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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) INTEGRATION IN EFL ORAL COMMUNICATION CONTEXT: ENGLISH MAJOR SOPHOMORES PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH-SPEAKING

Abdelmadjid BENRAGHDA

Assoc. Professor, PhD, University of Illizi (Algeria)

E-mail: benraghda.abdelmadjid@cuillizi.dz

Abstract: *In today's globalized educational environment, information and communication technologies (ICT) has become a fundamental prerequisite and integral part of education. In the 21st-century learning environment, digital literacy, or ICT, becomes another ability that students need to learn in addition to language and numeracy. ICT has significantly influenced English language education and learning as we enter a new millennium. Speaking is a fundamental language acquisition ability, thus for students to achieve their goals, they need a classroom that is well-equipped. Moreover, education is changing in response to the digital era. The most significant educational problems caused by the epidemic, such as the lockdown, have been addressed by teachers all throughout the world. Hence, this study tries to ascertain how sophomores feel about using digital devices during oral presentation performances. For 139 sophomores of the English Language, a questionnaire was adopted and distributed for the study to the sophomores who were registered for English for Oral Communication course for semester 2, session 2022/2023. SPSS was employed to analyze the quantitative data, and to calculate the descriptive statistics of the current study. The main results revealed that sophomores' attitudes regarding the use of ICT during oral performances were overwhelmingly favorable.*

Keywords: ICT, Perspectives, sophomores, oral communication, speaking.

1. Introduction

ICT has extended throughout the world; it is currently used in practically every aspect of life. Educators frequently employ ICT resources, such as computer, telephone (telecommunication products), walkie-talkies, digital cameras, and audio-recording software to enhance the teaching/learning process. The widespread desire to incorporate and utilise ICT in the classroom gives educators and learners greater chances to be productive in the digital era (Boussebha, 2023; Lawrence & Tar, 2018). The term ICT is seen as the technologies that enable telecommunications-based access to information. It is comparable to information technology (IT), but it is mostly concerned with communication technologies (Ratheeswari, 2018). ICT is simply a set of materials and tools, which are used to communicate, store, and manage information. The latter is considered an important element in the learning process, as it provides learners with opportunities to learn the language and improves their communicative competence.

In the early 2020s, the world witnessed an outbreak of the deadly coronavirus epidemic, also known as COVID-19. Although many endeavors have been made by governments to find a permanent cure, but no effective cure has been achieved yet. The spread of this virus led to unexpected negative consequences (Thomas & Rogers, 2020) as it has impacted the educational systems worldwide (Schleicher, 2020), consequently, universities and schools have been locked down in order to curb the virus's spread. As a result, governments and policymakers have shifted the teaching and learning process towards online learning. Like many other countries, which were infected by this virus, Algeria was one of them. The Algerian educational authority has ordered universities to transmit to online teaching and learning mode by establishing E-learning platforms. Therefore, teachers and learners have been obliged to cope with this new method.

The primary focus of this research is to investigate sophomores' attitudes towards ICT integration in oral performances during the post epidemic period. In psychology, the term attitude refers to the emotions and behaviors of a specific person towards an object, or event. Attitudes have a great impact on behavior; they are often the result of upbringing or experience (Cherry, 2021).

2. Literature review

A number of studies underlined that students' attitudes are the result of their success or failure in any educational process (Benraghda, Radzuan & Lardhi, 2022; Benraghda & Radzuan, 2019; Ghavifekr et al., 2014; Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). It is claimed that perception plays an important role in language learning process (Benraghda, Ali, Radzuan, 2015). Consequently, a positive attitude ought to be the umbrella of language learning (Baföz, 2016; Rabah, 2015; Sosas, 2021). While attitudes are important in traditional language learning, they also have an impact on online learning.

ICT is one of the main forces behind the rapid changes occurring in our society. It is a significant catalyst for rapid societal change. It has the power to revolutionize education and redefine the roles of students and teachers in the teaching and learning process (Baishakhi & Kamal, 2019). Recently, the educational process is shifting towards a learner-centered approach, necessitating that teachers be equipped to effectively utilize various forms of technology in the classroom. This ensures that teaching and learning become more interactive and engaging (Baishakhi & Kamal, 2019). Subsequently, quality education depends on the advancement of information technology in various areas, including improving learner's motivation, enhancing fundamental abilities, and expanding teachers' technology training. The effective employment of ICT in teaching eventually serves as a subject/curriculum transformation tool (Alkaramah, Fauziati & Asib, 2020; Salinas et al., 2017).

Kitchakarn (2015) conducted a research study at a private institution in Turkey, focusing on the use of computers as a learning aid for language acquisition among undergraduate students. The study found that students had a positive attitude towards using computers as a tool for learning. In a similar vein, Ramadhan (2019) explored the perceptions and attitudes of EFL learners in Kurdistan, Iraq towards online English courses. The findings indicated that participants had positive attitudes toward using the Internet to learn English. Additionally, the use of the internet and applications as platforms among students enhanced language learning and interaction.

Attitudes of learners and online learning both have an impact on one another. This reciprocal influence is crucial in helping EFL students accomplish their learning goals. According to Ridho et al. (2019), Google Classroom is an effective learning tool that enables students to enhance their learning by actively participating in online discussions and assignments. The study found that most participants had a positive response and viewed Google Classroom as a user-friendly and meaningful platform that offers flexibility in learning, allowing students to access materials and engage with their peers without the limitations of time and physical interaction with teachers and classmates.

When Sherine et al. (2020) investigated how Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) affected the improvement of speaking abilities, they realized that participants' pronunciation and speaking performance both dramatically improved. Furthermore, Chau (2021) sought to determine the impact of combining Whatsapp and informal learning in developing students' communicative competencies based on international English exams' measures test, such as fluency, pronunciation, coherence, grammatical range, accuracy, lexical resource. The results indicated that their speaking skills had improved and their attitudes towards speaking skills had shifted.

Similarly to Azzouz (2018) and EL Mortaji (2018) who looked into how videotaping affects college students' public speaking skills when they are learning English. The results revealed that the students' public speaking skills improved. The findings indicated that

videotaping and self-reflection had a substantial impact on improving students' public speaking abilities and promoting learning autonomy and confidence.

Other researchers, however, have found that EFL students have a negative attitude towards online learning. Orlando and Attard (2015) claimed that using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to deliver virtual classes would be ineffective unless the right technological instruments accompany it. Amin and Sundari (2020) investigated EFL students' choices on digital platforms during emergency distance learning due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia. Three digital learning platforms—Cisco WebEx Meeting video conferencing, Google classroom learning management system, and WhatsApp mobile messenger application were the core of their investigation. Despite their widespread popularity among students, for the most participants, the three digital platforms had less of a favourable impact than in-person instruction. It seems sense that, in comparison to a traditional learning environment, the learners' online digital learning system is not perfect.

In the light of the aforementioned, the emergence of Covid-19 has given more importance to the use of ICT in the educational system, therefore, online technologies will keep the learning process effective in these difficult times (Linda, 2014). Due to the Covid-19 epidemic, different institutions have launched and started using online learning software/platforms to facilitate distance learning, such as, Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp (Mannong, 2020).

3. Methodology

The process that researchers follow when doing their research is known as research methodology. It shows how these researchers formulate their issues and goals and present their conclusions based on the information gathered throughout the research period. (Kothari, 2004). This section is the methodological part of the research. It aims at providing a clear description of the steps, participants and the data collection method employed in the research. This section is devoted to analyze the questionnaire data given to sophomores of the English language at the University of Mohamed El Bachir Ibrahim. The results obtained will be analyzed statically using SPSS. Bear in mind, the objective behind the investigation is to examine sophomores' attitudes towards ICT integration in oral performance.

3.1. Participants

The current study was conducted at Mohamed El Bachir Ibrahim University. 139 individuals were chosen at random as the study's sample out of a total of 209 students, according to Krejcie and Morgan's table, which was used to establish the sample size.

3.2. Research instrument

The present study utilized the quantitative research approach where a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire used for this study is adapted from the questionnaires designed by Fitri et. al. (2020) and Kopinska (2020), it is considered suitable for this research. The questionnaire is composed of two sections. The first section asks the participants about their demographic information such as age, gender, while the second section is comprised of twenty (20) items, which ask the participants about their attitudes related to the use of ICT in oral performances.

3.3. Data collection

The questionnaire was distributed to sophomores of English at Bordj Bou Arreridj University whom they met on campus without any special arrangement. The distribution was handled by the researchers during students' ordinary sessions. The participants were allotted up to 15 minutes to answer the questionnaire. The questions were designed to get overall feedback from the students about their attitudes.

3.4. Data analysis

The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire for this study, which answered the first research question about sophomores' attitudes and perceptions related to the use of ICT in oral performances. The analysis of data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS. The sample of the students' questionnaire consists of 40 male students and 102 female students, based on Table 1 and 2. Thus, the majority of participants are female (71.83%). Primarily, (71.83%) of the students were between (19-21) years old. However, (15.50%) were between (22-24) years old and (12.67%) revealed from the students aged 24 years and more.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information (gender)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	40	28.16
Female	102	71.83
Total	142	100

Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants (age)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
19-21	102	71.83
22-24	22	15.50
24 and more	18	12.67
Total	142	100

4. Results and discussions

The questionnaire of the study is analyzed through descriptive statistics. (Table 3) which revealed the mean scores of some items were medium, (M=3.88) and none of the items scored a Standard Deviation (SD) lower than (SD=1.032). The results show that the items with the highest statistical analysis of mean scores are: item 1 (The use of ICT is important in delivering oral performance) with a mean score of (M=3.88; SD=1.09), item 20 (The use of ICT in my classes helps me to complete the work in my oral tasks) with a mean score of (M=3.61; SD=1.17), item 16 (I become more interested to ICT use in oral performance) with a mean score of (M=3.53; SD=1.07). By contrast, the items of the lowest mean scores are: item 13 (The use of ICT does not motivate my oral performance) with a mean score of (M=3.08; SD=1.25) and item 15 (The use of ICT in oral classes is boring) with a mean score of (M=3.12; SD=1.37), item 14 (It is difficult to use ICT to promote oral performance) with a mean score of (M=3.22; SD=1.35).

The results are depicted based on the percentage as well, in which 43% among students agree that the use of ICT is important in delivering their oral performance. In the same vein, 30.3% of the participants are strongly agreed upon the item mentioned above. Moreover, 14.1% of them are neutral towards it. On the other hand, 6.3% among the participants strongly disagree with the latter and 4.2 % of them are disagreeing.

Table 3: Students' Attitudes towards ICT integration in Oral Performances

Items	Percent					M	SD
	SD	D	N	A	SA		
The use of ICT is important in delivering oral performance, especially post Covid-19 pandemic.	6.3	4.2	14.1	43.0	30.3	3.88	1.09
The use of ICT post pandemic makes oral tasks more enjoyable.	6.3	12.7	21.1	43.7	14.1	3.47	1.09

The use of ICT post pandemic enhances my level in oral performance.	7.7	21.1	21.8	32.4	14.8	3.26	1.18
The use of ICT post pandemic upgrades my oral performance with more updated materials.	6.3	16.2	31.0	27.5	16.9	3.33	1.18
The use of ICT post pandemic helps me increase my speaking quality and oral performance.	7.7	15.5	16.2	40.1	18.3	3.47	1.14
The use of ICT post pandemic helps students to understand the materials in more effective way in delivering an oral task.	8.5	17.6	14.1	35.9	21.8	3.46	1.25
The use of ICT post pandemic encourages the students to be more active and involves their engagement in oral performance.	8.5	20.4	19.0	32.4	17.6	3.31	1.23
The use of ICT post pandemic increases students' interest and motivation toward oral performance.	9.9	17.6	22.5	32.4	15.5	3.27	1.21
The use of ICT post pandemic decreases students' oral performance due to lack of feedback.	8.5	18.3	24.6	26.1	20.4	3.32	1.24
The use of ICT post pandemic enhances oral performance among learners.	7.0	17.6	25.4	34.5	13.4	3.30	1.13
The use of ICT post pandemic enables students to interact effectively with teachers using oral performance.	9.9	18.3	21.1	31.7	16.9	3.28	1.24
The use of ICT post pandemic makes students more productive in their oral performance.	7.0	21.1	20.4	28.9	20.4	3.35	1.23
The use of ICT post pandemic does not motivate my oral performance.	12.0	23.2	21.8	26.8	14.1	3.08	1.25
It is difficult to use ICT to promote oral performance post pandemic.	10.6	24.6	20.4	17.6	24.6	3.22	1.35
The use of ICT post pandemic in oral classes is boring.	15.5	20.4	19.7	21.8	20.4	3.12	1.37
I become more interested to ICT use in oral performance post pandemic.	4.2	14.1	22.5	39.4	17.6	3.53	1.07
It is difficult to have an access to the technological resources in oral classes.	6.3	17.6	22.5	30.3	21.1	3.43	1.19
The use of ICT post pandemic helps me to expand various resources in oral classes.	8.5	14.8	20.4	38.0	16.2	3.40	1.18
The use of ICT post pandemic provides convenience in assessing and monitoring the students' progress in oral performance.	4.9	13.4	30.3	37.3	12.0	3.39	1.03
The use of ICT in my classes helps me to complete the work in my oral tasks.	6.3	12.0	19.0	36.6	23.9	3.61	1.17
Total						3.37	1.19

The statistical analysis results show that the majority of sophomore EFL students argued that the use of ICT is important in delivering their oral performance as shown in item 1 with a mean score of ($M=3.88$; $SD=1.09$). In the same vein, students claimed that ICT helped them to complete their work in oral tasks (item 20), ($M=3.61$; $SD=1.17$) and make it more enjoyable (item 2) with a mean score of ($M=3.47$; $SD=1.09$). They also become more interested in using it as shown in item 16 ($M=3.53$; $SD=1.07$). It is concluded that the general attitude of the participants is in accordance with the importance of ICT use in delivering oral performance during the post Covid-19 pandemic, which is in accordance with Puangpunsi (2021) findings that ICT plays an important role in oral production courses. Also, ICT assisted students in improving and

overcoming their challenges in delivering their oral production. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that using ICT tools is advantageous in progressing students' performances. Moreover, ICT integration in EFL classrooms gives access to learners to familiarize with language during lectures, also to get along with native speakers. That is mainly why teachers should be highly aware of its use in order to achieve positive learning outcomes. Similarly, another study conducted by Linda (2014) revealed that the integration of ICT in oral expression classrooms is vital. In addition, students are not motivated to study their oral expression because their teachers used the traditional way of teaching.

In addition, students consider the use of ICT as a way to enhance their level in oral performance with a mean score of ($M=3.26$; $SD=1.18$) in item 3. Likewise, a large number of students reported that they agree on the use of ICT in helping them increase their speaking quality and oral performance ($M=3.47$; $SD=1.14$) in item 5. Others confirmed that the use of ICT upgrade their oral performance (item 4) with a mean score of ($M=3.33$; $SD=1.18$). Therefore, it is concluded that ICT use enhances and upgrades students' level in oral performance. This is in line with previous research in which most students considered ICT as a tool that enables them to enhance and upgrade their speaking abilities. Students declared that using ICTs helped them to overcome difficulties while speaking the target language, they approved that the use of these technologies enabled them to better their English speaking (Azzouz, 2018). Ghavifekr et al. (2014) considered ICT integration as the most excellent technique that enhances students' speaking. Both students and teachers believe that technology may be used in the classroom as a useful and multifunctional tool for teaching and learning. They affirmed that EFL teachers should use ICTs in the classroom in addition to the traditional methods of teaching. Hence, it will be possible to improve language activities and develop student participation, resulting in the improvement of their speaking skills.

Besides, less than half of students believe that ICT increases their motivation toward oral performance ($M=3.27$; $SD=1.21$) as shown in item 8. This is consistent with Alkaramah, Fauziati & Asib (2020) who found that the use of ICT increases students' motivation and their speaking performances. It is also consistent with a study by Rabah (2015) who found that the use of high technologies increases students' motivation and improves their oral performance. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between ICTs and students' achievements in oral performance. Aşık et al. (2020). also disclosed that ICT increases students' willingness to learn English by promoting autonomy and helping them feel more competent. Using ICTs in the classroom has a significant impact on learning in general and speaking abilities in particular.

Moreover, the results in item 6 demonstrate that a number of students agree with the effectiveness of ICT use in understanding the materials when delivering oral tasks ($M=3.46$; $SD=1.25$). On the other hand, the results showed that the use of ICT during the post pandemic period encouraged students to involve their engagement in oral performance, they become more active, ($M=3.31$; $SD=1.23$) (Item 7) and productive as shown in item 12 with a mean score of ($M=3.35$; $SD=1.23$). The finding resonates with Ghavifekr & Rosdy's (2015) findings in which the use of ICT in teaching enables students to be more active and engaging in the lessons. Moreover, the use of ICT tools creates a good learning environment for teachers and students.

Numbers of students believe that using ICT fosters the interaction among them and their teachers as stated in item 11 with a mean score of ($M=3.30$; $SD=1.13$). Additionally, students approved that ICT enhanced their oral performance among each other (Item10). Likewise, Ghavifekr & Rosdy (2015) found that ICT efficiency lies in encouraging students to orally communicate more with their mates.

Furthermore, participants in item 18 said that the use of ICT helped them expand various resources in oral classes ($M=3.40$; $SD=1.18$). Besides, others agree that ICT helped in assessing and monitoring students' oral performance (item 19) with a mean score of ($M=3.39$; $SD=1.03$). On the other hand, some students claimed that the lack of feedback caused a decrease in their oral performance. (Item 9) ($M=3.32$; $SD=1.24$) However, some participants stated that using ICT during the post pandemic did not motivate them to speak maybe because they prefer face to face

learning as shown in item 13 ($M=3.08$; $SD=1.25$). This is inconsistent with a study conducted by Rabah (2015) who encountered that the use of high technologies increases students' motivation, learning's effectiveness, and improves their oral performance. Others believe that, the use of ICT during the post pandemic in oral classes is boring (Item 15) with a mean score of ($M=3.12$; $SD=1.37$). Items 14 and 17 show that half of students agree that having an access to technological resources in oral classes is difficult (Item 17), and it is difficult to promote their oral performance using ICTs (Item 14).

Finally, based on the overall mean ($M=3.37$; $SD=1.17$) it is concluded that EFL sophomores have positive attitudes pertaining ICT integration in oral tasks. This is similar to Alkaramah, Fauziati, and Asib's study (2020) which concluded that most participants have positive attitudes towards the use of ICT in learning and improving their oral performance. Furthermore, using ICT to practice speaking increases learners' autonomy and prepares them to communicate in English with confidence and competence.

Conclusion

ICT in the language educational setting has become a requirement, particularly during the post Covid-19 pandemic era, to facilitate the process of teaching/learning. When it comes to learning English as a foreign language, many students' main objective is to become proficient speakers of the target language. The usage of ICT tools is one effective way to raise students' speaking performances. In short, this research had led to conclude that sophomores had positive attitudes towards ICT integration in oral performance during the post Covid-19 period. Students are more conscious of the importance of technology tools in helping them improve their speaking skills.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are highly recommended in order to eliminate the hindrances that both teachers and students face when incorporating ICT into the English language teaching and learning:

For students

1. Students are highly recommended to use ICTs to improve their oral performances, and communicative abilities.
2. Students should use ICT tools to become effective web surfers in order to develop fluency and accuracy, as well as knowledge of the English language community's culture and customs.

For teachers

1. Teachers of oral expression are encouraged to employ ICTs in the classroom to transform their teaching methods. Teachers must learn how to improve their ability to teach speaking skills in order to create a positive classroom environment, thus they must be more careful in selecting acceptable teaching materials.
2. Teachers should enable students to use ICT applications when they face difficulties while doing their activities.
3. English language professors should be given training sessions on how to upload content courses to the university's digital platform.

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FACETS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ROMANIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Adrian BASARABĂ¹, Roxana NECȘI²

¹Associate Professor, PhD, West University of Timișoara (Romania),

E-mail: adrian.basaraba@e-uvt.ro

²MA student, BA, West University of Timișoara (Romania),

E-mail: roxana.necsi00@e-uvt.ro

Abstract: *The paper reviews the main aspects concerning the political representation of women both in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, the related influencing factors and the differences between the two states. In order to carry out this comparative case study we used main research methods as follows: desktop research and review of relevant documents, interview and statistical analysis methods. The methodology combines quantitative research, more precisely statistical analysis focused on the political representation of women from the two states at Parliamentary level, as well as on ranking of the two countries in international rankings, while qualitative research side is illustrated by the interviews conducted with two female politicians i.e. Ms. Alina Gorghiu, Senator, from Romania, and Mrs. Doina Gherman, Deputy from Republic of Moldova. Paper' conclusions highlight the fact that the Republic of Moldova ranks better than Romania in terms of political representation of women due to its legal provisions on political representation by gender quotas.*

Keywords: political representation, gender inequality, Romania, Republic of Moldova

1. Introduction

Political representation of women is paramount, since “it is a topic placed at the crossroad of several types of reflections and research works falling within the scope of political science and gender studies” (Băluță & Tufiș, 2021: 2); furthermore, this matter is also of particular importance and relevance for international relations, since women’s political participation is a vital aspect for achieving gender equality. To that end, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasises this issue in its fifth goal: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, more specifically in the target 5.5 set to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (UNGA, 2015: 18). At the same time, women’s political participation is a key element in and for a democratic regime and a priority of the European Union if we consider the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which encompasses the objective of “Achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics” (EC, 2024).

The starting point of research questions we aim to answer through this paper stemmed from the gender related interests of women and the link between them and women’s political representation, considering the European and international context we shortly described above. Thus, we will seek to answer the pair of questions below:

1. What factors impact the political representation of women in these states?
2. What differences stand out between the two countries?

In the first part of the paper, we carry out a statistical analysis of the political representation of women at Parliamentary level, both in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Through the interviews we conducted, we aim at providing some answers to the two research questions mentioned above, but not only, as the respondents’ insights are extremely useful for other chapter of the work as well. In the last part of the paper, we draw some conclusions of the study based on the previous analyses, and we present the research limits and strands of action which could be approached in the future.

2. Theoretical prolegomena

The first research question seeks to find out what factors impact the political representation of women; therefore, in the following pages we present at theoretical level the factors playing an important role in that regard. One of such factors could be the perpetuation of the idea that “the sphere of politics is considered unsuitable for women since it is perceived as a corrupt and muddy environment” (Iancu, 2006: 58). The mere fact that both in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova “the political area is most exclusively maleish” (Pasti, 2003: 217), and women’s problems are not on the political agenda - since this agenda is being dominated by men issues - it should change the view according to which women cannot identify themselves with the political sphere meanings. Women’s participation in politics and not only should be fostered in order to promote their interests related to health condition, children’s related concerns or the pressing matters in education. Moreover, this should happen on a voluntarily basis and not as a result of external pressure from the European Union (Popescu, 2006: 42). The EU has agreed certain standards Romania should comply with in its capacity of EU Member State, and on the other hand, the Republic of Moldova should adopt a similar behaviour; however, in the case of the latter country, the legal and de facto transposition of these interests is necessary from the perspective of joining EU. Romania’s outcomes with regard to the achievement of the objectives set by the EU did not take long to appear. This is how the Equal Opportunities Law was adopted or the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men was established in 2002 and on 19 December 2022 a *National Strategy on promoting equal opportunities and treatment between women and men and preventing and combating domestic violence for the period 2022-2027* was adopted by the Government. Considering all of the above, it goes without saying that the external pressures works; nevertheless, these matters could be brought to the fore in order to look for solutions as a result of some domestic initiatives taken at national level.

Furthermore, an extremely important aspect that drew our attention regarding the political representation of women concerns their interests. Women “must be represented due to the fact that they have distinct interests and life experiences, which cannot be fully acknowledged by men” (Popescu, 2004: 280). This aspect is also the starting point of this work, since there are some events that most women experience and some problems that mainly women face, and while considering them, women’ interests also come to the fore naturally. Perhaps the most edifying example that could clarify any confusion about what one should understand by women’s interests, is the one related to the experience of childbirth and its subsequent stages. There are certainly many examples, in the sense that “women’s specific interests are related to the division of labour in the public and private spheres, in the household, and in pregnancy” (Băluță, 2007: 20).

Gender related interests are twofold, namely strategic gender interests and practical interests. This classification belongs to Molyneux, and in we will try to explain below what these interests refer to. Strategic gender interests were formulated by feminists and refer to the “abolition of the sexual division of labor, the alleviation of the burden of domestic labor and childcare, the attainment of political equality, the establishment of freedom of choice over childbearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women” (Molyneux, 1985: 232-233). Instead, practical gender interests emerge as a result of the jobs women have within the gendered division of labour, representing a response to a perceived urgent need (Molyneux, 1985: 233). In order not to leave room for confusion, we are ought to present the example given by Băluță through which the difference between the two types of interests is highlighted. The latter author referred to maternity leave as in Romania maternity leave is granted for a period of two years, and in the Republic of Moldova for a period of three years to ensure the mother the necessary conditions for child care, respectively the provision of financial aid. From the perspective of strategic gender interests, the two-three year timeframe has a negative impact on women’s professional career. While at home, taking care of their children and family, women face a professional stagnation; at the same time, labor market

evolves, and when women have to resume their professional activity their job-related workmanships and skills are outdated. On the other hand, practical gender interests argue that the sum of money that women receive as a result of maternity leave is a decent amount that can even meet certain needs. Băluță claims that there are situations where the financial support is more substantial than the pay women normally receive at work (Băluță, 2007: 37-38). Moving on, an important aspect that we must bear in mind is that “strategic gender interests can conflict with practical ones” (Băluță, 2007: 37). We agree with this observation, and in the light of the example presented above, we believe that this is because strategic gender interests can appear more ambitious. By this we mean the fact that women do not value the material comfort reflecting short-term benefits, but the medium and long-term gains that relate precisely to professional advancement that may be hindered as a result of maternity leave. We believe that strategic gender interests are closer to reality because what happens *after* the two to three years maternity leave period is more important than what happens during maternity leave, at least from professional perspective. Settling for a little, specifically that allowance, although that small income as we have seen in some cases may represent more than the women in question usually earn, has negative consequences for the situation of women in general. The solution we consider would be to strike a balance between the two categories of interests, so that the strategic ones reflect the practical ones and the other way around, and at the same time we no longer end up in the paradoxical situation presented by the given example, in which on the one hand, for some women maternity leave has a negative impact, and for others who indulge in their condition, a positive impact. More specifically, the way this could be achieved would be by a greater involvement of women in politics, especially of those who are prone to what strategic gender interests mean, so that later, through the leadership positions they hold, to fuel positive changes for other women as well.

3. Women in nowadays political space in Romania and the Republic of Moldova

3.1. Representation of women in Parliament – longitudinal study

Quality of a state’s democracy is closely related to the political representation of women, since “one cannot talk about a true democracy in a society if a significant part of the electorate is not represented on a steady basis” (Terzi-Barbăroșie, 2013: 11). Both in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova, women represent over 50% of the countries’ population, so in the following paragraphs we aim to analyse the state of affairs in terms of women’ political representation. Parity representation ensures equal opportunities, a core factor in the protection of human rights (Council of Europe, 2017: 9), but bottlenecks such as patriarchal values, traditions or mind-sets, on the one hand, and women’s access to education, division of household chores between partners or the imbalance between family and professional life (Expert Forum, 2021: 4), on the other hand, make it difficult to achieve equal opportunities. We reiterate that the political representation of women is an important topic, as this “has become a priority of the European Union over the last decade” (Expert Forum, 2021: 1). Considering all of the above, in this subchapter we carry out a longitudinal study in which we will focus on the composition of the Parliament in the two states starting from 1990 and up to present day.

In the case of the Parliament, it is worth mentioning right from the very beginning that there is one significant difference between the two states, namely that the Parliament of Romania is bicameral, consisting in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, while the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is unicameral. In the Romanian Parliament, more precisely in the Chamber of Deputies, in the term corresponding to the period 1990-1992 there were elected 17 women, while in the Senate there was only one. The total share of women in Parliament during this first democratic term was 3.4%, an extremely low percentage that could be explained by the fact that this first term is the one that marks the first years of the transition from a communist regime to democracy. In the next legislature, i.e. 1992-1996, the number of women in the Chamber of Deputies decreased to only 13, while it increased in the Senate to

three female representatives. Although some progress was made in the Senate, the situation in the Chamber of Deputies led to a decrease of the total share of women present in the Parliament during that term down to 3.3%. In the 1996-2000 term, in the Chamber of Deputies there was an increase in the number of women MPs i.e. up to 25, while in the Senate it downsized to only two female senators. However, due to the increase in the Chamber of Deputies, the women representation share reached 5.5%. In the term 2000-2004, in the Chamber of Deputies the upward trend continued, reaching a total of 38 women MPs in the Parliament. The same trend was recorded in the Senate, with the number of female senators totalling 10 senators. Considering the increases recorded in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the percentage of women reached 9.8%. During the 2004-2008 term, in the Chamber of Deputies the number of women remained constant, but in the Senate it went up to 13. Thus, the women representation' share in Parliament also increased to 10.8%. Throughout the 2008-2012 term, no more progress was made, since in the Chamber of Deputies the number of women MPs remained the same, namely 38, but in the Senate it decreased, reaching a total of eight senators. Given the setback in the Senate, the overall share of female senators also decreased to 9.8%. The downward trend did not last since in the 2012-2016 term the trend reversed and thus the number of women in the Chamber of Deputies reached 55, and in the Senate raised to 13, the total share of women members of the Parliament reaching 11.5%. In the 2016-2020 term, the greatest progress was achieved, as the total percentage reached the threshold of 18.9%, with 68 women MPs in the Chamber of Deputies and 20 in the Senate. Finally, we come to the current parliamentary term that started in 2020 and in place until the fall of 2024. In the case of this Parliament, we witnessed a downward trend in the Chamber of Deputies, where number of women reached 58, while in the Senate their number has increased and reached 25 (own calculations based on the sources available in Addendum no 1). The regression noted in the Chamber of Deputies also changes the overall situation, so that the share of women in Parliament is now 18.5%. Following the presentation of the data available for the 1990-2024 timeframe, we may notice that the political representation of Romanian women in the Parliament is overall weak because women are underrepresented in the political decision-making. This state of affairs was also confirmed by Romanian Senator Alina Gorghiu, who pointed out outdated mentalities or misogyny as possible roots of the political underrepresentation of women, but perhaps the most significant reason is the lack of gender quota legislation, which, as she also mentioned, represents a solution that led to favourable outcomes for women from other states (see Addendum no 2, answer to Q1).

Politics in the Republic of Moldova has been extremely complicated and unstable over time. In the 1990-1994 timeframe, the Parliament did not carry out its political activity for the entire term as in 1993 it dissolved itself. Consequently, in the period 1990-1993 there were 12 women out of a total of 380 parliamentarians, and a women representation share of only 3.8%. Moreover, during this term, an electoral law was adopted which decreased the number of MPs to 104. In 1994-1998 term, the number of women in Parliament decreased to only five female MPs, but the representation share increased to 4.9% as the total number to which it referred was 101 parliamentarians as mentioned. The Parliament whose term started in 1998 was in turn dissolved in 2001. In this 1998-2001 partial parliamentary term, the number of women MPs increased to nine, and the share of women's representation raised to 8.9%. In the subsequent Parliament term i.e. 2001-2005, we witnessed an upward trend, with the number of female parliamentarians reaching 16 and a percentage of 15.8%. The same trend maintained in the 2005-2009 term, with 21 women present in the Republic of Moldova's Parliament, and a 20.9% representation share. After a stable period, in July 2009 things began to fluctuate again, since after two unsuccessful attempts to elect the head of state, the legislature was dissolved, and subsequently the one inaugurated in July 2009 also failed, its activity being halted in September 2010 as a result of the same problem persisting from the previous legislature, namely the election of the President of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, in the July 2009-2010 term, the number of female MPs reached 26 and a share of 25.7%. After this continuous

upward trend, in the 2010-2014 parliamentary term, the number of women decreased to 19, and their percentage down to 18.8%. Then, progress was made again, as in the 2014-2018 term the number of female parliamentarians increased to 20, their share reaching 19.8%. Furthermore, the upward trend continued in the 2019-2021 legislature, with a total of 26 women and a representation percentage of 25.7% (Own calculations based on the sources in Addendum no 1). Finally, we come to the current legislature that started in 2021 and for which one may notice that it adds up to a total of 40 female MPs, so the percentage of representation is 39.6%, which is the highest percentage ever recorded since 1990 until now. However, if we disregard the last legislature, we may notice that also in the case of the Republic of Moldova it can be noted that the political representation of women was weak, but unlike the situation described in the case of Romania and considering the women political representation share in the current parliamentary term, one may notice that the Republic Moldova is heading in the right direction in terms of women's political representation in Parliament. The grounds for the underrepresentation of women are similar to the ones in Romania, as one may also notice from the statements of the MP Doina Gherman, since until 2016 in the Republic of Moldova there was no provision regarding gender quotas. Things started to change in 2016, when the Electoral Code was amended by a provision in the sense that it became mandatory for political parties to have at least 40% candidates of both genders on the electoral lists. Although there was a change, it was not extremely visible, because on "the first eligible positions, namely 20-30, which were somehow secured for the party, they were occupied by men while women, all 40% of them were allocated at the end of the list of candidates" (see Addendum no 3, answer to Q1), which was a proof that this provision alone was not enough. The current visible progress is due to the amendment made to the Electoral Code, as in 2019 the double quota was introduced in the Republic of Moldova. The double quota stipulates that at least 40% of both genders should be present on the electoral lists for every 10 seats, and consequently the record share of 39.6% women MPs in the current parliamentary term is a result thereof. Deputy Doina Gherman also brought up the fact that "this provision is not only valid for parliamentary elections, but also for local ones" (see Addendum no 3, answer to Q2).

