by ritual and social prescriptions and superstitions. He believed that such rites as *sati* (burning widows alive at funeral pyre of husbands), infanticide, and the like, are serious symptoms of Hindu community illness: the ones are social evils “under the cloak of religion” (Vol. II., p. 372).

Rammohun Roy’s approach to Hinduism based on strict distinction of a spirit (faith as inner life of a person) and outer forms and symbolism of practice in any religion. Consequently, he turned to sacred texts of Brahmanic traditions—the Vedas, especially the Upanishads, to discover monotheism as primordial and essential faith in Hinduism. Starting from primordial monotheism position, he believes that the monotheism is historically native in his religion: “the doctrines of the unity of God are real Hinduism, as that religion was practiced by our ancestors, and as it is well-known even at the present age to many learned Brahmins” (Roy, 1982, Vol. I, p. 90). Turning to the Vedas authority, Rammohun consciously contrasts “the spiritual part of the Vedas” (monotheistic faith and way to salvation) and “allegorical representations of the attributes of the Supreme Being” (Vol. I, pp. 36, 131)—“for the sake of those whose limited understandings rendered them incapable of comprehending and adoring the invisible Supreme Being” (Vol. I, p. 36). Thus, Hinduism had been discovered by Rammohun as religion of One God inculcated by the Vedas. According to his interpretation, the Upanishads describe Brahman as Supreme Ruler and Creator, but the genesis of monotheism can be traced to *sāṃhitās*, hymns of “the most ancient and sacred oracles of his faith, the inspired Vedas, which have been revered from generation to generation, for time immemorial” (Vol. I, p. 179). The spirit of the sacred texts dominated peripheral and utilitarian ideas on worship divine attributes and rituals in the Upanishads.

In Rammohun’s interpretation, Vedanta is the theology of Hinduism; it declares the unity of God, spiritual worship without number of ceremonies. Sages Manu, Yajnavalkya, and others, as well as philosophers (especially Shankara) affirm, substantiate, and develop the spiritual doctrines of Hinduism (Roy, 1982, Vol. I, pp. 96, 99, 110–117).

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Moreover, Vedanta is in the core of Rammohun's image of Hinduism: it grounds unity and universalism of the Brahman (Supreme Being) (Vol 1. pp. 182–183), highest moral principles, and love for human in a society. Especially he proved ethical spirit of Hinduism, which deals with all difficulties of peoples' moral life: "the Vedanta does not confine the reward or punishment of good or evil works to the state after death, much less to a particular day of judgment; but it reveals positively, that a man suffers or enjoys, according to his evil or good deeds, frequently even in this world" (p. 185). Deduced from the Vedas and the Vedanta, the Hinduism without rituals and caste norms is some "ideal type" (Max Weber) by Rammohun; but it is simultaneously a pattern for a juxtaposition of modern condition of his own religion. He had historically described its evolution as a primordial monotheism's degradation to polytheism.

According to Rammohun, ancient Vedic doctrines had disappeared under a number of religious rites, ceremonies, customs connected with image-worship to a multitude of deities ("idolatry", in Rammohun's term). The condition generated a multiplicity of superstitions, prejudices, inhuman practices, and moral self-destruction of the majority of Hindu people. The polytheistic decline of Hinduism Rammohun interprets as a result of societal need to prevent "persons of feeble intellect unable to comprehend God as not subject to the senses and without form, should either pass their life without any religious duties whatsoever or should engage in evil work" (p. 161). The representation of God in human forms as well as other living creatures firstly appeared in Puranas and Tantras; then the polytheism developed to threatening scale with direct help of Brahmins who created the modern religious system for their own comfort and power in community. Rammohun states that in India of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Hindus "are, with a few exceptions, immersed into gross idolatry, and in belief of the most extravagant description respecting futurity, antiquity, and the miracles of their deities and saints, as handed down to them and recorded in their ancient book" (Vol. III, p. 559). But Rammohun rejected the Christian missionaries' allegations of polytheism against Hindus, because each Hindu "confesses the unity of the Godhead" and "only advance a plausible excuse for their polytheism" (Vol. III, pp. 582–583).

Thus, Rammohun laid a certain foundation for perception of Hinduism as whole system based on three components: faith in God (Brahman of the Upanishads and the Vedanta), the Vedas' authority, and philosophical/theological knowledge in the Vedanta. He added to ones the ethics to substantiate Hinduism's resemblance with other world religions—Islam and Christianity. In many facets of the native religion Rammohun saw a result of degradation of tradition, but "ideal Hinduism" of the reformer is a challenge for understanding of bright and multicolour real Hinduism. Rammohun refused to accept the condition of Hinduism as normal, that is why he connected Hinduism's future perspectives with the recovery of true spiritual faith and rejection of polytheism and faith in rituals—"for comfort and happiness of Hindus" (Roy, 1982, Vol. I., p. 116). For this goal he founded the religious society "the Brahmo Samaj" ("The Society of [worship to] Brahman") in 1828, with intention to "the worship and adoration of the Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe but not under or by any other name designation or title peculiarly used for and applied to

any particular Being or Beings” (Roy, 1982, Vol. I, p. 216). Rammohun’s interpretation of Hinduism was laid down in creed of brahmoists.

After Rammohun Roy’s death reflections on “discovered” Hinduism were continued by the young leader of the Brahma Samaj Devendranath Tagore (1817–1905) along with the group of Calcutta’s intellectuals. He came to the Brahmoism after his religious experience and spiritual crisis in searching for knowledge of true god and rejection of ritualism and idolatry in Hinduism. In his reflections on his own religion, Devendranath paid a special attention to evolution of Hinduism from Vedic period to present condition. His personal religious experience had begun from discovery of “the knowledge of Brahma and a system of His worship in the Upanishads” (Tagore, 1909, p. 40), and he was firmly convinced, that it is true essence of Hinduism. Therefore, Devendranath wished to preach the Brahma religion as based on Vedanta for “all India would have one religion, all dissensions would come to an end, all would be united in a common brotherhood, her former valour and power would be revived” (p. 40). He saw in reality of religious life that the Vedas are “the sealed book to us”, in Bengal its texts are “virtually extinct”, but *Smriti-shastras* “studied in every *to!*” and Pundits totally ignore the Vedas and well-versed in these shastras. Brahmins “did not even know the meaning of their daily prayers” (pp. 40–41). The next years Devendranath studied and juxtaposed the tradition and multiplicity of real religious practices in India. On the one hand, he scrupulously read the sacred texts and religious doctrines, on the other hand, the thinker observed different practices of popular Hinduism, taking journeys to Northern and Eastern India.

Firstly, Devendranath did not follow Rammohun’s pra-monotheistic representation of the Vedas and discovered in *sāṃhitās* polytheistic content of primordial religion, though he remarked that “it was not the actual moon, sun, wind, and fire alone that the sages of old worshipped. It was that one Great God whom they worshipped under the forms of Agni, Vayu, and many others” (Tagore, 1909, p. 76). He stressed the “idolatry” in Vedic age and the great role of rituals: “Agni, Vayu, Indra, and Surya are worshipped as gods in the Vedas. Kali, Durga, Rama, Krishna, are all modern divinities of the Tantras and Puranas. Agni, Vayu, Indra, and Surya, these are the ancient Vedic gods, and the pomp and circumstance of sacrifice concern them alone” (p. 60). Later only sages of ancient India gave up sacrificial ceremonies of worshiping material gods and, being desirous for salvation and Brahman, they became forest sannyasis. And the Upanishads appeared where the knowledge of Brahman was proclaimed as the highest in opposite to inferior branches of knowledge (*sāṃhitās*). Then Puranic and Tantric, Vaishnava and Shaiva gods and texts appeared and the knowledge of one God-Brahman was forgotten, the common Hindu people “believe that the worship of Kali and Durga is inculcated in the Vedas” (p. 68). Moreover, Devendranath discovered the evolution of Hinduism in its history and its need in revival—in the Brahma Samaj’s form.

Secondly, observing in Varanasi the quarrels of Brahmins on the Vedas reciting, and in the matter of sacrifice (*yājna*), bloody sacrifices, and religious *melas* (festivals), parasitic lifestyle of temple’s *pandas*, Devendranath perceives the condition of Hindus’ spiritual life as decline and stagnation (Tagore, 1909, pp. 54–57).

Generally, based on the discovery of traditional texts, in which the spiritual revelation of monotheism is presented (Brahman as Absolute, Creator of the universe and human beings), the Brahmo Samaj's image of Hinduism describes it as originated from the Vedas and historically existed religion with its own ups and downs. The Vedic tradition was considered and presented as uniting foundation for all Hindus, but its "ideal image" was opposed to real present condition of Hinduism with its multitude of beliefs, *sampradayas* (faith-teaching traditions), and cults.

### Neo-Hindu Discovery of Native Religion

The second phase in discovery of Hinduism by Bengal intellectuals of 19<sup>th</sup> century in the period of so-called cultural nationalism is characterized by the holistic perception and understanding of all-embracing native religious "unity in diversity". Traditional Bengal saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa (born Gadadhar Chatterjee, 1836–1886) can be called the forerunner of the holistic interpretation of Hinduism.

#### **Ramakrishna's Model Understanding of Hinduism**

Ramakrishna was a poor Brahmin of goddess Kali temple in Dakshineshvar near Calcutta with deep and many-sided religious experience of God-vision in *samādhi* (mystic ecstasy). He had a number of contemplation of goddess Kali, gods Krishna, Shiva, and so on as well as number of religious practices (*sādhanas*) of Tantra, *bhakti*, Advaita-vedanta, etc. Moreover, he experienced the meanings and spirit of other religions—Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. The peak of his religious searching became the ability to see God in all that exists in the world. The unique religious experience by Ramakrishna was combined with heterodox thinking and intuition along with rejection of caste differentiation. From 1870, his preaching attracted the broad circle of listeners and admirers; among them, there were prominent intellectuals of Calcutta. From 1879, a group of talented disciples was formed around Ramakrishna; afterwards Narendranath Dutta became the head of one in future known as Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902).

Ramakrishna's influence on the perception and understanding of Hinduism could be estimated as genuine, because he rediscovered Hinduism for his intellectual audience and explained its opposite parts and ways as components of whole native religion. The image of Hinduism appears from teachings and parables by Ramakrishna as all-embracing and harmonic religion, which unites all paths of God and all worship forms. He said: "It's enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else is false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form" (Bhuteshananda, 2006–2007, Vol. I, p. 55). The saint taught his disciples to follow their own native religion which is one of different ways to the same object—God: "All doctrines are all so many paths, but a path is by no means God Himself" (Vol. II, p. 308). Hence, all beliefs and faith, worships and cults in Hinduism are united by general aspiration to God.

Ramakrishna's *Samadhi* of Advaita-vedanta allowed him to assert that One God is worshipped in Hinduism in Impersonal (Brahman) and Personal (Íśwara) image. Eternal and Infinite God was worshipped by ancient sages—"the rishis of olden times renounced

everything and then contemplated Satchidānanda, the Indivisible Brahman” (Vol. I, p. 254). But it is the highest phase of God-contemplation; according to Ramakrishna, for a vast majority of believers, God appears in different forms and ways, “the universe is his glory” (Vol. I, p. 464; Vol. II, p. 27). That is why, “God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He, who is the Lord of the Universe, has arranged all these forms to suit different stages of knowledge” (Vol. I, p. 65). Therefore, people move their spiritual path from a simple phase of knowledge of God to higher ones, from image-worship to Personal Lord worship and then can become *brahmojnāni*—to know the identity of their own souls’ (*jīva*) identity with Brahman (“I am He”, “I am the Self”). In his teaching, Ramakrishna reconciled all opposites and variants of ceremonies, as well as traditional spiritual practices and ways. Ramakrishna called to choose ways of *bhakti* (love and devotion), *jnāna* (intellectual study) or *karma* (work without care of result) suitable for a personal character of each man. *Bhakti* is the best way for himself as well as for general majority of believers who worship divine avatars and gods—Krishna, Rama, Kali, Shiva, etc. “The bliss of worship and communion with God is the true wine, the wine of ecstatic love. The goal of human life is to love God. Bhakti is the one essential thing. To know God through *jnāna* and reasoning is extremely difficult”, he said (Vol. II, p. 21). Bhakti is the most natural way of faith, with rich and bright emotions; *jnāna* is difficult, but the “middle path” is karma—follow dharma (religious duty) in worldly life for God’s glory. The latest path is available even for agnostics and atheists. Karma for Ramakrishna first of all is the social service and making good to fellows.

As for the sacred scriptures, Ramakrishna was not an orthodox scholar of Brahmanic knowledge, and was even skeptic to its authority, preferring the spirit of religion. “Do you know my attitude? Books, scriptures, and things like that only point out the way to reach God. After finding the way, what more need is there of books and scriptures? Then comes the time for the action”, he said to his disciples (Bhuteshananda, 2006–2007, Vol. I, p. 392). He criticized both orthodox Brahmins, whose mind fixed on “woman and gold”, “on creature comforts and money” (p. 394), and modern *pandits* who tried to revive ancient rituals and scripture teachings. Lex Hixon (2011) presents his position on revivalism: “O Pandit, if you really insist on re-creating the sacred ceremonies of past ages—as if complexity or ancientness were somehow more pleasing to God—than at least do not require this exercise from everyone. Offer a direct, simple, powerful path for those who a sincere in their longing to reach the goal of human evolution in this very lifetime” (p. 197).

Ramakrishna outlined some model for understanding and interpretation of Hinduism by intellectuals: to embrace the diversity of its gods, cults and religious forms and to see their general high meanings, first of all mystical-spiritual one. Ramakrishna’s image of Hinduism was created owing to his universalistic approach to bringing together really differentiated practices of indigenous religions by general goal (God) and spirit of mystic relations with Divine Reality. The rightness of all various Hindu practices in meanings does not exclude their limitedness and even dangers, according to him. Moreover, Ramakrishna taught not to revive ancient/historical forms and not to create rationalist religious faith (as the Brahmo Samaj or Swami Dayananda in Northern India did), but he rather inspired to study real Hinduism.

### ***Neo-Hindu Intellectuals' Discovery***

Consideration and study of real Hinduism began in the last two decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century by so-called Neo-Hindu intellectuals; first of them were a writer and social thinker Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (Chatterjee, 1838–1894), social scientist and a writer Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894), and Ramakrishna's favourite disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902).

It is necessary to note the circumstances of their work. The first was that a wave of cultural nationalism rose, the movement against imitation of the Western culture and for taking care of Indian cultural forms and way of life. The second circumstance was that the Theosophical Society preached the superiority of the "Aryan" ("Hindu") civilization to all civilizations and the third one was Hindu Revivalism (Raychaudhuri, 1988, pp. 31–34; Sen, 1993). Revivalism was presented by orthodox pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani (1851–1928), "Hindu missionary" Krishnaprasanna Sen (1849–1902), and some others, who tried to use Western methods of substantiation for Hindu religions and traditions. Three forenamed thinkers presented their vision of Hinduism in critical polemics with orthodox revivalist and life positions; their "discovery of Hinduism" included conservative aspects of vindication and defense of native religions along with their conscious of necessity to transform actual religious practices according to the new times.

The most conservative of them was Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, who talked about Hinduism as a great and superior religion: "I shall never say that Hinduism is in a fallen state. In truth, if the Himalayan Mountains were to fall, you could not bolster them up with reeds" (as cited in Raychaudhuri, 1988, p. 35). The thinker was strong defender of Brahmanic culture and values in the core and ground of Hinduism. Bhudeb connects the origin of native religion with ancient Aryans; the latest and modern Hindus are their inheritors. Created by great rishis, the religion of Hinduism "has saved ... from the contamination of sins for thousands of years, preserved in every Hindu throughout this vast land of India some sense of national unity by actions as steps towards firm social cohesion, introduced the happy and pure family system of the Hindus, achieved in effect the knowledge of God, the ultimate end of all spiritual quest and rendered the Hindus more selfless God-fearing and convinced of a live hereafter" (p. 36).

Bhudeb's Hinduism was first and foremost Brahmanism which included both high knowledge of God and high faith and "popular practices"; it was Brahmanism that united all Indian peoples by its social institution and traditions. The thinker rationally explained all traditional norms, institutions, and practices suitable for Indians in their civilization—from child marriage and joint family to caste system (for the analysis of Bhudeb's works see Raychaudhuri, 1988, Ch. 2). Ideal "conservative" and "Brahmanic" image of Hinduism by Bhudeb emphasized the role of Brahmin's culture in integration of variety in people's religious practices and made an impression of their unity under aegis of one authority—sacred and high. Being a Brahmin, Bhudeb continued efforts of his own social stratum to represent "Brahmanic" image of Hinduism.

### ***Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: Tree of Hinduism***

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay discovered Hinduism in its entirety in his latest creative period, after long period of "secular" social activity as a civil officer, editor, publicist,

author of many novels and social-philosophical works. He began to write intensively on Hinduism in 1880s, indubitable under the influence of meeting with Ramakrishna (Hixon, 2011, pp. 70–79; Sen, 2011, pp. 211–216) along with Western influences of utilitarianism and positivism (Flora, 1993). Bankimchandra presented the concept of Hinduism as all-embracing religion of dharma, which develops in history.

Like Rammohun Roy before him, Bankimchandra reckoned Hinduism based on universal monotheism: “The root of religion, in particular of Hindu religion, is one God. God is in all things; therefore, it is our *dharma* to seek the welfare of all things” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 191).

In his *Letters on Hinduism*, Bankimchandra answers the question “What is Hinduism?” revealing a number of stereotypes and controversies hidden by words “Hinduism” and “Hindu”. These terms have foreign origin, because the religion of natives in India “had no name”, and for them the “whole life was religion”. “To the Hindu, his relations to God and his relations to man, his spiritual life and his temporal life are incapable of being ... distinguished. They form one compact and harmonious whole, to separate which into its component parts is to break the entire fabric” (Sen, 2011, p. 299)<sup>1</sup>. Along with manifold errors, the name “Hinduism” has “a good deal of truth”, as “all the various religions to which the name is appeared have at least two general features— firstly, they are all sprung from a common source, and therefore hold many doctrines in common; secondly, they are all supported by sacred scriptures in Sanskrit” (Sen, 2011, p. 301). Intending to reject or correct the erroneous interpretations of Hinduism, Bankimchandra creates his own image of it.

Hinduism for him is natural and historical religion, that developed from primitive elementary forms to its perfect form. Bankimchandra uses the tree metaphor to describe the origin of Hinduism and its development stages. They are the seed and root of the tree in early primitive society, in Vedic age, when people worshipped gods “symbolized one of the other natural elements like the sky, the sun, fire, or the river” (Sen, 2011, p. 64). Origin of Hinduism was connected with a faith of ancient Aryans, who had conquered non-Aryan races of India; the later embraced the religion of conquerors. Being the product of nature, with no founder, religion “sprang out of the necessities of primitive life and grew with the growth of culture” (p. 313). The tree of Hinduism grows from Vedic religion, where the source of eternal dharma has been formed. The writer says, “Vedic Hinduism lies at the root of Hinduism but it is not the tree. The tree is a separate entity by itself. This tree has crisscrossing branches, rich foliage, flowers, and fruits, none of which may be bound in the roots. However, so long as we lack familiarity with the roots, a proper understanding of the tree may elude us” (p. 63).

The tree metaphor aids to represent historical evolution of Hinduism; Bankimchandra speaks about five stages. The four of them belong to Vedic Hinduism; firstly, primitive man formed his first religious beliefs; secondly, a will and consciousness was ascribed to material objects; thirdly, early human communities began to worship natural elements (sun, moon, wind, storm, etc.), and then “the Vedic Hindus were quick to arrive at a true knowledge of God ... Later Vedic religion was fairly advanced, with

<sup>1</sup> Soon after, in 1896, Swami Vivekananda would repeat the same affirmations: “In India religion is the one and only occupation of life” (1998–2002, Vol. III, p. 107. See also pp. 146, 152, 177, 220).

the adoration of one Supreme God as its central principle” (Sen, 2011, pp. 71–72). It was Upanishadic Brahman. That monotheism is a result of evolution of natural religion; and later, at the fifth stage, Puranic Hinduism with religious history appeared and arrived to perfect state. Discovered by ancient Hindus, Impersonal God could not be an ideal for human, because “worship of him ... is fruitless; worship of him whom I call the Personal God is fruitful” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 165). He connected the state of perfection in Hinduism with knowledge of Absolute’s essence and pious devotion to a personal god. Heroes of Mahabharata and Ramayana (Janaka, Vasishtha, Yudhishtira, Krishna), as well as Puranic gods, became the ideals of a virtuous man or a god in human form (pp. 166–167). This perfect Hinduism for Bankimchandra is the best of world religion and national religion. Comparing Hinduism to other religions, before all Christianity and Islam, Bankimchandra concluded, that the former in many aspects was “superior to other religion” and “the best religion in the world” (p. 176). He believed Hinduism united all high values and best aspects of religion as such.

Bankimchandra understood Hinduism as “protean in its form”: there are monotheistic and polytheistic, pantheistic, dualistic, and even atheistic (Buddhism) Hinduism, as well as ritualistic and non-ritualistic, ascetic, and sensual, human one of Vaishnavas and cruel and blood-thirsty of Shaivas and Saktas, liberal and illiberal one, etc. The entire Hinduism integrates all its forms of them on some basis—“certain fundamental principles which all accept, and which ... alone is Hindu religion” (Sen, 2011, pp. 307–308). These principles are dharma (its essence Bankimchandra defines as culture), philosophical essence (*tattwajñāna* – knowledge of Supreme God and human soul), devotion to God, and moral life. Based on the fundamentals, every form of worship is accepted in Hinduism because God “can accept worship offered in every form” (p. 197). The morals of Hinduism were explained first of all in Bhagavadgita by Krishna: therefore, Bankimchandra described the essence of religion as *chittashuddhi*—moral purification of human soul through control of the senses, charity, good will, and adoration of God (pp. 176–178). Thus, Hinduism was postulated as ethical religion, comparable in this aspect with Christianity.

The image of Hinduism by Bankimchandra presents the native religion as a historically constituted religion with common base and grounds, all-embracing and all-encompassing spiritual wholeness with strong ethical and monotheistic vectors in the core and colourful variety at its periphery with peaceful co-existence and “all-happiness producing” for native peoples and even tribes (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 170).

### **Swami Vivekananda: Discovery of Vedantic Hinduism**

Similar way of interpretation was continued by Swami Vivekananda with some peculiarities; to him the essence of Hinduism was the Vedanta. But it was his conception of Hinduism that gained the broad world resonance and meaning for its perception and interpretation, because the thinker addressed to both Indians and foreign audience, including scientists. For Western public (in Europe and the USA) Vivekananda created a “presentational” image with strong vindication component of religion and culture tradition, whereas for Indians the philosopher delivered critics of real Hindu inhuman and restricting practices along with the stress on highest truths of native religion.

Like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Vivekananda calls the term “Hinduism” “fashionable” but loan word, it does not express the essence of native religion. Therefore, he offers another term “Vaidikas” or, the better “Vedantists”, because this one marks the essence of religion in the Vedas, delivered in the Upanishads (Vivekananda, 1998–2002, Vol. III, p. 120)—eternal relations between man and God. Vivekananda says, “We want to use the word ‘Vedantist’ instead of ‘Hindu’ ” (Vol. III, pp. 118–121, 173), but he himself continues to use terms “Hindu” and “Hinduism” in speeches and writings. Vivekananda also calls Hinduism “religion of a book” like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—“the oldest are the Vedas of the Hindus” (p. 118). First of all, Hinduism has general ground—the essential principles: faith in Brahman (God); the law of *Karma* which is understood as human responsibility for all causes and own fate to reach freedom and God; and the possibility of knowing the Highest through the human soul (pp. 123–126). The goal of Hinduism is to attain freedom (*mukti*), to overcome death and suffering, and attain eternal bliss. Moreover, Hinduism understands and accepts in itself different ways to God, if all and everyone acknowledges the Upanishad of Vedas (p. 120), its eternal spiritual principles. In the same manner as Bankimchandra, Vivekananda speaks about Impersonal and Personal God, and connects the first one with ethics (“it makes human strong”), and second one with love (*bhakti*) (p. 130). Impersonal God is very difficult for common believers, that is why ancient *rishis* revealed to all Indian people the way to worship as great personages as Incarnations, or incarnation of Personal God. From this follows the worship to Krishna, Rama, Sita as well as philosophers Shankara, Ramanuja, etc. (pp. 251, 257, 263–264, 267).

Consequently, all multiplicity of traditions, cults, and sects—from Brahmanic and Puranic faiths to a number of local cults (“folk Hinduism”) are united by Vivekananda in great “Vedantic” Hinduism. He said about all-pervaded influence of the Vedanta and urged Hindus to “think the Vedanta, ... live in the Vedanta, ... breath the Vedanta and ... die in the Vedanta” (p. 323),—even unconsciously and even quarreling each other. He compared Hinduism with “mighty *banyan*” (the tree metaphor!), growing from the Upanishads:

Whatever system in India does not obey the Upanishads cannot be called orthodox, and even the systems of the Jains and the Buddhists have been rejected from the soil of India only because they did not bear allegiance to the Upanishads. Thus the Vedanta, whether we know it or not, has penetrated all the sects in India, and what we call Hinduism ... has been throughout interpenetrated by the influence of the Vedanta. (p. 323)

In comparison with eternal and unchangeable principles of Vedanta, various religious practices, customs, institutions, and even the texts (Smritis, Puranas, Tantras, etc.) changed and must be changed from time to time and—if contradict with the Vedanta authority—must be rejected (Vivekananda, 1998–2002, Vol. III, pp. 120–121). Also Vivekananda repeatedly says that Hinduism is based on the eternal principle and has no person as a founder. But there are a multitude “startling, gigantic, impressive, world-moving persons”, “almost innumerable”, who again and again open eternal truth of the Vedas and appear in the world to save good, to destroy immorality and evil. These are *rishis* and modern sages, as well as so-called incarnations of God (pp. 248, 249); they

define the specificity of “living religion”. These were persons who developed Hinduism as religion of love, renunciation, rejection of egotism, “work against evil”, and serving for all creatures in the world (pp. 133–134, 142–143).

The image of Hinduism created by Vivekananda is built around some key ideas:

- The Vedanta has theoretically taken the place of Brahmanism (or “the Great tradition”) in Hinduism, and priority of its spiritual meanings allows to integrate any of possible religious ways and forms.

- Hinduism as based on the Vedanta is true religion, because “it teaches that God alone is true, that this world is false and fleeting” and “it teaches renunciation and stands up with the wisdom of ages” (p. 180). Verity of religion along with its eternity and universality allow to represent Hinduism as one of the world religions, as well as religion of love: its adepts demonstrated to all peoples that “love alone is the fittest thing to survive and not hatred, that it is gentleness that has the strength to live on and to fructify, and not mere brutality and physical force” (Vivekananda, 1998–2002, Vol. III, p. 188).

- In opposition to the traits of other religions—with theirs proselytism and missionary—Hinduism is outlined by the philosopher as tolerant and peaceful religion of peoples who never aspired to conquer other countries and political greatness, but show sympathy for different religions and “have built and are still building churches for Christians and mosques for Mohammedans” (pp. 114–115, 186–187, 274).

Vivekananda’s interpretation of Hinduism is theoretical and “ideal” one, but he also was a strong and impartial critic of real traditional Hindu religion, especially in its social aspects—caste system, customs, superstitions, and prejudices, such as untouchability, ritual pureness, gender inequality, etc. However, his interpretation integrates in general terms all diversity of modern Hinduism and presents practical and formal differences as tolerable and acceptable for the unity of Indian peoples.

At the same time, other Bengal intellectuals thought and researched different aspects of Indian civilization in connection with Hindu traditions. For example, Surendranath Banerjea, who delivered a lecture *The Study of Indian History*, substantiated that “Hindu has a most glorious past” (Banerjee, 1970, p. 235). His friend and colleague Rameshchundra Dutt wrote a lot of books on Indian ancient history, where he tried to represent historical development of Hinduism. And that was his special contributions to Bengal discovery of Hinduism and creation of its image as a system of universal meanings and values, the core of social life and culture as well as the foundation of religious and cultural identity.

## Conclusion

The results of discovery of Hinduism by Bengal intellectuals could be summed up as follows.

*The first result* is an intellectual “gathering” of native religion under the name “Hinduism” around high and deep faith in both Impersonal and Personal God and along with sacred knowledge of ancient Vedas. Different traditions were gathered together in the general spirit of aspiration to Highest reality and are thought as the unity in diversity.

*The second result* is the representation of knowledge of Hinduism by its different followers from chiefly heterodox positions (those of reformers, Neo-Hindu, Neo-Vedantic, etc.). The knowledge includes the Vedas and other scriptures as source and origin of religion, the interpretation of its historical evolution and diversity of faiths as well as the description of philosophy and religious ways and practices. Moreover, the knowledge is the systematization of Indian religions under the idea of general spiritual tradition (Vedic, Brahmanic, Vedantic, etc.).

*The third result* is creating of image of Hinduism—well-balanced, all-embracing, tolerant, accepting all faiths and beliefs in a sort of original harmony. The image greatly affected the Hindu community; for Western researchers it became one of the approaches to study the religions of India.

*The fourth result* is generated by the created image of Hinduism; in consciousness and thought certain specific “imaginary community” (Benedict Anderson) has been constructed—the religious “Hindu community”, notwithstanding real—local and regional, practical and theoretical, elitist and popular—differentiation of religion in the Subcontinent. “Imaginary Hindu community” had the potential to be affiliated and identified as “Hindu” for vast number of people in India, and also to be distinguished from another large community of Indian Muslims.