Comparing the data presented, one may notice that over time in Romania, the representation of women in the Parliament has fluctuated, recording an upward trend from the 1992-1996 parliamentary term to the 2004-2008 term. On the other hand, if we look at the situation presented in the case of the Republic of Moldova, one may notice that, despite all the obstacles arising as a result of the political instability in this state, the number of female MPs increased from 1990 to 2010. At the same time, if we compare the existing percentages in the two states until the year when the female MPs number increase was constant, the Republic of Moldova is in a more favourable position, the highest percentage amounting to 25.7%, while in Romania the maximum percentage is 10.8%. Looking at the current data, we may notice that the Republic of Moldova is also much closer to achieve gender equality, the percentage of women's political representation in the Parliament reaching 39.6%, while in Romania after a maximum of 18.9% reached in the 2016-2020 term, this figure decreased to 18.5% in the current parliamentary term (see figures in Addendum no 1). It is certain that what made the difference is the adoption of the provision on gender quotas; therefore Romania should follow the model of the Republic of Moldova in order to see improvements. For the time being, a course of action was made in that regard as Senator Alina Gorghiu together with other parliamentarians initiated two draft laws, one on "gender quotas in parliamentary elections which would lead to a representation of one third for the gender less represented", and another which establishes "a correspondence between the public subsidies granted to the political parties and the number of elected women and young people in both chambers of national Parliaments, but also in local legislatures" (see Addendum no 2, answer to Q7).

3.2. Parliamentarians from Romania and the Republic of Moldova - about the political representation of women

In addition to the quantitative analysis in the previous sub-chapter, we also used “the research interview, as a technique for obtaining “information by means of questions and answers” (Chelcea, 2004: 150) from individuals with the aim of answering the research questions from the introductory part of the work. The interview was based on a plan consisting of twofold components. On the one hand, an interview guide, i.e. an organized set of themes that we want to explore, and on the other hand, “interviewer’s intervention strategies, aimed at making up the most from the information obtained with regard to each theme” (Blanchet & Gotman, 1998: 152). The interviews were held with Mrs. Senator Alina Gorghiu for Romania and Mrs. Deputy Doina Gherman for the Republic of Moldova, as they are women involved in politics and have a consistent activity on the subject of women’s representation, which is evident from the fact that they initiated legislation to improve the situation of women in that regard. Conducting the two interviews was done differently, since in the case of Ms. Senator Alina Gorghiu, the questions were sent by email, and we received her answers in writing, through the same communication channel, while as far as the interview with Mrs. Deputy Doina Gherman was concerned, it took place online, through the Google Meet platform. At the same time, the interview guide differs in the two aforementioned cases, since the real-time conducting of the interview of the representative from the Republic of Moldova allowed for raising additional questions considering her answers. The sets of questions elaborated aimed at finding both the common denominators present in the two states, as well as the different aspects in order to be able to understand how, despite so many things these countries have in common, differences are currently noted in terms of the state of play in the political representation of women. To that end, the first question of the interview addressed to Mrs. Alina Gorghiu, and the first two questions addressed to Mrs. Doina Gherman provided the answer, since regulating gender quotas was the key element that made the difference.

Going back to the time when the political representation of women in the two states was both relatively similar and low, we tried through the interviews to find out which were the influencing factors. Mrs. Alina Gorghiu admitted that often the mother is the one who takes leave to take care of the children, and the maternity leave period of two years in which she focuses strictly on this aspect can have serious consequences on her subsequent career of the woman in question, whether it is about a political career or not. If public services for families were of quality the negative consequences of this problem would be significantly diminished. But this is only one of the solutions that can be adopted, since if “there was a clear anti-discrimination legislation and a firm enforcement mechanism” of it (see Addendum no 2, answer to Q4), when women return to the labor market things would be different. Deputy Doina Gherman also had a quasi-similar approach, yet she emphasized even more this topic related problems, claiming that in the Republic of Moldova women do not benefit from public funded nurseries or kindergartens, but only of private ones. Moreover, maternity leaves are provided for a longer period than in Romania, namely for three years, which means that “the chances of a woman who misses three years from the labor market decrease dramatically when she returns” (see Addendum no 3, answer to Q4). Moreover, the feeble political representation of women “is triggered by the existence of a large number of barriers, among which sociocultural and gender stereotypes are main factors of influence” (Ursan, 2019: 217). Both in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova, they continue to be an impediment to women’s political career as well as a challenge women are facing with. The assignment of household chores to the woman or the fact that “the woman has a <<place>> of her own, where she must remain” (see Addendum no 2, answer to Q5) represent some of the stereotypes indicated by Senator Alina Gorghiu. Gender stereotypes are also noticeable in the case of the Republic of Moldova, and Deputy Doina Gherman gave us some examples. When the current president of the republic, Maia Sandu, was running in the presidential elections, several ideas were often circulated in the public sphere: she has no family, she is a 45 kg woman, and a question was raised about what she could be able to accomplish. On the other hand, in the case of Mrs. Gherman, given the fact that she is the mother of three, her critics claimed that she is not a devoted mother as she gets

involved in politics instead of fulfilling her childcare duties (see Addendum 3, answer to the Q6). Another factor marking women's political representation is related to household related responsibilities. In the substantiation of the theoretical context, the idea that household chores have an important role in a woman's professional advancement came quite often, in the sense that their fulfilment results in a limited time for other types of activities (Iancu, 2006: 59). In Romania, more than in any other EU MS, women devote a good part of their time to household chores, which considerably reduces their ability to perform other types of work. The issue is that 46% of women, compared to 25% of men, devote at least one hour every day to household chores (see Addendum no 2, answer to Q6). The situation is not different in the Republic of Moldova either, but efforts are being made to find solutions to put an end to these problems. Deputy Doina Gherman informed us that foundations are being currently laid in the Republic of Moldova for a social legislative package intended for mothers, through which one aims to achieve wage equality, therefore the economic independence of women. This is the solution by which women will no longer be burdened with household chores, since with the achievement of economic independence, women can make decisions that do not affect their career, in the sense that they can hire a nanny for children or a woman to help them with household chores (see Addendum no 3, answer to Q5).

4. Conclusions

Following the presentation of the above aspects related to the political representation of women, we are able to claim that both Romania and the Republic of Moldova are truly two similar countries from several standpoints, and not only from the perspective of their common history. However, we should not ignore the fact that there is also a big difference between them that can be observed at the level of nowadays' political representation of women. Should we refer only to the Parliament in general and disregard the current parliamentary term, we could draw the conclusion that the presence of women in the political structures of the two states was low. However, if we include the current term, one cannot longer state the same, especially in the case of the Republic of Moldova, since a percentage of almost 40% is far from low. In Romania, the political representation of women is not even close to that of the Republic of Moldova, and according to the latest data, Romania does not seem to be heading in a direction favourable to women's political participation. This conclusion is also supported by the Global Gender Gap Index in terms of access to political power in 146 countries, where the Republic of Moldova which ranks 19th is far ahead of Romania which ranks 88th (World Economic Forum, 2023: 11). Despite the considerations above, we should remain optimistic and believe that what made the difference in the Republic of Moldova, namely the legislation of gender quotas, will eventually become the answer Romania needs and that solution will trigger the much-desired changes. As for the matter of women political underrepresentation, the influencing factors are very diverse. Whether we refer to household chores, or we talk about the gender stereotypes that women have to fight in everyday life, or if we address misogyny or outdated mindsets, we are far from exhaust them all. This mission of women is all the more difficult, the greater the involvement of religion or the mass media. Education plays an extremely important role in this overall picture, being among the few solutions by which outdated mindset could be changed and by which the negative impact of the two factors mentioned above could be mitigated. However, it is certain that women "must be among the representatives since their interests and life experiences cannot be acknowledged comprehensively by men" (Băluță, 2006: 116). This was confirmed by several aspects stated within our research, but in order to provide one last concrete example, we should return to lacking public early childhood education and care facilities so that the mother not have to limit her career path. Throughout our research we also faced certain limits: quantitative restraints due to the accuracy of the available statistical data and qualitative limits due to the low number of interviews we conducted. In the end, another aspect we would like to recall is that this research is not meant to be exhaustive, and therefore it is open for a follow-up work. In this sense, a much more in-depth approach can be undertaken

on this vast topic; however, it would be interesting to compare the two states also after the adoption of gender quotas on the electoral lists in Romania, of course, if this will become reality.

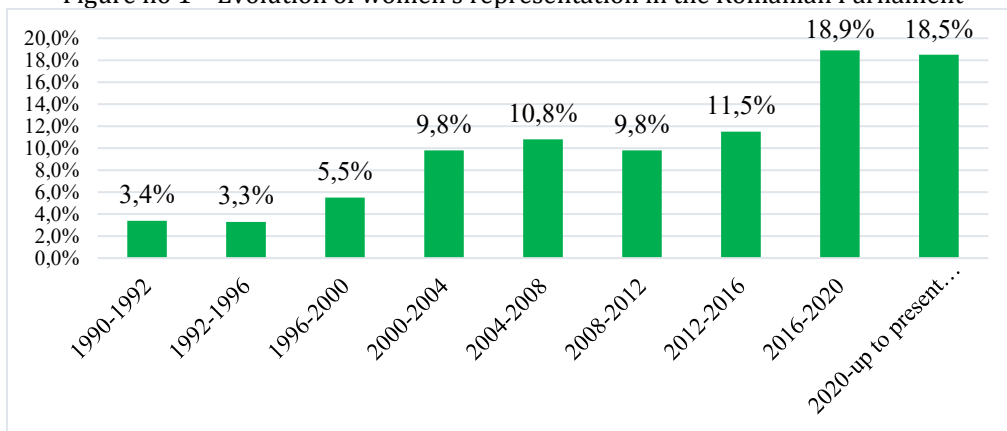
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Addenda

Addendum no 1: Statistical analysis of the political representation of women in the Parliaments of the Republic of Moldova and Romania

Figure no 1 – Evolution of women’s representation in the Romanian Parliament



Source: Own calculations based on data provided by the Permanent Electoral Authority (<http://alegeri.roaep.ro/>).

Figure no 2 – Evolution of women’s representation in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova



Sources: Terzi-Barbăroșie, 2013:14; Own calculations based on the data of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova (<https://a.cec.md/ro>) and the structure of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (<https://alegeri.md> and <https://www.parlament.md/>)

Addendum no 2: Interview Guide with Alina Gorghiu – Senator in the Romanian Parliament

Q1. In Romania, women represent over 51% of the country's population; however, they are underrepresented in the political decision-making process. What do you think are the main reasons for this state of affairs?

Q2. Are the issues that only women face being brought up by the political class? If so, how? If not, why?

Q3. What are the problems that prevent women from getting involved in politics?

Q4. Does maternity leave affect the political career of Romanian women? If so, how?

Q5. Can you provide us with some examples of gender stereotypes in relation to women in politics in Romania?

Q6. Do you consider that the involvement of women in other activities besides professional ones (household chores, raising children activities) are obstacles in their careers? What measures could be taken by the state to improve the situation of women from this perspective?

Q7. In nowadays Romania women represent 18.5% of the Parliament. What solutions could be adopted to increase their political representation?

Addendum no 3: Interview guide with Doina Gherman – Deputy in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova

Q1 After carrying out a statistical analysis starting with the parliamentary terms from 1990 until 2021, it appears that the average representation of women in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is 16.5%. What were the grounds for the low political representation of women in the Republic of Moldova in the mentioned timeframe?

Q2. In the Republic of Moldova, women currently represent 39.6% of the Parliament. What means were used to reach this representation share?

Q3. Are the issues that only women face being brought up by the political class? If so, how? If not, why?

Q4. What are the problems that prevent women from getting involved in politics?

Q5. Do you consider that the involvement of women in other activities besides professional ones (household chores, raising children activities) are obstacles in their careers? What measures could be taken by the state to improve the situation of women from this perspective?

Q6. Can you provide us with some examples of gender stereotypes in relation to women in politics in the Republic of Moldova?

Q7. Do you think the media has an impact in perpetuating these stereotypes?

Q8. How about religion: does religion contribute to the perpetuation of these stereotypes?

Q9. How do you perceive the presence of patriarchy?

BLENDED LEARNING: A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH

Imene CHIKH

Lecturer, PhD. at the University Center Salhi Ahmed of Naama, Algeria

E-mail: chikh.imene@cuniv-naama.dz

Abstract: *Information and communication technologies are playing crucial roles in today's educational system. Unfortunately, this later had been disrupted by the appearance of the Coronavirus around the world. Besides, education at the higher level in Algeria has changed dramatically and has called for an urgent involvement of remote teaching and learning processes in order to support students and their learning. At that time, distance education took different measures and methods throughout pandemic Moodle as a significant online interactive platform used in Algerian universities. In this vein, today's learning becomes blended through both onsite and online attendances to fundamental lectures and transversal webinars. Accordingly, this research paper aims to investigate how does digital education support and enhance students' learning and how does the digital world help students to become more active, autonomous, and responsible about their own learning.*

Keywords: autonomy, blended learning, digital education, motivation, students

1. Introduction

Due to the appearance of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic around the world, the educational system worldwide has been disrupted. As a response to this pandemic, most countries shifted to digital education to save the ongoing academic year and mitigate the transmission of the virus within educational settings. As the panic situation evolved in Algeria, the educational sector was compelled to adapt to virtual learning platforms, including Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, and Moodle. However, these virtual platforms caused serious challenges related to digital literacy for both students and educators.

In this context, education in Algeria, mainly at the higher level, urged educators to apply diverse distance teaching methods to save the academic year. Accordingly, many Algerian universities opted for remote education, where educators delivered lectures through webinars or Moodle platforms. They succeeded to accomplish all tasks and assignments online, even for the evaluation and assessment. By the end of the pandemic in Algeria, all universities implemented the blended approach through both teaching and learning processes, by keeping their online lectures with in-class ones. Hence, they found that this method helped their students to learn better.

This research paper aims to examine the effectiveness of blended learning within EFL learning environments. It plans, too, to scrutinize the role of students through today's digital education and to investigate the idea of autonomy among EFL students and their learning.

In order to reach these objectives, three research questions have been raised:

1. To what extent does the integration of blended learning affect EFL students' academic achievements?
2. How can students be more proactive through digital education to maximize their learning outcomes?
3. How can digital education affect students' learning autonomy and enhance their motivation?

2. Blended learning, a new approach at higher education

In response to globalization and the development of Information and communication Technologies, higher education in Algeria has witnessed several innovative teaching and learning strategies. Among them, blended learning emerged as a new hybrid method combining both traditional face-to-face teaching delivered in classrooms and online teaching. It is a new

technique that arises from technology's influences on teaching and learning processes by using multiple ICT tools to develop students' academic achievements. (McGee & Reis, 2012)

Many scholars suggested diverse definitions for blended learning; Driscoll defined it as follows:

- To combine or mix modes of web-based technology (e.g., live virtual classroom, self-paced instruction, collaborative learning, streaming video, audio, and text) to accomplish an educational goal.
- To combine any form of instructional technology (e.g., videotape, CD-ROM, web-based training, film) with face-to-face instructor-led training.
- To mix or combine instructional technology with actual job tasks in order to create a harmonious effect of learning and working. (2003: 01)

Hence, blended learning can occur in classrooms when combining lectures with images or videos through data show that displays power point slides about the main topic, as it can occur when attending live conferences via different platforms in classrooms.

After the pandemic, this innovative pedagogical method became broadly used at Algerian universities, where students became like new practitioners through blended learning approaches and digital technology. In this regard, this method urges students and educators to improve their digital literacy through training sessions. Students received theoretical and practical lectures about the implementation of ICTs in education. The newly recruited teachers at the University receive a one-year training about using digital devices throughout the teaching process. The other instructors who need more competencies in using digital tools received voluntary training during the pandemic and the post-pandemic eras to engage successfully through online teaching.

For teaching English as a foreign language at Algerian universities, the curriculum includes fundamental modules which are taught onsite, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics, phonetics, methodology, grammar, written expression, oral expression, psycho-pedagogy, literature, culture and civilization, and ICTs. In addition, transversal modules are taught online, including translation, cognitive psychology, French language, social and cultural sciences, and modern education.

Besides, the integration of blended learning within education can have several effects on the academic achievements of EFL students. It allows them to learn at their own pace by relying on themselves; they can get access to an unlimited set of information anywhere and anytime through online materials. Hence, these materials can increase their engagement and motivation mainly through gamified learning experiences such as applications like Duolingo or Babbel, which have specific characteristics that provide learners with points and levels. Hence, these challenges motivate learners to improve their language skills outside classrooms. Also, platforms can be used as gamified learning experiences through quizzes, leading students to earn badges according to their performances and advance to better levels. Students can solve puzzles, too, to learn EFL by practicing grammar and vocabulary. For educational purposes, gamification can provide learners with an enjoyable learning process and offer them immediate feedback about their answers. Hence, this method can lead to better learning outcomes.

Flipped learning and microlearning are among the best learning strategies today. On one hand, flipped learning is a type of blended learning where students can get access to information at their homes and prepare them for the following sessions, including homework assignments or handouts. In a flipped classroom, students got engaged with instructional content before coming to class. They come to classrooms to practice activities, participate in discussions, and solve problems about specific topics. Hence, their teacher has to guide and support them. This method is usually used in literature and civilization modules which include wide historical backgrounds full of events, personalities, literary periods, etc. So, here, the teacher acts as a mediator between students and knowledge; he/she has just to guide, support and evaluate the students' competencies within specific tasks. This learning approach involves the competency-based approach in which the student becomes the center of his learning.

On the other hand, microlearning is a method of learning that delivers information about specific topics via digital media. This data can be shared in the form of short videos that include micro lessons that teach something concrete. It can be used, too, in the forms of a slide show, infographic or a factsheet; a short report that gives the most important information about a specific topic in a clear and an easy way. Hence, microlearning method becomes the solution to understand a topic in a five-minutes learning session. By using this method, the student can easily understand the main topic. Hence, even teachers may incorporate both approaches into their teaching strategies.

Further, Blended learning can enhance students' digital and language skills as it can improve their communication skills through online collaborative discussions and interactive conversations, including forums and online platforms where many participants can exchange ideas. Basically, today's modern digital world pushes students to use a variety of digital devices through their virtual learning. More than that, Algerian university educators use Moodle, an interactive e-learning pedagogical platform, to assess their students' digital tasks through quizzes, tests, activities, and assignments about the lectures delivered onsite.

Besides, this platform holds even different lectures about all modules taught online and onsite to make them accessible for all students who missed some sessions. Hence, this platform allows students to interact and communicate online with their teachers, to get access to different lectures displayed in the forms of texts, videos, or power points anytime and anywhere, and to collaborate with their peers to perform group work and projects as it offers teachers to assess and evaluate their students and offers them constructive feedback from their homes without moving outside. In the beginning, only a small percentage of teachers and students supported blended learning, but nowadays, this method is excessively used at Algerian universities.

3. Online assessment through holistic and analytical rubrics

There is a good strategy related to online assessment where teachers use rubrics with specific criteria to discern performances of different qualities among students of different levels. This system enables students to know how their works will be rated and empowers them to recognize areas of weakness through their works. Besides, it is a good strategy that helps students to pay more attention to their learning process. There are two types of rubrics: holistic and analytical. On one hand, the holistic rubric assesses the level of proficiency through various tasks, such as writing, reading, or presenting, based on the overall performance quality. The rubric is presented in a hierarchical structure with several levels across the side, and each level is accompanied by a set of descriptors. On the other hand, the analytical rubric exhibits the hierarchical arrangement of levels along the top axis, while the descriptors are displayed along the side axis. As a result, each level is assigned a range of possible point values.

Table1. The holistic rubric used by the teacher to evaluate the students' writing skills

Excellent 90 - 100	Ideas are well explained. The writing is highly coherent and there are no grammatical errors.
Good 80 – 89	Ideas are explained, the writing is coherent, and there are few grammatical errors.
Satisfactory 70 - 79	Ideas are partially explained, the writing is less coherent, and there are many grammatical errors.
Needs improvement 0 - 60	Ideas are not clearly explained, the writing is incoherent and there are several grammatical errors.

Source: <https://educationalresearchtechniques.com/2017/09/06/types-of-rubrics-for-writing/>

Table 2. The analytical rubric used by the teacher to evaluate the students' writing skills

	Excellent (9 - 10)	Good (7 - 8)	Satisfactory (5 - 6)	Needs improvement
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				(0 - 4)
Ideas explanation	Ideas are well explained	Ideas are explained	Ideas are partially explained	Little explanation of ideas
Coherency	The writing is highly coherent	The writing is coherent	Somewhat coherent writing	The writing lacks coherency
Grammar	Few errors	Some errors	Many errors	Several errors that hurt the understanding.

Source: <https://educationalresearchtechniques.com/2017/09/06/types-of-rubrics-for-writing/>

4. The formative and summative assessment types used through both onsite and online education

Two types of assessments are used through blended learning, the formative and the summative, which help to evaluate students' learning. They provide insights about students' knowledge, skills and performances. On one hand, formative assessment takes place throughout the instructional process. It provides immediate feedback for students to correct themselves and to improve their levels. Besides, it helps the teacher to adjust his/her teaching strategies to better meet his/her students' needs. It can be done in diverse forms, including quizzes, classroom discussions and homework assignments.

On the other hand, summative assessment evaluates what students have learned at the end of a specific course or training, where students receive a certificate or a new grade for their overall performance. It mainly happened by the end of academic year or a semester. This type of assessment can be done through final exams and tests. Accordingly, both of these evaluation methods play crucial roles in the educational system, through evaluating students' learning and helping students to measure their progress and achievements. To sum up, the two types of assessment are used in both onsite teaching and online instruction to provide a comprehensive view of students' learning and progress.

5. Innovative teaching methods through digital education

There are also some innovative methods that have been emerged through digital education, to enhance students' learning and improve their language skills. Among them:

- The MOOCs or Massive Open Online Courses: are models that deliver learning content by teachers. This content includes lectures with activities and it is free and accessible to any person who got interested to, whether being a student, a researcher, a teacher, or anyone. These models can provide interactive courses with user forums or social media discussions to support social interactions among students and teachers. Besides, these MOOCs can provide, too, immediate feedback to quizzes which push students to evaluate their learning and correct their errors quickly.
- There is, also, an online learning platform created by international universities that provides some online training with certificates by the end, including, Coursera.
- Some other free online comprehensive constructive learning platforms, such as Edunext and Edx, provide free training for students or anyone interested in through free registration but without certificates.
- In addition, there are other paid learning platforms that provide lectures about specific topics, like: Udemy, Skillshare, and MCourser.
- And there is another free online certified platform, Mindluster, which provides learners with many online courses and MOOCs.

Hence, these innovative teaching platforms aim to enhance students' and learners' engagement and retention of information in different learning styles. Accordingly, these platforms help students to become independent learners who rely on themselves to learn English as a foreign language and to take responsibility for their learning.

6. The shift from teacher-centered-approach to student-centered-approach

Earlier, teachers were dedicating significant time to transfer information to students since students were focusing a lot on the role of the teacher as the only source of information with textbooks. In this vein, they used to determine their teaching outcomes by focusing on their students' needs. Nowadays, with the introduction of technological devices within education, students become like active agents able to get access to unlimited set of information displayed through several formats online. Here, the student becomes the center of his/her learning, able to improve his/her competencies. In this context, the teacher acts as a mediator who only supports, motivates, and evaluates his/her students' competencies within specific tasks.

The teacher has to create communication opportunities, motivate his/her students, and establish a welcoming environment where students can feel at ease and confident. He/she has to give them instructions and set activities about the main topic. Indeed, the teacher must consider the students' needs, identify their proficiency levels in the English language through both weak and strong points, and know more about their learning outcomes. He/she should, by the end, provide them with constructive feedback about their performances. Hence, according to these criteria, students are grouped. In this sense, students progress at their own rate and should concentrate on areas which lack competencies. Learning EFL depends, too, on motivation as an essential key to progress. Today, students from Algerian universities prefer collaborative learning, whether in pairs or groups; they rely on communication to develop their language skills. They create clubs, organize workshops, perform plays, write assignments, and book reports as a way to practice usually their English. They found that this method is fruitful and effective. Hence, these activities help the teacher to measure his/her students' achievements of the targeted outcomes.

6. a. The communicative approach

In this context, the communicative approach to language learning is characterized by its emphasis on learning language through communication and interaction. According to the scholars Richards and Rogers: “communicative approach in language learning is an approach that is used in learning the second language or foreign language that emphasizes on the improvement of communicative ability » that is « the ability of applying the language principle in order to produce grammatical sentences and understand 'when, where, and to whom' the sentences are used” (Richards & Rogers, 1997)

Little Wood, thoroughly, stresses this idea by claiming: “communicative approach in the language learning pays attention to the language structural aspects and its functional aspects”. “Language structural aspects focus on language form grammatically, while language functional aspects relate to the functions of language form itself”. (Little, 1988) Hence, according to these scholars, the communicative approach involves the knowledge about grammatical rules as well as the language functions which include expression of thoughts and feelings, communication, interaction and conveyance of information.

Besides, the American sociolinguist Dell Hymes acknowledged that the concept of the communicative approach includes the knowledge of grammatical rules and the ability to use language effectively in diverse social contexts. This involves understanding the cultural norms, appropriateness, and pragmatics of language use and the structural aspects of a language (Hymes, 1972). At its core, the communicative approach aims to teach students to be proficient communicators in practical situations by considering communication's linguistic, social and cultural aspects.

He added that communicative competence is “the most general term for the speaking and hearing capabilities of a person - competence is understood to be dependent on two things: knowledge and (ability for) use”. (Hymes, 1972: 16) In the same context, Savignon pointed out that foreign language communicative competence reveals “the ability to function dynamically in a truly communicative setting adapting to all of the informational elements in the context be

they linguistic or non-verbal". (1972: 08-09) Communicative competence is, thus, related to the learners' performances in specific social situations. Essentially, it describes the knowledge and the abilities required for effective communication. Thus, the communicative approach aligns to develop communicative competence in learners. The communicative approach, accordingly, emphasizes on the importance of both language knowledge and the ability to use language effectively in real communication contexts. It recognizes that language learning is not just about learning grammar and vocabulary but also about developing language skills to communicate and interact in meaningful situations. In general, the communicative approach aims to develop communicative competence in learners by providing them with opportunities for significant language use and interaction.

The communicative approach to language teaching focuses on developing learners' communication skills, such as speaking and listening, rather than just language systems, including grammar and vocabulary. It encourages learner-centered learning, which makes learners actively participate in communication, whether in pairs or groups, by using authentic materials to facilitate interactions and make the learning experience more practical. This approach, therefore, aims to prepare students for real-life communication situations.

6.b. The competence-based approach

The communicative approach is strongly related to a competence-based approach, which makes students integrate easily in different situations. This approach emphasizes on language use. It aims to equip learners with language skills and competencies to function effectively in real-world situations. In this sense, Luisa and Canado demonstrate that the "the ultimate aim of the competency-based model is thus to form flexible and adaptable professionals who can apply competencies to the varied, unforeseeable, and complex situations they will encounter throughout their personal, social and professional lives [...] and who can thus become active and useful citizens in our democratic society". (2013: 03) Consequently, in the long term, these learners will be able to decide confidently and think critically, manage different jobs and solve different problems.

In the same context, Nkwetisama and Cameroon sum up the important characteristics of competence-based approach in the following points:

The competencies are stated in specific and measurable behavioral terms.

The contents are based on the learners' goals, i.e. outcomes or competencies.

The learners continue learning until mastery is demonstrated.

The approach makes use of an unlimited variety of instructional techniques and group work.

It centers on what the learner needs to learn, which is the application of basic skills in life skill language context such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The approach makes extensive use of texts, media, and real-life materials adapted to targeted competencies.

It provides learners with immediate feedback on assessment performance.

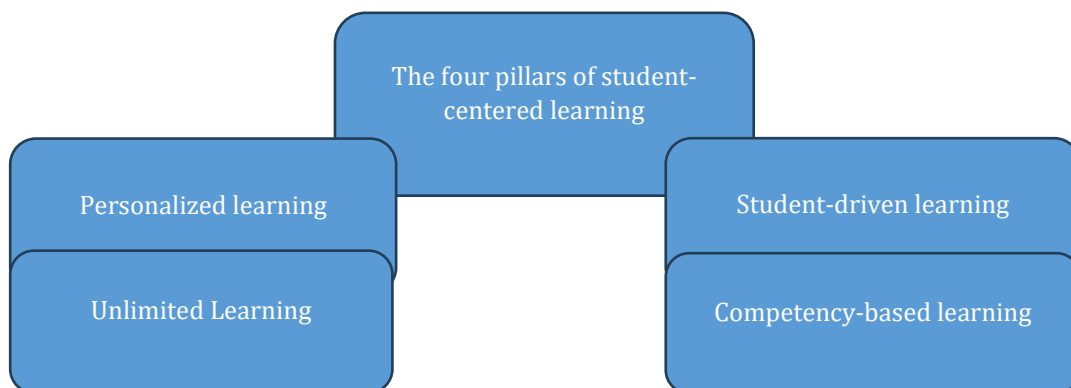
The instruction or teaching is paced to the needs of the learners.

It gets learners to demonstrate mastery of the specific competency statements or objectives Mapping of the same competency objectives or statements. (2013: 530)

Hence, the competence-based approach emphasizes practical skills and measurable outcomes, ensuring that students acquire knowledge and apply it effectively.

Both concepts, the competence-based approach and the communicative approach, prioritize the students' active involvement, engagement and the development of their practical language skills. According to the different views of scholars, today's learning becomes mostly centered on learners who are actively involved and motivated and act as responsible agents in their education. Accordingly, the two approaches align with the students-centered approach to foster an interactive learning environment that empowers students and makes them successful and autonomous.

Figure 1. The four pillars of student-centered learning



Source : <https://www.ultimatemultimediatraining.net/student-centered-learning/>

7. The impact of digital education on fostering students' autonomy and enhancing their motivation

Autonomy refers to: "a multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times" (Benson, 2001: 47). According to this quotation, the learner's autonomy is not a stable state but a capacity that evolves over time. Henceforth, students will develop their autonomy through the guidance and encouragement of their teachers to be active, creative, independent, and responsible for their learning. Hence, teachers are incredibly important for their learners' autonomy. Secondly, students' autonomy may be developed through peers-collaborative learning, improving their communication skills and engaging them easily into learning experiences.

Digital education may significantly impact students' learning autonomy by promoting students' independence and self-directed learning. There are several ways which boost their motivation.

- ❖ **Personalized learning:** digital education allows students to learn independently through accessing different resources such as watching videos, writing reports about specific topics, and reading e-books. Of course, they can manage time about their learning and they may focus on only areas that need extra improvement; hence, they feel autonomous about their learning.
- ❖ **Immediate feedback:** many online platforms offer learners with immediate feedback about their performances through quizzes or assignments. Hence, this method helps students to check their progress. Accordingly, they feel autonomous about their self-assessing.
- ❖ **Collaborative learning opportunities:** online platforms can facilitate collaborative learning through discussion provided in forums and group projects.
- ❖ **Determining goals:** digital education can support students to assess their progress and to determine their learning outcomes. Besides, the ability to see their achievements can enhance their motivation.
- ❖ **Flexibility and Accessibility:** distance education makes learning accessible to a large audience anywhere and anytime. They feel autonomous to engage easily through their learning process.
- ❖ **Real world application:** distance education can provide a link between onsite learning to real world contexts through virtual experiences and case studies. This association improves students' motivation by revealing the practical relationship of what they are learning.