Discovery of Hinduism in Bengal thought represents the history of thought which tries “to gather” India in religious, social, and cultural spheres for public consciousness and mind. There are a lot of consequences of the discovery. First, it was a presentation—chiefly positive and vindicating—of Hinduism for compatriots and the outer world, especially for the West. Secondly, the image became an artificial base for religious and cultural identity as “Hindu” for individuals, groups, communities of India. Thirdly, the “Bengal image” of Hinduism became influential in philosophical (in Neo-Vedantism by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Surendranath Dasgupta) and religious (Aurobindo Ghose, M. K. Gandhi) thought, addressing to its high meanings. Fourthly, it is possible to trace the influence of the conception on the idea of “Hindu nation” and the later development of religious nationalism in India. Fifthly, the positive perception and impression of Hinduism as a tolerant, harmonic, and all-embracing religion is largely the merit of Bengal religious thinkers from Rammohun Roy to Swami Vivekananda, who from the inside have discovered, gathered, and explained their native religion to Indians themselves and to the rest of the world.

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ARTICLE

## Humorous Portrayals of Celebrities in the Mass Media During the 2021 Papal Visit to Slovakia

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### ABSTRACT

This contribution presents the results of research focused on an analysis of humorous visual portrayals of visit of Pope Francis to Slovakia in September 2021. The study presents a qualitative content analysis of 43 memes taken from the social media environment and eight caricatures from selected print media outlets. The aim of the analysis of the memes and caricatures was to identify the topics that framed the papal visit before shifting the focus to the question of how the memes and caricatures present Pope Francis and selected Slovak political figures within this context. The study will identify the characteristics ascribed to the Pope and to Slovak politicians in the media and the tonalities (either positive, negative, or neutral) emphasized in the studied memes and caricatures in relation to the Pope, politicians, Slovak society, and the Church.

### KEYWORDS

meme, caricatures, Pope, politicians, celebritisation

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## Introduction

The visit of Pope Francis to Slovakia in September 2021 took place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and several safety measures intended to ensure public safety were announced by both the state and ecclesiastical authorities. The most controversial of these was the requirement that anyone who wished to attend events with the Pope should have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Although this rule was later rescinded, bureaucratic barriers remained in place, including the compulsory registration for attendance at papal events, a requirement that many saw as reducing the likelihood of the type of spontaneous encounters with believers and non-believers alike for which Pope Francis is famous.

Pope Francis is widely seen as a figure who endeavours to connect people and communities regardless of their faiths or creeds, but while his visit was pastoral in character, it was intended to do more than just strengthen the faith of the Catholic congregation and urge them to remain on the ecumenic path. As a meeting between the highest representatives of two sovereign states, the papal visit inevitably included a political aspect. The visit also took place amid a series of highly publicised arrests and prosecutions of political figures and high-ranking officials from the previous Slovak administration, including the former Minister of the Interior Róbert Kaliňák. In 2021, then, Slovakia found itself in a period of intense political and social tension with considerable polarisation on the political scene; political parties were uninclined to cooperate, and the rhetoric of many politicians was defined by mutual denigration.

The invitation for the papal visit was made by the more liberally minded President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, and the meetings between the two heads of state revealed their mutual respect and high esteem. An additional political aspect of the visit came from the fact that while the highest representative of the Catholic Church spent four days in Slovakia, his stay in the neighbouring state of Hungary lasted only a couple of hours, a decision which some political commentators interpreted as an expression of the Pope's disapproval of the politics of the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán. It is therefore clear that the importance of Pope Francis' visit went far beyond the borders of Slovakia itself and served as an important event in the wider region of Central Europe, with the event serving to emphasise the contemporary regional challenge of migration and the varying approaches taken to the issue by different states. Given such a context, it is apparent that the study of celebrities in particular may offer a valuable contribution to a fuller understanding of the contemporary situation.

In explaining the significance of celebrities in the current period, it might seem paradoxical to follow the approach of many authors (Inglis, 2010; Sámelová, 2021) and turn to the ancient cultures of ancient Greece or Rome, the cradles of our civilisation, but the comparison is surprisingly apt. In addition to their relative political sophistication, both cultures were also characterised by a respect for or even worship of outstanding representatives of political, cultural, military or athletic life. Odes were composed in honour of ancient heroes and their deeds were regularly communicated to the populace through dramatic plays and works of art. The precise term "celebrity" is not

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present in ancient sources; it appears in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is related to the concept of glory and celebration and also overlaps with the medieval ideals of adoration and piety. However, if we were to apply the term “celebrity” to the eminent personalities of the ancient past, it is important to note that these figures were invariably presented as positive role models who were worthy of imitation: figures of unimpeachable morality whose attitudes and deeds were intended to stand as a model for the conduct and behaviour of others. One common denominator of these “ancient celebrities” was the fact that their deeds were not oriented to their personal benefit but were instead intended to have a positive impact on the functioning and development of society as a whole.

Sámelová (2021) has highlighted the fact that the modern mass media of the press, cinema, film, radio, and television has created a dividing line between “being famous” and “being a celebrity”. She argues that celebrityism is a form of fame which is mediated by media, with celebrities no longer required to act for the common good; similarly, their appearance and unorthodox behaviour are considered of greater importance, regardless of whether they act legally or morally. Marshall (1997) traces the negative connotations of the term “celebrity” back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with many writers in that period ascribing a sense of vulgarity, omnipresence, and false value to the concept.

As this brief historical overview suggests, the study of celebrities has a long history and justifiably so given the fact that celebrities are a mirror of their times, allowing us to trace the political, social, and economic changes that societies undergo. This is also true in terms of moral standards within societies, with the behavior of these highly visible individuals who actively seek out the public eye revealing what is deemed acceptable by society. As a result, the study of celebrities “can reveal what is becoming and what is being left behind; what is being aspired to and what is being forgotten or denied” (Gaffney & Holmes, 2007, p. 1), with the behavior of prominent members of a society illuminating its moral face against the backdrop of the more overt social and political events. As Gaffney and Holmes also note, celebrities represent a “natural gate” to the essence of a culture while simultaneously serving as “symbolic negations”; they offer something new arising from the old, a sense of lustre where there is none. Therefore, our research focuses not only on the topics and tonality of the presentation of celebrities, but also on their specific characteristics as represented in the sources under review. An examination of what specific features determine the charm of a celebrity (i.e., the conditions of its production and the quality of their performance) and an analysis of the celebrity-making process may illuminate both the era and the phenomenon of the individual celebrity and their era as a whole (Gaffney & Holmes, 2007).

The paper analyses popular mass media responses to the visit of the Pope to Slovakia as reflected in the viral humor of both in Internet memes and in caricatures published in the most-read Slovak daily newspapers in September 2021.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the content reveals a considerable overlap between the topic of the papal visit and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, a meme is considered to be a pictorial/visual message which is spread online, while a caricature is a drawn hyperbole of a phenomenon or of a character originally published in a print medium.

contemporary political issues, and therefore a crucial element of the research was aimed at identifying the main features and differences in the depiction of the Pope and that of selected Slovak political celebrities.

Within the research sample, a widely acknowledged moral authority figure is confronted with local political personalities of varying levels of moral standing. Nonetheless, in the medium of popular viral humor “[t]hey are all processed in the same mode of publicity and ‘glory-making’” (Langer, 1998, p. 53), and it is this feature of the genre that may lead to interesting confrontations and observations.

The fulfilment of the main research goal was dependent on the accomplishment of the following objectives:

- (a) the identification of thematic categories;
- (b) the identification of specific personal characteristics of the Pope and selected Slovak politicians emphasized in the memes;
- (c) the determination of the tonality (either positive, negative, or neutral) of the depictions in relation to the Pope, politicians, Slovak society, and the Church.

### ***Celebrities—Famous Regardless of Their Moral Quality***

The modern process of celebritization has brought about a situation in which the public awareness of the general fame of a celebrity is of greater significance than an awareness of the deeds for which they are famous (Turner, 2014), and it is for this reason that one of the most quoted, and even famous, definition of a celebrity is that provided by Daniel Boorstin: “A person who is well-known for his well-knownness” (1971, p. 58). A more academic definition provided by Redmond (2014) integrates more recent studies of the phenomenon of the modern celebrity; “a person whose name, image, lifestyle, and attitudes have cultural and economic value and are mainly and above all idealized popular media constructs”. This definition is not limited to figures from the entertainment industries but “can be applied to individuals from various fields of public life, including politicians and intellectuals” (Redmond, 2014, p. 5). Since it is true that celebrities can be used to promote specific products, the celebrity effect is also of significance for politicians, intellectuals, and/or even religious authority figures, with their personal aura often being employed to legitimize political decisions or popularize intellectual movements (Gaffney & Holmes, 2007).

Chris Rojek (2012) categorises celebrities into three types: the ascribed (those who are born into celebrity, such as the nobility), the achieved (those who win recognition in open competition in fields such as sport, art, science, or the entertainment industry), and the attributed (individuals such as TV presenters, pundits, or showmen who play an overtly visible role in society). However, one of the focuses of this research, Pope Francis, is an unconventional religious celebrity who could perhaps be labelled an ascribed celebrity, as a kind of “nobleman” who has become a celebrity without any effort on his own part or without expressing an interest in this status. He is certainly distinct from the accidental or ephemeral celebrities that Rojek termed as “celetoids” (Rojek, 2001), a phrase composed of the original word “celebrity” + the suffix -oid. The Pope is also an interesting figure in the context of the “religious meaning of celebrities”, a concept which examines how the emotionally based worship of celebrities can establish

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the celebrity as a cult or religion (Frow, 1998; Rojek, 2001, 2012). Developments in the modern era such as the growth of individualism, democratization, and mass communication and the collapse of systems of religious and political privileges have played a major role in inflating the importance of fame, and the (partial) non-existence of religious and political privileges is of particular importance in terms of the categories of the celebrities who are the subjects of our study.

Naturally, the formation of celebrity is largely dependent on the mass media that constitutes a key component in the machinery of the celebrity industry. Mass media not only brought about the personalisation of public life but also transmuted political categories into psychological ones (Sennett, 2002). In recent years, however, the development of online and social media outlets has transformed the celebrity-forming processes, and academic discussion has focused considerable attention on the role of social media in this process. Thomas and Round (2014) used a narrative methodology to investigate the creation, propagation, and reception of stories about celebrities and ordinary people. In his concept of the attention economy, Franck (2011) has written extensively on the attention economy and the opportunities that new media offer for generating income from attention; in this context, it is interesting to observe the rise of mediated “quasi-interaction” (Thompson, 1995) when fans literally want to “touch” their idols through the media (Rusnák, 2013). This has led to an increased demand for authenticity in celebrities or, at least, some semblance of this (Mikuláš, 2016); regardless of the ever-present cameras, celebrities are always required to “be themselves” (Tolson, 2001), and this is also the case for the personalities studied in our research. Pope Francis displays a kind of honesty and approachability that strikes even non-believers, and this sense of “ordinariness” is also ostensibly valued and actively promoted in Slovak party politics; the largest party in the current coalition government is called *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities] and the names of other two coalition parties, *Sme rodina* [We Are Family] and *Za ľudí* [For the People] similarly attempt to suggest a concern for the ordinary man on the street.

While some celebrities cultivate the image of ordinariness and being down-to-earth in order to reinforce their moral credibility, it is ultimately their “well-knownness” rather than their moral calibre that determines their celebrity status; as Sámelová has argued, immorality and infamy are no obstacles to fame, and many Slovak celebrities are renowned for their links to organised crime and convictions for crimes ranging from financial fraud to premeditated murder (Sámelová, 2020, 2021). In a society increasingly marked by vanity, narcissism and possessive qualities, the coverage given by the media to such individuals is too alluring for many to resist (Holmes & Redmond, 2006).

### ***Humor—the Means of Portraying (Potential) Conflicts***

Memes and caricatures, the media genres which constitute the source material for this research, employ a softening hyperbole to pillory the actual shortcomings of their celebrity subjects. The humor used in these genres also acts to soften the unappealing reality of the events to which they refer.

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In academic terms, there are three basic theories of humor (Andreanský, 2015, p. 38):

(a) “incongruity theory that links humor with certain contrariness, expressed in the form of paradox, absurdity, unexpected situations, unfulfilled expectations, and the like;

(b) superiority theory, according to which humor is about realizing the superiority of the recipient to the object of humor;

(c) relief theory which finds the substance of humor in relieving psychological tension or releasing accumulated mental energy”.

In general, incongruity theory appears to represent the basic theory of creating humorous depictions, while relief theory describes the assumed reaction of the recipient, and the caricatures and memes relating to the Pope’s visit to Slovakia also fall within this framework. A humorous point is also well-served by an element of surprise or by the transgression of social conventions (Hoffmannová, 2003).

Memes and caricatures are produced along the lines of potential confrontation, and in the case of the memes and caricatures these take the form of conflicts of values and character and clashes between fictitious and factual realities unfolding against the background of contemporary socio-political changes and the COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, these serious issues are not portrayed in an aggressive manner in the memes and caricatures but are instead downplayed or mitigated through humorous portrayals and jocular, even ironic messages; humor serves as an effective means of approaching negative or controversial subjects in a way which is palatable for audiences.

The popularity of memes and caricatures can be explained analogically though the explanation offered by Cohen (1999) which states that jokes operate through the human need for sharing and strengthening the sense of belonging. We would develop this idea by suggesting that by understanding and grasping of a meme or caricature individuals can identify with a specific opinion community or affirm their affinity with a certain group. Memes and caricatures are not just source of entertainment but also of information about the state of a given society and its cultural aspects.

In modern parlance, memes are typically discussed in relation to postmodern digital culture, either as its language code (Petrova, 2021), its communication type (Vitiuk et al., 2020), as elements of an emerging metalanguage (Kostoglotov, 2022), or as cultural practices within the digital culture (Piantavinha, 2022). These meanings all draw on the use of the term meme to represent a viral idea in society, a usage which was initially popularised by Richard Dawkins in his work *The Selfish Gene* (1976), but which gained greater relevance in the era of the Internet. Memes are now understood as suprasigns (Rusnák, 2013) which serve as vehicles for and replicators of information, but Rusnák also mentions a specific category of memes in relation to contemporary popular culture which function on the basis of emotions called emomemes that enable not only visual and auditory perception to communicators but also a form of “emotional contact”. Like its genetic counterpart, the selfish meme must respond and adapt to its habitat, the human environment which has undergone a radical reorganisation under the impact of new media; however, to do so it requires a brain optimised for the environment of new media, i.e., the brain of the so-called generation MZ (Shin, 2022).

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Given their often bizarre style and seemingly esoteric references, several authors have attempted to account for the popularity of memes (Shifman, 2014). Some have suggested that the modern symbolic production and exchange of memes help their audiences to navigate the chaos of the information-saturated media environment (Vitiuk et al., 2020) or that memes provide simple readings of information and its reassuring replication which satisfy the expectations of their audiences through their familiarity (Ivanova, 2022). As with much of digital culture, memes are notable for their semantic complexity (Piantavinha, 2022); their meanings and original contexts should be taken into consideration when attempting to form a classification system of origin (Thakur et al., 2022) and recent efforts to investigate them using computer analyses have revealed a surprising degree of complexity (Sherratt, 2022).

In the context of the papal visit to Slovakia, the primary aim of memes and caricatures produced in connection to this event were intended to mediate humor, entertainment, and amusement on the topic, but they do offer a valuable insight into the state of Slovak society. As a result, this research also touches upon academic discussions of the social and political aspects of humor and their potential to develop a discourse which counteracts the official narrative and pushes against the rigid boundaries of the political sphere (Satir, 2022). In this vein, a study by Fluri (2019) examined humor in the everyday life of Afghan society, observing the counter-geopolitical tactic to resist or “make do” among civilians living in spaces of protracted precarity. Fluri identified four tactical responses to the difficulties of life in modern Afghanistan: survival, inclusion/exclusion, resistance, and mockery. As the contemporary socio-political problems of pandemics, wars, and economic crises have shown, any society can be faced with challenges, pressures, or crises, and humor plays a valuable universal role of generating positive emotions and helping people to cope with difficult situations (Muceldili, 2022). Humor also has an important influence in the field of cultural politics; a recent study by Schiwiy (2016) on the discourse of decolonisation in Latin America suggests that humor should be understood in this context as an event rather than an utterance, essentially a “comic transaction” that is constituted by the contextual aspects of shared or contested social norms and popular cultural texts.

## Methodology

During his four-day visit to Slovakia in September 2021, Pope Francis visited the three largest cities in the country, Bratislava, Košice, and Prešov, and the important pilgrimage site of Šaštín where he held an open-air mass and delivered a homily. Pope Francis also met with the country’s most senior political figures and representatives of the Jewish and Roma communities. All of these events provided a stimulus for the creation of memes and caricatures, and the creators of this content typically integrated other contemporary topics such as Slovakia’s social and political situation, the competence of the police authorities in Slovakia, the lack of public trust in the government, the COVID-19 pandemic, rigidly conservative elements of Slovak society, and the clash of liberal and conservative thinking as personified by President Čaputová and Pope Francis.

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### **Research Methodology**

The approach of content analysis forms part a broader group of methods which are used to analyse cultural products which include media content such as the memes or caricatures which are the focus of this study. The research was conducted using qualitative content analysis due to the qualitative character of this research method (Hornig Priest, 1996; Luo, 2022).

Qualitative content analysis has seen extensive use in analyses of media content in various scientific fields (Neuendorf, 2020) as it provides a more complex and deeper understanding of the media content, including the interpretation of opinions or the behaviour of the recipients of the content (Macnamara, 2005). Content analysis is based on the examination of media content by means of a system of established categories (Ferjenčík, 2000). This methodological approach draws on the hermeneutic approach and utilises literary critical interpretations of texts (Poláková & Spálová, 2009), allowing scholars to study not only the research of basic argumentative assumptions and categories but also the contexts of the media content under examination.

Content analysis is aptly suited for data analysis and for interpreting the semantics of source materials (Schreier, 2012) and offers not only descriptions and quantifications of variables but also provides interpretations and clarifications of the social reality and broader social phenomena (Ferjenčík, 2000; Janoušek, 2007; Plichtová, 2002). Studies of media communication should always reflect social reality, and therefore content analysis is seen as an appropriate and useful research method in this field (Fichnová & Satková, 2009; Scherer, 2011).

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

The research sample consisted of a series of 43 memes and 8 caricatures which were sourced from the Facebook<sup>2</sup> pages of the online media platforms of Zomri.online and Cynická obluda and the online versions of the three most influential Slovak broadsheet newspapers, *Pravda*, *SME*, and *Denník N*. As viral media content, memes are rapidly disseminated across the vast space of social media, but our research revealed that memes tend to be aggregated on the Facebook pages of Zomri.online and Cynická obluda, along with the three Slovak opinion-forming online daily newspapers, and these outlets thus both compile the most popular memes and caricatures but also drive the viral communication of such content. In the case of individual memes, references are given based on the primary source from which the humorous and satirical online media have acquired the content.

At time of writing, the Facebook page of the online platform Zomri.online has a follower count of more than 375,000: “Through viral memes, the satirically oriented Facebook page has transformed into a commercial mainstream project” (Hirtlová, 2019, p. 518). A key feature of the Zomri.online platform is the fact that its content is generated by the fans themselves. The site has no restrictions concerning the targets of humorous or satirical depictions; politicians, celebrities, and public figures are the

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<sup>2</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и полностью заблокирована.

predominant subjects of the memes showcased on the platform, but the behavior of ordinary people also appears in the form of, for example, messages that neighbours write on common noticeboards in blocks of flats or on lifts.

With a Facebook follower count of only 70,000, the *Cynická obluda* online platform is less popular than *Zomri.online* but its content is widely shared across all of the major social networks and it has even penetrated traditional media by providing a sub-page on the portal of the mainstream *SME* daily. It focuses mainly on political satire, preferring photo collages in which current political developments are depicted in a comic-strip-like format.

The humor sections of the Slovak broadsheet newspapers *Pravda*, *SME* and *Denník N* and their Internet editions generally offer political caricatures. The best-known Slovak caricaturist is Martin Šútovec who works under the pseudonym of Shooty; his caricatures feature on an individual sub-page in *Denník N*, and collections of his works have also been published in book form. The tabloid newspapers *Nový čas* and *Plus 1 deň*—generally adopt memes taken from social networks, in particular memes which are popular on *Zomri.online*. One specific feature of the Slovak media environment is the fact that conservative media outlets do not publish memes or caricatures and therefore all of the media platforms described above, whether traditional or new media, have a liberal-progressive political leaning. While this study aimed to provide a general sample of available memes and caricatures from the selected online media platforms, this necessarily means that the overall sample is generally more liberal-progressive in nature.

### **Procedure**

The sample group was collected in September 2021 either during or immediately after the papal visit in order to obtain memes and caricatures which related directly to the event. The criterion of inclusion to the sample was the requirement of a thematic connection to the papal visit rather than a direct reference to the Pope himself. A total of 43 memes and eight caricatures were identified which fulfilled these criteria.

The three authors, who are all experienced researchers of the Slovak media environment, established the coding categories and rules jointly. They then analysed the entire sample individually before unifying their results on the basis of a common consultation. The analysis of the sample material proceeded from the collection of the data to the formulation of conclusions in the form of a theory, and the research was inductive in character, adopting a text-driven approach. An outline of the full coding scheme is available upon request.

## **Results**

### ***Thematic Scope of the Memes and Caricatures***

The results of the analysis show that the most numerous thematic category of the studied memes and caricatures was that which depicted the character traits of figures on the Slovak political scene (26 depictions in total). Given the partially political aspect of the papal visit in the form of the Pope's meetings with state representatives, we

had expected a higher frequency of depictions of the current President of the Slovak Republic in the memes and caricatures, but only one meme was identified which related directly to her, with President Čaputová presented as youthful and energetic in contrast to the tired and aging Pope Francis (Figure 1). However, this meme has also another satirical dimension, referring to the effect of heavy drinking over the weekend on work performance on Monday, with the Pope used to represent those suffering a hangover on their return to work.

### Figure 1

Meme 1. #4 Začiatky Týždňa Sú Ťažké [Monday Mornings are Hard]



Note. Source: <https://zhumor.sk/zabavne-memecka-ktore-vznikli-v-suvistosti-s-navstevou-papeza-na-slovensku/> (for individual memes, the primary source from which the humoristic and satirical online medium took the meme is referenced)

The lack of representations of President Čaputová in the sample suggests that the creators of the memes and caricatures did not perceive her meeting with the Pope as a confrontation between liberal and conservative attitudes, but this theme does appear in four of the memes through the depiction of prominent ultra-conservative political figures. Surprisingly, the memes did not feature perhaps the best-known representatives of this socio-political trend, the OĽaNO MP and anti-abortion campaigner Anna Záborská or the far-right nationalist and Ludová strana Naše Slovensko MP Štefan Kuffa, possibly suggesting that these figures are now perceived as symbols of a rigidly conservative element of society for which even the Pope himself has lost sympathy. The creators of the memes and caricatures tend to perceive conservative attitudes as backward, not reflective of modern society

and even aggressively opposed to its mores. Within the sample, a similar attitude is ascribed to the politician Marián Kotleba, the leader of the far right nationalist LSNS party. Kotleba appears in four memes with the same message; he is seen as a hypocritical figure who is willing to twist reality to his advantage, claiming to represent Christian values despite the fact that his infamous xenophobic stance is very much at odds with the Christian maxim of “Love thy neighbour” (Figure 2). This approach to Kotleba uses hyperbole in reference to his character traits, and this is a common feature of all of the depictions of political figures which feature in the memes and caricatures of the sample.

### Figure 2

*Meme 2. Čierny Kresťan? [A Black Christian?]*



*Note.* Source: <https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/2182101/Papezov-prichod-prebudil-z-polospanku-aj-internetovych-humoristov--FOTO-Otec-naroda--no-nie-je-to-tento-otec->

Memes and caricatures tend to target politicians who act as polarising forces in society or who attempt to gain attention through deliberately contrived behaviour. As a result, the bland and unassuming figure of the Slovak prime minister Eduard Heger does not appear in the sample, but the erratic and antagonistic former prime minister Igor Matovič features much more frequently (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Meme 3. #6 Zjavne To Už Na Slovensku Nezvláda [Being in Slovakia is Clearly Too Much for Him]*



Note. Source: <https://zhumor.sk/zabavne-memecka-ktore-vznikli-v-suvislosti-s-navstevou-papeza-na-slovensku/>

The papal visit to Slovakia coincided with another socio-political event which was used hyperbolically by creators of seven of the memes and caricatures, the escalating internecine conflict within the Slovak police authorities. In July 2021, officers from the Bureau of Police Inspection had detained several investigators from the National Criminal Agency including its acting head, an act which triggered a further series of ill-judged arrests. The memes make reference to the frequency of arrests, comically suggesting that even the Pope himself was at risk of detention. An emphasis is also placed on the idea that Slovak society is traumatized by the developments in the police forces and that this is leading to a further loss of trust in the Slovak government, but it also appears to welcome the Pope's presence, overlaying this topic with one which bears witness to the social instability and governmental incompetence (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Caricature 1. Namiesto toho zatkneme niekoho iného, ten František ušiel [We'll Arrest Someone Else Instead, That Francis Guy Got Away]*



Note. Source: <https://nazory.pravda.sk/karikatura/clanok/600881-danglar-17-9-2021/>

As with many high-profile events, the impending papal visit sparked off furious efforts by the authorities and organisers to improve the visual appearance of the destinations visited by the Pope and to thereby present the country in a positive light. These activities were particularly apparent in the case of the Luník IX neighbourhood in Košice which is overwhelmingly inhabited by the Roma community. Pope Francis had chosen to visit this area due to his longstanding interest in improving the well-being of marginalised social groups. Although only a few of the memes and caricatures react to this event, they ironize the attempts to improve the visual appearance of the Pope's destinations, hyperbolically suggesting that if the Pope visits Slovakia more regularly, the country will look even more futuristic (Figure 5).

### Figure 5

Meme 4. *PAPEŽ VYTAJ už Zajtra* [PAY QUESTION Tomorrow]



Note. Source: <https://www.zomri.online/2021/09/11/papez-vytaj-uz-zajtra/>

One of the most interesting findings of the research was the approach which the memes took to the connection of the papal visit with the COVID-19 pandemic. This topic was remarkable less in terms of the frequency of references to it found in the sample but more on how the subject was addressed. As was mentioned above, only vaccinated persons were permitted to attend papal events, but this requirement led to low levels of interest and as the visit drew closer, the Church authorities became concerned about the possible optics of low attendance at papal events and reversed their rules, dividing the event venues into sectors for the vaccinated and other sectors for those who were not vaccinated but who had tested negative for COVID-19. The memes and caricatures refer to the possibility of meeting the Pope as a possible motivation for vaccination, in some cases suggesting that the papal visit had been misused to promote the vaccination campaign (Figure 6). Interestingly, twelve of the memes refer directly to the Church's U-turn on the vaccination rules, suggesting the hypocrisy of the Church in making the decision, implying an anti-vaccination stance on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities and seeing the Catholic congregation as overly faithful. Other memes see the Church as

overly conservative and obscurantist, implying that the visit of the progressive-minded Pope could serve as a threat to the moribund institution.

**Figure 6**

*Meme 5. Vakcína Je Stretnutie S Pápežom. Ze Táto Návšteva Nebude Pastoračná, Ale Vakcínačná* [The Vaccine Is a Meeting With the Pope. This Visit Will Be Vaccinatory, Not Pastoral]



Note. Source: [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=350752229871834&id=107752747505118&p=30](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=350752229871834&id=107752747505118&p=30)

In many of the memes and caricatures, the Pope is presented as merely a by-stander or as an individual whose presence only highlights the failings of Slovak society and its political representatives, and therefore the Pope is not shown as revealing his own emotions. This is particularly apparent in twelve examples in our sample, with the impression being transformed into a trait that the recipient is expected to associate with the Pope (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Meme 6. V prípade nebezpečnosti je pápež pripravený striekať svätenú vodu až do vzdialenosti 5,5 m* [In Case of Emergency, the Pope Can Spray Holy Water for a Distance of up to 5.5 m]

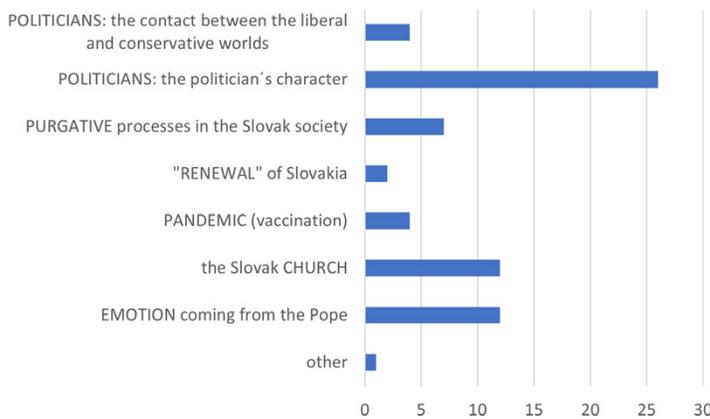


Note. Source: <https://zhumor.sk/zopar-memeciek-ktore-vznikli-aby-ti-sprijemnili-den-1093-slovenske-sci-fi-ostane-navzdy-sci-fi/>

Only two of the studied memes did not correspond to any of the topics under study. The first is an image of a mobile phone in a toilet bowl with the text: pá-pá mobil [bye-bye, mobile phone], an obvious pun on the Slovak term for the Popemobile [papamobil], while the second refers humorously to Slovak monetary policy in Slovakia where “after the Euro, the strongest rate in our country is the Vatican currency; May the Lord repay you”. The categorisation of the memes and caricatures in terms of theme is shown in Chart 1 (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

*Chart 1. Thematic Categories*



### ***Personality Traits of Political and Ecclesiastical Celebrities***

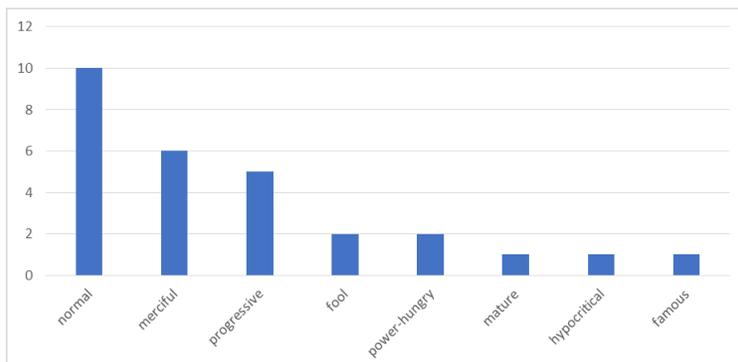
In order to determine which personality traits attracted the attention of the creators of memes in reference to individual celebrities, we categorised the specific characteristics attributed to the depicted personalities into two groups:

- characteristics of the Pope;
- characteristics of politicians.