To sum up, it is a question of motivation and willingness which push students to thrive through digital education in order to foster their learning autonomy and independence.

8. The teachers' roles to promote the learning autonomy

In order to promote students' autonomy, teachers should perform different vital roles as organizers, facilitators, and counselors.

- ❖ As an organizer, the teacher should pick out appropriate activities to their students' levels that best meet their needs and demands. In addition, he/she has to build a positive classroom culture that promotes students' respect for each other, collaboration, and love of learning. Moreover, he has to make the content of lectures more interactive to attract students' attention in virtual classes.
- ❖ As a facilitator, the teacher has to help students to facilitate their learning and to create a conducive learning setting both in traditional classrooms and through webinars. Besides, the teacher has to enhance students' motivation as a way to overcome the psychological obstacles that they may face them as anxiety and the lack of confidence.
- ❖ As a counselor, the teacher shows students how to choose the best learning strategies in order to achieve efficient learning. He/ she has to provide guidance for their learning and to offer them support and feedback about their learning for improvement.

Teachers play a crucial role in enhancing students' learning to become autonomous learners, able to think critically about specific tasks and to find solutions for these tasks. Also, they become able to assess themselves and their learning. Hence, they will become successful and independent citizens.

9. Conclusion

During the pandemic, Algeria's educational system seemed unready for the sudden shift towards online teaching. With the evolution of the pandemic, several alternative teaching methods have emerged through distance education to save the situation. In this respect, remote teaching helped students access their lectures at any time and gradually brought about effective results for students, regardless some problems that others had faced. After the pandemic, blended learning has been integrated into education. Thus, it succeeded in enhancing the teaching and learning processes by giving students opportunities to participate in real-time discussions and access several online courses assigned by educators. More than that, using ICT tools provides a connected teaching that links teachers to their students and to professional content, resources, and a system that helps them to improve their instruction and digital skills. In this respect, teachers can organize projects or arrange tests and activities for their students. They can monitor their progress and address areas needing extra explanation or practice. With the usual training on online academic platforms, students become more engaged and motivated and, simultaneously, independent, autonomous, and responsible for their learning. In this context, they become eligible to take decisions, think creatively, and solve problems they may face through their learning. Therefore, both traditional and modern online instruction fulfill the needs of students. The only thing that students should consider is being well-motivated and confident about their learning to achieve better outcomes.

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ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ECOLOGICAL SECURITY IN THE FUNCTION OF ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Darko M. MARKOVIĆ¹, Željko BJELAJAC², Boro MERDOVIĆ³

¹Associate Professor, University Business Academy in Novi Sad, Faculty of Law, Novi Sad (Serbia), E-mail: darko.bg.ns@gmail.com

²Full Professor, University Business Academy in Novi Sad, Faculty of Law, Novi Sad (Serbia), E-mail: zdjbjelajac@gmail.com

³Research Fellow, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Police Department for the City of Belgrade (Serbia), E-mail: boro.merdovic@gmail.com

Abstract: *Ecological security is a fundamental concept in the field of sustainable development, which plays a vital role in ensuring the welfare of biodiversity, balance of ecosystems and natural resources. Significance of the ecological security lies in its ability to maintain the delicate balance of ecosystems and mitigate the impact of climate change. Without ecological security measures, long-term health of our planet and its inhabitants is endangered. Ecological awareness is equally important in promoting sustainable conduct and practice among individuals and communities. We can encourage the feeling of responsibility towards nature by increasing the understanding of environmental issues and their effects on society. Ecological conscience is a term referring to an individual's awareness and concern for the health of the environment and all its living beings. It is about understanding our place in the ecosystem and recognising the effects our actions have on the planet. This is a key concept because it supports motivation for sustainable life and preservation efforts. By analysing past studies about human awareness and experiences in the field of ecological security, we notice key elements of ecological awareness, its importance to individuals, communities and the planet, and how it can lead to positive ecological results. By analysing ecological consciousness as a form of social responsibility, we come to the conclusion that ecological conscience and ecological security are two interrelated concepts that play a key role in ensuring the environmental sustainability and long-term sustainable wellbeing. By implementing ecological security measures and strengthening global ecological awareness we can address environmental issues on a broader level and strive towards long-term sustainability.*

Keywords: security, biodiversity, ecology, ecological conscience, environmental protection

1. Securitization of environment

1.1. Ecological security in light of two approaches to conceptual determination of security

Due to the fact that it is in very wide use in everyday speech, security is one of those concepts whose explanation seems to be the simplest. And indeed, this concept does not need to be explained separately in the public discourse, because practically all interlocutors will understand that it is a state of harmlessness, that is, the absence of danger or a serious threat that a stable state will be violently disturbed. For a human being, such a stable state is natural, and security is an innate quality, based on the fact that the period before birth is spent in the mother's womb. The case, that even in that period there is exposure to threatening dangers, but science has not yet confirmed to us that during the development of the embryo there is an awareness of the outside world as well. At least not to such a large extent. However, even in the general meaning, and especially not in the scientific sense, safety does not mean only a state, but also a process, as well as the organization of a system that is established in order to unify the process and state of safety. To make things more complicated, a significant feature of the concept of security is its ambiguity, because this concept does not contain only those elements that we have already experienced. Therefore, we cannot always be sure about which experiential elements we are talking about, which, not only in this case, imposes the need to develop a scientific opinion about a certain concept, that is, to determine its term and the subject of research. Going into the methodological foundations of security sciences would take us away

from the goal of this work, but we cannot fail to emphasize the necessity of determining the unambiguous meaning of terms in order to give the same meaning to words in mutual communication, i.e. to assign the same experiential meanings to the same terms. In scientific research, it is a prerequisite for observing the structure of the problem being studied.

Regardless of whether security exists as a state, process or organization (system), it is a response to the existence of challenges, risks and threats to such a state, and their existence, including the processes it produces, is conceptually defined as endangering security. Taking into account the ambiguity of the term security, it is completely clear that there are different and diverse forms and subjects of endangerment. They are not universal, because in one case they can be treated as a threat to some entity, and in another they can have a completely neutral status and even have a positive influence on another entity. At the same time, one must not lose sight of the fact that there are hidden dangers.

Guided by this negativist approach, which views security as the absence of a source of endangerment, due to the impossibility of unifying all forms of threat, it is practically impossible to come up with a single definition of security. With this in mind, Barry Buzan (1991:18) gave a simple definition of security, as “the pursuit of freedom from threats”. Taking into account the variety of forms of endangerment, he divided security into five sectors: military, social, political, economic and environmental. In this way, Buzan made a big step forward in relation to the narrow militaristic views of security studies characteristic especially of the Cold War period (Bjelajac, 2017: 93).

On the other hand, the positivist approach to defining the concept of security focuses on the content of this concept, that is, on the phenomena and cause-and-effect relationships that build it in a totality that tends towards integrality. When performing the functional determination of the security term, this approach takes into account the common values of the living world, viewed as *the state of any subject or object that exists and operates normally or relatively undisturbed* (Ilić, 2012: 125). This relativity constitutes the subjective side of the interpretation of the security term, and the factual situation, which can be independent of human influence, constitutes the objective side. Taking both sides into consideration, subjective and objective, the term of security can be defined in a narrower sense as *the state of protected, free, quality and certain existence and action of individuals, human groups, organizations, institutions and communities*, and in a broader sense as *the totality of factors of an objective and subjective nature that affect the survival and other essential values of people and their groups, organizations, institution and community* (Ilić, 2012: 127).

Any sector of security can be expressed with a negativist definition, including the environmental sector. However, the meaning of securitization of the environment is confirmed by a positivist approach, so Buzan himself was guided by it when forming the ecological security sector as a separate security sector, with reference objects of species and habitats.

1.2. Is securitization of environment justified?

If we simply understand securitization as giving security attributes to various phenomena and objects, then we can rightly say that it has been present in human life throughout whole history, even before Ole Wæver introduced it to science. He gave us a model of how to view a problem in the full security sense, not as a simple speech act, but as a problem that is securitized, that is, brought into the area of security.

Bringing it into the area of security does not imply the automatic existence of a real existential threat but it is enough that some problem is presented as a threat (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998: 24). This brings us to the question of who is authorized to securitize a problem. In the public discourse, it can be anyone, but "anyone" does not have enough authority to raise such a form of securitization to a level of significance large enough for official institutions to deal with it. Therefore, the answer to this question is simply imposed – the securitization of any issue, including the environment, has a deep political nature. It goes without saying that the mere statement of the assumption of a security threat is not enough for the complete securitization

of the problem, but it must be supported and matched by facts. Due to the deep political nature of such a statement, which is depicted in the political authority of the subject who announces it, those supporting facts do not always have to have a scientific and/or professional background. The larger the goals of securitization, regardless of whether they are motivated by real concern or misuse to achieve hidden intentions, the more serious the threat must be, as close as possible to the level of existential threat. This increases the success of securitization, especially its consequences, which are also one of the main questions that need to be answered. We have the most recent example in the area of environmental protection, where global warming and climate change stand out as an existential threat to humanity, but not to a much lesser extent environmental pollution.

Although the securitization of the environment is most often associated with the last few decades, it is known that the security importance of the environment was written about in the 19th century as well. Thus, George Perkins Marsh in his book *Man and Nature* points to the destruction of nature by man as a danger to civilization. He built awareness of this on the realization of the importance of natural resources for the state's economy as the cause of human actions that cause great damage to nature, pointing out that natural resources are not inexhaustible (McFadden, 2019). However, this book did not reach the subjects of political power, neither the American society to which it was intended, nor anywhere else in the world, so the issue of securitization of the environment was not of great importance, which confirms the position on the importance of the political nature of securitization.

A significant shift in this regard occurred in the second half of the 20th century, especially since the publication of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent spring* (1962). She, writing about the damage to insects and plant life due to the use of pesticides during World War II, provoked a condemning reaction from chemical companies, which further attracted the attention of the American public and initiated the establishment of environmental movements, as well as the US Environmental Protection Agency (Paull, 2013). Among the most famous movements of that period is Greenpeace, founded in 1971, which later expanded its initial advocacy against American nuclear testing in Alaska to concern for nature, its flora and fauna, including the fight against pollution and climate change. Since the second half of the 20th century, meteorological measurements and monitoring of changes in nature have provided indicators of unfavorable climate changes under the influence of human activities, which increased the interest of the international community in this problem. Environmental protection is legally formalized through numerous international conventions and other legal documents, but “there are still numerous challenges to its effective judicial protection” (Mladenov, Stefanović & Marković, 2023).

The fact that environmental problems also affect the realization of some basic human rights (Marković & Barjaktarović, 2021), made an additional contribution to the securitization of the environment, which has a constant tendency to increase since then. In addition to climate change, the securitization of the environment has also led to other problems that give rise not only to assumptions of threats but also to real threats, which in some cases are not only existential for certain entities or regions, but also for humanity as a whole. Environmental pollution is at the very peak of seriousness, contributing to the aforementioned securitization, which is further the basis for demanding urgent action by the international community to eliminate the causes of these security threats (Foster, 2013: 39). In addition, a series of devastating natural disasters that hit different regions of the world, especially during the eighties of the 20th century, including the industrial disaster in Bhopal in India (1984) and the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl in the USSR (1986), also triggered the scientific community in the field security, as well as official institutions. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report entitled “Our Common Future”, in which it warned of threats to world peace due to ecological degradation and resource scarcity (Ejdus, 2011: 187). The war in Vietnam, and then the wars and military interventionism that mark the recent era, caused and are causing enormous damage to the ecosystem, leaving lasting

consequences on the health of people living in those areas (see Bjelajac, Pocuca & Mijatovic, 2013).

Bearing all this in mind, the answer to the question of whether the securitization of the environment is justified can be found in the factual situation, i.e. the changes in nature brought about by the way of life after the industrial revolution and accelerated technological development, especially characteristic of the last few decades. Numerous studies indicate that the threat to the environment has reached a level of danger that calls into question not only the balance of ecosystems but also the basis of the survival of the planet (Bjelajac, 2021: 9; Bjelajac, Dukić Mijatović, Zirojević Fatić et al., 2014: 201; Bjelajac, Dašić & Spasović, 2011: 568). In an era in which video technologies are at a very high level of development, with the enormous potential of spreading information available to almost everyone on the Internet, negative changes in nature are more than visible - pollution of land, water and air, as well as the extermination of millions of animal and plant species. It is no secret that numerous non-renewable energy sources are in advanced stages of depletion, and the exploitation of some of them causes existential threats to the local population and biodiversity (see Marković, 2022). The availability of energy sources is of strategic importance for states, and in modern conditions it is one of the main parameters of their power, at the regional and global level. Threats to the environment threaten not only human health and biodiversity, but also other existential parameters of humanity, such as the economy and material conditions for survival. All that, both individually and together, makes the securitization of the environment more than justified. This justification is also reflected in the association and mobilization at the local, regional and global level of practically all subjects of the human community – from individuals, groups, associations and other organizations, through states to the international community as a whole, whose action is manifested primarily through international organizations, in the first instance of the United Nations. The ecological environment cannot be isolated within national borders, and it is precisely for these reasons that international agreements in this area impose an obligation of cooperation between states (Šogorov Vučković & Marković, 2020: 150, 159).

Securitization of the environment does not mean only giving security attributes to the problem of its sustainability, but also seeking solutions, which require social consensus and commitment of the international community as a whole. In order to really establish such a social consensus, it is necessary to overcome the urge of states to put their own priorities before the interests of global society. Therefore, we can ask ourselves how each of us individually can contribute to the improvement of environmental safety culture, that is, environmental protection (Bjelajac, 2017: 610). This brings us to the question of ecological awareness.

2. Ecological awareness

2.1. Awareness, consciousness, conscience

Awareness, consciousness, and conscience are very important psychological phenomena for the shaping of human behavior in all phases - from the thought formation of decisions, through their adoption, to the way of acting. It is important to understand the differences between these concepts and how they interact.

Although each of us believes that we are the knower of our own awareness, no one has a definitive explanation of what it is. Since it is a phenomenon, the subject of research of which penetrates into various areas of scientific interest, the answer to the question of what awareness is, how it arises and functions, different scientific disciplines are trying to give. Awareness is one of those scientific terms that requires a scientific synthesis, i.e. connecting the basic scientific terms of certain sciences, in this case, natural with humanistic and social.

Natural sciences investigate the organic basis of awareness, so the Nobel laureate biologist George Eldeman connects the phenomenon of awareness, and the mind itself, with physical and chemical changes in the cortex of the cerebrum. He believes that these are biological phenomena, which are the product of complex cellular processes in the brain, and he claims that awareness itself “consists of a stream of unified mental constructs that arise

spontaneously from a material structure, the Dynamic Core in the brain” (Edelman, Gally & Baars, 2011: 5). When it comes to mathematics and physics, mathematician Roger Penrose emphasizes the quantum-mechanical nature of consciousness (Brooks, 2022), while some other scientists view consciousness as “a global manifestation of individual calculations by the brain’s billions of neurons” (Derakhshani, Diósi, Laubenstein et al., 2022). And while researchers in the field of natural sciences express their theoretical hypotheses precisely and quantitatively and verify them in laboratories, they do not clarify how the impulses produced in neural networks are transformed into a subjective feeling of something, from the physical features of the world to the manifestation of personality characteristics and gaining awareness of oneself and that what makes.

Social sciences and humanities try to give answers to these questions, above all psychology, philosophy and sociology. The main difficulty they face in these attempts is that they are trying to come to an explanation of a completely subjective experience in an objective way. It is not easy to find a scientifically valid answer to the question of how something that intuitively seems immaterial to us arises in physical systems. An even greater difficulty is the unverifiability of research in scientific disciplines such as, for example cognitive psychology, that is, the inability to access subjective content and thus confirm the conclusions derived from appropriate scientific research. Even if it were possible, the problem of individuality remains unsolved, i.e. the fact that awareness is unique to an individual, which further opens the question of how the sum of individual awareness is shaped into a collective awareness. This is especially important for issues of forming awareness of a common objective reality, such as, in our case, the relationship to the environment. In order not to deviate from the topic of our work, we will not go into the details of the really numerous researches of this problem, but we will point out the basic facts that scientific thought has arrived at, which are important for the explanation of ecological awareness.

For psychology, awareness is the totality of an individual's experiences that he reaches through the perception of external stimuli through his senses. It is individual, because it manifests itself as a psycho-physiological ability of an individual to perceive, think, feel and strive to achieve some goal. But awareness is not only individual but also social, because it arises and develops in society as a product of mutual social activities of people and their behavior. Under the influence of sociocultural factors, a system of beliefs, ideas, values, knowledge and attitudes about a phenomenon, which belong to the human community, i.e. society, develop. From the point of view of philosophy, awareness is the knowledge of oneself, an ontological view of the relationships that man develops through being in the objective world. When we talk about awareness as the totality of experiencing, we are talking about a state that refers to a longer period of time. Therefore, built awareness is important for us, because it determines our path through different life situations. On that road, we have to react to the unfolding of different situations every day.

The function of the mind that allows us to understand what is happening in and around us at all times, and to react correctly in different life situations in accordance with that experience, is consciousness. We can be conscious of the existence of something without understanding it, that is, without being aware of it. The level of consciousness depends on the depth of knowledge about the inner nature of the phenomenon or thing, which penetrates below the surface image of reality and refers to the basic laws and nature of objects and phenomena. We cannot gain knowledge without cognitive intelligence, which is closely related to the ability of moral reasoning (see Kawamoto, Mieda & Oshio, 2018).

Conscience refers to our moral compass and guides ethical decision making. It is closely related to obligations arising from common life, including solidarity in maintaining social relations (Yildiz, 2018: 1).

The interactions between awareness, consciousness, and conscience are complex and profound. For example, increased awareness can lead to increased consciousness of one's own thoughts and emotions. This heightened consciousness can then influence moral decision-

making processes guided by one's conscience. Studies have shown that individuals exhibiting high levels of self-awareness are more likely to act in accordance with their moral values due to a heightened sense of responsibility (see Xu, Li, Kwan et al., 2023).

2.2. Ecological awareness

In modern conditions, solving the challenges caused by climate change and environmental degradation depends to a significant extent on the ecological awareness of each subject of the social community. Ecological awareness means seeing life on the planet as a community with all living beings and understanding their role in the life of the planet. It also includes the knowledge of the effects of human activities, which bring not only positive, but also harmful changes to the environment. The higher the level of this understanding, the greater the chances of stimulating a sense of responsibility towards nature. Among the elements of environmental awareness, education, public advocacy campaigns and policy change play a key role. These are key tools for raising environmental awareness and empowering people to align their behavior and decisions with the needs of improving environmental protection.

As usual in the formation of safety culture among individuals, education plays a central role in developing and nurturing environmental awareness. It provides knowledge on a number of environmental issues, thereby empowering people to make decisions that benefit the environment. At the same time, education contributes to the development of critical thinking skills that are necessary to analyze complex environmental problems.

Environmental awareness at all levels, from local to global, is promoted through advocacy and activism. Individuals and organizations do this by advocating for policy change in the direction of environmental protection. By launching initiatives, they raise awareness of critical environmental issues and mobilize communities to take positive action.

Sustainable practices that contribute to a healthier environment contribute to the daily strengthening of awareness - recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, support for environmentally friendly products, etc. Besides encouraging the environmental responsibility of all members of the community, these actions directly affect the improvement of environmental safety (eg, the reduction of carbon emissions as a consequence of these actions).

Combining these elements creates the basis for building a more environmentally conscious society, preserving biodiversity and natural resources, as a guarantee of a safe future for future generations.

Ecological awareness encompasses a deep understanding of ecosystems, recognizing the intricate connections between living organisms and their environment. For example, research has shown that coral reefs are not only beautiful marine ecosystems, but also provide vital services such as protecting coastlines from storms and supporting fisheries. Recognizing human impact on the environment is another key aspect of ecological awareness; one striking example is the decline in the bee population due to the use of pesticides, which threatens food safety around the world (Bjelajac, Stošić & Filipović, 2023); Bjelajac, Filipović & Banović, 2021). By promoting sustainable practices such as recycling and reducing carbon emissions, we can influence the mitigation of environmental damage caused by human activities.

Developing and nurturing ecological awareness is a necessary condition for solving crucial environmental challenges and ensuring a healthy planet for all forms of life. At the individual level, ecological awareness empowers people to make preventive decisions that reduce their impact on the environment. At the community level, fostering ecological awareness can lead to collective action toward conservation efforts and sustainable resource management. Increased ecological awareness on a global level is necessary to achieve long-term sustainability goals and preserve biodiversity for future generations. Spreading ecological awareness on a global scale is essential to involve the population in efforts to preserve the environment. Educational programs, media campaigns and advocacy work are instrumental in raising public awareness of pressing environmental issues. However, challenges such as different priorities

among regions and communities need to be addressed through tailored communication strategies and inclusive dialogues.

2.3. Ecological conscience as part of social and cultural fabric

According to Maslow's theory of motivation, human needs are hierarchically organized on five levels: physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Higher level needs arise only by satisfying lower level needs. At the lowest (basic) level are physiological needs, which include the need for food, water, air, homeostasis (relative constancy of the composition of the internal environment of the organism), sleep and sex. Although, according to this theory, the need for security arises after the satisfaction of physiological needs, it is quite obvious, in the category of axioms, that the need for food, water and air is also the need for security. These needs are simply inseparable, and we satisfy them thanks to nature. Their quality and safety of use are most directly related to ecological (environmental) security.

Therefore, being in a healthy and safe environment is at the very top of human needs. That is why the importance of awareness about it is huge, but at least equally important is the consciousness of the necessity of proper behavior in order to preserve a healthy environment as a source of satisfaction of basic human needs. Degradation of the environment at every step, as a factor in awakening ecological awareness (Lunić, 2020: 537), is also an alarmist for ecological conscience.

The basis of ecological conscience lies in the understanding that people are not separate from nature, but part of it. Every action we take, from the water we use to the products we buy, has a ripple effect on the environment. This interconnectedness means that the health of the environment directly affects the health and well-being of people. Understanding ecological conscience also includes recognizing the ethical implications of our interaction with the environment. It's about making choices that don't harm other species and ecosystems. This ethical stance is rooted in the belief that all life has intrinsic value and deserves respect and protection.

Ecological conscience is the first step towards creating a sustainable future. Without a collective change in the way we perceive and interact with the natural world, efforts to combat environmental problems such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss will not be successful. Ecological conscience fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment. It encourages individuals to take steps, no matter how small, to subordinate their bad habits to the interests of a healthy environment. From reducing waste to supporting renewable energy, every action contributes to a larger movement towards sustainability. Initiatives such as conservation projects, sustainable resource management practices and international agreements play a key role in keeping our planet healthy. Successful initiatives such as the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015) have demonstrated international cooperation in the fight against climate change and ecosystem protection.

3. Conclusions

Ecological security, ecological conscience and ecological awareness are key concepts in the field of environmental sustainability. Ecological security refers to the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources from damage or degradation. On the other hand, ecological conscience refers to the ethical responsibility of the individual towards the preservation of the environment for current and future generations. Ecological awareness means understanding the interconnectedness of all living things and recognizing the impact of human activities on the environment.

The relationship between ecological security and ecological conscience is complex, but also vital. Individuals with a strong ecological conscience are more likely to prioritize environmental protection in their actions and decisions. This ethical responsibility plays a significant role in ensuring ecological security by driving sustainable practices and policies at both the individual and collective levels. When individuals and communities develop an ecological conscience, they become more aware of the impact of their actions on the environment. Increased awareness often leads to the adoption of sustainable behaviors such as reducing waste production, conserving energy and supporting green initiatives. These positive changes not only

contribute to the immediate environment, but also contribute to an increase in overall environmental safety.

Ecological awareness serves as a catalyst to promote ecological security by fostering a deeper understanding of environmental issues and threats. When individuals are well informed about the consequences of their actions on nature, they are more inclined to adopt environmentally friendly behavior and support initiatives aimed at preserving the ecosystem. Increased ecological awareness can lead to the development of responsible behaviors and policies that are necessary to maintain long-term ecological security.

Spreading ecological awareness on a global scale is essential to involve the population in efforts to preserve the environment. Educational programs, media campaigns and advocacy work are instrumental in raising public awareness of pressing environmental issues. However, challenges such as different priorities among regions and communities need to be addressed through tailored communication strategies and inclusive dialogues.

Collective action at the local, national and international levels is key to mitigating environmental degradation and building resilience to the impacts of climate change. It is imperative that we continue to prioritize ecological awareness and take proactive steps towards creating a more balanced coexistence with nature. Strengthening ecological security measures requires the cooperation of governments, organizations and individuals. Policies such as promoting renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions and conserving natural resources play a significant role in environmental protection.

Further research and action should focus precisely on strengthening ecological security measures and spreading ecological awareness globally to create a healthier planet for all living beings.

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ETHNOTHERAPY OF DIABETES PATIENTS AND COVID-19 BARRIER MEASURES IN CAMEROON

Edwige Christelle NAANBOW ANABA

PhD, University of Garoua (Cameroon), E-mail: anabachristelle@yahoo.fr

Abstract: *The main purpose of this article is to examine the impact of Covid-19 barrier measures the adequate care of diabetic patients. This study is qualitative. Medical anthropology research techniques were used to collect field data. Using interview guides, the information collected from diabetics, medical staff and people close to the patient are analysed using content analysis method and following the "sickness, illness, disease" structuring. Barrier measures and lifestyle changes (diet, physical training, etc.) are closely linked to inadequate diabetes care. Precariousness is greater when families are forced to strictly respect barrier measures introduced in the fight against the spread of Covid-19. Interventions focused on taking into account risk factors (sedentary lifestyle, inappropriate diet.) are not obvious during periods of confinement. Barrier measures (social distancing, wearing masks, hand washing) are not respected at all, since the presence of close relations plays an undeniable role in psychological and moral comfort in all aspects of diabetic care.*

Keywords: Covid-19, Diabetes, barrier measures, confinement.

1. Introduction

At the start of the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, diabetes was identified as a factor associated with severe forms, and a prognostic factor. Numerous studies have focused on this relationship and have been able to clarify a number of elements, impact: comorbidities associated with diabetes, phenotype of diabetic subjects at risk of severe forms, glycaemic control, COVID-19 on diabetes risk. This article is part of what is commonly referred to as the "Post-COVID-19 article".

In developing countries, around 90% of new cases of diabetes are attributable to lifestyle. People with diabetes in a medically fragile context (cardiac, pulmonary or renal) are more at risk to develop a severe form of COVID-19, unlike those with no other health problems. Poor households are the most affected by chronic non-communicable diseases as diabetes. Yet health care coverage is still limited, and medical costs are largely borne by families. In relation with hospitals, compliance with barrier measures remains a major public health challenge in Cameroon, especially in a health context where there is still no emphasis laid on the Covid-19 pandemic and diabetes.

This article is a point of attraction, or a piece of the veil, whose main aim is to examine the impact of Covid-19's barrier measures on the proper care of diabetes patients who are a category of patients that carry on the one hand, an incurable but controllable non-communicable chronic disease: diabetes and on the other hand, an extremely contagious and deadly disease which, in strict compliance with barrier measures can be treated: COVID 19. On the sidelines of biomedicine, this article, seen from an anthropological perspective, examines the impact of Covid-19 barrier measures on the treatment of diabetes. What is the interest of this article at a time when we tend to believe that COVID 19 is entirely eradicated given the abandonment of the barrier measures introduced by the Cameroonian government? Even if the attendance of certain places such as public buildings (Morgues, Banks, international conferences, etc.) where wearing a mask is still required, shows evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has left its mark on the minds of the people who experienced it.

2. Methodological framework

This is a qualitative study. Medical anthropology research techniques were used to collect field data in the city of Yaoundé, on the basis of "illness, sickness, disease". Semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with COVID-19 prevention and care service

providers, diabetics and their families and friends. Qualitative data were transcribed, typed in MSWord, then analysed using Quivy Campenouh's content analysis. Primary data processing consisted in highlighting the article's salient themes. At the same time, primary data were collected simultaneously with secondary data. As Covid-19 is a new disease, there is little scientific literature on this pandemic and diabetes. Thus, the literature review focused on reports, articles, journals, documentaries, etc., and social science literature, mainly anthropology. The field survey took place from June to October 2022. During the peak period of the Covid-19 epidemic, when the Cameroon Government has decreed confinement, the survey focused on compliance with the practice of barrier gestures in health facilities, public and private administrations, large gatherings, homes; compliance with barrier measures by diabetics, their families, friends and healthcare professionals specializing in diabetes care. Also, we have experienced Covid because we have come into contact with the coronavirus. In fact, family dynamics explain decisions on whether or not to comply with barrier measures, as well as social roles and power relationships relating to the health of others: Who decides on the purchase of hydroalcoholic gel, the installation of a water point for hand-washing, the number of meals, etc.? The life stories of diabetics who were victims of COVID-19 provided insights into their individual and collective experiences of barrier measures during this period of restriction.

In the quest for a scientific basis, the data were analysed on the basis of Jodelet's (1989) theory of social representations. This provided a synoptic view of the impact of barrier measures on the lifestyle and behaviour of diabetic patients at risk of exposure to COVID-19, as well as information on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of diabetics exposed to COVID-19, healthcare staff, their relations and community players.

From an ethical point of view, respect of to the rule of art has brought assurance that informants have accepted to submit to the investigation without constraint. Protective measures are focused on ethical requirements. An informed consent form was submitted to each participant for signature.

3.Results of the study

The results are of several kinds.

- Population knowledge of COVID-19 and diabetes

Worldwide, and mainly in Cameroon, community members are aware of Covid-19 through awareness campaigns and communication in the media and social media. Emphasis is placed on barrier measures, the principal means of preventing transmission or eradicating the scourge: respect for barrier measures, wearing a mask in public places, correct and systematic hand-washing, respect for social distancing, limiting groupings of people (no more than 50), burials in strict privacy, prohibition of cultural ceremonies (mourning, funerals, weddings, etc.). Toll-free numbers have been set up to enable people to contact specialized health professionals to report any suspicious cases in the community.

- COVID-19 and diabetes: two entirely opposed diseases

Respondents were not aware of the risks of COVID-19 for people living with diabetes. This is due to the fact that the coronavirus is a new disease whose aspects are still under study. These shortcomings are the responsibility not only of community members, but also of healthcare personnel, scientists and others.

Diabetes is a chronic, non-communicable disease that cannot be cured but can be controlled. In contrast, COVID-19 is a contagious curable pandemic although it is poorly known by healthcare professionals. Health professionals are general practitioners, most of whom have no specialized training in the joint management of diabetics who have been tested positive, or who are at risk of contracting COVID.

A number of measures are recommended to control diabetes. Strict respect of hygiene and dietary rules, and barrier gestures as frequent ventilation, repeated use of hydroalcoholic gel, wearing of masks, social distancing, systematic taking of medication; regular checking of the patient's blood sugar levels. According to specialists, "*if blood sugar levels are high (over 2.50*

g/ml), it's important to check that the patient isn't making acetone. If so, contact a healthcare professional as soon as possible, as the patient is insulin-deficient, and vaccinate him or her against the flu. These measures are also prescribed in case of Coronavirus".

Hypoglycaemia being a drop in blood of sugar level, it can affect the quality of life of diabetics and their families. It is important to be aware of the symptoms, treatment methods, causes and preventive measures. In view of the barrier measures associated with COVID-19, diabetics are still not surrounded by close relatives. The isolated patient cannot perceive the symptoms or realize that he is suffering from a fairly viral form of diabetes. Therefore, we must lay emphasis on COVID-19 and the risks for people living with diabetes. During periods of confinement, movement and visits were restricted, and patients who were tested positive quarantined. As a result, it was not at all easy for families to monitor hypoglycaemia in diabetics.

- Involvement of various stakeholders in the fight against COVID-19

The Cameroonian government supported by international organizations has announced the provision of preventive inputs and care for Covid-19 patients. This includes funding research, supplying specialized treatment centres with improved drugs and essential equipment, welcoming patients to CTAs, creating a national Covid-19 care program, making drugs available, and ensuring that the care package is free of charge for all patients. Barrier measures as a Cameroonian response strategy have seen the strengthening of community involvement, through the accompaniment of institutional partners and international organizations by local authorities in their respective communities, awareness-raising in their communities; the granting of donations by the elite: buckets, mufflers, hydro-alcoholic gel, soap, etc., to encourage families to respect the law, to respect barrier measures and hygiene rules on a daily basis, to combat misinformation, to ensure the safety of health personnel, and to inform people about the advantages and disadvantages of vaccination against Covid-19.

However, the level of poverty of the population acutely poses the problem of financing care in the event of a combination of diabetes and COVID-19; the precarious living conditions of the populations could not allow them to submit to strict compliance with barrier measures.