A total of 28 specific personality traits were identified in the sample, and Chart 2 (Figure 9) shows the characteristics which were attributed to the Pope.

**Figure 9**

*Chart 2. Personality Traits of the Pope*



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The Pope was presented in an overwhelmingly positive light in the sample. Without doubt, the most frequently attributed trait was the Pope's "normality", in the sense that he is an everyman figure, "one of us"; he is also shown to be down-to-earth and suffers from tiredness, exhaustion and disappointment. The creators of the memes appear to have co-opted the Pope as a partner with a similar view of Slovak society; he shares their disappointment and frustration with the grim reality and is equally bewildered by what he is confronted with. The second most attributed trait was that of mercy; the Pope was portrayed as understanding and kind, judging no one and expressing love even towards those who do not deserve it. The trait of progressiveness also featured regularly, with many memes considering Pope Francis to be a liberal, pioneering Christian; this trait was used to contrast the Pope with the more conservative ecclesiastical and Christian political environment in Slovakia.

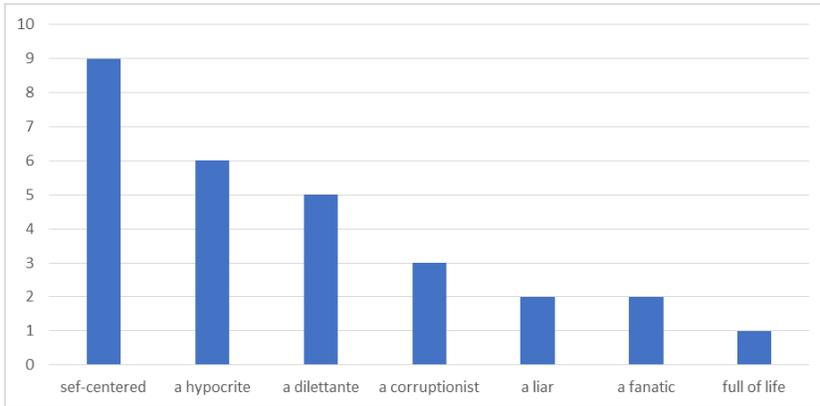
The memes ascribed relatively few negative traits to Pope Francis, but those which did appear included those of foolishness (reflected in the gaudy papal accoutrements and the perceived manipulation of his flock), charges of being power-hungry which has long been levelled at the Church hierarchy and hypocrisy. Interestingly, one meme portrayed the Pope as "mature", suggesting that Francis was deserving of the position of Pope and contrasting his dignified demeanour with the widely ridiculed former Slovak president Ivan Gašparovič who many saw as being wholly unqualified for his position. A single meme from the sample portrayed the Pope as a typical vacuous celebrity, someone who is famous simply for being famous (cf. Boorstin, 1971).

In sharp contrast to the portrayal of Pope Francis, the depictions of Slovak politicians (Figure 10) were overwhelmingly negative with the notable exception of the current president Zuzana Čaputová who was presented as energetic, hardworking and approachable. The trait of self-centeredness was used most often, especially in the case of the Slovak politician most frequently targeted in the memes, the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament, Boris Kollár. Kollár is a notorious figure in Slovak politics who claims to represent Christian values despite being father to twelve children with ten different women. The memes regularly portrayed Kollár as an aberrant, sex-obsessed egocentric, and allusions are regularly made to his dubious business activities in his past by depictions of him as a gangster or mafioso. The former prime minister Igor Matovič, leader of the strongest coalition party, was another common target of the memes, and was repeatedly portrayed as complacent and narcissistic.

The second most frequently attributed trait in terms of politicians was hypocrisy, with many being seen as having entered politics for their own personal profit and not for the common good; other memes criticised their preference for pragmatism over principle or their falseness, servility and penchant for disinformation. Closely following in third place was the trait "dilettante" to depict politicians who simply lack the dignity and professionalism required of statesmen; this was most commonly associated with Igor Matovič a figure whose behaviour and statements since achieving his undeniable electoral success in 2020 has rendered him a laughing stock and target of ridicule both within the community of creators and disseminators of memes and in the wider public. The "corruptibility" of politicians who steal and enrich themselves at the expense of the country which they are supposed to serve was also perceived critically, while two

depictions applied the trait of “fanatics” to Christian conservative politicians who were perceived as being borderline fundamentalists.

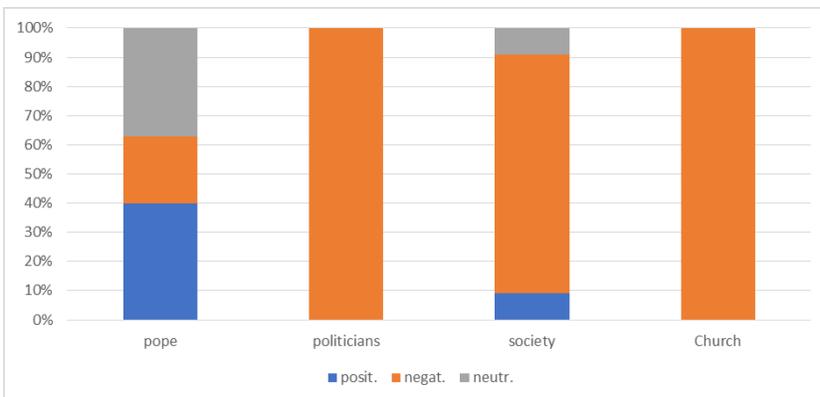
**Figure 10**  
*Chart 3. Personality Traits of Slovak Politicians*



**Tonality of the Depictions of the Pope, Politicians, Society and the Church**

The tonality of the depictions in the sample was examined in four categories: in relation to the Pope, to politicians, to Slovak society and to the Church, with each being assessed as either positive, negative, or neutral (Figure 11). Tonality is understood as the sentiment contained within an individual image; this can be both the sentiment of the author who

**Figure 11**  
*Chart 4. Tonality of the Depictions of the Pope, Politicians, Society and the Church*



creates the image with that sentiment and also the sentiment of the audience who decodes it. In this part of the analysis, the research team made use of the qualitative aspect of content analysis, more specifically the “close (or ethnographic) reading of mass-media texts” in which the emphasis is placed on profound examination of both the source material and also the impressions and internal reactions of the researchers

themselves who are considered as relevant representative of the norms, principles and customs of their culture (Hornig Priest, 1996). The authors first examined tonality in the sample individually before objectifying their preliminary findings in a collective discussion.

Tonality in depictions of the Pope was identified in 35 memes and caricatures, the majority of which were positive in addition to several cases of neutral. In contrast, politicians were depicted with an overwhelmingly negative tonality, largely in the context of clash of values in reference to the above-mentioned far right MP Marian Kotleba or a prominent conspiracy theorist and vaccine opponent, the former Supreme Court judge and Minister of Justice Štefan Harabin. The positive tonality observed in depictions of the Pope is also related to the sympathy with the Pope's perceived liberal attitudes on the part of the creators of the memes and their opposition to the more overtly conservative stances of Christian politicians such as Anna Záborská. The neutral tonality in depictions of the Pope was observed in the context of his official meetings with political leaders such as Igor Matovič or Boris Kollár in which the Pope is depicted as tired, ill-at-ease or even frustrated. Negative tonality in depictions of the Pope was relatively infrequent and was mostly observed in the contexts of the Church's lust for power and money or its hypocrisy, for example, in the depiction of the Pope (or rather the actor Jonathan Pryce who bears a startling resemblance to Pope Francis) partying during the weekend and then back "at work", clad in his white robes, on Monday (Figure 12).

### Figure 12

*Meme 7. Víkend—Pondelok v práci* [Weekend – Monday at Work]



*Note.* Source: <https://www.1.pluska.sk/spravy/z-domova/navsteva-svateho-otca-toto-su-najlepsie-memecka-papezovi-ktore-valcuju-internet/6>

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Perhaps the most interesting finding of the research was that the 32 memes and caricatures which displayed tonality in portrayals of politicians applied exclusively negative tonalities. Slovak politicians are accused of failing to control the pandemic situation and are depicted as hypocritical, complacent, base, foolish, arrogant and acting in their own interests. It is possible to suggest that the tonality in the majority of depictions of Slovak politicians was presented in the context of the clashes of values of between politicians and the Pope and between the attitudes of politicians and those of the creators of the memes and caricatures and also in terms of the contrast between political leaders and Slovak society.

Tonality was identified in 11 memes and caricatures depicting society, and this tonality was largely negative. Slovak society was portrayed ironically by referencing long-standing problems that have been neglected by politicians for decades, such as endemic corruption, the overall “backwardness” of Slovak politics or the marginalisation of the Roma minority. A parallel image of society was its general level of ignorance and seemingly self-destructive urge as reflected in the failure to respect anti-pandemic measures or the rejection of the COVID-19 vaccine by a large proportion of the population. A positive tonality in the depiction of society was found in the context of the joy which many Slovaks felt at the Pope’s arrival.

Lastly, tonality in depictions of the Slovak Church was identified in 12 memes and caricatures, and this tonality too was exclusively negative. The Slovak Church was presented primarily in relation to the Pope. While the head of the Catholic Church was depicted as a progressive and liberal leader who is concerned with the fate of individuals and society as a whole, essentially as “one of us”, the Slovak Church was depicted by the creators of memes in the context of conservatism, backwardness, anti-vaccination attitudes and hypocrisy. The creators of the memes also refer to the overall unpreparedness of the country for the arrival of the Pope, emphasizing that the poor organisation of the visit, like the mismanagement of the pandemic situation, the ongoing political scandals and the backwardness of the Church (as opposed to the liberal attitudes of the Pope), is fuelling discontent and negative emotions among Slovak citizens.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In the content analysis, the researchers examined the media presentation of Pope Francis and Slovak politicians in the research sample of 43 memes and eight caricatures taken from the research period of September 2021. Using three partial goals as a framework for the analysis, the authors focused more closely on identifying the thematic categories that stood out in the sample of the memes and caricatures under study, categorising the characteristics observed in the depictions of the Pope and Slovak politicians, and assessing the tonality of the depictions as emphasized in the memes and caricatures relating to the Pope, Slovak politicians, Slovak society and the Church.

This study applied the methodology of qualitative content analysis, an approach which has been proven to be of use in the analysis of media contents in various scientific disciplines (Neuendorf, 2020). One significant advantage of this research method is its capacity to develop more complex and profound understandings of

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media content and more detailed overviews of the basic argumentation categories, images and symbols that are present in media communications (Macnamara, 2005). Nonetheless, this study also took the limitations of content analysis into consideration, including some methodological challenges related to, for example, the plausibility and authenticity of the results which it offers (Graneheim et al., 2017) or the high level of flexibility in the research process (Poláková & Spálová, 2009). Finally, the level of abstraction and interpretation used in establishing the categories based on which this method formulates the conclusions of the research in the form of a theory may also be problematic, since the research is inductive or text-driven in character. However, we remain certain that the limitations of the methodology are not detrimental to the timeliness, usefulness and importance of the research findings presented in this study.

It is clear from the analysis that the memes and caricatures have little sympathy for the Slovak Catholic Church and its congregation, emphasising instead the dogmatism and obstinacy of the institution and its adherents. Within the context of Slovak memes and caricatures, the Pope is often considered a celebrity who has not directly chosen his status, but that his position has been attributed to him by the very nature of the post that he fills.

Although the sample under analysis is exclusively produced from a more liberal background, the Pope himself is treated relatively sympathetically and is depicted as being more at odds than in accord with the backward Slovak Catholic Church. The staunch conservatism and inflexibility in the reactions of Church representatives to social, scientific and technological progress is emphasised by the creators of the memes by associating the Slovak Church and its congregation with the unscientific and socially irresponsible anti-vaccination movement; the references to the COVID-19 pandemic in the studied memes and caricatures are reflected almost exclusively through this prism.

Given the overwhelmingly liberal origin of the analysed memes and caricatures, it comes as a slight surprise to the authors that the Slovak president Zuzana Čaputová, a figure who is typically seen as representing the progressive element of Slovak society, is depicted as a largely passive participant in the visit rather than an actively political actor in this meeting between two heads of state. The relative invisibility of President Čaputová is also an indication that the creators of the memes and caricatures do not perceive her meeting with the Pope as a clash between liberal and conservative worldviews, an attitude which can perhaps be explained by the possibility that many Slovak liberals consider the Pope as a somewhat progressive influence within the Catholic Church. Also relevant in this context is the fact that the President has a less polarising effect on Slovak society than many other leading politicians. This view is also corroborated by the results of the tonality assessments of depictions of the Pope which were significantly positive, a finding in sharp contrast to the negative depictions of Slovak politicians (with the notable exception of President Čaputová herself).

The hyperbolic treatment of Slovak social problems and the traits of Slovak politicians and the softening humorous mood adopted towards the Pope allow the recipient of the memes and caricatures to view contemporary socio-political developments with a sense of detachment and irony. This approach fulfils another purpose of humor, one which is perhaps the primary function of humor in memes and

caricatures: the capacity to serve as a means of providing relief from the tension of the unpalatable factual reality. However, it is important to note a slight contradiction here in the form of the one-sided depiction of representatives of the Catholic Church and its congregation as “doubting Thomases” through their kneejerk rejection of COVID-19 vaccines, an approach which could conceivably be perceived as a point at which the recipient engages in polemics with the creator of the meme or caricature rather than merely accepting the humorous hyperbole. Within the limits of their conviction, the recipient may perceive the Church as an unconvincing authority figure which is willing to abandon its convictions for pragmatic reasons, as was demonstrated in the U-turn on the requirement that those attending papal events be vaccinated, or as an institution that is willing to risk the well-being of its congregation in order to ensure positive optics during the visit. This hypothesis is deserving of further research aimed at determining recipients’ reception of memes and caricatures and examining whether memes and caricatures hyperbolising negative social phenomena serve as means of venting the recipient’s tension or as a platform where the recipient’s view of reality is placed into conflict with that presented through the media.

The results of the study clearly corroborate the results of analogous studies and confirm that an understanding of the media portrayal of celebrities offers valuable insights into the specifics of the context of the times. The analysed memes and caricatures represent a snapshot of a country that has not yet come to terms with the corruption of its past, in which the focus of the media (and therefore of the public) is trained on political representatives who, according to Rojek’s classification (2011), can be categorised as celebrities due to their overt visibility in society. It should be added, however, that in the Slovak context, many politicians draw public attention through their aberrant behaviour and unconventional demeanours and agendas which serve to polarise society rather than a more professional approach to statesmanship which contributes to the stability and prosperity of the country. In conclusion, the results of this research demonstrate that the study of celebrities is a useful means of increasing our knowledge regarding the contemporary state of society “here and now”, especially with the emphasis on its morality and system of values.

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*V prípade nebezpečenstva je pápež pripravený srtiekať svätenú vodu až do vzdialenosti 5,5 m* (In Case of Emergency, the Pope Can Spray Holy Water for a Distance of up to 5.5 m) [Digital Image]. (2021, September 15). zHumor. <https://zhumor.sk/zopar-memeciek-ktore-vznikli-aby-ti-sprijemnili-den-1093-slovenske-sci-fi-ostane-navzdy-sci-fi/>



## RESEARCH NOTE

# Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology in Light of Classical Persian Literature

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present a tentative analysis of the possible commonalities and differences between Adlerian individual psychology and classical Persian literary texts of the pre-modern period written by mystics Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair, Jami, Saadi, and Rumi. The authors put forward the suggestion that modern psychological approaches, especially those dealing with education of children, might be rooted in the teachings of Iranian mystics. In mysticism and classical Iranian literature, like in Adlerian psychology, much attention is given to human nature in its entirety and personality development. The analysis focuses on such core aspects of Adler's theory as the feeling of inferiority and the striving for recognition, the influence of family and social environment on personality development and lifestyle. It is shown that, like Adler's individual psychology, classical Persian texts stress the importance of the social aspect in the child's development but while Adler believed in the freedom of choice and people's creative power to change their personality structure (lifestyle), the classical Iranian authors emphasized the existence of a certain "true nature" that cannot be influenced by education or social environment. These findings can inspire future research into the possible connections between the holistic personality theories in modern psychology and the philosophical thought in classical Persian literature.

**KEYWORDS**

Adlerian psychology, mysticism, Alfred Adler, childhood, education, individual psychology, lifestyle

**Introduction**

In this study, we explore the teachings of Iranian mystics, in particular the texts that deal with personality development and upbringing of children, in light of individual psychology of the Austrian psychotherapist Alfred Adler. Methodologically, the study relies on the descriptive-analytical framework applied to examine the anthropological foundations in Adler's theory (e.g., described in his seminal work *Understanding Human Nature*, 1927) and compare his ideas and concepts with those discussed in classical Iranian literature, more specifically, in the writings by Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair, Jami, Saadi, and Rumi. Since, according to Adler, the most important period of the child's development is before the age of six or seven (Adler, 1927/2000), we selected the poems and anecdotes of these authors that focused on the same age range.

Alfred Adler was among the first to develop a holistic approach to human personality, and his methods of psychotherapy were inextricably connected to a humanistic philosophy of living. Despite the widely criticized drawbacks of Adlerian theory such as the lack of empirical evidence, we cannot deny the fact that his work pioneered attention to mental health, community life, and prevention of mental illnesses, "bringing people together with its emphasis on the healing power of connection" (McCluskey, 2022). Moreover, Adler's work offered some valuable insights into the reasons behind people's discouragement in life, the feelings of inferiority and disconnection. His theory sheds light on how a child may form what he referred to as a "mistaken" lifestyle because of abuse and neglect and poor family guidance they face (McCluskey, 2022).

Like Adler, classical Iranian authors offer a holistic understanding of moral and spiritual growth and personality development. Persian literature is a treasure of narratives seeking to engage their readers with a variety of ethical and philosophical questions such as destiny and human effort, the objectives of human life, guilt, virtue, justice, striving for perfection, and so on. In a condensed, sometimes allegoric form, these didactic tales, anecdotes, and poems convey the most important concepts of Persian moral thought.

This paper is structured as follows. In the following section the general theoretical background is outlined, providing the overview of Adler's individual psychology and the writings of pre-modern Persian mystics. The Results and Discussion section analyzes specific examples of their texts and draws parallels with the key principles and concepts of Adlerian psychology. The Conclusion section summarizes our findings and highlights avenues for further research.

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## Theoretical Background

In Adler's view, each person is a unique, indivisible, and complete entity endowed with a creative power to shape their own destiny (Hashemlou, 2017). Adler's concept of human nature does not portray individuals as victims of instincts and conflicts, doomed to serve as a playground of biological forces and childhood experiences (Schultz, 2012).

Adler's approach is based on a social perspective on human nature: in his opinion, a person's fundamental motivation is social in character and stems from a strong desire to be part of human society. In other words, human behavior is developed within a certain social context, which should be taken into account in psychotherapy. Since the basic desire of every person is to belong, people can fulfill themselves and become significant only within a social context. In Adlerian philosophy, a person is seen primarily as a being having the capacity for cooperation and collaboration as well as the ability for self-improvement, growth, self-realization, and meaningful participation in social life. Adler used the concept of "social interest" or "community feeling" (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) to denote a complex process involving empathy and cognitive processes: it is a developmental process which starts when a person first needs "the aptitude for social living and cooperation with others", after a while this aptitude evolves into the person's ability to "comprehend and show empathy for others", and, finally, it turns into a "subjective, evaluative attitude determining choices and the interactions the person has with others" (Ansbacher, 1991). The development of social interest is the ultimate expression of striving for superiority (Carducci, 2009).

Lifestyle or *style of life (Lebensstil)* is another important concept in Adlerian psychology. It refers to a collection of convictions, beliefs, and behavioral patterns that a person develops in their childhood and uses to navigate their further life. In Adlerian psychology, a person's lifestyle is expected to be formed by the age of six or seven—lifestyle is constructed depending on the person's social interactions, the order of birth in the family, and the nature of the parent-child relationship (Schultz, 2012). The key factor in the formation of a lifestyle is the child's early interactions within their initial social environment (parents, siblings, and other family members).

Adler identified four basic types: the social useful type, the ruling type, the getting type, and the avoiding type lifestyles (Adler, 1929). In this classification scheme, only the social useful type is a constructive type, the other three types are destructive (Ryckman, 2004). The avoiding type, for example, lacks the confidence for solving problems and thus, instead of dealing with the problem, prefers to sidestep, avoiding defeat (Ryckman, 2004). The conflict between a person's lifestyle and reality leads to abnormal, self-defeating behavior that manifests itself in the form of neurosis and psychosis.

Adler was among the first to put forward the idea that the *birth order* has a significant impact on the formation of a given person's lifestyle. He believed that it correlates with positive or negative life outcomes (Eckstein et al., 2010). Adler explained that, of course, it is not the child's number in the order of successive births which influences the character, but the *situation*, into which the child is born and the

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way of its interpretation (Adler, 1929/2006). This means that Adlerians are not so much interested in the ordinal birth position but in psychological birth order or the role which the child adopts in their interactions with others (Eckstein et al., 2010).

In Adlerian psychology, all human behavior is goal-orientated and motivated by *striving for superiority*. Individuals may differ in their goals and in the ways of achieving them. Striving for superiority is the natural human desire to move from a perceived negative position to a perceived positive one (Watts, 2012). It stems from the feelings of inferiority (*Minderwertigkeitsgefühl*) or the feelings of disempowerment and insignificance that the child experiences, because at the beginning of every psychological life there is a more or less deep inferiority feeling (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). A natural and healthy reaction to inferiority is compensation, that is, efforts to overcome real or imaged inferiority by developing one's own abilities. Unlike the normal feelings of inferiority, however, *inferiority complexes* result from a person being unable to compensate for their inferiority. Thus, an inferiority complex tends to paralyze people instead of motivating them to seek self-improvement. The overarching goal of Adlerian psychotherapy is, therefore, to help the patient develop healthy ways of overcoming their feelings of inferiority through what Adlerians call "encouragement" or the therapeutic modeling of social interest (Hoffman, 2022; Watts, 2012).

Texts written by Iranian mystics place much emphasis on the cultivation of moral virtues, philosophical and religious values, the perfection of beauty and knowledge. These authors attached great importance to literature's function as a medium of education and enlightenment (Sarfı & Esfandiari, 2012). The genre of educational poetry is a perfect illustration of the belief that the poet's main goal should be to teach wisdom and ethics as well as to dissect and explain religious issues and ideas, philosophical and educational themes (Yalameha, 2011).

*Mystical literature* includes a diversity of forms and genres, both in prose and poetry. A large part of Persian literature deals with Sufism, mysticism, and the basics of conduct. The emergence and evolution of mystical literature coincided with the rule of the Ghaznavid, Seljuk, and Mongol Turks in Iran. The verses attributed to Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair, which are mostly quatrains, the poems of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari (1006–1088) and the couplets of Baba Tahir (947–1032) are among the most famous Sufi and mystical poems of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which are in fact the introduction to the great mystical poems of Sana'i Ghaznavi (1080–1141) of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the following works. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Sana'i mixed mysticism and Sufism with Persian poetry, brought about a great transformation, and the mystical poetry literature was officially founded. Fariduddin Abu Hamid Mohammad Attar Neishabouri (1146–1221), a famous mystic and poet, continued this tradition, and in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, mystical literature reached its perfection and glory in the poetry of Rumi and other authors. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) combined mysticism and enlightenment wisdom to impart a scientific attitude and gave Sufism and mysticism an aspect and reasoning. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, systematic scientific Sufism was taught; Sufism and Shi'ism became close to each other, and found their perfect embodiment in the writings of Hafez Shirazi (1326–1389) (Sajjadi, 1997).

In mystical literature, there is a distinct type of poetry that is of special relevance to this study: it is *didactic poetry* (or educational poems). While lyrical poems are intended primarily to express the poet's feelings and emotions, didactic poems were created for the purpose of education (Shafii Kadkani, 2007), these texts could be used to teach disciples and people who were attracted to Sufi teachings.

The great Iranian reformers and mystics included in this analysis are Abu Sa'ïd Fazlullah ibn Abu al-Khair Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim known as "Sheikh Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair" (967–1049), sage Abu Muhammad Elias Ibn Yusuf ibn Zaki Ibn Muayyid "Nizami" (1141–1209), Musharraf al-Din Mosleh ibn Abdullah Shirazi alias "Saadi" (1209–1291), Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi known as "Rumi" (1207–1273), Nooruddin Abdul Rahman Ibn Nizamuddin Ahmad Ibn Mohammad alias "Jami" (1414–1492) (Sarfi & Esfandiari, 2011).

## Results and Discussion

In our analysis, we are going to concentrate on the following three ideas in Adler's writings that most resonate with moral and educational philosophy found in classical Persian literary texts:

- (a) the feeling of inferiority and the striving for recognition;
- (b) the influence of the social environment on the child's early development;
- (c) the origin of human personality, parental influence and the influence of education.

Let us now look at each of these aspects in greater detail.

### ***The Feeling of Inferiority and the Striving for Recognition***

In the story about the childhood of Sheikh Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair (967–1049), we find the following:

One night Babu Abu al-Khair went to their dervishes at their invitation, and the sheikh's mother begged him to take Abu Saeed with him so that the opinion of his loved ones and dervishes would fall on him; Baba Abolkhair took the sheikh with him. When they were preoccupied with Sama, the singer sang the anthem of this verse. (Monavvar, ca. 1174 B.C./1992; transl. by Nazyar Khamenehei [N. K.]

The manner of treatment of a child in the family, by parents and other adults affects the process in which their feelings of inferiority are formed, thus also affecting their future adult life. This story describes the child's experience of visiting the dervishes with his father, which contributed to his development and resulted in Sheikh Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair becoming one of the greatest Iranian mystics and thinkers.

Another story worthy of interest is found in the writings of Sheikh Jalaluddin Mohammad Rumi nicknamed "Rumi" (1207–1273):

The child's name was Mohammad, but at home they respectfully and lovingly called him Jalal-al-Din, Mawlana. His father, Baha'-al-Din Valad, who was a great orator at Balkh and a renowned preacher and religious teacher there, called his son "Khodavandgar"<sup>1</sup>, out of love and great esteem for him. (Zarrinkoub, 2009)

This text is reminiscent of the following part of Adler's text:

Because every child has to grow up in an adult environment, he sees himself as a weak, small person, unable to live alone, and not even self-confident in doing small and insignificant things. Mistakes in education also results from this concept. Thus, some other children are treated as property and valuables that must be carefully cared for, and some children are treated in a way that makes them feel like useless creatures. (Adler, 1927, p. 30)

### ***The Influence of the Social Environment on the Child's Early Development***

The book *Makhzan al-Asrar* (1173) written by "Nizami" Ganjavi contains the following story:

The child of a nobleman went out with some others of his own age. As he was running, he fell down, his happiness was destroyed, and his backbone was broken. The distress of his companions was greater than the calamity which had befallen him. He who was his best friend said: "We must hide him in the bottom of a well, so that the secret may not be as manifest as the sun; and so that we should not be ashamed before his father". The wisest child among them was his enemy. He said: "Surely the matter will not be kept a secret by his company. Since they consider me to be his enemy, they will lay the blame for this misfortune upon me". He went to his father and informed him of the accident, so that the father could resolve the matter. He who possesses the jewel of wisdom is able to do everything. (Nizami, 1173/1945; transl. by Gh. H. Darab)

This story may be seen as an illustration of how social interactions (in this case collective and individual decision-making) shape the child's personality as the child seeks to obtain love and respect from those they interacts with (Adler, 1927). This story also correlates with the following part of Adler's theory: the child, like adults, wants to overtake their rivals. The child's objective is to attain the level of supremacy that will both ensure their safety and help them achieve their chosen purpose. The child has an optimistic belief that they can solve their difficulties quickly. Solving tasks and overcoming difficulties is an important part of personality development as the child gains confidence in the process.

Another interesting example to be considered here is the verses from *Bustan Saadi* (1257) written by Saa'di Shirazi:

<sup>1</sup> The word *Khodavandgar* means "creator" and "lord" in the Persian language and is used as an address of respect (Ferdowsi, 1957).

If thou desire that thy name should remain, train thy son in knowledge and wisdom, for if he possesses not these, thou deist obscure, with no one to commemorate thy name.

Teach him a handicraft, though thou be as rich as Korah. Place no hope in the power that thou hast—riches may go from thee. A bag of silver and gold is emptied; the purse of an artisan remains filled.

Dost thou not know how Sadi attained to rank? He journeyed not over the plains, nor crossed the seas. In his youth he served under the yoke of the learned: God granted him distinction in after-life. It is not long before he who serves obtains command.