- Non-compliance with barrier measures prescribed by Ministry of Health (MINSANTE)

Effective application of these measures improves the epidemiological picture. Despite efforts to raise awareness, there has been a lack of interest among diabetics who have been tested positive for Covid-19 because it does not take into account the joint treatment of the two diseases. Non-compliance with barrier measures is linked to the lack of rigor in awareness and communication campaigns for behaviour change. According to informants, this situation can be observed in front of supermarkets, where security and law enforcement forces no longer oblige users to wash their hands, or in the non-existence or gradual disappearance of hand-washing points. For the population, this situation is the evidence that Covid-19 has been partially or totally defeated. For some others, Covid-19 is nothing but a pure invention of Western countries to cause harm.

- The healing processes for diabetes patients and COVID-19

We notice the shortage or almost non-existence of health professionals/auxiliaries specialized in the simultaneous management of the two diseases; lack of equipment for the management of serious cases; difficulties for patients in respiratory distress to access some geographic areas; the demotivation of community field agents who do not always have the substantial financial resources to carry out awareness campaigns in the field.

The material and immaterial support given to families affected by the pandemic is the evidence of the community solidarity. In addition, patients and their next of kin turn to informal healthcare providers to follow different therapeutic pathways: street medicines, traditional pharmacopoeia, underqualified healthcare auxiliaries working illegally in search of their daily bread. They neither perform laboratory nor blood sugar levels tests, but give infusions to patients. Such practices have disastrous health consequences and reinforce chemoresistance.

Customary, there are three categories of traditional medicine practitioners in Cameroon. Traditional healers who are skilled in ritual practices and use clairvoyance to diagnose the ailment before proceeding with treatment. Herbalists know a great number of medicinal plants handed down from generation to generation. They propose the same dosage to treat both illnesses. Naturopaths believe that, alongside biomedicine, they have the drugs to treat COVID-19 and diabetes. They are in touch with the components of nature on which they act to treat disease. Observation of the different practices reveals confusion between the three categories. They all claim to be health agents, and diagnose illnesses by representing pathologies according to their knowledge.

Traditional practitioners preserve the cultural assets linked to the cause, manifestation, designation and management of diseases. They are closer to biomedical health professionals. It is in that context that we can speak of "illness, sickness and disease", to the extent that care pathways are governed by popular systems of interpretation of illness. Informants also mention the strong practice of self-medication among populations or street pharmacies where pharmaceutical products are available over the counter along the roads and near pharmacies or health centres. These pharmacies offer the following advantages: retail sales, low prices, treatment advice from the salesperson who often has no training in medical services; the possibility of discussing prices; equivalence of medicines; speed of service and availability of equivalent medicines. In the absence of financial means, people use whatever medicines are available, including expired tablets, bitter tree bark and "leftover" medicines for old diseases. In terms of geographical accessibility, the homes are far from the health centres, where stocks of essential medicines regularly run out. Moreover, people sometimes have to travel long distances by motorcycle. Barrier measures, however, prohibit movement and promote social distancing, even on public transport. A Covid patient who suffers diabetic seizures is obliged to resort to available therapeutic practices, to the detriment of compliance with barrier measures.

On the economic front, people are unable to follow a treatment through to its end because of the very high cost of treating both diseases, which sometimes involves hospitalization or quarantine. Recurrences are frequent, and a return to the health centre for the same disease is obvious.

Culturally, the populations are strongly rooted in their traditions. For these supporters, there are several ways to treat diseases without resorting to biomedicine. Their lay knowledge leads them to opt for medicinal plants or to consult traditional practitioners. The Covid 19 pandemic has for instance, led to the development of a number of potions, fusions and traditional medicines. People have confidence in medicinal plants, which reflect their identity and come from ancestors who always give them guidance on their health, ailments and fate.

Irrespective of social rank, the respondents use alternative medicine, where illnesses are associated with specific representations. Nonetheless, they differ in their therapeutic practices, and believe they have the same medicine for Covid-19 and diabetes for centuries.

Since pharmaceutical products are sold over the counter by the roadside and close to pharmacies or health centres, and due to a lack of financial means, people use the medicines available in "street pharmacies", where everything pleads in their favour: tablets, even expired ones, bitter tree bark and "leftover" medicines for old diseases, retail sales, low prices, the possibility of discussing prices, rapid service and availability of equivalent medicines, and the advice of the salesperson who has no medical training. There are a multitude of medicinal plants in the traditional pharmacopoeia to combat COVID-19 and diabetes, commonly known as sugar disease. In popular imagery, any bitter plant eliminates sugar levels or cleanses the blood of diabetics. These practices were not easy to comprehend under confinement. As a result, to achieve this, populations were forced to disregard barrier measures.

- *Hand washing*

At the start of the pandemic, when awareness was high, the practice of hand washing was respected. Users were obliged to wash their hands on a daily basis. Currently, in the health facilities we visited, despite the availability of handwashing points, the practice of handwashing is no longer on users' agendas. Ongoing awareness-raising campaigns could help to alleviate this lack of interest.

Overall, the lack of communication is reducing protection against Covid. Wearing a mask is no longer compulsory. The practice of hygiene measures is encouraged within the DS through posters, but not required of users. According to informants, hand-washing was a reality when they were forced to do so. The practice of using running water in communities, public spaces, schools, public buildings, some hospitals and homes has become optional. Indeed, since the lifting of government restrictions in March 2020, commercial spaces and places providing various services have seen an almost systematic disappearance of handwashing points.

- *Working environment for diabetics under COVID-19 confinement*

It was risky for diabetics to keep on working during the period of COVID-19 confinement. There is no government financial support for people who decide to voluntarily withdraw from their workplace for fear of infection. However, they can try to reach an arrangement with their employer. Although diabetes has been clearly identified as a risk factor for severe COVID-19 and mortality, there are additional risk factors in the diabetic population. Understanding these risks could help manage diabetics effectively and advise clinical services.

When a diabetes patient is tested positive to COVID-19, measures should be taken in accordance with symptoms. If they have difficulty breathing, feel intense fatigue or have very high blood sugar levels, they should go to hospital. "*Hospitalization is mandatory to limit kidney failure and the thrombogenic risk, that is to say the risk of developing clots, is very high in the case of COVID-19. If the diabetic patient suffering from COVID-19 only presents flu symptoms, he must monitor his blood sugar and stay confined at home*" recommends the diabetologist (Interview conducted on June 14, 2022).

- *Shortage of qualified healthcare personnel in diabetes and COVID-19 care*

Major difficulties include interactions with patients by telephone; close follow-up of patients at home remains problematic, given positive tests after several days of treatment; the lack of qualified staff; the lack of infrastructure and equipment causing delays in the management of COVID-19 cases; perceptions relating to the non-existence of the disease; and difficulties in obtaining medicines, which outpatients say are expensive.

Among the main obstacles that prevent the sustainability of barrier measures, field survey reveals religious beliefs, the stigmatization of people who attempts to respect the measures, health problems and the specificity of activities performed by some workers (transporter, sex worker, health personnel...). At the individual level, purchasing power, people's mind, representations linked to the illness, socio-cultural factors, the persistence of gatherings (meetings, funerals, associations) in small spaces without physical distancing. According to, people in the community, the government is to blame for this failure to comply with barrier measures. They believe that it should not talk about compliance with barrier measures to a very deprived people who must fight daily to survive. Unlike in Western countries, no provision has been made for either financial assistance or set up support measures for the populations. Moreover, in a context where economic activities are slowing down at community level, school and university calendars are being disrupted, and attendance at places of worship, markets, leisure facilities, etc., is down, there are no measures in place.

Consequently, the systematic abandonment of compliance with barrier measures is interpreted by most informants as the consequence of the implementation of support measures for people with diabetes, whether or not they have been tested positive. The fact that

compliance with barrier measures is not demanded overnight has led to controversy about the real existence of the disease.

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) affects individuals in different ways. Most infected people develop a mild or moderate form of the disease and recover without hospitalization. Symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue and loss of smell or taste, sore throat, headache, aches and pains, diarrhoea, skin rash, discoloration of fingers or toes, and red or irritated eyes. It is imperative to be consulted by healthcare professionals at the same time as the diabetes doctor before travelling, if you have serious symptoms such as difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or motor skills, confusion or chest pain. Hence the need for private means of transport, or failing that, the easiest and most practical choice: traditional medicine. Economically, people are unable to afford treatment during peak epidemics of these two diseases, given the high cost of the entire treatment package. In the event of serious illness, patients cannot accept hospitalization and stop treatment as soon as they feel relieved, so that recurrences are frequent and a return to the health centre for the same illness is obvious. From a cultural point of view, people prefer returning to medicinal plants treatment based on lay knowledge or being consulted by a specialist of the field without going through biomedicine or implementing barrier measures to movement, grouping and distancing. This trust reflects their identity and creates a link with their habits and customs, in communion with the ancestors who always give them guidance on their health, ailments and fate. This confers the socio-cultural character of the disease. In fact, it is not just the patient who suffers but also, the patient's environment. The African concept of illness is assistance. To the point where people separate or become enemies only because during the period of illness, the patient has not been visited by so-and-so, or a third party. The kind of behaviour that goes against the confinement of the Covid 19 pandemic.

- *Diabetes-related complications of Covid-19*

A common cause of diabetes-related complications is too much glucose in the blood. If blood glucose levels remain too high over time, this has a damaging impact on several of the body's organs, principally: the kidneys (nephropathy), the eyes (retinopathy), the neurological system (neuropathy) and the heart (heart attack). Diabetes is now recognized as a chronic disease that cannot be cured, but can be controlled. It is characterized by blood sugar levels above normal values. Usually, blood sugar levels are maintained within the normal range thanks in part to insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas. Nowadays, diagnostic capabilities exist, although the quantity of reagents, as elsewhere, could be a challenge.

- *Reinforcing barrier measures for people living with diabetes*

Barrier measures need to be reinforced for people living with diabetes, as they are at greater risk of developing severe symptoms and complications if they contract COVID-19. This can be explained by the fact that viral infections (COVID-19, influenza, respiratory tract infection) can be more difficult to treat in people living with diabetes due to fluctuations in blood glucose levels, particularly if they are often high.

Contracting COVID-19 can greatly affect diabetes management, especially in people treated with insulin. The result is hyperglycaemia. While it is important to contact your pharmacist or physician to find out if medication adjustments are necessary, some medications can be temporarily discontinued because of barrier measures. For example, if you are unable to go to your doctor for treatment in the middle of a crisis, because you must not move beyond 6 p.m. in order to respect the curfew imposed by the government, this can be life-threatening for diabetics.

The WHO recommends quarantining these people at home. However, this measure is difficult to implement. In fact, unlike the situation in North America and Europe, a large proportion of our populations live from day to day, and have to find the means of subsistence

on a daily basis. For some, staying in quarantine is impossible in terms of financial compensation.

To stem the spread of COVID 19, community members had to play an important role in following the following hygiene rules: Wash hands with soap whenever possible; Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, which are entry points for the virus; In the event of a cough or sneeze, it is advisable to cover mouth and nose with the bend of the elbow or with a handkerchief, then dispose of the handkerchief immediately afterwards in a closed garbage can, and wash hands with a hydro-alcoholic solution or soap and water. You should also avoid close contact, especially with people who have been in contact with a confirmed case or a person from a country affected by the coronavirus. Avoid large gatherings of people, as they increase the risk of contamination. Protecting yourself also means protecting others.

- *Perception of hydroalcoholic gel*

Many people still stereotype the use of hydroalcoholic gel. On the pretext of the lotion's proven or presumed side effects on the skin, the use of hydroalcoholic gel to disinfect hands is in most cases disfavoured in favour of hand washing considered less harmless. Superstores are content to have security staff pour a drop of hydroalcoholic gel into the palm of their customers' hands, which, in popular imagery, is nothing more than high-capacity alcohol, not to be used frequently for fear of damaging the hands. And given the fragile nature of diabetics' skin, this solution is not very suitable.

People from countries with an active outbreak of the epidemic should place themselves in voluntary quarantine, i.e., limit their movements and contact with their neighbourhood, and be able to detect the first symptoms and report to the relevant health authorities. With regard to the level of community involvement, both formal and informal sector stakeholders have been mobilized in the fight against COVID-19. At this level of reflection, we can decry the measures concerning the simultaneous care of diabetes.

- *Community resilience*

From an anthropological point of view, the forms of resilience experienced by communities faced with the demands of respecting barrier measures lead us to question the combined control programs when a person suffers from a curative pandemic such as COVID-19 associated with an incurable disease like diabetes. It revealed profound socio-cultural dysfunctions that need to be understood and analysed in depth. At the start of the pandemic, there were major problems in humanizing care for COVID-19 patients. Anthropologically, this distancing contributed to weakening or breaking physical contact which is an essential dimension of humanizing care. Indeed, in popular imagery in the Cameroonian context, any disease with a strong media connotation, as it was the case with COVID-19, borders on pure publicity. A diabetic who has been suffering from this incurable disease for decades wonders why it is not covered by the media. In a global context of health system fragility, where the quality and quantity of health professionals are inadequate, and where the infrastructure is sometimes proven to be inadequate, the humanization of care for COVID patients, including the related barrier measures, has been perceived as a Western invention designed to weaken African solidarity, hence the misperception of the barrier measures by the target populations.

The effectiveness of COVID-19 treatment is linked to acceptance of the disease. But some people don't believe in the existence of COVID-19. Those who are tested positive opt for other therapeutic routes, to the detriment of biomedical therapy, in order to avoid the stressful treatment: isolation, eating fruit, etc. Identifying the corona virus with the simple flu from which Africans usually suffer, traditional herbal pharmacopoeia or a "grandmother's" potion would put an end to it.

- *Community perceptions of barrier measures*

In the process of caring for their patients, members of the community refused to accept quarantine, which they perceived as stigmatizing them and raising various issues linked to the

problem of self-representation. The institutional requirements for treating COVID-19 death in the Cameroonian context were dehumanizing. They ran counter to the communities' socio-cultural and religious aspirations, resulting in scenes of tension and open conflict, sometimes bloody, between the institutional stakeholders and the victims' families.

In addition, compliance with barrier measures lost its vitality in households and neighbourhoods where deaths from covid-19 were not known. In the Cameroonian context, a diabetic cannot be quarantined by family and friends under the pretext of respecting barrier measures.

- *Wearing masks and social distancing*

At the start of the pandemic, social distancing and the wearing of masks were required. Not being common practice, it is difficult for a people deeply rooted in tradition to discard certain habits and customs overnight in order to meet Western standards. In public services, where compliance with these measures is required, their application is not absolute. Service providers and users alike sometimes ignore, without being bothered, the requirements relating to barrier measures indicated on notice boards at the entrance to offices. As people are not reading-minded, they don't pay much attention to them. They are only interested in services rendered within the prescribed time limits.

Thus, the response to COVID-19 at community level had more of a profit-making connotation than the fight against the pandemic. For example, at the start of the pandemic, face masks were made from fabric or plastic, and sold at relatively low prices. Today, the drastic fall in the price of imported masks has outstripped artisanal production. Locally-produced hydro-alcoholic gels have flooded the market. Added to this are a host of herbal teas made from culinary products and traditional pharmacopoeia.

The messages addressed to the communities concerned the perception and prevention of the disease, and compliance with barrier measures. In the awareness-raising sessions, no mention was made of the differences and similarities with diabetes.

- *Instant appropriation of barrier measures prescribed by the WHO and the Cameroon government*

As soon as the pandemic broke out, it was not easy to instantly adopt the barrier measures prescribed by the WHO and the Cameroon government. It was only with a little hindsight that people began to adopt them: social distancing and the wearing of masks in relation to messages on morbidity and mortality relayed by the official media, social networks and rumour (sidewalk radio). The survey shows that, contrary to preconceived ideas, positive cases of Covid-19 are accompanied by solidarity on the part of families, friends and communities. Acceptance of cohabitation with this pandemic is becoming increasingly widespread. Particular attention is being paid to people suffering simultaneously from COVID 19 and diabetes. Hence the need to explore family involvement in the care of diabetics testing positive for COVID 19.

- *Community and family as important pillars of the psychological support network in the care of diabetic patients with covid-19*

The family plays a central role in the care of diabetic patients with covid-19. Although the disease is often seen as a fatality, the family is the main shield on which patients can rely to find the psychological strength they need to overcome the ordeal imposed by their situation. This support is even more significant when the patient is receiving treatment at home. In some cases, the onset of illness is an opportunity to strengthen the grieving family's attachment to the religious faith. Last but not least, this support from the family kinship also takes place at a distance when some of the members are not in the same locality. Incessant telephone calls are made daily to encourage the patient, letting him know that he is going to defeat diabetes.

The community is the other important pillar of the patient's psychological support network. Depending on their social affinities, sufferers receive comfort from friends, colleagues

and other acquaintances via social networks and vicarious messages. Through this constant attention, the community becomes the patient's second family. This attention is explained by the duty of solidarity, which is still one of the fundamental principles of community life in all African societies. However, while it is true that community support is a given, some patients advise their relatives not to divulge their state of health outside their immediate circle, and even better, to limit home visits. This strategy is doubly beneficial, because it reduces the risk of contamination, while reducing the extent of social stigmatization.

- *Experience of the disease by diabetics with or without a positive test for COVID-19*

Social support (family, friends, healthcare personnel) is a determining factor in the experience of the disease by diabetics, whether or not they have been tested positive for COVID-19. The more support patients receive from those around them, the more (psychological) strength they find to cope with the disease. Social mobilization around the patient which is a particularity of the identity of Cameroonian communities constitutes one of the first medicines against the disease. In this context, the patient does not face the disease alone. He is supported by those closest to him. We no longer speak of the sick person in the "singular" sense, but of the sick person in the "plural" or "community" sense of the term.

Barrier measures and lifestyle changes (diet, physical activity, etc.) are closely linked to the lack of adequate diabetes care. Precariousness is more accentuated as families are forced to strictly respect the barrier measures introduced in the fight against the spread of Covid-19. Interventions focused on taking into account risk factors (sedentary lifestyle, inappropriate diet, etc.) are not obvious during periods of confinement. Barrier measures (social distancing, wearing helmets, etc.) are not respected at all, as the presence of family and friends plays an undeniable role in providing psychological and moral comfort in all aspects of diabetic care.

It is important to respect the 4 pillars of balance, because living with diabetes means developing a lifestyle that helps control the disease. According to biomedical experts, the focus should be on care and treatment (medication and insulin, self-monitoring, hypoglycaemia, hyperglycaemia, weight management, body care, natural health products, testing and follow-up), diet, physical activity, psychology (adapting to diagnosis, stress, family and friends, mental health, testimonials).

People with diabetes are advised to eat well to achieve better glycaemic control. To ensure adequate nutrition, they should eat three balanced meals a day, and avoid skipping them. Meals must therefore be taken at specific times. However, field results reveal that this is a rather delicate situation in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic. In terms of barrier measures, confinement is not conducive to strict compliance with these recommendations, given the degree of poverty in households, it is not easy for healthy people, even less for diabetics, to eat properly. During the period of confinement, all income-generating activities suffered a drastic financial downturn. Still, no specific plan has been drawn up for people with diabetes to earn enough money to buy the foods they need for their nutrition. Not only is it difficult for people with diabetes to comply with nutritionists' prescriptions, i.e., to submit to a proper diet due to a lack of financial resources, they are also forced to adopt barrier measures that slow down all income-generating activities.

According to this specialist, *"In a population hospitalized for COVID-19, a third of whom are diabetics, age is a common factor that cannot be influenced, unlike weight control linked to a balanced diet, sufficient physical activity and a healthy lifestyle"* (Interview conducted on June 19, 2022). Diabetics are obliged to control their weight. However, with the abrupt cessation of all activities during the confinement of parents and pupils who no longer attend school from March 2020 due to the rapid spread of the disease, families have seen their consumption patterns change. As a result, the number of daily meals has multiplied. The fact that schoolchildren are at home means that householders have to prepare large quantities of food several times a day. As a result, people with diabetes not only run the risk of contracting the Corona Virus, but also of falling prey to obesity.

- *Covid-19's impact on the cost of living*

Patients are monitored not only during treatment at the health facility, but also in the community. At the same time, measures are taken to mitigate stigmatization and enforce respect for Covid-19 patients. The Covid-19 was psychologically rejected by the population, who considered it a pure invention. On this basis, it was impossible to gather information about the various actors involved in the therapeutic and community management of the disease. However, some data collected from health service providers enabled us to better circumscribe the elements related to violence surrounding the care of Covid-19 patients.

Generally speaking, the weight of socio-cultural factors and poverty are the main bottlenecks, whatever the survey area. Many socio-cultural factors influence compliance with barrier measures. Indeed, some people's standard of living would not allow them to buy one or two mufflers a day. And if we have to take into account the diabetes care from which the Covid patient suffers, it is quite obvious that the population cannot take into consideration the barrier measures.

- *Socio-cultural practices favourable to the transmission of COVID-19 in relation to Diabetes*

There are a number of socio-cultural practices that are conducive to the transmission of COVID-19. When a family has a diabetic to care for on a daily basis, even if only in terms of nutrition, it is obliged to go to the market constantly to stock up. Within the markets, the results of the survey reveal that social distancing is not respected, and neither is the wearing of masks. Public transport is one of the main factors contributing to the rapid spread of the virus. Also, the gathering of dozens of people always takes place without respect for barrier measures (mourning, marriage, baptism). According to the respondents, barrier measures are very difficult to respect. Few people stop at the corners where buckets are placed for hand-washing. No specific measures have been taken for people suffering from COVID and diabetes.

According to respondents, barrier measures are very difficult to comply with wearing masks is a major constraint preventing those who wear them from breathing normally. Some people admit they can't keep their nose in the mask for long because they can't stand it. However, those questioned acknowledged that simply washing hands was not enough to prevent the transmission of Covid-19.

- *Factors favouring the relaxation of barrier gestures*

The most frequent symptoms of Covid are fever, cough, fatigue, loss of smell or taste, while the least frequent are sore throat, headache, aches and pains, diarrhoea, skin rash or discoloration of fingers or toes, red or irritated eyes. However, the patient may present severe symptoms such as difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or motor skills, or confusion and chest pain. At this stage of the disease, patients are advised to consult a healthcare professional immediately. However, with barriers in place that limit movement, even if a doctor or health centre is contacted by telephone, it is not easy for the patient to get in touch with his or her attending physician.

However, in the midst of the Covid period, when the entire population is required to comply with barrier measures as confinement and travel are restricted. Moreover, we live in a context where precariousness and poverty levels prevent a large number of the population from affording this luxury. Most have to go out every day to get enough to eat. And yet, if a diabetic has to stop working, he or she will never be able to meet these requirements.

4. Discussion

In diabetics, we observe, on the contrary, a more or less remarkable increase in fasting blood sugar (hyperglycaemia: 1.2 per thousand at least) and a more remarkable rise in it after meals (1.4- approximately 1.6 per thousand). The value of hyperglycaemia certainly gives us a measure of the severity of the disease: we speak of mild diabetes when glycemia oscillates

between 1.2 and 1.8 per thousand, of moderate diabetes when it varies between 1.8 and 2.5 per thousand, and of severe diabetes when fasting glycemia permanently exceeds 2.5 per thousand. The essential data, of fundamental importance for diagnosis, is the determination of the amount of glucose in the blood (glycemia). Normally, fasting blood glucose levels hover around one per thousand (between 0.80 and 1.20 per thousand), with a slight rise (up to 1.30 per thousand) after a meal.

Living with diabetes does not increase the risk of contracting COVID-19, but does potentially increase the risk of developing severe symptoms and complications if COVID-19 is contracted. The most common complications are pneumonia and acute respiratory distress. In some cases, COVID-19 can lead to death. People living with diabetes are at greater risk of developing severe symptoms and complications if they contract COVID-19, as viral infections (COVID-19, influenza or other) can be more difficult to treat in people living with diabetes due to fluctuating blood glucose levels, particularly if these are often high.

Covid-19 has an undeniable impact on the care of diabetics under insulin, for example. In the context of biomedicine, it is always advisable to contact a healthcare professional, in this case a doctor, to find out whether a medication adjustment is necessary, or whether certain drugs need to be temporarily discontinued. Diabetes is one of the most frequently reported comorbidities in COVID-19 patients. Diabetes does not appear to increase the risk of contracting COVID-19. Although diabetic patients are considered to be at greater risk of infection, recent studies have shown that these are mainly fungal and bacterial infections, particularly soft-tissue infections, urinary tract infections and community-acquired pneumonia (especially pneumococcal). Viral infections, such as seasonal flu, are not usually more frequent in diabetic patients than in the general population. In the case of influenza, however, diabetes is recognized as a risk factor for developing a severe or critical form of the infection.

There are a number of factors to be taken into account when dealing with a disease or pandemic, in this case COVID 19 and diabetes. The economic context refers to the economic institutions, norms, values and rules in force, the positioning of the various players in the economy, and production, distribution and consumption activities. What matters is the degree and modes of state intervention in the economy, the cycles of growth and decline in economic activity, job creation and loss, the effects of market globalization, but also the cost of consumer goods and marketing practices, all of which influence a society's way of life and standard of living. Yet, in the fight against COVID 19, the Cameroonian government has instead introduced restrictive measures that run counter to all the above: confinement, systematic disruption of activities for some who would have to move from one town to another in search of gain to be able to meet the family's health needs.

Diabetes is a chronic disease that cannot be cured, but it can be controlled. Therefore, to live with diabetes, the patient should develop a lifestyle that enables him or her to control the disease while achieving full self-fulfilment. In this respect, diabetes sufferers are advised to eat well. A well-balanced diet can help considerably in achieving adequate glycaemic control. Dietary recommendations for diabetics are similar to those for the general population. For example, diabetics must eat three balanced meals a day. Skipping meals is not recommended. In other words, meals must be taken at regular times.

The demographic context relates to the particularities of a population, such as fertility, age and gender distribution, and ethnic diversity. It also concerns population movements such as the rural depopulation, suburban growth, the gentrification or impoverishment of certain neighbourhoods, and immigration. Barrier measures put a stop to population movements during COVID 19.

The social and cultural context refers, among other things, to the predominant norms and values in a society, religious practices, gaps between social groups, the intensity of collaboration or competition between community members, and phenomena such as racism or sexism. Social distancing as a barrier measure has instead created the deconstruction of this collaboration between family and community members. So, in times of confinement, we

couldn't really talk about "illness, sickness and disease", but about the patient's experience of illness. By experience, Cameroonians know that an illness such as jaundice (the name Africans give to icterus) or haemorrhoids is best treated by a traditional doctor. This is what Mbonji E. (1993: 329) means by "horizontal complementarity", referring to illnesses that can be treated both by the doctor and the healer. He mentions some of these illnesses: hypertension, stomach ulcers, cirrhosis, constipation, sexual sterility and asthma.

As we have seen from statistical studies, the number of diabetics is rising steadily throughout the world in general, and in developing countries in particular. This increase calls into question the efficacy of the drugs used to treat it, notably insulin and the other specific medications used to curb the disease. While insulin treatment does have its advantages, there are also a number of recognized drawbacks. In the past, according to A. Saponaro (1973), and there is no evidence that this has changed today, the accidents that have occurred following the use of insulin are attributable to gross errors of prescription or administration. Imbalances between insulin doses and the amount of carbohydrates in the diet, and poor glycaemic control, are the least acceptable.

The diabetics we interviewed admit that they sometimes abandon their hospital beds to receive potions from traditional healers, or go to church to pray for healing. But the sick's quest for care begins at home. Diabetes is a disease that can be cured with medicinal plants. In the field of diabetes, these multiple recourses reveal a health sector in the throes of change, where disease and health, science and experience, ethics and aesthetics, values and morals, economics and politics, rights and duties, public and private, are intertwined. In the face of so-called conventional medicine, the renewal of this phenomenon has been structured around a dualism opposing orthodox medicine to other systems and techniques whose scientific evidence is questionable, if not unproven. For several years now, the literature has been mentioning the diversification of diabetes patients' recourse to care, remedies and treatments based on "medicines" known as "alternatives" or, more recently, "complementary and alternative medicines" (CAM) or "alternative", "parallel", "soft", "natural" medicines, etc. (Siri, 2006). The same terms, at the level of the people affected, are used to express the use of alternative care and recourse in the temporality of treatments. Thus, a complementary treatment will be sought simultaneously with diabetology care, while an alternative treatment will replace (most often punctually) one or more treatments proposed by official diabetology.

Diabetes can be cured, in the sense that, after a more or less lengthy period of dietary or insulin treatment, the individual can become accustomed to the quantity of carbohydrates considered sufficient under normal conditions: these individuals, even once cured, will nevertheless have to continue to observe certain precautions by complying with preventive hygiene rules to avoid a possible relapse. But the success of the treatment, i.e., the cure of the disease, depends on the consistency, assiduity and intelligence with which the cure itself is carried out.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this article, the measures are adequate, but they are ineffective because of their low level of appropriation and, above all, the lack of community support for their application. Almost unanimously, the people interviewed find them logical, but they remain inoperative, as they are in contradiction with local habits and customs. There is in fact a breakdown in interpersonal, family and community ties. They feel that the government has enacted measures that have not really been implemented on the ground.

Today, in various communities, the barrier measures, although well known, are little respected by a population that displays deviant behaviours and practices on a daily basis. Wearing masks, washing hands or using gel, and respecting social distancing, which were once good practices to be encouraged or perpetuated, are now being severely tested, or even increasingly ignored. Barrier measures, in this case social distancing, or coughing into the elbow to further combat the spread of COVID-19 would be salutary. However, people's deeply-

rooted fear of stigmatizing the patient leads them to disregard these barrier measures. Anyway, in the context of COVID-19 where according to some of our interlocutors, barrier measures obstruct certain therapeutic remedies, it is not easy to carry out an ethnography of diabetes plus COVID-19 patients.

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SOCIOGRAPHY AND ION CLOPOȚEL'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF INTER-BELLUM ROMANIAN REALITIES

Mihai PASCARU

Professor, PhD., "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Romania

E-mail: mihaipascarupag@gmail.com

Abstract: *The present work reviews some of the contributions of Ion Clopoțel (1892-1986), an illustrious personality of the inter-bellum period, to the understanding of social and economic life in Romania. The work contains a biographical sketch of Ion Clopoțel, then representative elements of his methodological perspective are highlighted: sociography with a significant economic component. We will show how the sociographic perspective of Ion Clopotel is actually a monographic one, but applied at the regional level. Historical, economical and related to household life aspects as well as psychosociological and linguistic aspects are targeted. Moreover, the data collected and analyzed with scientific methods were directly intended to underpin policies for the modernization and development of Romania. The scientific foundation was necessary, as Ion Clopotel suggested, because of the wrong policies of the governors of the time. They neglected the rural world, its modernization and industrialization, even though they were aware of the importance of this world for the future of the country. The conclusions bring to reader's attention, among other things, some of Ion Clopoțel's socio-economic considerations and themes of surprising actuality.*

Keywords: sociography, socio-economic survey, agriculture, social progress.

1. Introductory considerations

For Romania the inter-bellum period analysts say, was "a period of profound socio-economical, political and cultural transformations", the context being "a vast laboratory for reflection and action for the Romanian intelligentsia who was called to contribute to the positioning of our society on the coordinates of modernisation" (Negru, 2003: 7). Numerous personalities stood out in this context, some of whom having been directly involved in the act of the Great Union (December 1st, 1918), like that of Ion Clopoțel (1892-1986).

To begin with, ample presentations of Ion Clopoțel's biography can be found in several sociology dictionaries (Filipescu, 2001: 111-114; Negru, 2005: 113-116). Such publications present him as publicist, historian and sociologist (Filipescu, 2001: 111).

Ion Clopoțel was born in Poiana Mărului, in Romania's Brașov County and passed away in Bucharest. According to the above-mentioned dictionaries, he went to primary school in his native village of Poiana Mărului and later to gymnasium and high school in Brașov City. He completed his upper education in Budapest and Vienna, the time spent in Budapest "allowing him to have contact with the Hungarian Sociological Society under the direction of Iàszzi Oszkàr, opportunity which laid in front of him a clear path towards the social research of a sociographical nature" (Negru, 2005: 13). The sociographical type of sociological research is in fact field data-based research. More recent Romanian works define sociography as a frame for sociological knowledge "consisting in the collection of raw data on the objects, the phenomena, the relationships and the social processes, in the objective description of these, in their measurement and in the realisation of statistics (tables, graphics etc.) on the observed social phenomena" (Ungureanu, 1998: 554). According to some opinions, sociography - descriptive in its essence - is tightly linked to sociology in general and to *applied sociology* in particular (Sullivan, 1992; Steele & Price, 2008).

Ion Clopoșel's interest in sociology was also elicited by Vasile Goldis, another notable personality of the Great Union and an "avid reader and commentator of works of political sociology and social philosophy" (Negru, 2003: 13).

For being a militant unionist, Ion Clopoșel was "arrested and convicted to prison by the Hungarians (February to October 1918)" (Filipescu, 2001: 111). The day of The Great Union finds Ion Clopoșel as Director of the Press Office and member of the Great National Assembly representing the electoral college of the Arad County Romanian Press Office (Negru, 2003: 14). The event of the union and the preceding period have been described by Ion Clopoșel in his book *Revoluția de la 1918 și Unirea Ardealului cu România [The 1918 Revolution and the Union of Ardeal (i.e. Transylvania) with Romania]* published in 1926 by *Societatea de mâine [Tomorrow's Society]* magazine. During his career, Ion Clopoșel held progressive editing and contributing functions for numerous publications of his age. His journalistic career peaked with the publication and coordination of the *Societatea de mâine* magazine (Cluj, Bucharest, 1924-1945), publication to which we shall make further references in this study. Ion Clopoșel's professional portfolio would not be complete without mentioning also his Director of Bucharest University Central Library's tenure between 1946 and 1961. In politics he has been elected as a representative of the Făgăraș electoral college (Filipescu, 2001: 111). On a separate but particularly relevant note for this study, we will also mention Ion Clopoșel's assignment during 1938 through 1939 as General Inspector for Apuseni Mountains, one of the poorest regions of Romania

To list a few notable contributions of Ion Clopoșel to the specialty literature, one should include *Direcția realismului social-economic [The Direction of the Social-Economic Realism]*, "Societatea de mâine" Publishing, Cluj, 1926; *Sociografie românească. Anchetarea plășilor muntoase Margina, Almăj, Vașcău și Beiuș [Romanian Sociography. Survey of the mountain shires of Margina, Almăj, Vașcău and Beiuș]*, "Societatea de mâine" Publishing, Cluj, 1928; *Satele răzlețe ale României. Habitatul răsfirat din munții transilvani și bănățeni. Studiu de sociologie rurală [The Scattered Habitat of the Transylvanian and Banatian Mountains. A study of Rural Sociology]*, "Alba" Publishing, Alba Iulia, 1939. Numerous studies have also been published by Ion Clopoșel in *Societatea de mâine* magazine, some of them, mostly of economic problems, some being the object of our analysis.

2. The Economic background of the social problems

Andrei Negru remarked at one point that in Ion Clopoșel's opinion "agriculture constituted the main branch of the national economy, the farmer's household representing the very economic base of the Romanian state". In this context Ion Clopoșel "took upon him to criticise the authorities' lack of interest in the agrarian problem, arguing for the replacement of circumstantial measures with a rational agrarian policy that be based on a scientific and responsible analysis of the real problems of the Romanian rural area, in general" (Negru, 2005: 114).

According to Andrei Negru, Ion Clopoșel considered at the time that the main problems faced by the Romanian agriculture were: a) the excessive fragmentation of the agricultural property resulted from the defective allocation policy of the agrarian reform and from the retention of too much land for state reserve in comparison to the one allocated to farming households; b) the lack of an agricultural inventory of the new property owners after agrarian reform of 1921; c) the insufficiency of the financial means of the new land owners (Negru, 2005: 114). For more details on the agrarian reform of 1921 and on the agriculture of Romania during the inter-bellum period, one can also refer to Lup, Miron and Alim (2018).

Ion Clopoșel also pleaded, including as Member of Parliament, for the establishment of the agricultural credit. A broad study has been published in 1930, in which among other things, he expressed the spirit of his times: "Every citizen wishes for a larger and a cleaner house. Store owners are expanding their offices. Industrial firms are building more factories and are equipping them. All these aspirations need a financial correspondent to be created. The new

spirit and impetus cannot be strangled, stifled, diminished. One should push hard to create the great agricultural credit" (Clopoșel, 1930a: 350).

Institutionally, Ion Clopoșel proposed the creation of Chambers of Agriculture which in his view should have had attributes like: 1) support the supply of fertilisers for arable land; 2) encourage the expansion of orchards and facilitate the commercialisation of fruits; 3) reclaim degraded land through tree planting; 4) coordinate crop rotation, supply productive seed stock and promote the scientific exploitation of soils; 5) manage, for the state, the abandoned land; 6) takeover the land available to model farming and nurseries; 7) purchase the land from families without heirs or who cannot work it anymore; 8) control crops and facilitate equipment acquisition; 9) research the "naturalisation" of alien grains, plants and fruits; 10) organise an agricultural union and a "present-day peasant school" (Clopoșel, 1931: 402). A secondary set of attributes of the Chambers would have been objectives in agreement with the villages like: 1) the introduction of tractors and farming equipment with backing from communities; 2) the establishment of forestry cooperatives for timber and firewood management; 3) the construction of granaries and silos for grain storage; 4) the provision of state institutions with firewood; 5) the organisation in a cooperative model the commercialisation of agricultural produce and the market prospecting; 6) the provision of transport facilities; 7) the organisation of promotional expositions and fairs for varieties that were successfully acclimatised; 8) the initialisation, development and overseeing of the agricultural product processing industries; 9) the commercialisation of agricultural produce; 10) the development of superior livestock (Clopoșel, 1931: 402-403). Finally, a third series of attributions of the Chambers of Agriculture derived from their mandate to collaborate with the state: 1) the provision of credit to local development; 2) the provision of compensation for losses due to livestock epidemics and of accident insurance for farmers unable to continue their work; 3) the coordination of activities related to the distribution of agricultural produce on external markets (Clopoșel, 1931: 403).

Another very important aspect is the support of Ion Clopoșel for the industrialisation of agriculture (Negru, 2005: 114-115). In essence Ion Clopoșel "was criticising the doctrine of the peasant state" according to Negru, respectively "the idea of returning to the patriarchal village primitivism" and was arguing instead for "the possibility of rural development via the path of agricultural industrialisation" (Negru, 2003: 75).

An interesting thesis of Ion Clopoșel has been described in the following terms by Negru: "Being convinced of the superiority of the industrial nations over the agrarian ones, I. Clopoșel considered that the industrialisation of agriculture could contribute, in cases of agrarian countries like Romania, to the emancipation of their economies from the caprices of nature and, at the same time, to the consolidation of Romanian democracy as a result of the increase in welfare of the majority social class, the peasantry" (Negru, 2003: 75). In Ion Clopoșel's vision, the industrialisation of agriculture was linked to democracy and to the future of the Romanian people: "We cannot conceive an industrialisation of Romania on a grand scale without an organic correlation with the agricultural occupations. We are conceptualising the industrialisation as a rational employment of raw materials, so abundant in the hands of the rural population. Romania possesses immense sources of natural riches. The world economic encyclopaedias are conferring it the fame of being the granary, of being the owner of gold mines and oil, of forests and waterfalls, of zootechnical possibilities and of being an important supplier of fruits, wines, wools and other products... The industrialisation of agriculture is called upon to lay the foundation for democracy and for the future of the Romanian people" (Clopoșel, 1937b: 84). "We are now an anti-economic and romantic state", Ion Clopoșel was writing in 1927, at the end of an article on the economic policies. The transport tariffs on the Romanian railways and the high export duties (not to mention the "unofficial" duties) were hindering animal exports and the development of Romanian livestock. In that sense, Ion Clopoșel was concluding: "The transportation and the duty are the most obstinate enemies of national prosperity, as they bear on the whole capacity of agricultural production" (Clopoșel, 1927b: 432).

3. The economy and economic policies in the inter-bellum Romania

One of the worst economic phenomena with negative impact on the post-Union Romania was that of inflation. The inflation was framed on the unexpected background of abandonment of some of the ideals of the Great Union: "New provinces have been offended, their leaders ostracised, their flourishing institutions materially boycotted. The politically and economically-alive forces lay in idleness, paralysed by the obstinate supremacy of Bucharest' plutocracy" (Clopoșel, 1924: 310). The solution, as Ion Clopoșel saw it, was the consolidation of Romania's external situation, such that to become a collateral for an eventual foreign loan, simultaneous to the entrenchment of a broadly democratic regime (Clopoșel, 1924: 310). Few years later, in 1927, in view of the unchanged external situation of the country, Ion Clopoșel was writing: "The Romanian state has the duty to create at the earliest precise rapports with neighbouring states, to align its interest to each in accordance to their agrarian or industrial character, to decide on custom duties and transit charges and to affirm the courage of entering treaties that will bring a consolidation and a much-awaited stability" (Clopoșel, 1927a: 91). His critical comments were also aimed, in context, at the "Through Ourselves" slogan-centred liberal policies and at the neglect of the external economic problems.

The inter-bellum economic policies of the newly created Romania led to the collapse of the mining industry in Ardeal (Transylvania). Ion Clopoșel wrote on the subject: "We weren't able to ensure Ardeal's mining industry the prosperity it deserves. It is like our horizons have closed, our gaze has been sidetracked, and we ignored embracing with our attention a very fervent field of economic activity, one of the great sources of national wealth" (Clopoșel, 1925: 585). The coal mines were loosing ground in the face of massive imports from Poland and Hungary, but also due to an overall decrease in demand for coal. Gold mines also were becoming unprofitable due on one hand to the low price imposed by the state on gold purchase and on high price of explosives it made available to miners, on the other (Clopoșel, 1925: 585).

The drastic budgetary cuts in personnel and salaries that followed during the crisis were agreed on by Ion Clopoșel, although he considered that the state had the obligation to take all precautions "without abdicating from its permanent responsibilities for the health and culture of its people (Clopoșel, 1930b: 446). In his opinion, the economic life of the inter-bellum Romania was scarred both by a "lack of a systematic, intensive and general productivity, and by the inability to quickly realise the value of the primary articles on both the local and the external markets". The industrialisation was appreciated by Ion Clopoșel as being "shy, uncertain, hopeless and without perspective". To it, regional unbalances should be added: "Some regions, due to a privileged situation (easier transit, closeness to big cities, a more elevated conscience of the trader) have scored successes in that regard. Others however, notwithstanding resources of the same quality, are crawling in sleepiness and primitivism" (Clopoșel, 1931: 402). Ion Clopoșel was at one point a supporter of decentralisation: "We are a state of hirelings which is being impoverished by the vast apparatus of administrations which disproportionately swallow the financial availabilities. This is where the immense advantage of decentralisation comes about and which would open avenues of validation for local elements, would awaken the spirit of enterprise and the conscience towards the obligations of existence..." (Clopoșel, 1937a: 36).

4. Scientific foundation: the socio-economic survey

At the base of all transformations, Ion Clopoșel considered, there must lie the "critical spirit" - that is the scientific analysis and presentation of the identified problems. This is why Ion Clopoșel militates for the institutionalisation of social research. He will lay the foundation of the "Societatea de mâine" Institute of study and subsequently of the "Socio-Economic Movement - the Association of Publicists and Intellectuals with Permanent Interest for the Socio-Economic Problems" (Negru, 2005: 115). The Institute, Filipescu explains, had the following sections: Economics (agrarian, industrial and financial), Sanitary, Cultural and

Minorities. The "Socio-Economic Movement" also had inter-disciplinary goals (economical, social, cultural, psychological and medico-social). The support for the "Socio-Economic Movement" was probably rooted in Ion Clopoșel's faith in the importance of the socio-economical role of the press who keeps the problems at the surface, is a permanent stimulus for their understanding (Negru, 2003: 22). He believed in fact that the press can elicit in the political agenda changes towards a closer interest in public's agenda, which is concerned with different economic and social problems. Such connections are also analysed these days in applied social psychology (Roskos-Ewoldsen R. D. & Roskos-Ewoldsen, B., 2005; Pascaru, 2012).

Under a methodological perspective, the monographical method is almost self-evident, but, as Filipescu notices, unlike the Bucharest Sociological School that studied the villages separately, the monographies promoted under the auspices of "Societatea de mână" had their object of study entire regions, like that of Apuseni Mountains. The accent fell on the determination of "economical complexes" (Filipescu, 2001: 113), fact that was reflected in the proposed data collection survey instrument.

The main field activity methods of Ion Clopoșel were the direct observation, the questionnaire-based survey and the family budget study, for which a special data collection form was designed by "Societatea de mână" Institute. One must not forget, Negru suggests, the analysis of the official and personal documents and, as well, that of official statistics compiled by authorities (Negru, 2003: 90).

Notwithstanding methodological aspects, very important was also the systematisation of the inquiry in conjunction with the institutionalisation of the system of inquiries. The systematisation of the inquiry implied a kind of standardisation resulted from the determination of common thematic directions; the institutionalisation was underscored through special provisions in "Societatea de mână" Intellectual Association's statute in 1925. As Negru states, the "Association" set itself the goal of "the initiation of inquiries and the cultivation of the socio-economic sciences" which was to be accomplished through: a) the research of the economic, demographic, sanitary and cultural situation of the population; b) the study of the specific situation of ethnic minorities; c) the synthesis of the documentary material and the development of solutions to the problems encountered in the field; d) the publication of informative briefs and theoretical studies; e) the organisation of conferences and open schools; f) the support of facilities for social science specialists' formation (Negru, 2003: 94-95). Similar objectives would also be found in the "Socio-Economic Movement" of publicists established in 1926. As Negru explains, the purpose of the movement was: a) to conduct inquiries and monographies on the Romanian social realities; b) to elicit intellectual interest in social problems through public conferences and periodical publications; c) to publish works with social and economic content; d) to gather information that was necessary to the understanding of cultural and social situation of different regions of the country and make the information available to researchers and to authorities alike; e) to establish any form of economic enterprises that would help it in achieving its goals (Negru, 200: 102).

Since the compilation with own means of a large number of monographies was difficult, in 1926 *Societatea de mână* magazine organised a *contest of regional economic monographies* that were to be compiled with the help of a *standardised questionnaire* designed by Ion Clopoșel. The questionnaire was designed to collect comparable data to be used for writing regional social synthetic abstracts (Negru, 2003: 98).

The analysis of the questionnaire reveals that it is remarkable in how well it embodies the idea of an instrument destined to monographic research (Otovescu, 2009), having features that can be found in later research, like that of Bucharest Sociological School (Bădina, 1966), of the French sociological school from the period of rural renovation, in the seventies (Mucchielli, 1976) or of the Cluj sociological school of the eighties (Pascaru & Vedinaș, 2011). Specifically, in *Societatea de mână* questionnaire that was published in 1926, the first items concerned historical aspects (sources, historical documents, monuments), geographical aspects ("showing

the geographical altitudes", land plots - agricultural or otherwise, ownership of the plots) and demographical ones (population by nationality or religion, mixed marriages). They were then followed by a series of items specific to the economic domain, to its objective dimensions, and to its objectives. We can quote as examples issues like "how many families can make a living from working their own land and from husbandry... (show land use according to old land registry records)", what is the population's propensity for saving, "how does it invest its savings, does it own shares, do they make loans, everywhere statements on the notion of money and to what average value is the family budget estimated", "what are they selling and purchasing in fairs and what markets are they usually going to", "do they have the notion of associations", "where do they hire the local proletariat and for what kind of works (agricultural, mining, wood processing etc.)" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). The economy is next examined in its local context through issues like "what are the sources of income, how many workshops, large and small, stores and pubs are there (the description of the products and their quantities, the identification of the economic and cultural preferences and necessities of the region), what type of economic role is assigned to pubs and stores" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). A special place in the questionnaire was taken by questions on the local development opportunities, as seen by the inhabitants themselves and on the demands they might have. Respondents were expected to also provide suggested solutions to the problems they were stating. Another special area of inquiry included issues of nourishment and clothing of the subjects, of the exterior and interior aspect of their dwellings - dimension that can be related to the ones centred on the health of the population, with particular attention to specific social problems like alcoholism (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). The questionnaire also reveals concern for the problem of education, querying on the existence of schools, on "how many students are committed, enrolled and how many are just trying the school", if there is a need for student accommodation, on "who in the village reads newspapers, books, calendars (and which ones), on how many writers has the village produced" or if "there are any students, since the Union, that made it to superior schools" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). The spiritual and psycho-social dimensions were also explored through questions on the existence of churches, if they are frequented by believers, on the existence of sects, on "what spiritual phenomena is being observed", on whether people are "quarrelsome, humane, kind, suspicious", on "what nature are most of the litigations and what kind of sums are demanded at trials" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). A distinct section of the questionnaire brings together local social life with connections to the external world in asking questions on "what is the social life of the village (traditions, gatherings, games, meetings)", on "the citizenship thinking (thoughts on life in the state, on law, on political parties, on village community)", and on what direction are the markets developing (connections to economically-related communities). In a final note, linguistic aspects on items brought into play are being approached, explaining some of the particular terms employed (Clopoșel, 1926: 564).

5. Conclusions

As a promoter of sociology with a solid economic foundation, Ion Clopoșel embarked on answering mainly to some practical demands of the economic and social reality of the post Great Union Romania and of the aspirations of building the Romanian unitary state. One should keep in mind what Andrei Negru underscored, the fact that the research activity of Ion Clopoșel had "a pronounced applied character, being geared towards the effort of supplying solutions to the social problems of the under-developed areas of the country, to the rural population's problems, in general" (Negru, 2005: 115).

In today's more frequently utilised terms, we can say that Ion Clopoșel has raised the status of the socio-economical analysis and diagnosis to the level of law when it comes to the design of realistic economic and social policies, strategies and measures. Nevertheless, it is notable that Ion Clopoșel's analysis is not the product of a rigid economic determinism, but rather a rigorous system of economic, social and psycho-cultural dimensions. It is what comes

out patently from the investigation instrument proposed - the multi-dimensional socio-economic questionnaire.

It is important to mention here that the empirical aspect of the sociography does not exclude the theoretical one. The sociography cannot be accomplished according to Ion Clopoșel, without a preceding theoretical preparation (Filipescu, 2001: 112).

The empirical field data-based socio-economical analyses, as well as the solutions developed for the uncovered problems, are being subordinated, like in Ion Clopoșel's case, to a certain vision of the economic and social progress. Andrei Negru asserts that being concerned with the problems of social progress "Ion Clopoșel affirms that the human society travels an ascending path at the end of which there must be a social organisation that will realise the unity of the individual and collective interests" (Negru, 2005: 114). Andrei Negru even postulates a law of social evolution according to which "progress is directly proportional related to the possibilities for enrichment of popular masses and inversely proportional to the monopoly of a greedy and profiteering economic minority" (Negru, 2005: 114). Ion Clopoșel's economic and social conception can be anchored at one point in the main currents of economical thinking of the inter-bellum Romania: the liberalism, neo-liberalism, socialism and others (Ionescu, 2014). At the same time though, his thinking appears to express a certain opposition to the perennial allure of modernity in Romania, a modernity that tends to affect a limited part of society, being "partial and beneficial only to certain groups" (Schifirneț, 2009: 16).

On a historical scale, just by simply taking into account Ion Clopoșel's analyses, one finds striking similarities between the three decades after the Great Union and the last three decades of the past century, all the way to our times, in regard to the problems the country was and is still facing: the scarcity of foreign capital and the chronically poor management of it when it becomes available, the neglect of the problems of the rural world, an unbalanced regional development, and the lack of a genuine decentralisation.

Casting today a look over these past decades, the assertion of *Societatea de mâine* magazine as a genuine centre of economic and social analysis in the inter-bellum period, reminds us almost one hundred years later, of the special role the socio-economic publications and its supporters could have in the promotion of a realistic economic and social policy.

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THE PERCEPTION OF THE EMPLOYEES ON THE CONDUCT OF THE HIERARCHICAL SUPERIOR

Ovidiu-Florin SENDRONI

PhD Student in Sociology, West University of Timișoara (Romania)

E-mail: ovidiu.sendroni00@e-uvt.ro

Abstract: *In order to ensure the retention and improvement of the quality of work, it is important, in the current global context, that companies ensure a positive perception of employees about their work, the company and, in particular, the hierarchical superior. Thus, by adopting appropriate behavior by the hierarchical superior, he can facilitate the development of beneficial behaviors among employees. Moreover, for the company, the attitude of the subordinates towards the behavior of the hierarchical superior can represent a method of measuring his legitimacy, through which measures can be developed that lead to an increase in organizational efficiency, but also a landmark in making forecasts related to the evolution of the employee in company. Through the present study, we aim to identify the most attractive attributes of a hierarchical superior, so as to answer the research question: what is the profile of the ideal hierarchical superior? The research was carried out using a quantitative method, having as an instrument an online questionnaire. We used descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, T-test and Anova in the data analysis process. We believe that the results of this study can be a benchmark in behavioral analysis for employees holding management positions, and for organizations, a tool by which they can be evaluated.*

Keywords: hierarchical superior, conduct, organizational behavior, managerial typology, human resources

1. Introduction

The present paper focuses on an essential aspect of organizational dynamics - the perception of employees towards the behavior of the hierarchical superior. In this context, the term "conduct" refers to a person's behavior and course of action, while the concept of "perception" is defined as how a person interprets and understands a certain phenomenon or behavior (on this topic, for more details, see Otovescu, 2008, 2021).

Perception, although a subjective process, plays a crucial role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. In a corporate environment, they are essential for the efficient functioning of the organization, maintaining team cohesion and achieving the company's goals and vision. The behavior of the hierarchical superior, and especially the way it is perceived by subordinates, can have a significant impact on their motivation and efficiency (Escribá-Carda et al., 2017; Kalkavan & Katrinli, 2014; Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2018).

This paper aims to explore the relationship between subordinate and hierarchical superior. The results can be used by companies to correctly evaluate employees with managerial positions (who report to other employees), because the employees' perception of the superior is directly correlated with his legitimacy (Douthit & Majerczyk, 2019).

In addition, it is important to note that the term "hierarchical superior" includes the concepts of management and leadership. Although there are significant differences between the two - the leader is the one who sets the vision and focuses on long-term results, inspires and takes risks, playing an important role in terms of coordination (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024), while the manager focuses on the present, on medium and short-term results, seeks order and limits risks (Ielics, 2019) - in common parlance, the two notions are often used interchangeably. For people who are not specialized in the field, both the leader and the manager are perceived as hierarchical superiors. Therefore, to avoid any confusion, this paper will address the two dimensions as a whole, analyzing the impact of superior behavior on employee perception in a comprehensive way.

2. The importance and effects of perception towards the hierarchical superior

According to studies, it has been found that employees' perception of the company, their superiors, their work and their results are closely related, according to several studies (Escribá-Carda et al., 2017; Kalkavan & Katrinli, 2014; Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2018). This perception not only influences how employees view their role and contribution to the organization, but is also considered an important metric for quality of work life. Research indicates that employees' perception of aspects such as the workplace, the department, the manager or the organization can be used as an effective method to improve the quality of professional life (Research Clue, 2017), and the influence and support of the superior have an important role in the evolution of the employee in the company (Seibert, Akkermans & Liu, 2024).

A subordinate's positive perception of a hierarchical superior can bring multiple benefits to the organization. First, studies have shown that a positive perception of one's superior can lead to increased autonomy and motivation at work (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017). Improving the relationship between the subordinate and the hierarchical superior can lead to increased results and an improvement in the quality of the employee's professional life, providing him with a more positive and motivating work environment. Also, a valuable relationship based on respect and trust between the two can generate beneficial behaviors such as comfort, a positive attitude and increased commitment to work tasks (Stringer, 2006), which can contribute to increased productivity. This relationship is all the more important in a highly digitized organization because, in the virtual environment, hierarchical superiors have an important information and communication role (Whillans, Perlow & Turek, 2021), because a negative perception can lead to inhibition of interaction with him, which can negatively affect the employee's performance.

On the other hand, the employee's positive perception of the superior can provide the organization with important information related to possible problems or improvements (Morrison, 2014), along with an insight into the legitimacy of his role and can be a result of positive psychological capital, which can bring other benefits, such as resilience, effectiveness, high performance and job satisfaction (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Monitoring employees' feelings about it through surveys or assessments can help companies better understand how superiors are perceived and adjust their control systems in line with organizational culture and employee expectations. Understanding these perceptions can help increase organizational effectiveness by better aligning management practices with employee needs and values (Douthit & Majerczyk, 2019).

The superior's behavior plays a crucial role in the subordinate's professional life within the company (Katsaros, Tsirikas & Bani, 2014; Kalkavan & Katrinli, 2014; Roberts & David, 2020). It is essential that subordinates perceive the conduct of their superiors in a positive way, as this can bring multiple benefits. When employees perceive the behavior of their superiors to be consistent with the organization's values and goals, they are more likely to dedicate their resources and work devotedly to achieve those goals, which can positively influence the organization's productivity and performance (Research Clue, 2017).

In contrast, a negative perception of the illegitimacy of the superior's role can have negative repercussions on work relations and organizational effectiveness. When employees perceive that their superiors are not performing their roles legitimately or are not acting in the best interest of the organization, team dysfunction may occur and overall productivity may be affected (Douthit & Majerczyk, 2019). Therefore, promoting positive behavior from superiors and effectively managing employee perceptions are critical to organizational success and well-being.

3. The traits of the hierarchical superior

The importance of the superior's traits for the present study lies in the fact that they can best describe his behavior. For example, an incompetent superior will act in an incompetent manner, while a competent one will act according to this characteristic/label. And these characteristics can have various effects on subordinates. A concrete example is a thorough, perfectionist hierarchical superior who closely supervises the work of subordinates and can be a stress factor for employees (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016), while a fair superior can increase employees' trust in him (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). In 2002, Furnham conducted a study on employee perceptions of peers, superiors, and subordinates. The goal was to determine the most desirable characteristics for each category previously specified. Although there were psycho-temperamental traits universally desired by the three groups – honesty, competence – there were, of course, specific traits as well. In the case of the hierarchical superior, Furnham summarized that: among the most desirable characteristics are orientation towards the future, liveliness and impartiality (Furnham, 2002).

Other studies, such as the one carried out by the researchers Aliekperova & Aliekperov (2023), also addressed the issue of the traits of the superior person from a hierarchical point of view. This study included the assessment of traits identified in other research, such as sociability, decency, integrity, efficiency, etc. The results of this study showed similarities with Furnham's research in that some of the traits classified as the most important are intelligence, competence or responsibility, which is why we expect to see such similarities in the present research.

In addition to psychological characteristics, socio-demographic traits could also influence employee behavior and perception. People are more likely to positively perceive in-groups than out-groups or to act in a certain way depending on the space of origin (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Hobcraft, 2006; Furunes & Mykletun, 2010; Chi, Maier & Gursoy, 2013; Tinker, & Fearfull, 2007). However, it is important to consider that these traits do not always determine perception or behavior. In another study conducted by Furnham, it was observed that participants did not show an obvious preference for male or female superiors, or younger or older superiors. However, we must bear in mind that there is the possibility of dissimulation on the part of respondents, as gender or age discrimination is prohibited (Furnham, McClelland & Mansi, 2012).

4. The typology of the hierarchical superior

In addition to the appropriate traits, it is necessary for superiors to use an appropriate leadership style (or at least to be aware of their own leadership style), as this aspect can have positive effects on employees. For example, an inclusive leadership style could help interdisciplinary teams overcome the negative effects of status differences by facilitating members' collaboration to improve processes (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). That is why it is important to take into account behavioral theories, such as the Blake-Mouton model; model that aims at the dynamics of interactions within a team and demonstrates its usefulness when it is aimed at continuous quality development (Molloy, 1998). Also, according to this model, when there is a balanced focus on both people and results, employees are more engaged and productive. Thus, this model provides insight into leadership style and its impact on team productivity and motivation and represents a logical continuation in the evolution of management thinking and is considered one of the best practices for managers and leaders (Islam & Jee, 2019).

The model, also known as the "Managerial Grid", highlights two dimensions of a leader/manager: concern for people and concern for results (Blake, Mouton, 1964). Depending on the position on the graph formed by these two aspects, we identify five classifications: the motivator (sound), the accommodating (accommodating), the administrator (status quo), the indifferent (indifferent), the dictator (dictatorial). These typologies are influenced by the

personality of the leader and his level of experience in the field (Ielics, 2019). The choice of a specific style depends both on the leader and on the needs and dynamics of the team he is coordinating. For example, a passive style may be more effective when the team is already experienced and autonomous, while an assertive style would be more appropriate for giving instructions to inexperienced employees or in situations where firmer guidance is needed. Also, addressing these typologies is important, because depending on the typology approached by the manager, employees can work and develop in optimal conditions, leading to organizational resistance (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu & Westman, 2018).

5. Research methodology

Because we aimed for the data to be as representative as possible, it was necessary to obtain as many answers as possible from as many respondents as possible. That's why we used the sociological investigation method, having the questionnaire as a research tool. In terms of sampling, we originally considered quota sampling. However, taking into account the fact that we used the snowball method, along with the online questionnaire, some categories were more accessible than others. The majority of respondents are largely young, with higher education, from Timișoara, which provides a certain profile to the respondents and, at the same time, certain limitations to the study.

For the questions concerning the opinion towards the behavioral dimensions of the hierarchical superior, we used a Likert scale from 1 (Very little extent) to 5 (Very large extent). As for the traits of an ideal hierarchical superior, they were taken from the research Rating a boss, a colleague and a subordinate, developed in 2002 by Furnham A. However, we note that we did not use all the traits used by the British researcher, because the study it also targets the ideal characteristics desired in co-workers and subordinates, not just superiors. Thus, we identified a set of 15 characteristics, from which we asked respondents to choose only 5 and rank them according to importance. As for the last scale, it measures the respondents' perception of the managerial typology adopted by the hierarchical superior, being a Likert scale from 1 (Totally untrue) to 5 (Totally true). This scale was developed starting from the set of characteristics of the Managerial Grid typologies, found in the work of Professor Ielics B., Management and leadership in organizations (2019).

6. Objectives, hypotheses, data collection and limitations of the study

The general objective of the research aims to identify the most attractive attributes of a hierarchical superior, through which to identify a prototype of the ideal hierarchical superior.

Following the operationalization of the general objective, we formulated the following secondary objectives:

1. Exploring the demographic characteristics of subordinates and their impact on the perception of the hierarchical superior, especially by gender and age.
2. Exploring the demographic characteristics of hierarchical superiors and their impact on subordinates' perception of them, particularly by gender and age.
3. Analysis of respondents' preferences on the traits that are perceived as most desirable for an ideal superior.
4. Investigating the relationship between the managerial style perceived by subordinates and their satisfaction with the behavior of the hierarchical superior.
5. Identifying the profile of the ideal hierarchical superior, respectively the profile of the most undesirable hierarchical superior.

To support the general objective, we formulated the following specific objectives and hypotheses:

O1. Capturing the characteristics of the ideal hierarchical superior, from the employees' perspective.

I1.1. There are similarities between the traits of the ideal hierarchical superior identified with previous studies.

02. Identifying the link between the adoption of a specific managerial style and the perception of subordinates towards the conduct of the hierarchical superior.

12.1. There is a statistically significant, directly proportional link between the motivating managerial style and the employee's perception of the superior's behavior.

12.2. There is a statistically significant, inversely proportional relationship between the dictatorial managerial style and the employee's perception of the superior's behavior.

03. Identifying the differences in employees' perception of their hierarchical superiors, depending on their socio-demographic characteristics.

13.1. There are statistically significant differences between male and female employees regarding subordinates' perception of superior's behavior.

13.2. There are statistically significant differences between rural and urban employees in terms of their perception of their supervisor's behavior.

Regarding the data collection process, we used the snowball method. Thus, we sent the questionnaire for completion to several acquaintances whom we asked to forward it on. We also sent it, through the e-mail platform, to other students, with the specification that it is only aimed at people who have a hierarchical superior and with the request that they send it forward for completion. Data collection extended over a period of approximately 1 month, and after that, we managed to collect a number of 316 valid responses.

In this work, we encountered several limitations, the most important being related to data collection. It was a challenge to obtain a representative sample for the study population, given the diversity of socio-demographic characteristics. Despite this obstacle, we made efforts to ensure as good a representativeness as possible by applying a weight when there were significant discrepancies. This was particularly the case with the gender and age distribution of employees.

Another limitation of the study is related to the subjective nature of perception. Subordinates' evaluation of superiors can be influenced by a number of factors, such as the recency effect (the tendency to give more importance to recent events), the halo effect (the tendency to let a single characteristic influence the overall evaluation), and the error of contrast/similarity (comparison with other superiors or oneself). These phenomena can distort objective reality and introduce a bias into our results.

Additionally, it should be noted that we used only one data collection instrument, which may limit the complexity and depth of information obtained. In the future, it would be useful to use more data collection methods and tools, such as interviews, observations or focus groups, so as to obtain more detailed information, in order to obtain a complete and more nuanced picture of the studied phenomenon.