A boy who suffers not at the hands of his teacher suffers at the hands of Time. Make thy son good and independent, so that he may not be beholden to any man. Protect him from evil associates; and pity him not if he brings ruin and destruction upon himself, for it is better that a vicious son should die before his father. (Saa'di Shirazi, 1257 B. C./1911; transl. by A. H. Edwards)

All children, slowly, from an early age, realize that some people can fully satisfy their desires and are better prepared for life. If the parents' love for their children is not adequate, it may cause problems in the child's development and they may be facing serious psychological difficulties in adult life. Due to the lack of flourishing desire to love in the child, their point of view is so proven that they cannot know love or affection and use it properly. The basis of educability is that the child tries to compensate for their weaknesses in this way, when a feeling of inadequacy arises in the child, hundreds of talents and abilities appear in them. Education that is accompanied by excessive love is as dangerous as education under pressure and coercion. A child who is a mollycoddle, just like a child who was hated by their parents, is facing huge problems. The classification of children begins from childhood. While some children seek the power to choose a bold approach that leads to their recognition, other children seem to meditate on their weaknesses and try to express them in different ways. Obstacles that the child faces in their mental development usually leads to deviation and hinder the development of feelings of cooperation. These barriers are divided into two categories, one that arises due to the shortcomings of their physical environment, such as those that are rooted in the child's abnormal relationships in socio-racial or familial economic situations. The second category is the barriers that result from the disability of the individual limbs (Adler, 1927).

### ***The Origin of Human Personality, Parental Influence, and the Influence of Education***

In *Masnawi Haft Awrang* (written in 1468) by "Jami" (1390–1466), we can read the following "story of the little boy who was holding big bread, eating and crying that this bread is small and I have a big appetite":

The clever speed messenger went to Baghdad; he saw a child. The child's face was rounder than the moon, and he held a loaf of bread, which was round like his

own face. He was eating bread and crying. The man said to him: "Why are you crying?" The child said: "I am a lonely child who has only one hungry stomach from the table of the world. I'm very hungry and this is small bread. How can I get rid of my hunger with this bread? I cry for this because I know this bread will be gone soon. I will be without food again, I will neither have bread in my hand nor a full stomach". (Jami, 1468 B.C./1997; transl. by N. K.)

Looking at Adler's theory, the above story can be analyzed as follows: the exact opposite of optimistic people are pessimistic people. These are the people with whom we have the biggest educational problems. This pessimistic philosophy of childhood abuse always looks at the dark side of life. He also makes the following points when it comes to adapting to untamed instincts: there are people who show a trait that we can call rudeness or lack of culture. People who chew their fingernails or put their fingers in their noses all the time, and people who throw themselves on food as if they have no choice but to eat, belong to this group. These symbols are clear, and when we look at such a person, we see that they attack food like a hungry wolf, and because they know that no one can stop them, they are not ashamed to show their hunger. How loudly they eat; what morsels that it is not clear where it fits in the stomach; how fast they eat; how many times have you seen people get upset if their mouth doesn't move constantly? Overall, child savagery and bad habits of children are commonly used to attract the attention of adults. Children who want to have a bigger plan or show their adults how weak and helpless they are will resort to these things. The common denominator of all of them is that they mistreat when they see a stranger, and these abuses have only one similar meaning (Adler, 1927).

The following verses from "Rumi" in the book *Koliyat Shams-E Tabrizi* illustrate the influence of the family and upbringing on the child's development. They compare the wrath of the prophets of God to mother's anger towards her child, which contributes to the latter's development and goes hand in hand with compassion and kindness:

The wrath of the prophets is like the wrath of a mother, a wrath full of patience for her beautiful child. This anger is like lightning that strikes the ground and causes the flowers of Nasrin, Lily, and the hundred-leafed and fragrant flower to grow. (Rumi, ca. 1260 B.C./1996; transl. by N. K.)

The same view and emphasis on the role of the mother in the family and society in educating and shaping the child's lifestyle at an early age and choosing their future path is evident in Adler's theory: he pointed out the importance of the mother as the first person the child has a relationship with and as the person who teaches the child the skills of cooperation and association. Only if children feel related to others can they boldly cope with life's problems. Rumi writes about the mother raising her child: even if she shows anger towards the child in the process of upbringing, this anger, like the wrath of the prophets of God, goes hand in hand with compassion and kindness and thus can be compared to a garden where the gardener hoes the earth so that beautiful flowers could grow. A comparable idea finds reflection

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in the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's views on the mother-child relationship, which is considered "fundamental for the healthy development of the child" (Brühlmeier, n.d.). The mother, shaping the child's attitude to the future world, is close to her child in all kinds of activities.

Another interesting fragment is the following anecdote from *Gulistan* written by Saadi:

One of the ministers had a foolish son. He sent him to a scientist and said, "Train my son so that he may be wise". The scientist taught the child for a while but it was not effective, so he sent someone to his father and said: "Your son will not be wise and he drives me crazy". When a nature is originally receptive, instruction will take effect afterwards. No kind of polishing will improve iron whose essence is originally bad. Wash a dog in the seven oceans, it will be only dirtier when it gets wet. If the ass of Jesus be taken to Mekkah, on its return it will still be an ass. (Saa'di Shirazi, 1257 B.C./2010)

In contrast to Saadi's idea about the underlying reality or the "true nature" of a child that cannot be changed, Adler's psychology centers around the idea of freedom of choice and personal responsibility for the choices we make. According to Adler, we have control over our destiny and we are not its victims. Lifestyle, though formed in early childhood and affected by heredity and environment, can be modified through "creative power" or "striving power", which is a major intervening variable (Edgar, 1985). As Adler explains, "this creative power, the foundation of a striving life, must be considered as much more important than our capacities, what we inherit, or the impressions we receive" (Adler, 1929/2006, p. 29). It is the way people interpret the external influences that forms the basis of the creative structure of their attitude toward life (Schultz, 2012). Adler places creative power in the center of human personality development, seeing it as the ability of individuals to shape their own lives and destinies, and it is this idea that was later used in Abraham Maslow's theory (Jones-Smith, 2016).

As the above-described examples have shown, the texts of classical Persian literature have some remarkable common points with Adlerian psychology. In mysticism and classical Iranian literature, like in Adlerian psychology, much attention is given to human nature in its entirety and to the methods of educating human beings. It should be noted, however, that since this research note focuses on Persian poems and prose that have roots in Sufism and Islam, caution should be exercised when extrapolating the findings to a wider field and further in-depth research should be carried out. There is, however, one important difference between Adlerian understanding of human psyche and that of classical Iranian authors: while Adler believed in the freedom of choice and people's power to change their personality structure (lifestyle), Iranian authors emphasized the existence of a certain core of the personality or the person's "true nature" that is manifested in childhood and cannot be influenced by education or social environment.

## Conclusion

In this paper our aim was to put forward the suggestion that modern psychological approaches, especially those dealing with education of children, have parallels in the teachings of Iranian mystics. Mysticism and classical Persian literature, like Adlerian psychology, considers matters of personality development and in particular the influence of education and family upbringing. Our analysis of the key points of Adlerian psychology has shown that many of his ideas about the role that family, relationships with parents and other family members, and the immediate social environment play in the child's development were given equal attention by the Iranian mystics. We believe that our findings may stimulate further discussion on these questions and thus bring new insights into the roots of modern psychology.

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Re-reading the Tales of Colonisation: An Ecological Perspective

**Amitav Ghosh (2021). *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*.  
University of Chicago Press.**

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When a writer narrates the tale of human society and their journey into modernity in its totality, it will be ridden with instances of violent erasure along with moments of resistance and tales of survival. Amitav Ghosh's elaborately researched work, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, published in 2021, during the times of the pandemic, traces this journey of humankind, in a fascinating manner, into the Age of the Anthropocene.

*The Nutmeg's Curse* begins with the description of a monument in Ternate, Indonesia, which has the sculpture of a clove. This "acknowledgement of the role of botanical products" (p. 112) in the memory and history of geographical regions around Indian Ocean becomes a symbol of the violence, the genocide, of the stories of extermination that define the acts of colonization. Beginning with the story of the nutmeg, Ghosh compels us to revisit the history of exploitation of natural resources to an earlier age when European travellers began their exploration of the Global South. In the age of decolonizing knowledge, Ghosh' work is a timely one since it traces the history of colonization through the erasure of indigenous population and indigenous knowledge.

The work, though non-fiction, reads like a prose narrative, the story telling often providing the reader a pleasurable reading experience, all the while reminding the reader of the history of human progress, the story of acts of Othering in the march towards civilization. The author of this work on human society and its intricate relationship with nature, Amitav Ghosh hails from India, and writes both fiction and non-fiction. As a novelist, he enthralls the reader with tales from South Asia, and as a writer of non-fiction, he writes about the ecological concerns of his times. His latest work titled *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* analyzes the impact of Western normative structures, that are embedded in the values of modernity, on the globe. It is informative as well as imaginative, thereby providing a pleasurable

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yet thought provoking reading experience. *Nutmeg's Curse* is a tale of the hegemonic human agency seeking control over nature, where violence, aggression, greed and the desire for power define the trajectory of colonialism, capitalism and Western modernity. The text dismantles the once-revered discourses of modernization and “myth-making of modernity” (p. 19) through his story of the nutmeg. As Ghosh says: “Humanity is being so closely entangled with the products of the Earth that the past cannot be remembered without them” (p. 91). Amitav Ghosh weaves his narrative around the structural violence of colonization by foregrounding the tale of the nutmeg, that acts as a trope symbolizing the vicious trajectory of capitalism over centuries, which was once a priceless spice, “a fetish, primordial forms of the commodity” (p. 9) and later, as it lost its value as a commodity, nutmeg trees were cut down, making it costlier by reducing the supply in the market.

Climate change, according to Ghosh, is a multidimensional threat to the planet and its geopolitical dimension cannot be ignored. Genocides, refugee migrations, erasing cultures and communities and above all, the systemic violence that validates the destruction of the planet—remain significant milestones in their journey towards civilization and modernity.

*Nutmeg's Curse* tells a melancholic story, recounted in a poignant fashion, liberally interspersed with quotes from memoirs, testimonies and narratives of travelers, giving the work credibility yet maintaining its narrative quality. Ghosh's earlier work of non-fiction, on the Age of the Anthropocene, titled *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) was about the agency of nature and non-human species and the canonical literary texts from the Global North that failed to envision such perspectives. But his later work, *Nutmeg's Curse* attempts a more comprehensive analysis of climate change, discusses the historical contexts in which geological changes have been happening over time, and proceeds to explain its contemporaneity as a global phenomenon of immense magnitude. The text invites the reader to reimagine the place of the human on the planet by re-reading modernity's fundamental normative structures and decolonizing histories from the West. He cites from Sir Francis Bacon to Lord Tennyson and to the latest texts on human social experiences and their interactions with the natural world, to clarify his position on modernity. Ghosh further cites the “intensely chauvinistic nature of English literature” (p. 44) that perpetrates the myth of civilizing the native “barbarian”.

Furthering his arguments on human centrality and ecological interventions, Ghosh uses the concept of “terra-forming” (p. 53) to explain “biopolitical conflicts” through five centuries from the spice wars to the latest social movements involving climate activist Greta Thunberg (p. 55). He explains this process further: “Where Bolsonaro is right is that a large part of Brazil has so far escaped the fate of the interior of North America: it has not yet been terraformed into a neo-Europe like, say, the American Midwest. But this is exactly what Bolsonaro's government intends to change; the goal is to complete the project of colonial terraforming by replacing vast swathes of the rain forest with cattle ranches, mines, and soya and sugarcane monocultures” (p. 213).

Ghosh perceives history and politics as not merely human engagements with territories and populace, but they are seen enmeshed in environmental factors, and cites examples from the Americas. Colonization was not only about occupying

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and owning territories but also about emerging as forces of irreversible change in the ecology of the land as well, ranging from the introduction of domestic animals to construction of dams. It was consolidated by a “belief in human exceptionalism” (p. 81), resulting in the misconception of an inert planet. He speaks of the “process of subjugating, and reducing to muteness, an entire universe of beings that was once thought of as having agency, powers of communication, and the ability to make meaning—animals, trees, volcanoes, nutmegs” (p. 190). The book goes on to successfully incorporate the concept of a “living earth—Gaia” (p. 84), adopted from James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, along with the concept of vitalism as an antidote to the rationale of modernity that normalizes human interventions and the abusive, exploitative character of human-nature encounters.

Ghosh explains the multiple dimensions of this planetary crisis, resulting from the destruction of the environment, by looking beyond the economic determinants and attempts to pinpoint the reason for the significance of fossil fuels even in the new millennium. He explains the manner in which these forces “reinforce structures of power” (p. 102), and, therefore, this energy transition can also lead to paradigm shifts in geopolitical dynamics. With largescale acceptance of renewable energy sources, Ghosh envisages a power shift from the West. Another dimension to the planetary crisis is the humanitarian issue of climate refugees. Ghosh, like a storyteller that he is, begins this discussion from a survivor’s tale and leads the reader towards the systemic violence that seeks to erase the oppressed and othered class from the collective memory of the populace. Ghosh elucidates it further with the example of the pandemic thereby breaking the illusion that economic backwardness aggravates a crisis that is related to the natural world. It is inequity of all forms that worsens the condition of life forms, and it is concern not only for the marginalized sections of society, but for the whole planet. He identifies normative discourses around the “valorization of personal pursuits” and the glorification of the “ideology of morbid individualism” in contemporary societies, that is present in literature and other cultural artefacts and philosophies, as contributing significantly to this mindset that results in turning “crises into tragedies” (p. 177).

Ghosh concludes his work around the concept of ecofascism that is prominent in the West, where ecological movements are suspiciously viewed even by the lesser privileged. He finds “vitalist ideas and politics” (p. 233) waning in importance even in a country like India with its spiritual tradition and pantheistic practices. Yet he is optimistic, and believes that “global connectivity” will help build collectives who will participate, perform and gather “to find a common idiom and shared story” (p. 242).

*The Nutmeg’s Curse* is exceptional for its display of Ghosh’ scholarship. Extensive notes and bibliography that is a significant part of the text reveals the research that has gone into the work, which is truly interdisciplinary in nature. The work at times falters in building an argument, sometimes it rambles around several ideas, yet it keeps the reader mesmerized in the reading experience. Ghosh succeeds in moving through time, from the ancient past to the present, and his scholarship which leads the reader through the ideas from around the world keeps us captivated. Being a storyteller, Ghosh successfully presents facts in the format of stories, the human and the world in the text, appealing to the empathetic reader, thereby ensuring that the work is a critique of the Anthropocene.