7. Research results

Following the data collection process, we obtained a number of 316 respondents, aged between 18 and 62 years. The mean is 25.52 years, while the median and mode are 21 and 20 years, respectively (60 respondents), which means that most of the respondents are young. Of these, 79.7% (N = 252) are female, while only 19% (N = 60) are male. Also, 64.2% (N = 203) come from the urban environment, and 35.4% (N = 112) belong to the rural environment. Regarding the distribution by level of education, it varies from secondary education to postgraduate studies. However, most respondents state that they have completed 12 classes (61.4%, N = 194 respondents). A natural result, taking into account the fact that half of the people who answered the questionnaire do not exceed the age of 21 (see table 1).

Regarding the hierarchical superiors of the respondents, according to the people who responded to the questionnaire, they fall between the ages of 18 and 76, with the majority being 40 years old (median = 40). The majority are male (N = 167, mean = 52.8%) and come from the urban environment (N = 185, mean = 74.2%). From the point of view of the level of education, 63.9% of them graduated from higher education (N= 202), 8.2% from high school education (N = 26), and 26% of the respondents did not know or did not want to reveals the level of education

of the hierarchical superior (N = 82). The remaining 1.9% graduated from other categories of education (secondary school, post-secondary school or foreman technical school, etc.) (see table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive analysis on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their superiors

Subordinate				Hierarchical superiors			
Attribute		N	Mean	attribute		N	Mean
Age	18-24 years old	240	73.6	Age	18-24 years old	9	2.85
	25-34 years old	38	11.7		25-34 years old	68	21.52
	35-49 years	38	11.6		35-49 years	222	70.25
	50-64 years	10	3.1		50-64 years	26	8.23
	over 65 years	0	0		over 65 years	1	0.32
Sex	Male	60	18.99	Sex	Male	156	49.37
	Female	252	79.75		Female	142	44.94
environment	Rural	112	35.44	environment	Rural	62	25.94
	Urban	203	64.24		Urban	177	74.06
Education	Secondary education	194	61.39	Education	Secondary education	26	11.11
	Higher education	108	34.18		Higher education	202	86.32
	Other studies	14	4.43		Other studies	6	2.56

To verify the first hypothesis, we performed a frequency analysis on all characteristics of an ideal hierarchical superior. Depending on how often they were chosen by respondents, the first three places are occupied by intelligence (N = 152), respectful behavior (N = 146) and competence (N = 142) (see chart 1). At the opposite pole, in the last places, are imposing character (N = 40), the tendency to be direct with subordinates (N = 49) and impartiality (N = 55).

Following a weighted mean, we was also able to obtain a ranking based on how important those traits were to the respondents. Thus, in the first three places we find competence (mean = 3.85), intelligence (mean = 3.54), respect (mean = 3.15). Conversely, the top three least important traits desired in an ideal superior are ambitious (mean = 2.47), tendency to be direct (mean = 2.51), and assertive behavior (mean = 2.58) . As can be seen, the most common, but also the most desired, traits are those related to professionalism/skills that allow the superior to achieve performance at work (intelligence, competence). Over time, characteristics aimed at sociability are less desirable, with the exception of respectfulness (see Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency and weight on the traits of an ideal hierarchical superior

The most often chosen and the least chosen ideal traits of a hierarchical superior		Most-Preferred and Last Preferred traits in a hierarchical superior	
Feature	N	character	Mean
Intelligent	152	Competent	3.85
Respectful	146	Intelligent	3.55
Competent	142	Respectful	3.16

Cooperative	125	Calm	3.06
Calm	125	Ripe	3.03
Honest	111	Imposing	3.03
Open to change	109	Cooperative	3.02
Friendly	107	Inspiration	2.98
Ambitious	90	Open to change	2.92
Decided	81	Friendly	2.85
Inspiration	64	Impartial	2.78
Ripe	62	Honest	2.75
Optimistic	56	Optimistic	2.62
Impartial	55	Decided	2.58
Direct	49	Direct	2.51

Since, in the study, we wanted to explore the traits that employees consider important in an ideal hierarchical superior, we wanted to give respondents the freedom to specify other characteristics that they consider important, apart from those that we proposed. In this regard, we have included the option 'other', to allow respondents to add any other characteristics they consider relevant.

One aspect we would like to mention is that we did not take into account the variable "others" in the analyzes carried out, since it was chosen by very few respondents (N = 6). This can be interpreted in two ways: either the majority of respondents thought that the options we proposed sufficiently cover the features they consider important, or some respondents did not want or did not have time to complete this section.

However, we noticed that among other traits that employees would like in an ideal supervisor, which are not among the options proposed by me, the respondents mentioned characteristics related to sociability ("open", "empathetic"), of competence at the workplace ("punctuality", "to know the field very well"), but also of religiosity ("faith in Jesus").

These answers give us a more nuanced picture of employees' expectations of their superiors and underline the importance of humane management that takes into account the individual needs and expectations of employees. They also highlight that, in certain contexts, employees may also value other aspects, such as professional competence or even religious belief.

Further analyzes revealed subordinates' perceptions of their superiors' behavior. In general, subordinates perceive that hierarchical superiors most frequently adopt behavior specific to the motivator (sound), with a mean of 3.78 on the evaluation scale. This suggests that most superiors are perceived as inspirational and able to motivate employees. The next behavior that hierarchical superiors adopt, according to the perceptions of subordinates, is accommodating, with a mean of 3.58, followed by that specific to the administrator (status quo), which was evaluated with a mean of 3.41. Indifferent behavior received a mean of 2.90, indicating that superiors are sometimes perceived as detached or uncaring of their employees. Finally, authoritarian (dictatorial) behavior received the lowest mean, 2.56, suggesting that superiors are rarely perceived as authoritarian.

Next, we conducted correlation between all these managerial typologies and employees' perception towards the hierarchical superior. Following the analysis, it emerged that there is a correlation between the subordinate's perception of the hierarchical superior's conduct and his typology ($p < 0.01$). The strength of the correlations is small regarding the following typologies: accommodating ($r = 0.285$), indifferent (-0.303), authoritarian (-0.314) and administrator (0.267). Regarding the motivator, although we expected it to show a lower level of correlation than the accommodator and the administrator, it shows the highest degree of correlation ($r = 0.551$). Also, all correlations are directly proportional except those for indifferent and dictator, which are inversely proportional. In other words, the less the superior

behaves in an indifferent or authoritarian way, the more positive the perception of them is (see table 3). These results confirm my hypotheses I2.1 and I2.2, respectively.

Table 3: Correlation between the employee's perception of the hierarchical superior and the managerial typology adopted by him

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Motivator (sound)	0.551	< 0.005
Accommodating	0.285	< 0.005
Administrator (status quo)	0.267	< 0.005
the indifferent (indifferent)	-0.303	< 0.005
The Dictator (dicatorial)	-0.314	< 0.005

We also wanted to find out if the socio-demographic aspects of the hierarchical superior can influence the employees' perception regarding their adoption of certain managerial typologies. Therefore, we performed a t-test, which provided us with the fact that significant differences between male and female superiors in adopting an authoritarian style ($p = 0.021$; Lower Bounds = 0.209; Upper Bounds = 2,669). Continuing the interpretation, based on the differences between the means, we observe that male hierarchical superiors (mean = 15.95) are perceived as more authoritative than their female counterparts (mean = 14.51). A possible explanation would be that men may be seen as tougher, while women are seen as softer, more pleasant. In addition, we found significant differences from a statistical point of view between the hierarchical superiors from the urban environment, respectively those from the rural environment, regarding the adoption of an authoritarian style, because the significance threshold does not exceed the value of 0.05 ($p = 0.44$), and the value 0 is not found in the Lower Bounds (0.40) – Upper Bounds (3.178) range. Also, according to the mean, the hierarchical superiors from the rural environment (mean = 16.37) are perceived as more authoritarian than those from the urban environment (mean = 14.76). A possible reason would be that the importance of a leadership position might differ between those in rural and urban areas. Which would mean that rural superiors might be more task-focused than employee-relationship-focused when they get into such positions.

8. Conclusions and discussion

At the beginning of the research, we thought that we would get similarities between the results of the study conducted by Furnham A., from 2002. However, we found out that there are some differences between the current study and that of the British researcher, which disproves my first hypothesis. For example, although they were rated as some of the most desirable characteristics in the psychologist study, honesty and openness to change ranked low. Another example is that impartiality was among the most desirable traits in a superior in Furnham's study, but in the current one, it ranks third among the most undesirable traits. It is possible that these differences are explained by a difference in methodological approaches. However, we believe that these differences are more likely to be explained by the 20-year difference between the current study and Mr. Furnham's study. In addition, it is not excluded that these differences also have a cultural, value explanation, since the current study was conducted in Romania, while the one from 2002 was conducted in Great Britain. On the other hand, we also registered certain similarities. For example, competence is among the most desirable characteristics of an ideal superior in both my study and that of the British researcher.

The analysis carried out revealed that respect is a universally desired trait in a hierarchical superior, regardless of the importance each respondent gives. Instead of being at the extremes, respondents' answers were evenly distributed across the 5 response options,

with a slight upward trend. This suggests that regardless of the level of importance they place on it, all employees want their superiors to be respectful.

Regarding the profile of the ideal hierarchical superior, according to the data obtained, this would be a motivating, intelligent, competent and respectful leader. This would be a reliable person who helps employees develop professionally without becoming arrogant. In contrast, an authoritarian, imposing, impartial, and direct superior—a person who constantly and indiscriminately criticizes all of his subordinates—is not considered an ideal superior.

However, it is important to note that the study has some limitations. The study population was predominantly young, which may result in a limited representation of the labor force population. Because of this, further research could include a more varied sample to provide a more accurate representation of the workforce population. This would allow a deeper understanding of employees' expectations from their superiors and could contribute to the development of more effective management strategies. Furthermore, future research could include other research methods, such as qualitative ones. Thus, more detailed information could be obtained.

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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON SOCIAL BONDS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AN ALGERIAN MINING ENVIRONMENT

Bekhouche OUSSAMA¹, Soufyane BADRAOUI²

¹PhD Student, Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University (Algeria)

E-mail : oussama.bekhouche@univ-tebessa.dz

²Professor, PhD, University Centre of Maghnia (Algeria),

E-mail: badraoui.soufyane@cumaghnia.dz

Abstract: *This article examines how social bonds influence the behavior of professional groups in the mining industry, specifically focusing on the Boukhadra mine in Algeria. By employing an ethnographic methodology and conducting interviews with 43 workers, the research uncovers those informal connections rooted in familial, tribal, and community bonds are prioritized over formal professional associations. The concept of "social capital" plays a vital role in understanding the dynamics of these groups, as it encompasses the network of relationships and shared values within them. According to the findings of this research, workers tend to prioritize mediation and personal connections over formal procedures when seeking to address their rights and needs. Although the mining organization has embraced modernization, its behavior remains rooted in traditional socio-cultural norms, creating concerns about the rift between the community and modern society.*

Keywords: social bonds, social capital, professional groups, mining sector, ethnography, traditions and modernity.

1. Introduction: the research problem, objectives and method

The term "social bonds" encompasses the interconnected relationships that individuals form, representing their affiliation and inclusion in a community. The concept explores the connections that bind individuals and groups together, as well as the individual's relationship with their respective group. Scholars and sociologists, such as Ibn Khaldoun (Khaldoun, 1981), Ferdinand Tönnies (Tönnies, *Communauté et société: Catégories fondamentales de la sociologie pure "le lien social"*, 2015), Lahouari Addi (Addi, 1999), Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1978), Slimane Medhar (Medher, 1999) and others, have thoroughly examined its dimensions and implications. The following questions pertain to our problem. What role do social bonds play in shaping and constructing the behaviors of groups and professional social categories in the mining sector? What are the social and anthropological contexts and implications of this?

The objective of this article is to investigate into the extension of the social bond within the mine's local community, specifically "Boukhadra." Additionally, it will explore the impact of this connection on communication and group cohesion within the economic facility. The analysis will draw upon significant Western and Algerian studies in the field of sociology. The Boukhadra mine was subject to intermittent field studies conducted during various periods due to the health conditions in the country (COVID-19 pandemic) in February and March 2020, November 2021, and February and April 2023.

Our research methodology involved a qualitative approach, specifically focusing on the ethnographic method. This method proved to be highly effective because of its utility to provide rich and significant research data. We conducted free and direct interviews and actively observed and took parts in various sites.

Our sample consisted of 43 workers selected at random from diverse occupational groups. Our research was impacted by several factors, including its nature, methodological and time constraints, as well as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including total and

partial lockdowns and subsequent obstacles. Also by the specific characteristics of the community we worked in, as well as the need for privacy, all validate some of the methodological choices made for this study.

2. Social connection and its implications: a literature review

According to Pierre-Yves Cusset (Cusset, 2011) in his book "Le lien social", he claims that the social bond encompasses all the connections we have with our family, neighbors, friends, and even extends to the collective sense of solidarity, which is shaped by the norms and values that define our understanding of the collective.

"Social problems can be classified into two major categories: some that are negative, have a disruptive role in people's lives, and others that are considered positive, as they concern the need for development, progress, such as, for example, the computerization of education for online courses in the current period or the modernization of the medical system, to face the challenges of epidemic phenomena" (for more details on this topic, see Otovescu, 2021).

André Akoun and Pierre Ansart suggest that social bonding establishes a connection between individuals and social groups, facilitating socialization and integration into society. As a result, gaining diverse aspects of social and cultural identity. It represents different ways people socialize and control behavior in society (Ansart, 2002).

However, Rachid Hamadouche delves into the idea of the social bond as the representation of social relationships that connect a group of people in an interactive, in-person environment. Regardless of whether these connections are personal, professional, or otherwise. In his view, social bonds refer to relationships that are formed through intimacy and sociability. (Hamadouche, 2009).

In a community or social group, a social bond is constructed through a network of relationships that connect and unite individuals. The way people or groups interact and agree upon a shared philosophy or logic differs between societies and eras, influenced by their cultural backgrounds and surroundings. Solidarity can also manifest in various ways among individuals, including within families, schools, religious and political groups, and even industrial organizations. (on this topic, for more details, see Otovescu, 2012).

Social bond can be defined as the collective interactions that unite members of a community, with the nature of this bond differing based on whether the community is rural or urban. This distinction is attributed to the unique cultural patterns and norms that shape the interactions within each urban area (for more details, see Otovescu, 2008, 2012).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Social connections and professional communities: the dimensions of social and cultural capital.

The strength of social bonds indicates the amount of social capital present in a given society. It is described by Fukuyama as a system or set of informal values and norms that are collectively embraced by members of a particular group, enabling them to collaborate effectively (Fukuyama, 1999). In a group, it is typically expected that members will engage in behaviors that are based on trust. Consequently, this helps them maintain their strategies and presence for a longer period.

Despite the legal regulations that govern the miner's connection with the mine as a contemporary establishment, our field observations indicate that informal interactions and dynamics among workers and professional groups are prevalent. This is particularly evident in terms of communication, which primarily occurs orally and face-to-face. Additionally, these interactions tend to occur within the context of family or tribal groups, providing a sense of security and protection for workers against institutional regulations, such as those related to professional errors or absences.

According to a professional worker, "the way to handle any problems with my supervisor or the management is to contact him in writing. While this seems logical, I personally

prefer to address them directly and have a verbal conversation since I already have a relationship with them and they know me well”

One of the managers states:

“When it comes to dealing with communication involving worker, the administration, or anything related to, we prefer an informal approach. We believe in fostering a sense of unity within our household, making formal procedures unnecessary”.

In the workers' conversations, the term "Dar Wahda" ("One House" that symbolically means the Family) frequently arises, highlighting the strong social bond within the local community. The mine, as a modern organization, mirrors this sense of community, where familiarity and relationships based on family and neighbors prevail. The workers' culture and movements within the mine are heavily influenced by the social environment, which encompasses family ties and interactions with neighbors. We observe that social connections, kinship ties, and clan affiliations play a significant role in shaping the collective mindset of these groups, often superseding the formal protocols established by the institution.

Social capital, a vital element of social cohesion, is constructed through cultural mechanisms such as religion, customs, sociocultural values, and informal norms. These mechanisms encourage individuals and groups to engage in behaviors that foster continuous and meaningful communication and cohesion, without relying on formal structures.

In the same context, Bourdieu formulated field theory and described social capital as the total resources that an individual has by virtue of possessing a strong network of relationships and mutual recognitions. (Bourdieu, 1986) He directed his attention towards social capital and its role in facilitating specific actions within social structures. According to one of the maintenance workers:

“Sometimes we need document from the administration, considering our network with them beyond the mine, their cooperation may present obstacles or prolong the process.”

As stated by other maintenance worker:

“In many organizations, we have observed a pattern where they prioritize ease of access for citizens but create obstacles for their employees, limiting options to their special needs of holydays as example. It's a relief that we don't have to depend on anything or anyone when we visit any service here. We have a strong sense of community, where your brother could be your cousin, neighbor, or friend.”

Bourdieu defines social capital as the means by which specific goals can be accomplished, and these goals can only be attained through it. (Coleman, 1990) However, Syrett, Stephne, and Evans. M examined social capital as the result of an individual's utilization of their network of relationships within specific professional and social groups. (Syrett, 2007) Hence, social capital is a crucial component of relationships and plays a vital role in facilitating various social and professional activities. It entails investing in social connections within local communities and industrial organizations to gain personal advantages. This is what we observed based on the conversations of maintenance workers.

From the previous argument, we can conclude that social capital is created by the socio-cultural backgrounds that individuals and groups embrace in their ideas and understanding of social connections. Based on this, Lin discussed social capital as the resources embedded in social networks that individual's access and utilize to achieve their objectives. As a result, these actions naturally involve the utilization of underlying resources or intangible wealth and the strategies for leveraging these resources to attain individual and communal objectives (Lin, 2001).

It should be acknowledged that social capital is established through two key factors: social networks and relationships, as well as a value system that is often centered around solidarity, cooperation, and unity. This aligns with Sara Ferlonder's perspective, which emphasizes the influence of values on social capital. Ferlonder defines social capital as a relational framework involving the exchange of benefits, cooperation, and diverse forms of support (Ferlander, 2007).

3.2. Prioritizing informal relationships over formal ones

What we are referring to is how informal relationships are more effective than formal professional relationships, which are based on regulations and organizational structure, in meeting and fulfilling the needs of workers. This, of course, is dependent on the worker's level of social capital within the company.

While conducting research at the mine, we had the opportunity to observe a female miner (who held a position as an engineer in the studies office) advising a worker to intervene with the human resources officer. Her intention was to boost her productivity by exaggerating her performance beyond what she was actually capable of.

Once our conversation settled, we proceeded to ask the employee we mentioned earlier if they were involved in any accounting-related positions within the administration. Surprisingly, the participant revealed that he is only a maintenance worker, but he has personal connections with a manager-in-chief at the department.

The professional groups in the mining organization utilize their network of relationships to accomplish their goals and strategies. According to Pierre Bourdieu social capital can be seen as a social bond, just like any other type of capital (Canada, 2003)

Our field investigation revealed that mediation (El-wassita) has become a prevalent phenomenon within the mining organization, and it is now considered a fundamental aspect of social interaction. It has even become an integral method that shapes the daily lives of professional groups, without which obtaining rights in a flexible manner is impossible. There was a comment from one of the employees in the studies office:

“ At the Mine, informality is the norm, if we conducted via formal proceed it resulting a prolonged disruptions procedure. The strong sense of community extends beyond this location to the mine, where people have personal relationships with friends, family, and neighbors.”

This statement indicates that the primary foundation and unity of social relationships within professional groups stem from social connections. The link provided depicts the complex social networks and relationships found in the local community within the mining environment. The basis of this link is a traditional local reference, encompassing family, blood ties, neighborhood, and friendship.

By conducting a focus group interview, we inquired the group of truck drivers employed at the mine about their ability to engage with the organization in a formal manner, adhering to the hierarchical structure and without relying on informal professional groups. The respondents provided negative responses. Workers are hesitant to solely carry out their professional tasks within the mine, as it isolates them from their family connections and social networks. These ties, which encompass both neighbors and friends, typically exist outside the traditional framework of social media and conventional solidarity based on social relationships. Our understanding of the mine and the workers' perspectives is derived from our observations and their speeches.

From this, it seems that the social structure in the mine, adopted by individuals and groups, is built upon various influences that go against the idea of a modern organization in the mining industry. Simultaneously, it exhibits a powerful ability to communicate and foster social harmony.

This commentary aims to highlight that communication activities, particularly oral and intra-group interactions, extend beyond verbal expression to encompass grouping patterns, social behaviors, and attitudes. This showcases one of the methods through which social organization is established in day-to-day existence, with intricate dynamics involving the interplay of local factors and the realm of influence. Anthony Giddens highlights the complex sociocultural patterns that emerge from relationships formed in local contexts, where various social and cultural networks are constructed and sustained. (Giddens, 2013)

When we revisit Ferdinand Tönnies ideas in "Community and Society," (Tönnies, 2010) which explore various social connections, particularly those between tradition and modernity,

we find that society, within this context, can be seen as a manifestation of modernity. On the other hand, communities represent the traditional values of these societies, and Tönnies believes that the family and various points of reference are crucial symbols and integral elements of social connections that are deeply intertwined with community existence. (Tönnies, 2015) He states that the foundation of community life is family life. In social groups where the position and role of each person are traditionally determined by factors like gender, age, and status, cohesion is maintained through customs, shared values, and the collective memory that shapes upbringing, as Tönnies describes it. (Tönnies, 2015)

4. Conclusion

The statement above implies that the kinship circles within the mining unit's occupational groups are not restricted to biological ties, but rather encompass the social connections and cultural norms shaped by the dominant social environment. In this occupational setting, individuals reside in a shared space, utilizing kinship and clan systems to successfully reach their desired outcomes.

Our field investigation revealed workplace behaviors that appear to be inconsistent with the modern organizational culture. In this setting, professional groups carry out their daily professional activities in a way that reflects their commitment and adherence to the traditional social and cultural context, which defines the rules and regulations of their work. In his analysis, Mostefa Boutefnouchet highlights the paradoxical nature of Algerian society, which is both modernized and traditional at the same time. Despite serious attempts to embody modern organizations and integrate with current developments, traditional patterns of resistance to systems of acculturation remain entrenched in the representations and behaviors of the groups (Boutefnouchet, 1986) . Sociocultural backgrounds and the tendency to express traditional manifestations (Chrit & Begami, 2024) remained the primary reference and guide for every action, and this was clearly evident in what we observed through our observations and interviews with sociohumanist groups.

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INCREASING RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES THROUGH A PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL PROGRAM

Tatiana BARBAROS¹, Enache TUȘA²

¹Lecturer, Ph.D. Ovidius University of Constanta (Romania),

E-mail: tatianabarbaros2020@gmail.com

²Lecturer, Ph.D. Ovidius University of Constanta (Romania), E-mail: enachetusa@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Ukrainian refugee crisis represents an unprecedented aspect for the entire population. The specialists had to manage the situation of many refugees in 2022, and the refugees settled for an extended period in Romania. According to the research carried out in May and June 2023 by FONPC (Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Children), which aimed to identify the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, adults and children, most of the refugees have been in Romania for over a year (42%), and for over six months 38% of respondents. Among the 1285 respondents, according to the research, 94% are female, and only 6% are male. From the data of the same study, it appears that 89% have children, 46% stating that they have 2-3 children. Among them, 67% said they care for the children alone. Thus, three-quarters of the parents with children are in a single-parent family. The specialists draw attention to the need for support that these families need.*

Keywords: children, violence, resilience, trauma, war, refugees

1. Introduction

What causes domestic violence? This question is essential to both theorists and practitioners of the field. Establishing causality involves analyzing violence at the following levels: individual, family/couple, neighborhood, community, culture, economic system, or historical era, as well as variables: genes, psychiatric symptoms, individual attitudes, ways of thinking, performance in anger management, social attitudes, media influence, and legislation (for more details, see Otovescu, 2012, 2013).

An integrative approach is imperative for this. At the national level, studies that capture the analysis of the factors that lead to family violence have been done very recently. In contrast, at the international level, in the 70s, the first case studies and the first qualitative analyses made on small samples appeared, but also the reaction of various observers to those studies, which they disqualified, considering them aberrant and extremely rare. Then came the stage of determining the incidence and prevalence within the population, followed by correlational studies, which aimed to determine the difference between violent and nonviolent men (sometimes part of longitudinal studies done on small population samples). The next step in advancing methodologies was analyzing correlational and descriptive data and developing explanatory theories. In the specialized literature, five predominant perspectives (biological, psychopathological, social, systemic, and feminist) aim to describe the causes of family violence by reviewing the empirical support and explaining the implications and limits of intervention and prevention

In terms of prevention, an important role is played by prospective studies that lead to the need to intervene very early on with children who have had such experiences or are exposed to violence in their families, to intervene with parents and future parents to destroy the cycle of intergenerational transmission of violence. Specific interventions against domestic violence are focused on individuals, the family or society, and their institutions. In other words, the mentioned theories examine the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal factors that maintain, cause, or eliminate violence in the family (Social Assistance, studies, and applications, (Neamțu & Stan, 2005: 145). The increase in violence against children represents one of the most severe social problems facing contemporary societies. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of children abused by their parents themselves due to the latter's natural reluctance

to respond to inquiries, various studies, and published statistics indicate that this number is increasing.

Most of the parents who resort to such assaults are either women assaulted by their husbands or men assaulting their wives. There is, in this sense, a 40 to 80% probability that men who physically abuse their wives will also physically abuse the children they have. On the other hand, unlike women whose husbands do not abuse, those who are abused are at least twice as likely to abuse their children. The same parents consider physical punishment as the primary means of disciplining the child to comply with the rules of behavior imposed by the family. In many countries, these punishments obligatorily accompany the primary socialization process, being applied from the very first year of life to preschool and then school until adolescence. These punishments often go beyond the permissible limits, resulting in serious injuries, up to fractures and trauma. Research shows that most of these parents who resort to violent means of education were, in turn, educated through violence (on this topic, for more details, see Otovescu, 2005, 2011).

2. Aggression as an instinct

Sigmund Freud (1920) argued that aggression is an instinctive drive (drive) in human beings. Initially, Freud believed that the primary motivational force in human beings was the libido, the vital force involved in all pleasurable sensations. Still, after the First World War, he concluded that humans also have a destructive instinct, which he called thanatos. It, like libido, is a powerful motivational force for the human being that requires ways of expression.

Lorenz also considered aggression to be a primary instigating impulse. He saw it as an energy source continuously produced by the body like a reservoir constantly filled. And like the reservoir, this energy would overflow into extremely aggressive behavior if not released occasionally. According to Lorenz, in most animal societies, aggression is expressed through ritual fighting gestures, in which the animal shows its natural weapons, such as horns or teeth, to the opponent. These aggressive gestures are responded to by what Lorenz called submissive gestures—in which an animal places itself in a vulnerable position to demand that the aggressor stop the attack. When a puppy rolls onto its back in front of a larger dog, it becomes vulnerable on its initiative. Lorenz believes that it thus sets off an automatic "stop" signal, preventing the attack from continuing.

Lorenz considered human beings and rats to be the most different from the rest of the animal kingdom, having no natural weaponry at their disposal. As a result, these species have not developed ritual aggressive and submissive gestures, as have most animals, and do not benefit from some form of automatic signaling of the end of the fight, which entails fighting to the death. Therefore, humans must find ways to release aggression without harming other species, such as through competitive sports. Otherwise, society would have to go through heavy and destructive wars.

Since 1996, when Lorenz advanced this idea, many ethological studies have shown that submissive gestures are less common than he thought. Goodall (1978) observed a group of chimpanzees in Tanzania attacking and killing members of another group. Other ethologists (specialists who study behavior in the natural environment) found that aggression does not disappear in seagulls even after displaying submission gestures (Hayes&Orrell, 2010:37).

Data from various research undertaken indicate that domestic violence is closely related to multiple structural characteristics of the family, including its way of organization, relationships between members, income, occupational status of parents, level of education, and patterns of parental authority. In turn, family violence has a substantial impact on the developing personality of minors and adolescents. Violence is linked, at the same time, to poverty and the difficulties faced by families with an income below the poverty line. These families have to face unbearable problems, including highly modest material resources, unemployment, job dissatisfaction, family disorganization, alcoholism, the existence of unwanted children, etc. Families that are characterized by tendencies of violence against their

members and, especially against children, are typically families that have to face many existential problems. Apart from these structural characteristics, other factors maintain or increase family violence, such as lack of attachment between spouses, absence of affection towards children, lack of religious affiliation of family members, and social isolation of the family from the kinship group, neighborhood, or community. The greater aggressiveness of mothers is explained by their greater involvement in disciplining and educating children. (Hogaş, 2010:51).

Many children exposed to violence in their own homes are also victims of physical abuse. Children who witness domestic violence or are victims of abuse themselves are at increased risk of experiencing long-term physical or mental health problems. Children who witness domestic violence between their parents are more likely to experience violence in their future relationships. If you are a parent experiencing abuse, you may have difficulty knowing how to protect your child. If a parent experiences abuse, they may have trouble understanding how to protect their child. Children in homes where one parent is abused may feel fearful and anxious. They may be constantly on guard, wondering when the next violent event will occur.

3. Kindergarten children and school-age children

Young children who witness intimate partner violence may repeat what they did at an even younger age, such as bed-wetting, finger-pointing, increased crying, and whining. Difficulty falling asleep or staying awake may occur; they may show symptoms of terror, such as babbling or hiding; they may also exhibit symptoms of severe separation anxiety. Children in this age group may feel guilty about the abuse, blaming it on themselves. Domestic violence and abuse damage children's self-esteem. They may not participate in school activities or get good grades, have fewer friends than others, and get into trouble more often. At the same time, they may suffer from numerous headaches and stomachaches. Teens who witness abuse may act in violent ways, such as conflicts with family members or bullying at school. They may also engage in risky behaviors such as unprotected sex or alcohol and drugs. They may have low self-esteem and difficulty making friends. They might start fights or quarrels or try to intimidate others and are more likely to get into trouble with the law. This type of behavior is more common in boys who are abused than in teenage girls. Girls are more likely to be withdrawn and suffer from depression.

4. What are the long-term effects of domestic violence or child abuse?

More than 15 million children in the United States live in homes where domestic violence has occurred at least once. These children are at significant risk of repeating this cycle as adults, either entering into abusive relationships or becoming abusers themselves. For example, a boy who sees his mother abused is ten times more likely to harm his partner as an adult. A girl who grows up in a home where the father abuses her mother is more than six times more likely to be sexually abused than a girl who grows up in a non-abusive home. Children who witness or are victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse are at high risk of developing health problems in adulthood. These can include mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. They can also include diabetes, obesity, heart disease, low self-esteem, and other problems.

Can children recover after suffering or witnessing domestic violence or abuse?

Every child reacts differently to abuse and trauma. Some children are more resilient, and some are more sensitive. A child's degree of success in recovering from abuse or trauma depends on several factors, including:

- A secure support system or good relationships with trustworthy adults
- High self-esteem
- Healthy friendships

Although children will likely never forget what they saw or experienced during the abuse, they can learn healthy ways to deal with their own emotions and memories as they mature. The sooner a child gets help, the better his chances of becoming a mentally and physically healthy adult.

How can I help my child recover from experiencing or witnessing domestic violence?

You can support your children by:

- **Helping them feel safe.** Children who endure or witness domestic violence need to feel secure. Consider whether leaving the abusive relationship might help your child feel safer. Talk to your child about the importance of healthy relationships.

- **Talk to them about their fears.** Tell them it's not their fault or your fault. Learn how to listen and talk to your child about domestic violence.

- **Talk to them about healthy relationships.** Help them learn from the abusive experience by discussing what constitutes and what does not constitute healthy relationships. This will help them know what is healthy when they start romantic relationships.

- **Talk to them about boundaries.** Let your child know that no one, including family members, teachers, coaches, or other authority figures, has the right to touch or make them feel uncomfortable. Also, explain to your child that they have no right to touch another person's body, and if someone tells them to stop, they should do so immediately.

- **Help them find a safe support system.** In addition to a parent, this can be a school counselor, therapist, or other trusted adult who can provide ongoing support. School counselors are required to report domestic violence or abuse if there is any suspicion.

- **Offer them specialized help.** Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of talk therapy or counseling that may work best for children who have experienced violence or abuse. CBT is beneficial for children who suffer from anxiety or other mental health problems because of trauma. During CBT, a therapist will work with your child to convert negative thoughts into positive ones. The therapist can also help your child cope with stress.