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## **ETHICAL CODE**

### **FOR JOURNAL EDITORS**

We ask all journal editors to make every reasonable effort to adhere to the following ethical code for Changing Societies & Personalities journal articles that are worthy of peer review:

- Journal editors should be accountable for everything published in their journals meaning that they should strive to meet the needs of readers and authors; strive to constantly improve their journal; have processes in place to assure the quality of the material they publish; champion freedom of expression; maintain the integrity of the academic record; preclude business needs from compromising intellectual and ethical standards; always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed.
- Journal editors should give unbiased consideration to each manuscript submitted for consideration for publication, and should judge each on its merits, without regard to race, religion, nationality, sex, seniority, or institutional affiliation of the author(s).
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- All authors named on the paper are equally held accountable for the content of a submitted manuscript or published paper. All persons who have made significant scientific or literary contributions to the work reported should be named as co-authors. The corresponding author must ensure all named co-authors consent to publication and to being named as a co-author. Where there are others who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the research project, they should be acknowledged or listed as contributors.
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  - If required, authors must facilitate access to data sets described in the article. a paper should contain sufficient detail and references to permit others to replicate the work.
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- Reviewers should declare any potential conflict of interest interests (which may, for example, be personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or

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religious) prior to agreeing to review a manuscript including any relationship with the author that may potentially bias their review.

- Reviewers must keep the peer review process confidential; information or correspondence about a manuscript should not be shared with anyone outside of the peer review process.
- Reviewers should provide a constructive, comprehensive, evidenced, and appropriately substantial peer review report, and provide feedback that will help the authors to improve their manuscript. Reviewers should express their views clearly with supporting arguments and make clear, which suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration, and which will just strengthen or extend the work. Reviewers must ensure that their comments and recommendations for the editor are consistent with their report for the authors.
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- Reviewers must be aware of the sensitivities surrounding language issues that are due to the authors writing in a language that is not their own, and phrase the feedback appropriately and with due respect.
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- Reviewers should make all reasonable effort to submit their report and recommendation in a timely manner, informing the editor if this is not possible.
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## INSTRUCTION FOR AUTHORS

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## Manuscript preparation

### 1. General Guidelines

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#### *Description of the Journal's Article Style*

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All authors must submit articles written in good English using correct grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. If authors are non-native English speakers or writers, may, if possible, to have their submissions proofread by a native English speaker before submitting their article for consideration.

A typical manuscript is from 6000 to 8000 words including tables, references, captions, footnotes and endnotes. Review articles should not exceed 4000 words, and book reviews should not exceed 1500 words. Manuscripts that greatly exceed this will be critically reviewed with respect to length.

Manuscripts should be compiled in the following order: title page (including Acknowledgements as well as Funding and grant-awarding bodies); abstract; keywords; main text; acknowledgments; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figure caption(s) (as a list).

Abstracts of 150–200 words are required for all manuscripts submitted.

Each manuscript should have 5 to 10 keywords.

Section headings should be concise.

All authors of a manuscript should include their full names, affiliations, postal addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses on the cover page of the manuscript. One author should be identified as the corresponding author. Please give the affiliation where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after the manuscript is accepted. Please note that the email address of the corresponding author will normally be displayed in the published article and the online version.

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Please supply a short biographical note for each author.

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For all manuscripts non-discriminatory language is mandatory. Sexist or racist terms must not be used. The singular “they” or “their” is endorsed as a gender-neutral pronoun. Instead of using adjectives as nouns to label groups of people, descriptive phrases are preferred. Instead of broad categories, using exact age ranges that are more relevant and specific is preferable.

## 2. Style Guidelines

- Font:* Helvetica, “Helvetica Neue” or Calibri, Sans-Serif, 12 point. Use margins of at least 2.5 cm (1 inch).
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- Affiliations:* List the affiliation of each author (university, city, country).
- Correspondence details:* Please provide an institutional email address for the corresponding author. Full postal details are also needed by the publisher, but will not necessarily be published.
- Anonymity for peer review:* Ensure your identity and that of your co-authors is not revealed in the text of your article or in your manuscript files when submitting the manuscript for review.
- Abstract:* Indicate the abstract paragraph with a heading or by reducing the font size.
- Keywords:* Please provide five to ten keywords to help readers find your article.
- Headings:* Please indicate the level of the section headings in your article:
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  - Second-level headings should be in bold italics, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.
  - Third-level headings should be in italics, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.
  - Fourth-level headings should also be in italics, at the beginning of a paragraph. The text follows immediately after a full stop (full point) or other punctuation mark.
- Tables and figures:* Indicate in the text where the tables and figures should appear, for example by inserting [Table 1 near here]. The actual tables and figures should be supplied either at the end of the text or in a separate file as requested by the Editor.

If your article is accepted for publication, it will be copy-edited and typeset in the correct style for the journal.

Foreign words and all titles of books or plays appearing within the text should be italicized. Non-Anglophone or transliterated words should also appear with translations provided in square brackets the first time they appear (e.g., weltanschauung [world-view]).

If an English translation of a foreign work is referenced, the author, title, and so forth come from the version read, with a nod to the translator: Piaget, J. (1969). *The psychology of the child* (H. Weaver, Trans.). Basic Books.

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Please use double quotation marks, except where “a quotation is ‘within’ a quotation”. Long quotations of words or more should be indented with quotation marks.

To draw more attention to the items and help readers understand the separate, parallel items in a complex list, use lowercase letters in parentheses before each item. Do not use numbers in parentheses.

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Placement	References are cited in the text by the author's surname, the publication date of the work cited, and a page number if necessary. Full details are given in the reference list. Place them at the appropriate point in the text. If they appear within parenthetical material, put the year within commas: (see Table 3 of National Institute of Mental Health, 2012, for more details)
Within the same parentheses	Order alphabetically and then by year for repeated authors, with in-press citations last. Separate references by different authors with a semi-colon.
Repeat mentions in the same paragraph	If name and year are in parentheses, include the year in subsequent citations.

With a quotation	This is the text, and Smith (2012) says "quoted text" (p. 1), which supports my argument. This is the text, and this is supported by "quoted text" (Smith, 2012, p. 1). This is a displayed quotation. (Smith, 2012, p. 1)
Page number	(Smith, 2012, p. 6)
One author	Smith (2012) or (Smith, 2012)
Two authors	Smith and Jones (2012) or (Smith & Jones, 2012)
Three or more authors	Three or more authors is shortened right from the first citation: Smith et al. (2012) or (Smith et al., 2012).
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Author with two works in the same year	Put a, b, c after the year (Chen, 2011a, 2011b, in press-a)
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Form of author name	<p>Use the authors' surnames and initials unless you have two authors with the same surname and initial, in which case the full name can be given:          Smith, J. [Jane]. (2012).          Smith, J. [Joel]. (2012).</p> <p>If a first name includes a hyphen, add a full stop (period) after each letter:          Jones, J.-P.</p>
<b>Book</b>	
One author	Author, A. A. (2012). <i>This is a book title: And subtitle</i> . Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).
Two authors	Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (2012). <i>This is a book title: And subtitle</i> . Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).
Three authors	Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (2012). <i>This is a book title: And subtitle</i> . Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).
More authors	Include all names up to twenty. If there are more than twenty authors, list the first nineteen authors, followed by an ellipsis and the last author's name.
Organization as author	American Psychological Association. (2003). <i>Book title: And subtitle</i> . Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).
No author	<i>Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary</i> (10 <sup>th</sup> ed.). (1993). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster (place of publication is optional).
Chapter	<p>Author, A. A. (2012). This is a chapter. In J. J. Editor (Ed.), <i>Book title: And subtitle</i> (pp. 300–316). Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).</p> <p>Author, A. A. (2012). This is a chapter. In J. J. Editor &amp; B. B. Editor (Eds.), <i>Book title: And subtitle</i> (pp. 300–316). Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).</p> <p>Author, A. A. (2012). This is a chapter. In J. J. Editor, P. P. Editor, &amp; B. B. Editor (Eds.), <i>Book title: And subtitle</i> (pp. 300–316). Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).</p>

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<p>Edition</p>	<p>Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Book title: And subtitle</i> (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).</p>
<p>Translated</p>	<p>Author, J. J. (2012). <i>Book title: And subtitle</i>. (L. Khan, Trans.). Abingdon: Routledge (place of publication is optional).</p>
<p>Not in English</p>	<p>Doutre, É. (2014). <i>Mixité de genre et de métiers: Conséquences identitaires et relations de travail</i> [Mixture of gender and trades: Consequences for identity and working relationships]. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement, 46, 327–336. <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036218">http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036218</a>                  For transliteration of Cyrillic letters please use the links: ALA-LC Romanization Tables at the web-site of The Library of Congress <a href="http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html">http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html</a></p>
<p>Online</p>	<p>Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work: Subtitle</i> [Adobe Digital Editions version]. (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a></p>
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<b>Multivolume works</b>	
Multiple volumes from a multivolume work	Levison, D., & Ember, M. (Eds.). (1996). <i>Encyclopedia of cultural anthropology</i> (Vols. 1–4). New York, NY: Henry Holt (place of publication is optional). Use Vol. for a single volume and Vols. for multiple volumes. In text, use (Levison & Ember, 1996).
A single volume from a multivolume work	Nash, M. (1993). Malay. In P. Hockings (Ed.), <i>Encyclopedia of world cultures</i> (Vol. 5, pp. 174–176). New York, NY: G.K. Hall (place of publication is optional). In text, use (Nash, 1993).
<b>Journal</b>	
One author	Author, A. A. (2011). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 22(2), 123–231. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/xxxxxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/10.1080/xxxxxxxxxxxxx</a> Volume numbers in references should be italicized, but do not italicize the issue number, the parentheses, or the comma after the issue number. If there is no DOI and the reference was retrieved from an online database, give the database name and accession number or the database URL (no retrieval date is needed): Author, A. A. (2011). Title of the article. <i>Title of Journal</i> , 22(2), 123–231. (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a>
Two authors	Benjamin, L. T., Jr., & VandenBos, G. R. (2006). The window on psychology's literature: A history of psychological abstracts. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 61(9), 941–954. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.9.941">https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.9.941</a>
Three authors	Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (1987). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 22, 123–231. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx</a>
More authors	Include all names up to twenty. If there are more than twenty authors, list the first nineteen authors, followed by an ellipsis and the last author's name.
Organization as author	American Psychological Association. (2003). Title of the article: Subtitle of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 22(1), 12–23. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx</a>
No author	Editorial: Title of editorial. [Editorial]. (2012). <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 14, 1–2.
Not in English	If the original version is used as the source, cite the original version. Use diacritical marks and capital letters for the original language if needed. If the English translation is used as the source, cite the English translation. Give the English title without brackets. Titles not in English must be translated into English and put in square brackets.  Author, M. (2000). Title in German: Subtitle of the article [Title in English: c article]. <i>Journal in German</i> , 21, 208–217. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx</a> Author, P. (2000). Title in French [Title in English]. <i>Journal in French</i> , 21, 208–217. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx</a>  For transliteration of Cyrillic letters please use the links: ALA-LC Romanization Tables at the web-site of The Library of Congress <a href="http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html">http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html</a>
Peer-reviewed article published online ahead of the issue	Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (2012). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> . Advance online publication. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx</a> If you can update the reference before publication, do so.
Supplemental material	If you are citing supplemental material, which is only available online, include a description of the contents in brackets following the title. [Audio podcast] [Letter to the editor]

Other article types	Editorial: Title of editorial. [Editorial]. (2012). <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 14, 1–2. Author, A. A. (2010). Title of review. [Review of the book Title of the book, by B. Book Author]. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 22(1), 123–231. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxx</a>
Article in journal supplement	Author, A. A. (2004). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 42(Suppl. 2), p–pp. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxx</a>
<b>Conference</b>	
Proceedings	To cite published proceedings from a book, use book format or chapter format. To cite regularly published proceedings, use journal format.
Paper	Presenter, A. A. (2012, February). Title of the paper. <i>Paper presented at the meeting of Organization Name</i> , Location.
Poster	Presenter, A. A. (2012, February). Title of the poster. <i>Poster session presented at the meeting of Organization Name</i> , Location
<b>Thesis</b>	Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of thesis</i> (Unpublished doctoral dissertation or master's thesis). Name of the Institution, Location.
<b>Unpublished work</b>	
Manuscript	Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (2008). <i>Title of the manuscript</i> . Unpublished manuscript. Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (2012). <i>Title of the manuscript</i> . Manuscript submitted for publication.
Forthcoming article	Do not provide a year in the reference if the document is not published yet. If the document is about to be published, use "in press": Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (in press). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> . <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxx</a>
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<b>Newspaper or magazine</b>	Author, A. (2012, January 12). Title of the article. <i>The Sunday Times</i> , p. 1. Author, A. (2012, January 12). Title of the article. <i>The Sunday Times</i> . <a href="http://www.sundaytimes.com/xxxx.html">http://www.sundaytimes.com/xxxx.html</a> Title of the article. (2012, January 12). <i>The Sunday Times</i> . <a href="http://www.sundaytimes.com/xxxx.html">http://www.sundaytimes.com/xxxx.html</a>
<b>Reports</b>	
May or may not be peer-reviewed; may or may not be published. Format as a book reference	Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work</i> (Report No. 123). Location: Publisher. Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work</i> (Report No. 123). (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a>

Working paper	Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work</i> (Working Paper No. 123). Location: Publisher. Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work</i> (Working Paper No. 123). (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a>
Discussion paper	Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work</i> (Discussion Paper No. 123). Location: Publisher. Author, A. A. (2012). <i>Title of work</i> (Discussion Paper No. 123). (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a>
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Patent	Cho, S. T. (2005). U.S. Patent No. 6,980,855. Washington, DC: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
Map	London Mapping Co. (Cartographer). (1960). Street map. [Map]. ( <i>The website name</i> ) <a href="https://www.londonmapping.co.uk/maps/xxxxx">https://www.londonmapping.co.uk/maps/xxxxx</a>
Act	<i>Mental Health Systems Act</i> , 41 U.S.C. § 9403 (1988).
Audio and visual media	Taupin, B. (1975). Someone saved my life tonight [Recorded by Elton John]. On Captain fantastic and the brown dirt cowboy [CD]. London: Big Pig Music Limited (place of publication is optional). Author, A. (Producer). (2009, December 2). <i>Title of podcast</i> [Audio podcast]. (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a> Producer, P. P. (Producer), & Director, D. D. (Director). (Date of publication). <i>Title of motion picture</i> [Motion picture]. Country of origin: Studio or distributor. Smith, A. (Writer), & Miller, R. (Director). (1989). Title of episode [Television series episode]. In A. Green (Executive Producer), Series. New York, NY: WNET. Miller, R. (Producer). (1989). The mind [Television series]. New York, NY: WNET.
Database	Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, A. A. (2002). A study of enjoyment of peas. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 8(3). Retrieved February 20, 2003, from the PsycARTICLES database.
Dataset	Author. (2011). <i>National Statistics Office monthly means and other derived variables</i> [Data set]. Retrieved March 6, 2011, ( <i>The website name</i> ) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a> If the dataset is updated regularly, use the year of retrieval in the reference, and using the retrieval date is also recommended.
Computer program	Rightsholder, A. A. (2010). <i>Title of program</i> (Version number) [Description of form]. Location: Name of producer. Name of software (Version Number) [Computer software]. Location: Publisher. If the program can be downloaded or ordered from a website, give this information in place of the publication information.

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