A psycho-emotional program and intervention methodology

Studies show that there is a predisposition for various mental disorders in people who come from conflict zones. The prevalence of mental disorders (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia) was 22·1% at any point in time in the conflict-affected populations assessed. The mean comorbidity-adjusted, age-standardized point prevalence was 13·0% for mild forms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder and 4·0% for moderate forms. (Charlson,et. Al., 2019). From a psychological perspective, many refugees have undergone a traumatization process. It is the trauma of the non-combatant, of the civilian who had to helplessly witness the actions of war and the trauma of the refugee. (Zashirinskaia, 2024:20-28). Traumatic experience, according to the German authors G. Fischer and R. Riedesser, is a vital event of discrepancy between threatening situational factors and individual coping possibilities, which occurs with feelings of helplessness and defenseless abandonment and thus causes a lasting shake of understanding of self and understanding of the world. (Fischer & Riedesser, 2001)

Based on the classic definition of trauma, it is worth remembering G. Mate's formulation: trauma is not what happens to you but what happens to you inside you (Mate,2022:40). Of course, traumatic situations will be different from individual to individual, even if the traumatic event is the same (Vasile, 2011:17). With increased emotional arousal in stressful situations, attention narrows to essential features of events. This results in improved memory for central information at the expense of peripheral details. (Christianson & Loftus, 1991)

Under severe emotional arousal or stress conditions, people may focus almost exclusively on survival, endurance, and emotion regulation efforts. This extremely narrow attention focus can result in poor memory even for emotionally evoked events, a phenomenon

called emotional memory narrowing (Kensinger, 2009) or memory tunneling. Under conditions of extreme stress, this narrowing of attentional focus can lead to memory deficits and pronounced susceptibility to misinformation.

People can also piece together fragments of autobiographical information with information gathered from external sources to ensure the coherence of memories related to emotionally rich events that never happened (Christianson & Loftus, 1991). Thus, the specialized intervention focused less on cognitive processes and more on emotional regulation and validation techniques. The approaches were individualized from person to person. The reactions to the same event differed in function of the particularities of people's personalities and resources to manage critical situations. According to D. Vasile, people need therapeutic help. Still, many of them will avoid or refuse precisely because of the inability to give meaning to their experience to believe in a possible - positive perspective on life and the world. (Vasile, 2011:22)

The loss of vision in life, together with the threat to the person's life and living patterns, the threat to the integrity and coherence of the ego, the loss of a significant relationship, the interruption of the normal functioning of the person, and the disruption of the expansiveness of the soul in the context of life, represent the six central traumas that a person can experience in life (Macna, 2000:27-31).

The phases that traumatized people go through, according to Fischer and Riedesser (Fischer & Riedesser, 2001:90), were the following:

The peri-traumatic exposure phase, or flooding phase, is characterized by exaggerated emotional reactions, panic, and exhaustion. All this was observed through anger, crying a lot, and a state of even physical exhaustion or paradoxical emotional responses. When we were in the refuge, and the city (Mariupol) was being bombed, the sirens sounded together, and to encourage my people, we sang and danced. Denial phase - avoiding heartache by using alcohol or accentuating eating disorders, especially bulimia. During this period of denial of reality and non-acceptance of the situation, magical thinking occurs - Tomorrow, it ends; indeed, the war will end in a few weeks. I have my luggage ready; I can even go home tomorrow. I can't plan anything, and I don't accept anything because I will go home at any moment.

The phase of the invasion of mnemonic thoughts or images with experiences and pictures of events. Individuals reported having insomnia and flashbacks and overreacting to loud auditory stimuli. Every time a rescuer passes by with the siren on, I tend to throw myself to the ground, but then I remember that I'm in a safe place and ashamed of my overreaction.

The processing phase in which the personal emotional reactions to the traumatic event appear - people complain of states of apathy and even depression. I have no energy to do anything; I lie in bed and don't even feel the need to take care of myself. In the relative conclusion stage, people can recall and process the most essential parts of the traumatic situation. It is only at this stage that they begin to seek psychological support in individual sessions. I understand that my life has changed. I need help to live on

Then followed, in each case, the period of awareness of the current situation and the search for adaptive solutions. I am looking for a job; I want to enroll my children in a local school; I want to learn the language because I will be teaching here in the country; I am enrolling in professional qualification courses to access the labor market; I would like to start a business for to secure my gain. I need psychological support - I feel that you cannot cope; I would like to change something.

These stages differed from person to person. Some people asked for psychological support right from the first stage. Still, they could not consciously process the information, so the intervention aimed to provide emotional support and normalize the condition. In international practice, in refugee situations, the most frequently reported activities were individual counseling (39%), facilitating community support for vulnerable people (23%), providing child-friendly spaces (21%); the support of social support initiated by the community (21%); and basic counseling for groups and families (20%). (Wietse et al, 2011).

The anxiety caused by these changes amplifies the stress felt. The effects are emotional freezing and refuge in various non-constructive activities (addictions - excessive tobacco consumption, addiction to gadgets). Changing the place of residence and way of life, changing the daily routine, and accepting the refugee status - all involve enormous mental consumption, which can lead to mental exhaustion.

A group psychological support program was developed and implemented, considering the needs of the participants and the particularities of the intervention in the refugee crisis. The general objective of the intervention was to increase the level of resilience and improve well-being (resilience capacities and well-being) by the MHPSS Community-based approaches to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, taking into account the well-being pillars. According to L. C. Colom, the five pillars of well-being are Safety, security and stability, Bonds, relationships and networks, Roles and identities, Justice, and Hope and meaning.

The program's beneficiaries were women between the ages of 28 and 62, all mothers. The program was designed through eight face-to-face meetings, followed by the creation of an online support group

The support group has the following **objectives**:

- Improvement of mental state
- Acceptance of the situation
- Validation of emotional experiences specific to current stressful situations
- Encouraging the expression of emotions in a safe setting
- Triggering of emotional self-regulation mechanisms
- Creating a sense of belonging to a community and mutual support

Mode of delivery: 8 workshops with a duration of 2 hours each workshop (group of 12 participants)

The meeting themes:

- Awareness of reactions in acute stress situations
- Normalization of reactions and manifestations during the period of acute stress
- Identifying personal resources and establishing strategies to amplify them
- Awareness of individual potential that ensures adaptation to the new environment (qualities, skills)
- Accepting the current situation and identifying solutions for the future
- Designing plans, projection into the future
- Realizing action strategies for the immediate period with the specification of concrete actions.
- Creating a support network and psycho-emotional support (interest groups, thematic meetings, etc.)

Working methods:

- Body techniques (Jackson progressive muscle relaxation)
- Emotional (emotional self-regulation techniques)
- Cognitive (identification of cognitive schemes and cognitive restructuring)

The methods used were predominantly art-therapeutic and metaphorical. Cognitive explanations are often met with resistance, so some techniques had to be explained several times during the meetings. The most effective interventions were those based on metaphors and art drawing, completing a story with a given beginning, commenting on a metaphorical card, commenting on a quote, and making a symbol from plasticine, wax, semi-precious stones, and wire. We list some of them.

- Art therapy techniques (Drawing, Modelling, Making various symbolic objects, using associative, metaphorical cards (e.g., resource cards from the COPE set)
- Therapeutic metaphors (Metaphor of the pearl, Metaphor of the three boxes)
- -Storytelling (Creating a story on a topic chosen by the participant or continuing a story)

- Using cognitive techniques (Stop thinking, ABC Model – identifying cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in concrete situations)
- Everything took place in a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere.

Program results

Following the completion of the program, the following were observed:

- Acceptance of the current situation. I realize I have nowhere to turn and must look for ways to adapt. So, I started a refresher course.
- I am making plans for the future. My son wants to pursue higher education here in the country, and I want to support him. Now, I am looking for a job.
- Stability. I feel much safer here.

An aspect worth mentioning was that most women representing single-parent families became aware of the deficient marital role practiced in the last two years. They expressed their interest in paying more attention to this aspect, which indicates focusing attention on other spheres of personality. A disturbing factor was the high fluctuation of the participants. Many of them were absent because they had to leave the town for various reasons (to visit their injured husband in the hospital in Ukraine, to complete documents for the child outside the city, and to go for medical consultations outside of Romania).

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SMUGGLING COMMUNITYS: A SOCIO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY. ACROSS THE EASTERN BORDER OF ALGERIA

Mohammed Tayeb BELGHIT

Université Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi- Tebessa (Algeria)

Email: mohamedtayeb.belghit@univ-tebessa.dz

Abstract: *This study addresses the issue of smuggling in the city of Tebessa, focusing on the socio-ethnographic characteristics of smugglers operating on the eastern border route (Algeria-Tunisia). The multidisciplinary approach used aims to build a model of deviance based on a research field limited to fuel distribution stations and the so-called strongholds of smuggling in the region. In other words, the smuggling phenomenon may be part of much wider social phenomena, where it becomes almost impossible to determine its specific causes and effects. The study revealed that smuggling activities, particularly fuel trafficking in the Tebessa district in Algeria, are not only a subject of investigation, but also provide significant indicators and dimensions for the local society studied. The research highlighted the role of various facilitating factors such as geographical location, standard of living, peer groups, culture, religious morality and tribal affiliation, which indirectly shape and influence the development and spread of smuggling.*

Keywords: contraband, crime, ethnography, social, deviance

1. Introduction

Crime is considered one of the major problems due to the scale and diversity of the factors involved in its existence. The complexity associated with crime is rather due to its systematic and analytical relationship with different interpretative paradigms, characterized by different epistemological foundations and theoretical positions. In Algeria, fuel smuggling is considered as an obvious and influential criminal activity, which exerts its influence in certain geographical areas that define its particular importance, notably the eastern border zones. Fuel smuggling in these areas has become a much more complex phenomenon. It is no longer simply an illegal commercial activity, but it has become an integral part of the region's social and cultural life. Based on this contextual consideration, this study aims to carry out a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon of fuel smuggling in the Tebessa region. Socio-ethnographic methods are used to identify the factors contributing to the expansion of the phenomenon under study, and to investigate its various aspects including the social, tribal, cultural and economic aspects of this complex issue. Smuggling is a pervasive criminal phenomenon faced by all countries, whatever their level of development, with varying degrees of severity. This widespread phenomenon poses a lasting challenge to the financial, economic and social structures of nations and societies, whether at national, regional or international level, and beyond the orientation and philosophical foundations of the system. The fight against crime and its various manifestations is one of the greatest challenges facing our country. In response to this, the Algerian authorities have implemented a wide range of important measures to ensure the safety of people and property. So, they are working to mobilize material and human resources. The aim of this study is to investigate the issue of smuggling. The aim is to study not only the nature of smuggling, but also the relationships and interactions that occur between the groups involved in this activity and the social environment. The emphasis is on understanding how these groups perceive the surrounding society, as formulated by (Assamari 1992: 92). The aim is to go beyond simplistic linear analyses based solely on institutional practices and media representations.

Despite the criminalization of activities such as smuggling through legal frameworks, this study reflects a deep understanding of social reality of smugglers involved, and is committed to examining their ongoing involvement in these activities. Furthermore, it acknowledges the adaptability of culture and recognizes that cultural dynamics can change in

response to perceived problematic phenomena (Leman, 2007: 229). Thus, the study reveals how cultural adaptation contributes to the survival and consolidation of deviant cultures embodied by smugglers leading ultimately to the formation of subcultures rich in distinctive behavioral norms. This study is based on a conceptual framework that integrates numerous theories, approaches and concepts that have already been used to elucidate similar or contraband-related phenomena. Within the field of deviance studies, which examine the sociological aspects of deviant behavior, this study explores the complex social and psychological processes as well as the rejection and exclusion that affect certain disadvantaged categories, as explained in detail. The mechanisms are discussed (Naim, 2011: 58). When studying group differentiation and the social mechanisms that lead to the exclusion and marginalization of particular segments, it is essential that researchers draw on the framework of subculture theory. As suggested by Becker (1985: 229), research on deviance focuses on group differentiation, and the resulting exclusion pushes certain factions to the margins of society or towards dissidents. In this context, this study draws on the concept of specific subcultures to explore how the social existence of groups involved in fuel smuggling occurs beyond the framework of the dominant culture and takes root in different contexts. Furthermore, it will be shown how these groups are able to form their own cultures and foster semi-independent worlds in which they exist semi-autonomously.

Depending on the context, the different cultures of these fuel smuggling groups range from traditional norms to deviant practices. As EL Kayal (1997: 103) points out, this scope is important for understanding how the needs of group members are met. The theoretical investigations and concepts used in this study aim to clarify these issues by attempting to recognize the particular within a broader general framework. The scope of explanation of these theoretical questions and concepts varies and includes structural or macro-sociological global aspects, as explained in Blau (1977: 26-54), deals with social events and their organizational dynamics. This macro-level analysis examines the wider social context and its structural influence on the smuggling phenomenon, in particular fuel smuggling across the eastern border, which is the focus of this study. At the same time, the focus is on understanding the social and psychological processes that lead certain categories or individuals to join marginalized groups as formulated by Howard Becker. This micro-sociological perspective addresses the complexity of the social and psychological dynamics that lead individuals to join groups involved in smuggling activities. This study falls in the field of criminal sociology, which is an aspect of social ethnography, a field of knowledge mainly dedicated to the study of phenomena in historical contexts. Contrary to certain theories that consider criminal behavior as a simple act of brutality treated at the individual level, this study is based on the paradigm of the normative model which has become predominant since the 1960s and is perceived as social behavior.

In addition, specific characteristics of smugglers, including their nature, socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender) considered as a variable in the study, will be the subject of in-depth analysis. This in-depth investigation seeks to provide a clear understanding of the various dimensions of criminal behaviour, in particular smuggling. Just as important is the analysis of cultural characteristics that shed light on prevalent stereotypical perceptions within society regarding criminal behavior, in particular smuggling. This analysis aims to identify cultural stereotypes influencing criminal behavior and contributing to the social stigmatization of smugglers within their cultural milieu. In addition, the study seeks to identify the subculture inherent in smugglers, constituting additional lens of analysis within the dysfunctional social structure. Adopting a functionalist perspective, this involves recognizing cohesive groups with their distinct customs, traditions and regulated practices, forming a subcultural context.

2. Methodology

The researcher employed an ethnographic method to reveal the contemporary context of cross-border smuggling and to complete the existential analysis of these groups, in particular

the smugglers' groups. The aim is to determine their socio-demographic characteristics, the nature of interactions between group members, and between them and individuals in society. This approach also aims to understand how smugglers perceive themselves and others as well as the specific language used in interactions with members of society (Djaber, 2016: 67).

The use of the ethnographic approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of the methods and daily lifestyles within a society or group (Abouzid, 1978: 81). This encompasses knowledge of its members, their beliefs, values, behaviors and the results of their actions as well as an exploration of how they interact with these productions. This understanding is made possible by participant observation where the researcher immerses himself in the natural setting of life, as emphasized by Kaufman (1996: 112). The ethnographic approach ensures a rich, contextualized exploration of the subject since this research methodology is based on detailed observation and analysis of a subject emphasizing the meaning of words and phrases rather than relying on numerical data and statistical tables. This research method depends on the participation of the various stakeholders underlining the need to present their perspectives in a comprehensive and dynamic way. Consequently, the progression of the research and its investigations does not derive from the researcher's personal vision, culture or intellectual thoughts. On the contrary, the ethnographic researcher is expected to enter the field of study with an open cultural and cognitive mindset. His/her mission involves total immersion in the society studied through participant observation, actively exploring and documenting detailed descriptions of their observations, while gathering opinions, ideas, suggestions and perspectives from the field of study (Hamel, 2003: 84).

Using the ethnographic method, the process of gathering and interpreting information differs from the approach adopted in quantitative research. This approach is based on four distinct phases forming a coherent whole. The first phase focuses on gathering information followed by the organization and categorization of this data in the second phase. The third phase involves presenting the information, summarizing it and structuring it in the form of matrices and key concepts. The final phase focuses on extracting and presenting the results while verifying their coherence all within the adaptable framework inherent in the ethnographic method.

This adaptability gives the researcher the latitude to adjust the plan and design of the study, and even to revise his or her research questions based on observations in the field. Immersion, in particular, has the potential to inspire the formulation of new, more meaningful research questions than those initially envisaged (Diop, 2018: 140-157).

To achieve the goals of understanding the fundamental factors influencing social behavior, and discerning the aims and intentions behind them, the ethnographic researcher needs to establish a special social connection with the participants, gaining their trust and cooperation. This is achieved through the use of less formal methodologies such as participant observation, immersion and full integration into the daily lives of the groups studied.

Ethnographic research places the researcher as the primary instrument of information gathering adopting a holistic perspective on social behaviors and practices in the context of social, cultural, economic, political and organizational dimensions (Dominique, 1996: 177-179).

The study was carried out in the district of Tebessa which has deliberately been chosen for its distinctive features pertaining to the research subject and the problem studied. Located on Algeria's eastern border. This district which is a long history of smuggling problems, making it a valuable and relevant field worth studying. Significantly, the researcher resides in the region. This facilitates direct and effective communication on the spot (Angers, 2004: 197). The researcher's intimate familiarity with the study, acquired through day-to-day experiences, proves advantageous, especially as smuggling is almost ingrained as a norm in the region and is perceived as a legitimate practice.

Initially, the research focuses on service stations, recognized as centers where many smuggling groups converge. This approach allows the researcher to see first-hand the interactions of these groups without introducing distortions or alterations to reality (Stéphane,

1997: 288). It is important to point out that certain areas of the city may be perceived as restricted or off-limits to foreigners. Even security forces face challenges in gaining access to these high-risk areas.

The researcher conducted interviews and observations in the meeting places of smuggling communities to understand their diverse characteristics and perspectives (Beaud, 2010: 64). Likewise, conducting interviews with a range of community members, who represent other stakeholders in the phenomenon, helps to understand the stereotypes they hold about these deviant groups, particularly with regard to social characteristics such as place of residence, place of birth, age, level of education, occupation, overall social status, family type, size, etc.

The identification of cultural characteristics requires the analysis of features such as morality, predominant values, different behaviors, law, order, social control, common social customs, as well as the presence of traditions, values, customs, legal consciousness, morality, dominant subcultures and economic attributes (poverty, wealth, standard of living, type of housing, type of neighborhood, etc.). (Lebon, 1996: 123). In addition, the researcher relies on participant observation, a primary data-gathering tool in the study of individuals and human groups. Which is considered as of the most widespread and effective methods, particularly in ethnographic research. It is essential to recognize that interviewing is not a simple task; rather, it is a scientific and technical manner (Kaufman, 1996: 123).

The data of the study were collected through participant observation involving the researcher's active involvement in specific aspects of the smuggling communities' daily lives. Observations were carried out while these individuals were present at fuel distribution stations. The latter are locations for the subsequent discreet transport of fuel across the eastern border into Tunisia. In addition, interviews were conducted with various actors in the smuggling business.

In examining the groups involved in smuggling, conventional data collection techniques in the social sciences (Mohamed, 1983: 365), such as the use of statistical data or random opinion surveys, do not provide an accurate representation of the actual number of groups engaged in smuggling activities. The relations these groups maintain with society as a whole are truly indicative of a subculture at odds with the dominant culture in society (Abdelghani, 2006: 146). A predominant tendency among most smugglers is a lack of trust in representatives of the dominant society. This prompts them not to divulge their secrets and experiences to outsiders seeking information on the smuggling phenomenon.

When collecting data on the lives of individuals residing in a community and involved in competing illicit activities, ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, developed particularly in cultural anthropology since the 1920s (El Kayal, 1997: 37), are considered superior to quantitative methodologies. These methods require the building of solid relationships based on trust before plunging into personal and potentially sensitive investigations, ensuring the acquisition of authentic and meaningful responses (Kaufman, 1996: 129).

The ethnographer generally immerses himself in the communities he/she wishes to study establishing organic and lasting relationships with the individuals involved to ensure the acquisition of reliable data. The ethnographer transcends the principles of positivist studies by cultivating an "intimate" relationship (Tietze, 1997: 188) with the individuals and, consequently, with the object of study.

In pursuit of the predefined objectives, the researcher spent whole days at fuel distribution stations, fuel storage sites and in border areas of eastern Algeria such as Bouchebka, El Meridj, Morsot and Bir El Ater. This involved careful observation of the activities of smuggling groups.

Smugglers make multiple trips to Tunisia, the other party involved in this criminal activity. Interviews were conducted with guides known as "Eclaireurs". These are providing

smugglers with information on road conditions night and day, working for the smugglers in exchange for wages. Their mission is to monitor the movements of border guard teams. Along the various tracks and trails, the smugglers enlist the support of shepherds and unemployed young people, while on the roads. These logistical groups are equipped with cell phones with two SIM cards, one Tunisian and one Algerian. It should be noted that Algerian border guards often encounter obstacles from local residents.

Smuggling in the district of Tebessa is full of contradictions (Becquet, 1959: 104). Some of the people involved in this activity hold official positions and are paradoxically involved in smuggling. They use their personal vehicles to obtain fuel, which they then sell to smuggling chiefs. These leaders play a crucial role in collecting and storing the fuel in tanks and containers. Following this stage, other elements take charge of transporting these quantities of fuel to the border, where they are smuggled into Tunisia.

3. Results

Our study has come to conclude:

The perceptible correlation between declining economic prosperity within the social structure and the prevalence of fuel smuggling in the district of Tebessa.

High unemployment rates associated with a lack of employment opportunities prevalent in society in the district of Tebessa, particularly in border areas far from urban centers, specifically in rural areas and remote conscience isolated regions.

The weakness of religious morality, and the lack of respect for moral values in their formative association with fuel-smuggling communities in the city of Tebessa.

The considerable impact of geographical situations, in particular proximity to the Tunisian border, in increasing smuggling activities in areas close to the district of Tebessa.

The emergence of a new affluent social class justifying their aspirations to profit from the prevailing situation, both materially and socially, generally coming from a social background initially far removed from "deviance", has intensified the influence of notable financial assets on smuggling dynamics. This trend should assert a form of material authority over marginalized social classes driven by the desire to improve their economic situation. This is particularly remarkable given the substantial price differentials between subsidized fuel in Algeria and the comparatively high prices prevailing in Tunisia.

The carelessness of Tunisia's internal security forces in the face of fuel smuggling activities is visible, not least in the illegal sale of Algerian fuel along the arterial roads, particularly near border centers.

A widespread acceptance of the culture of fuel smuggling, encompassing both inbound and outbound activities, and sometimes its explicit approval, underlines the persistence of this phenomenon over time in the district of Tebessa.

The monopolization observed in specific fuel storage locations by wealthy barons with extensive networks positions them as crucial intermediaries in smuggling efforts for a variety of reasons.

The emergence of informal communications infrastructure and the adoption of a specific language and subculture within the smuggling community facilitates its integration in society, characterized by a "singularity" that defies established norms and societal conventions.

Legislative and security frameworks have proved insufficient to effectively eradicate, even partially, the phenomenon of fuel smuggling in border regions, particularly in the district of Tebessa where this illicit practice persists despite the considerable risks involved.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results:

The correlation between declining economic status and the proliferation of fuel smuggling perfectly illustrates Robert Merton's theory of anomie (N'Gahane, 2019: 171-175). According to Merton's theory of anomie and deviance, when social structure significantly impedes access to cultural goals through institutional means, it engenders deviant innovation.

Faced with a dearth of legitimate economic opportunities, individuals' resort to contraband as a means of achieving economic success.

The monopolization of fuel storage sites by a new affluent social class, and the emergence of a new prosperous group through smuggling, aligns with conflict theory (Alessandro, 1982: 1-22). This theoretical perspective emphasizes the concentration of power and economic resources in the hands of an elite, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities and driving the underprivileged classes to engage in deviant activities in order to survive.

The weakness or lack of religious morality and the fragility of moral references, combined with an undercurrent of dominant culture within smuggling communities, serve as illustrations for Sutherland's theory of differential association (Dhanagare, 1963). This theory maintains that deviant behavior is acquired within intimate groups, where exposure to values conducive to deviance outweighs conformist influences.

The laxity shown by the authorities and the permeability of social acceptance of contraband activities echo social control theory (Hirshi, 2015: 289-305). This theoretical framework suggests that deviance emerges when the social bonds that normally encourage respect for social norms are weakened or absent. In the context of Tebessa, the widespread acceptance of smuggling and the ineffectiveness of institutional control mechanisms appear to diminish the obstacles to engagement in illicit activities.

The inadequacy of legislative and security frameworks to eradicate the smuggling phenomenon, as well as the stigmatization and isolation of smugglers, can be examined through labeling theory (Lacaze, 2008: 183-199). This perspective sees deviance as a consequence of social labels applied to individuals, who internalize these labels and then act in accordance with them. The failure of punitive measures may unintentionally reinforce deviant identities within border communities.

5. Conclusion

This socio-ethnographic analysis of smuggling in the Tebessa region, focusing on a specific group, has brought to light dimensions often neglected in statistical surveys, notably the critical historical aspects of social characteristics. This methodological approach facilitated appreciation of the constructive role of cross-border smuggling, amalgamating various previously identified dimensions which, when synthesized, contribute to the development of a comprehensive and culturally grounded analytical framework in a dynamic historical perspective for both individuals and social phenomena.

The study revealed that smuggling activities, particularly fuel trafficking in the eastern region of Tebessa, transcend mere survey subjects and serve as significant indicators and dimensions for the local society under examination. The main conclusions can be summarized as follows:

The phenomenon is undergoing both quantitative and qualitative historical changes, influenced by multiple factors, including security considerations.

There is a dynamic interplay between various forces impacting on the fundamental family unit of society in an evolving historical context, subsequently influencing the phenomenon of fuel smuggling.

Deviant culture and subcultures, an integral part of this societal milieu, help shape deviant patterns in the region, suggesting a degree of uniformity across diverse cultural contexts and signifying the enduring nature of these behaviors.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of fuel smuggling is linked to fundamental societal forces and cannot be examined in isolation. This interaction encompasses not only objective structural elements, but also cognitive constructs that exert an influence on these behaviors. Historical phenomena, such as ancestral beliefs, religious doctrines, myths, etc., contribute to the creation of conflicts and a perceptible void in subsequent generations, who internalize and manifest these influences through behavior in their reality.

The historical context is the main obstacle to conceptualizing and defining these phenomena in relation to reality, especially when it comes to studies at the individual level, as in the case of clinical analyses in criminology. Separating the phenomenon from its historical context poses a considerable challenge, as such an abstraction risk dehumanizing it. History is intrinsically linked to humanity, a species that has established structural norms and regulations which then evolve into inevitable binding forces.

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THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN SANGMELIMA SUBDIVISION AND THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH THE FRENCH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION BETWEEN 1925 AND 1940

Daniel Arnold EBALE

Ph.D, History International Relations, University of Bertoua-(Cameroon)

Email: arnoldebale2018@gmail.com

Abstract: *The text discusses the administration system in Cameroon, stating that there is no clear separation between French and indigenous administration. Both representatives of the Mandatory Power and the indigenous population participate to varying degrees in the management of public affairs. Traditional rulers have a strong influence over their constituents and a council of notables was established to gather proposals from the grassroots. The French colonial administration used this council to consolidate its power, making traditional rulers a crucial intermediary between the population and the authorities. The focus of the study is on the contribution of traditional rulers, within the council of notables, to the development of the Sangmélisma subdivision. The aim is to trace the political, economic, and social proposals made by the traditional rulers. The data for this study was collected from various sources, including general and specialised works, articles, theses, dissertations, and archive documents, and was analysed thematically. After all, traditional rules in Sangmelima contributed to the development of our city. All citizens of our locality noticed it regularly.*

Keywords: Sangmelima, indigenous, mandatory power, traditional rulers, local dignitary.

1. Introduction

After the end of the First World War, Germany relinquished its colonial possessions, which were subsequently transferred to the League of Nations to be administered by the victorious powers. France, for its part, included its zone of influence as part of its colonial empire while maintaining autonomy as a mandated territory under the SDN (Gourévitch, 2006). It employed an assimilation policy through the implementation of the *indignant system*. In 1916, the territory was partitioned into nine districts, each with a designated capital. At the administrative district level, the Commissioner of the French Republic was supported by regional and subdivisional officers. It was governed by a representative of the French Republic whose main responsibility was to maintain public order and security while fostering economic and social growth. Administrative and litigation councils were appointed to assist the Commissioner in fulfilling his duties. Additionally, each district was further divided into one or more subdivisions.

The Ntem Region underwent a change. On 14 May 1916, General Aymerich published a decree dividing Cameroon into nine districts. The former district of Ebolowa-Akoafem became the circonscription of Ebolowa-Akoafem, with Ebolowa as its capital (Ngoh, 1990). On 8 August 1934, Repiquet, the French Governor, reorganised the administrative units. The administrative districts were set up as Regions. He divided the territory into 17 Regions. The Ntem Region, comprising the sub-divisions of Ebolowa, Sangmélisma, Ambam and Djoum, covers an area of approximately 48,140 km². Its capital is Ebolowa. On 29 December 1951, Jean Louis Marie André Soucadaux, High Commissioner, split the Ntem Region into two: the Ntem Region and the Dja and Lobo Region (ANY, JOC, 29th december 1951). The latter comprises two subdivisions: Sangmélisma and Djoum. The Ntem Region is made up of two subdivisions: the Ebolowa Subdivision and the Ambam Subdivision (Anonym, 1968). Part of the Ambam subdivision is attached to the Kribi-Lolodorf-Campo district, specifically Nyabessan. The colonial administrators lead the districts and subdivisions with a varying number of subordinate officials, both European and indigenous. The text adheres to conventional academic structure and employs clear, objective language with neutral tone. The text maintains a formal register,

with precise vocabulary and grammatical correctness. Appropriate style guides are used, with consistent citation and footnote formatting (Mveng, 1985). Quotations are clearly marked, and filler words are avoided. The administrators have broad responsibilities, such as administration, agriculture and public works, within their allotted territory. They also act as judges. Technical abbreviations are explained when they are first used. They preside over the local court of appeal for indigenous peoples and collaborate with village, regional, or canton chiefs in their interactions with community members (Mveng, 1985).

When it came to organising and administering the country, the Mandatory Power respected the traditional social organisation. It endeavoured to perfect this organisation and to make it an instrument of progress. The role of the indigenous element is even greater in regional administration. Each administrative district has a council of notables which acts as an intermediary between the population and the administration (Mveng, 1985). It is an association of local executives who participate in drawing up administrative, political, economic and social decisions. What role does the council of notables play? What contribution has this institution made to the development of the Sangmélima subdivision? In what way have the chiefs been involved in drawing up development projects? In order to do this, this work is based on a line of reasoning developed using the main data collection techniques: firstly, selective interviews, then the use of archive collections, and finally second-hand documentary sources (general works and scientific publications).

This article focuses on three main points: firstly, the creation, organisation and functioning of the council of notables; secondly, the chiefs and the defence of political and socio-economic interests through political relay; and thirdly, the social contribution to regional development.

2. The advent of the council of local elders

The French colonial administration set up a council of notables to organise and operate the administrative structures.

2.1. Creation

By decree of 9 October 1925, the councils of notables were created by Theodore Paul, commissioner of the French Republic (Bassa, 2011). They were established in the administrative districts. The text sets out their composition, powers and how they are to be convened. They are made up of canton and regional chiefs and representatives of each major ethnic group in the district (Ngongo, 1987).

In 1931, three categories of chiefs were created: 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree chiefs. Village chiefs were appointed by the district chiefs on the recommendation of the subdivision chiefs (Bassa, 2011). They may only be dismissed by an order of the Commissioner of the Republic. Regional or canton chiefs who occupy a higher rank in the indigenous administrative hierarchy are appointed and dismissed by order of the head of the territory. They have political, administrative and judicial powers.

2.1. Organization and Functioning of the Council of Local dignitaries

Membership varies between 08 and 16 members. Members are chosen by the Commissioner of the French Republic from among family, village and canton chiefs, leading merchants, wealthy landowners and religious moral authorities. They serve for 03 years free of charge. They may be dismissed by the Commissioner of the French Republic (Bassa, 2011).

The council is chaired by the district chief. He is assisted by the subdivision heads. In the Ebolowa district, the council of notables meets at the Ebolowa indigenous court. The Council of Notables deliberates on issues relating to taxation, infrastructure construction, civil status, benefits, etc. Its role is to maintain contact between the various ethnic groups in the region, to study by mutual agreement the political, economic, fiscal and social issues that may be of particular interest to the region's inhabitants, and to collect and study their wishes (APE, Report of the Council of Notables, 1938).

The council is chaired by the heads of region, assisted by his or her deputy. Each subdivision chief heads the delegation for his district. The chiefs are generally identified by tribe. Thus, in the Sangmélima subdivision we have the senior chiefs of the Boulou and Fong races (APE, 1933). The following table shows the notables of the Sangmélima subdivision in 1936.

Table1: Local dignitaries of the Sangmelima subdivision in 1936.

Local dignitaries Names	Origins
Mboutou Abeng	superior ruler of the boulou tribe
Mboutou Atchamelame	superior ruler of the Fong race
Mvondo Ekoa	boulou senior ruler
Mfoula Alem	boulou ruler constable
Oyono Azoa	senior ruler of the boulou breed
Zame Mfenda	boulou senior ruler
Enondji Mvomo	senior ruler of the boulou breed
Messele Essiane	boulou senior ruler
Akama Voto	boulou senior ruler
Zili Mimbe	boulou senior ruler
Esian Kpwang	boulou senior ruler
Bomo Minko	boulou senior ruler
Mvom Ela	head ruler of the boulou tribe

Source: APE, *Rapport du Conseil des notables*, 1933.

The board has two interpreters: Rudolph Ebo and Pierre Ebanga. The issues submitted to the agenda of the meetings of the council of notables were proposed by the subdivision chiefs on the following aspects: capitation tax, redemption of benefits, medical assistance and economic issues (APE, 1939). The head of the Djoum subdivision submitted questions for approval by the head of the Ntem region for inclusion on the agenda. On this subject, the head of the subdivision gave his opinion on the development of the Djoum-Gabon track, which had been converted into a road in 1938 along a new route, as far as the village of Nkane, using hired labour (APE, 1938).

Every year, a list of chiefs is sent to the governor containing more names than the number of notables set in the official gazette. The governor chooses from this list and changes the notables so that successively all the chiefs and notables are in turn members of the council. In November 1933, Bomo Minko, Enondji Mvomo and Mfoula Leme were not chosen to take part in the meeting on the 17th. For the chairman of the meeting, Maurice Decharte, the fact that they had been struck off the list for that year did not constitute a sanction against them. They did not lose out, but all the regions, all the major villages, should be represented on the council in turn. The Chairman asked the chiefs for their opinion on how the meetings should be held, as some members had to travel more than eight days from Sangmélima to Ebolowa. Mboutou Abeng proposed the end of June, around the 20th of the month. All the members agreed. On the holding of meetings of the various commissions: the Council of Notables, the Agricultural Commission and the Health and Hygiene Commission. The main issues discussed were indigenous civil status, family emancipation, medical assistance, sport, marriages, dowries and divorces (APE, 1933).

The indigenous population is also represented on the bodies responsible for studying and examining affairs affecting the entire territory. Two indigenous notables sit alongside senior civil servants on the Board of Directors, and two others are members of the Chamber of Commerce, which brings together representatives from the various branches of the country's economy.

3. Leaders and the defence of political and socio-economic interests

The Council of elders deals with political, economic and social issues.

3.1. A relay policy

Leaders are involved in decision-making and implementation in the field. They participate in the transmission of orders and their execution. They supervise worksites. They are employed as auxiliaries in the census and tax collection. The importance of the chief's role within the council of notable people contributed to the creation of the chiefdoms. With regard to this political position, Mboutou Abeng points out that the authority of the chiefs is diminishing as a result of the erosion of command. The individualist Boulou only wants to be a chief. As a result, for a population of 55,000, there are 310 chiefs or "cheffailons", of whom 70 have fewer than 30 men under their command. In his view, the number must be reduced in order to strengthen the authority of the others. It was a question of regrouping the command and not moving a village (APE, Rapport du conseil des notables, 1938).

3.2. An economic and social function

The chiefs play a leading role in the economic and social development of their region. In economic terms, the council dealt with agricultural matters, capitation tax, taxes, benefits and public works (roads and tracks).

An agricultural committee was set up within the council of notables. In the Sangmélisma subdivision, work is carried out to supply the Europeans and natives of the Sangmélisma post with fresh food. There is a market twice a week. The chairman of the council, Martin, gives an update on groundnut cultivation. The local people started planting groundnuts in 1938. Optimum yields should be achieved in 1939. According to reports from 1927, 70 tonnes were supplied (APE, 1938).

Cocoa marketing operations are resisted by farmers, who complain that the distances involved are too great (an average of 5 km), that the poorly adapted pushchairs do not work properly, and that the transport is tiring. Cocoa is sold on the roadsides and in the exporters' shops, as the product can be sold at any time, day or night (APE, 1935). The notables are calling for regular markets to be set up. They felt that it was up to the buyer to come to the producer, who had no means of transport (APE, 1935).

In 1935, at a meeting of the Ntem council of notables, the regional chief announced the creation of approved centres known as periodic markets. The approved centres, known as periodic markets, avoided the long portage to the commercial centres, particularly in Kribi (APE, 1935). The head of the region said: "On these markets, and in a specific location, you can only buy and sell local produce, cocoa, palm nuts, groundnuts, maize, palm oil and foodstuffs, to the exclusion of all other goods" (APE, 1935).

In Boulou and Béti country, traditional markets are virtually unknown. The word for them (mâkit) in Ewondo or Boulou is of European origin. There is a busy, well-stocked market every day in every subdivision capital (Binet, 1955). The institution is well established, but its very location shows that it is linked to the European administration and the urban development that followed it (Binet, 1955).

The chiefs are all in favour of these markets, where products are paid for at the normal price. Periodic markets partly eliminate the need for portage and enable people to find essential items and objects close to their village. During the cocoa season, periodic markets are organised, but in the absence of a traditional substratum, they still only have an artificial existence. The villages of Mélane, Mfem, Endengue and Minko'o in Dja and Lobo were chosen to host the first periodic markets (Binet, 1955).

Some chiefs forbade the purchase of cocoa because false rumours had circulated among the natives. The authorities set the price of cocoa at 2 francs. Traders bought at a lower price. During a meeting, the district chief demonstrated to certain chiefs that these rumours were

false. Traders pay as much as they can. Nationals of all nations pay the same price. It is up to the notables to explain this to the natives of their regions and villages (APE, 1935).

As far as the capitation tax is concerned, circular N^o 78 of 28 April 1937 from the Commissioner of the Republic asks the regional heads to provide him with all suggestions and indications for the adjustment of certain taxes and in particular the capitation tax, which plays an important role in the tax system. It is necessary for work of general interest: work on the railway, work on the port of Douala, road works, and indigenous medical assistance, the fight against sleeping sickness, educational work, the operation of development services and the maintenance of the European staff who are the only ones capable of ensuring this operation.

The Commissioner of the Republic envisaged an increase in the tax rate for women and a reduction for men. The district chiefs proposed a rate of 25 francs and 23 francs respectively (APE, 1938). The notable Voula of the Sangmélina subdivision states that groundnuts, sheep, cocoa and palm trees are not being sold. Under these conditions, it is difficult to pay taxes (APE, 1932).

On this matter, the council president explains to the members that all expenses are made for the common good. Even those related to projects in other regions, like the Douala port works, have indirect benefits (Binet, 1955). Chief Mboutou Abeng agrees with the president's views. The people of Sangmélina are happy to see the return of the teams from the mission fighting against sleeping sickness in 1929, because they have noticed a decrease in deaths since the last visit. The upkeep of these teams and the medicine they distribute is expensive, but the taxes demanded by the government are very low in comparison to its expenses. He also saw significant amounts of money that the special agent carries each month to pay the road workers (APE, 1929).

The village chiefs collect the money based on numerical rosters created and monitored by the subdivision chiefs. The Sangmélina subdivision is divided into two zones. The first zone includes all residents except for the Boulou from Lomié. Regarding the second area, it is composed only of Boulou people who came from Lomié (APE, 1938).

Regarding the social aspect of the territorial development, the council of elders has been involved in matters related to the development of cocoa tracks, hiring contractors, village development, healthcare, education, civil registration, and sports.

The locals prepare the tracks so that the savings company truck can go through. On this topic, the council puts forth suggestions. Chief Mboutou Atchamelame suggests developing the Ekong-Messok, Ekong-Ngoassé, Mvoutessi-Meyila, and Sangmélina-Ngoulemakong tracks. Also, the completion of the Lobo Bridge and Bengbis road (38 km) should be prioritised. Chief Oyono Azoa requests the development of the Sangmélina-Ntyé track. Meanwhile, Chief Mboutou Abeng requires the construction of a permanent bridge on the Lobo, 6 km from Sangmélina. The regional leader Maurice Bertaut approves of this plan, which he deems completely justified. (APE, 1939).

The issue of roads is important. It is discussed within the council of nobles. Residents improve some parts of their area. However, they cannot do everything on their own. Therefore, leaders request support from the government to motivate and inspire the people. Chief Mboutou Atchamelame requests the assistance of the administration to provide a guard, an indigenous works supervisor, and the use of a contracted workforce to carry out the necessary work. During the session on September 17, 1935, he proposes the development of the Sangmélina trail through Mengbwa (Mvangan) up to the Ebolowa boundary. The people who reside at the Ebolowa border sell their products in Sangmélina, and this trail is of great use to them (Binet, 1955). In 1936, the notables' council debated the development of the runways. The Region's chief approves the proposal in principle, suggesting implementation in 1937 works program (APE, 1939).

As part of the contractor's employment, village leaders are submitting requests to carry out road and village development projects. Mvondo Ekoa suggests developing the Mbalmayo

road. Mboutou Atchamelame requests the development of the Sangmélîma-Ngoassé and Ngoassé-Bengbis roads for palm kernel sales.

Chief Zame Mfenda requests that only one category of indigenous people be authorized to purchase services, and that the purchase rate remains constant. The tax rate is set by the fiscal body in the Sangmélîma subdivision. Men are charged 34 francs and women are charged 25 francs. He proposes that all men pay a tax and that the administration pays those who work on roads or other construction sites. In 1938, Mboutou Abeng claims that the mandatory benefits rate is too high. Regarding the benefits, Mboutou objects to the current system. Mboutou and all the Sangmélîma leaders are happy to provide the men needed for the Mbalmayo route, as they understand it's in their best interest.

The opening of the Bengbis airstrip prompted Chief Enondji to urge payment of the capitation tax at the same rate as the other chiefs of the Sangmélîma groupement. The Bengbis road is open to trade. In 1938, the road brought in around 70,000 francs. With this in mind, Chief Enondji proposed a levy of 34 francs for men and 24 francs for women, as his constituents received a lot of money thanks to the road, which allowed products to be transported quickly and easily (APE, 1938).

In the Djoum subdivision, work on building the tracks was slow in coming. In 1929, Chief Abessolo Nleme of Djoum was unhappy with the work programme. The natives of Djoum are Boulous like those of Sangmélîma and Ebolowa and there is no reason why they should not benefit from the same advantages. For 3 years, the chiefs and inhabitants of Djoum have been asking for a road linking them to Ebolowa or Sangmélîma, and they have still not received satisfaction (APE, 1937).

Djoum Subdivision is connected to Sangmélîma via a road that is around 188 km long. It plays a crucial role in cocoa transportation. In 1932, the leaders of Djoum and Sangmélîma were ordered to improve and laterite the track. They were very pleased with this decision. The president of the council instructed the contractors to construct the Sangmélîma-Djoum route as soon as possible. The road opened for traffic towards the end of 1936, coinciding with the opening of the commercial centre at Djoum (APE, 1936).

The colonial administration instructed the villages to gather together, align them and tidy up their houses. The leaders began to carry out this programme. Chief Abessolo Nleme requested the construction of his village. In 1935, the rebuilding programme for houses in pote-pote style was successfully executed in the subdivisions of Sangmélîma. Lefebvre, the chief of the Ntem region and president of the council of elders, recommends the Djoum elders to follow this example. During the council meeting on November 16th, 1935, the leaders of Sangmélîma, specifically Mboutou Abeng, Mboutou Atchamenlame, Mvondo Ekoa, and Messele Essiane, requested the urban centre of Sangmélîma to be parcelled out. This will allow for similar permanent work to be done as that in Ebolowa. The president is looking into the matter and is pleased with progress (APE, 1935). However, some chiefs have raised concerns and expressed dissatisfaction. Mboutou Abeng stated that the entire Sangmélîma region disagrees with the decision of the administration to suspend the construction of a doctor's residence in Sangmélîma, causing the doctor to resign. Everyone is asking for a doctor because the villages are too far away from Ebolowa or Ayos. All the leaders of the Sangmélîma and Djoum region strongly approve of this position (APE, 1935).

Regarding health matters, the president informs the council that people with leprosy must live in separate facilities called leprosaria. The camps required to accommodate all lepers in the area have been established. Contractors are hired to build the segregation villages. Contractors are hired to build the segregation villages. Village leaders are aware of lepers living in their communities and must report them. The President believes that in 15 years, more people will suffer from leprosy if we don't take necessary measures. He thinks it's a vital issue. A similar approach is taken for sleeping sickness. Enondji Mvomo is asking for a clinic to be built in Bengbis. The President points out that providing them with a nurse isn't essential. It is necessary first to build the road to carry out effective health monitoring (APE, 1935).

The council places particular emphasis on rural and artisanal education. Delisle, head of the educational sector, oversees the Ntem region. The aim of rural education is to equip young people with practical skills, preparing them not only with education but also for life in their families and villages. In the Sangmélîma subdivision, artisanal education is producing positive results in training workers and craftspeople (APE, 1935). The head Enondji has requested a second monitor for the Bengbis School. Mfoula Alem also requests a monitor for Messok. Mvondo Ekoa has requested the opening of a school in Meyila.

The schools in Sangmélîma are equipped with a collection of tools not only for cultivating the soil, but also for maintaining, improving, complementing, and realizing this equipment. Handling these tools physically develops children and increases their dexterity. However, many children are expelled from schools, even if they are only 10 years old. One cannot accept children over 10 years old; we choose the good subjects that we can educate from a young age. It is indeed pointless to admit children who cannot complete a study cycle. Moreover, the sons of chiefs have priority (APE, 1938).

Regarding the issue of civil status, the Knight, subdivision chief, emphasises the significance of this document and the officers' responsibility for monitoring marriages. The certificate must be established in the presence of both parties; otherwise, it is invalid. Negligent officers may face punishment. Civil status pertains to declarations of births, marriages, deaths, adoptions, and children's acknowledgements. Such documents are drawn up according to local customs. The amount of dowry must be recorded on the contract, along with the payment date or dates agreed upon by both parties. The dowry should not be subject to the decree of 11 February 1935, as this has led to unchecked fraudulent activities. It is customary for the woman's family to provide a much larger dowry amount aside from the one declared on the marriage certificate. Such an act serves as formal evidence in court in the event of a divorce case (APE, 1939).

The issue of divorce is raised by Chief Enondji. He asserts that women often leave their husbands under the guise of converting to Christianity, when in reality it is to remarry more easily or even live in unmarried cohabitation. Mboutou Abeng adds that missions no longer accept such defectors who have quarrels with their husbands and damage the family before a divorce is pronounced. Otherwise, it leads to the degradation of the family. When a divorce is granted, the district civil registrar is notified by the judge who granted the divorce. The divorce pronouncement is immediately added as a note on the marriage certificate. After the divorce is granted, the woman's family is only obligated to refund the portion of the dowry recorded on the civil registry (APE, 1938).

Gambling games such as 'abia' or 'Djambo' have become increasingly common and continue to benefit certain unscrupulous and vagrant individuals at the expense of the masses. In relation to these specific concerns, the division chief is examining the issue of card and gambling games. He urges all natives who engage in these games to be cautioned against responding to charlatans, emphasizing the consequences they face (APE, 1939).

4. Conclusion

Overall, the council of notables offers a means of decentralising power and enabling chiefs to participate in the economic and social life of the region. It serves as more than just a recording body for decisions and its participating traditional chiefs are regarded as notables and elites, contributing to the local development of the Sangmélîma subdivision. They act as intermediaries between the leaders of Circumscriptions and subdivisions and the population of villages. They communicate received instructions to the villagers, ensure their execution, and report incidents of their administration. They have the ability to speak on issues relating to their command.

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POPULISM ASCENDANCE IN EUROPE: EXPLORING BACKLASH DYNAMICS AND THE DUAL PROCESS MECHANISMS THROUGH A ROMANIAN LENS

Doina GAVRILOV

PhD, National School of Political and Administrative Studies - SNSPA (Romania)

E-mail: doina.gavrilov@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Over the past two decades throughout Europe, there has been a noticeable increase in public demonstrations of populist discourses, and the rise to power of populist political factions. With the aim of comprehending the reasons behind this phenomenon and identifying the factors underlying the growth of populist parties, this study centers on the Romanian case. The objective is to offer insights and solutions to ensure a stable democratic path of the European countries. For this, the study embraces a mixed approach of the cultural backlash theory and the dual process theory to explain the social change in the light of the current international events, and identifies reasons and motivations of the voters turning towards populist ideologies. The paper begins with a historical analysis of the development of Romanian political parties to discern potential variations in the preferences of the Romanian electorate. Then, the study follows the emergence of new parties in Romania over the past four years, aiming to assess the balance between pro-European and populist parties. In the end, the study follows the discourse delivered by representatives of populist parties in Romania, identifies keywords and specific subjects in their speeches, and emphasizes their impact on voters' choice.*

Keywords: populist parties, backlash theory, the dual process theory, fear, discourse

1. Introduction

After the second World War the vote share of populist parties in Europe has been rising from 5.3% in 1946 to 12.4% in 2017 (Döring, Manow, 2016, apud Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The populism has spread and flourished even in the “richest and most egalitarian European societies, with long-established democracies like Austria, Norway and Denmark, in societies with mass unemployment like Greece and Bulgaria, and recently has taken root in Netherlands, Germany” (Norris & Inglehart, 2019: 9), and in the UK, that it pushed towards Brexit (Miliband, 2020).

Muis and Immerzeel (2017) argue that the rise of radical populist parties was possible because of the way the other political parties position in the political space. “When they ideologically converge, they leave a ‘gap’ in the electoral market” (p.913).

Others say it is Globalization that divided the electorate in the ones that enjoy the freedom of movement and international competition, and the ones that fear the opened borders. Yet, the populist party voters are not necessarily those who have not found themselves in the lifestyle brought by globalization, but actually those who shared the fear of open borders (Rodujin, 2018) or other fears in moments of crisis. And since the fear of open borders is not something that defines a specific member of our society, but rather the behavior of individuals in certain circumstances, the populist electorate is not stable and relies on fear.

Quite important is that “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (Lovecraft 1927, apud Carleton, 2016). So, when the populist speeches direct the public attention towards fears and the unknown they gain the public sympathy. Yet, one question remains unanswered: What makes people turn towards the populist parties and believe their speeches?

2. Research methodology

To answer the question of this study we use the case-study and the historical analysis to collect data and identify the evolution of the political landscape in Romania after the 2nd WW to help us understand the transition of the European states from nationalism to the idea of European unity. We also use the comparative research method to highlight the difference in the political preferences of the Romanian political parties and electorate and the specific contexts influencing voters choice.

Then, we use the social media screening to analyze the use of Facebook by the political parties. This method helps us differentiate between active and inactive parties and their speeches. In the same line we use the discourse analysis and content analysis to identify discourse strategies and keywords of the populist parties.

3. Populist parties in the 21st century

In 2019 the populist parties were defined as: “anti-establishment, anti-pluralist and authoritarian” political groups (Guth & Nelsen, 2019: 2) which encourage the creation of a corrupt elite with complete powers, promising to fully represent the society while guaranteeing benefits only to themselves. They are present in the whole political spectrum (Santana & Rama, 2018), but manifest specific individual ideologies (Mudde, 2016). Meaning, generally, populist parties support nativism, authoritarianism and populism. But individually they have specific ideologies like anti-semitism, welfare chauvinism, xenophobia, ethno-religion, etc.

In the past, these parties were the traditional ones. Nowadays, however, they are the opposition (Guth & Nelsen, 2019: 2) and the traditionalists are the parties supporting diversity, pluralism, democracy, and all that the Globalization brings to us.

EU seemed to temper the nationalist and extremist tendencies of the Europeans that led them into destructive wars (Hoffmeister, 2012; Bărbulescu, 2015; Birchfield, Krige & You, 2017; Gavrilov, 2020). Through the accession treaty it required the member states and their parties to comply with its values. For this reason, in the current European governments we find a sort of ‘political octopus’, with populist, globalist, liberal and traditional, “left-right variations in the party composition of government” (Imbeau, Petry & Lamri: 2). And it is only the public discourse the sole means to identify the populist and extremist parties.

Over the past decade the populist parties have witnessed a notable increase in their influence and presence (Norris & Inglehart, 2018: 11). Defined as “a style of discourse reflecting first order principles about who should rule, claiming that legitimate power rests with ‘the people’ not the elites” (ibid. p.5), populism remains silent about the necessary actions to reach a purpose.

3.1 Defining the populist parties electorate

We used to associate the populist electorate with the old people, believing they inherited the ideology from their families, or with the poor people, the young, the less educated and/or religious, or the ones with a lower social status in need for special policies and help (Guth & Nelsen, 2019).

Akkerman (2012) and Immerzell et al (2015) confirmed this belief showing that the electorate of the populist parties manifest anti-immigration attitudes. In the same line Norris and Inglehart (2018) argued that the populist voters are mostly men, old people, religious and less educated people together with the ethnic majoritarian populations, nostalgic for an old model of social organization.

Meanwhile, the European Social Survey has shown that there is no such a thing as the populist voter. But to find it Rodujin (2017) recommended to follow the demands of the electoral market instead of looking at the electorate supply, meaning, rather than focusing on the party ideology and leadership style, to analyze the voters, their needs and motivations.

By doing so, Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck (2016) have found that the electorate of populist, autocratic parties is dependent on the number of people facing social,

politic and economic vulnerability, and the number of those with difficulties in finding a social identity in the Globalization context.

Considering these, to comprehend the surge and expansion of populist parties in Europe, we will examine the central tenets of the Cultural Backlash theory.

4. Cultural Backlash theory: theoretical insights

In 1995 Hochschild laid down the basics of the backlash theory. She embraced a feminist approach and starting from the impact of women in various sectors of the social life since entering the workforce she explained the cultural impact of this phenomenon on the social organization, dynamics, behavior and choice.

To explain the social resistance to change, the sudden support for tradition, and the strong opposition to progressive ideas, Hochschild introduced the term backlash. Along with this, she also proposed the concept of conservative countermovements describing people resistance to progress and support for values and ideas representing 'the traditional'. The theory focuses on the impact of work environment but also of the family on the social movements. In this way it highlights the importance of a wider perspective considering both the public and private aspects when trying to understand social problems, behavior and decisions (Gotz, 2013).

For understanding the rise of populism, the backlash theory turns its attention towards fears, and shows that the influence of change in the social roles has a huge impact on economy and raised a reaction of resistance, particularly in those who are affected by the change in the workforce and the gender roles within the family. The change of social roles together with multiculturalism, highlighted the identity problem in the context of threatened traditional values which made "society members feel they had become strangers on their own land" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019: 35).

Another aspect is the deep - rooted values that guide the lifestyle of our society (Norris & Inglehart, 2019: 35). They are about social priorities and define the society members, their roles and the social aspirations. They are crucial in people's lives and highlight their characters, attitudes and opinions. Thus, touching these values will trigger a sense of insecurity and enhance the identity crisis. In this context Globalization is nothing but another trigger of fears with a specific impact on culture and economic inequality.

Among the greatest fears raised by the contemporary lifestyle we also mention the fears of a higher rate of divorces, a lower rate of natality, a higher rate of immigrants, etc. All of these highlighting a change in the social lifestyle, making people feel like their grounding pillars of life are shivering, thus their future being under the question mark. But, to better understand the impact of fear on our decision making we turn towards the dual process theory.

5. The dual process theory

In 2011, Kahleman proposed the dual process theory (DPT), which explains human cognitive, decision-making and behavioral processes considering the basic mechanism of brain functioning. Starting from the way the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex work, this theory describes the waltz of the decision-making process.

Kahleman differentiates between two systems of decision: System 1, is the automatic mode of interpretation and response to external stimuli, often known as the "fight or flight" reaction, which focuses on the interpretation of immediate and imminent dangers, being responsible for survival; and System 2, is a complex system of thinking that allows solving problems that do not threaten our existence and are described by an advanced degree of complexity.

Kahleman distinguishes between automatic and conscient decision-making, yet highlighting their connectedness when "most of what we think originates in our System 1" and when the "System 2 has often the last word" (Kahleman, 2011: 26). In spite of this, System 1 is always the first to analyze any impulse, and the System 2 functions when the alert state was

exceeded. And even then, the direction of thinking is always established by System 1. It is also the System 1 that constantly “generates impressions, intuitions, feelings and intentions for the System 2” (ibid.) to analyze and decide what is to be transformed into beliefs, impulses, voluntary actions and what is to be ignored.

Thus, fear is the main aspect the populist parties use to get the public's attention. It is raised with alarmed speeches about peoples' well-being, future and existence. Hence, individuals tend to opt for familiar routines and practices, seeking a sense of security, rather than embracing novelty and change (Gavrillov, 2023). Yet, how do populist parties manage to transform false statements and half-truths into absolute truths in the minds of voters?

To answer this question, Kahleman proposed the concept of cognitive ease, describing a pleasant state of familiarity achieved through specific techniques like repetition, rhyme and recognition.

Familiarity is the first way to transform some statements into truth. The DPT underlines that an effective method of making people believe something false is through the use of repetition. The secret is about people's difficulty to differentiate familiar from truth (ibid., p.64). So, when we hear a statement that seems familiar but we don't remember the source, we take it for granted just as it is almost impossible to check the source of all the information we are exposed to. And even more, when parts of the sentences we hear often are used in other speeches we come to believe the whole story because we are very familiar with one part of it.

Another way to make something seem true is through rhymes (ibid., p.66). This is the reason we have rhyming aphorisms at protests and in political contexts. Rhymes trigger a deep judgement of the words meaning and penetrate deeper in the human mind.

Thus, the populist parties juggle with the use of rhymes, when they want society to make clear associations and the use of repetition to emphasize keywords and transform ideas into truths. This is why the populist parties' resort to rhetoric endorsing traditional values, nurturing a sense of familiarity, security, representation, connection and confidence among their supporters.

6. The rise of populist parties in Europe: The Romanian case-study

Between 1946 and 1965 Romania was governed by the Romanian Workers' Party (PMR), but from 1965 to 1989 it fell under the communist dictatorship of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) (The Presidential Commission for the analysis of the communist dictatorship in Romania, 2006). The discourse of regime representatives was about worthy intentions, which is why Romania fell into the trap of the communism in the first place. However, in order to achieve its goals, the party recorded serious violations of human rights, the reason why in 1989 Romania put an end to the communist regime and followed the European model.

Thus, Romania has not a very distant past with an authoritarian regime. The question is: What makes the Romanian citizens attracted to such speeches again? To answer the question, we take a closer look at the political dynamics, the votes and the parties' discourse in Romania since 1989.

6.1 Political parties in Romania since 1989: evolution, votes share and discourse

On December 20, 1989, Romania created the Political Party of the December Revolutionaries to lead the revolution and leave behind the communist regime. Yet, Romania has met the political pluralism only after the decree of 31 December 1989. Following this, the parties dissolved by the Communist Party in 1965 re-appeared and others were founded: the Christian-Democrat Peasant National Party (re-established), the National Liberal Party (founded), the Romanian Socialist Democratic Party (founded), the Romanian Social Democratic Party (re-established), etc. The last one was quite close in the past with the Communist Party. Their closeness was marked in 1946 when its representatives participated under joint lists in elections with the ones of the Communist Party, and in 1948 it merged with

the Communist Party forming the Romanian Workers' Party, that in 1965 was renamed the Communist Romanian Party (PCR) (The Presidential Commission for the analysis of the communist dictatorship in Romania, 2006). The two Socialist and Social Democratic Parties merged in 2001 building the Social Democrat Party (PSD) (PSD, 2024).

Other political formations we can name are: the Ecological Movement of Romania (MER), from which a formation laid the foundations of the Ecological Federation of Romania (FER) that merged with the Popular Action Party in 2004; the Romanian Environmental Party (PER); the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (in response to the communist treatment of the Hungarian community); the Romanian Unity Party (PUNR) (in response to the creation of the Hungarian Democratic Unity of Romania) which, disappeared by joining the Conservative Party; the Liberal National Party - Young Wing (formed because of the divergences between the members of the National Liberal Party).

At the moment, Romania has over 30 political parties, but only 7 of them got regular votes during the years. So, let us take a closer look at the Romanian parties and their ideologies (see Table 1).

Table 1: Leading parties in Romania in the last 10 years and their ideologies

Party	Year	Ideology	Classification
Social Democrat Party (PSD)	Founded in 1983 as Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Romania (PSDMR), it reappeared as PSDR in 1993, and changed its name once more in 2001 after its merger with PSDR.	Has its roots in classical socialism supporting progress and the well-being of all, with emphasis on the nation and the country. A center-left wing party, claiming to support competition, globalization and fight against the climate change.	Populist Pro-European
The Save Romania Union (USR)	Founded in 2016	A center-right party, supporting freedom and responsibility, market economy, human rights, diversity and Euro-Atlantic values.	Pro-European
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats Party (ALDE)	Appeared in 2015 after the fusion of the <i>Conservative Party</i> (recognized before 2005 as <i>The Humanist Party</i> from Romania) and the Liberal Reformer Party (built in 2014).	A center-right party supporting the middle-class workers, the entrepreneurs, the liberal professions and human rights.	Pro-European
The National Liberal Party (PNL)	Founded in 1875 , dissolved by the communist regime, and rebuilt on January 15, 1990. It had alliances with the <i>Conservatory Party</i> in 2011, and nowadays with the <i>Social Democrat Party</i> .	A center-right party, supporting the rule of law, the human rights, diversity, pluralism along with other values and principles of the EU.	Pro-European
Pro Romania Party	Founded in 2018 by the former president of the Social Democratic Party (<i>PSD</i>). It merged with <i>ALDE</i> from October 8, 2020 until January 26, 2021 for the parliamentary elections.	A center-left party, with a pro-European and a socialist ideology. Is focused on: the minimum income during crises, the economic support during crises, the national program of testing, re-opening schools and respect towards the militaries.	Populist

Popular Movement Party (PMP)	Founded in 2013 after the divergences between the former president of Romania between 2004 and 2014 Traian Basescu, and the Democratic-Liberal Party (PDL). For the 2024 European parliamentary elections, <i>PMP</i> joined forces within the United Right Alliance together with <i>USR</i> and the <i>Right Force Party</i> .	A center-right party with European - oriented objectives. Focused on: a free nation, the rule of law, efficient and trusty administration, healthy and prosperous families, justice, free economy, free press, environment, etc.	Pro-European
The Right Force Party	Founded in 2021 by the ex-president of the National Liberal Party.	A center-right party with a liberal, conservatory and Christian-democratic ideology.	Pro-European
Hungarian Democratic Union from Romania (UDMR)	Founded on December 25, 1989 . It represented the third governmental force in Romania in 2020 alongside the PNL and PSD. Since 2023 it is in opposition.	A center-right party, defending the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania, their identity and the expansion of this minority rights and territory.	Pro-European, separatist
Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (PLUS)	Founded in 2018 , merged with <i>USR</i> in 2021. In 2018 it merged with <i>USR</i> and created the <i>USR-PLUS</i> alliance to fit the social needs.	A center-right party. From November 15, 2015 it had a technocrat government that dissolved on January 4, 2017.	Pro-European
Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR)	Founded in 2019	A right/ extreme-right party. Promotes family, nation, faith and liberty. The official governing program focuses also on liberty, the rule of law, transparency, efficient governing, etc. The party intends to rebuild the national conscience, giving special attention to the Christian religion, to the traditional family, and the love for the nation.	Populist

Source: Author's table after Camera Deputatilor (1989), PSD (2024), USR (2024), AUR (2024), RDMSZ (2024), PRO Romania (2024), PNL (2024)

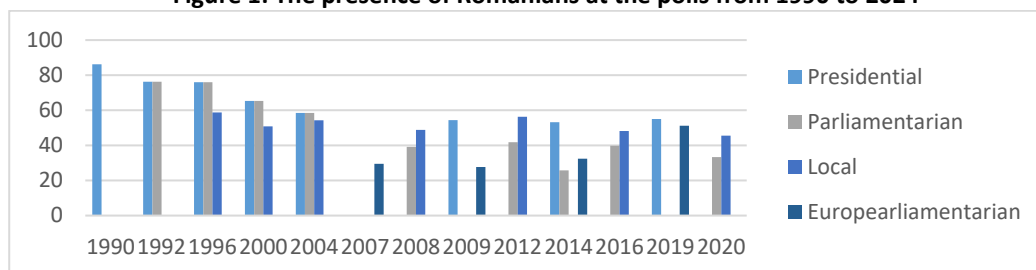
The society differentiates the parties mostly at the level of speeches, and divided them into pro-Europeans and Eurosceptics. The first ones are centered on human rights, equality, liberalism, globalization, multiculturalism and diversity, while the second are nationalist, populist, anti-globalist, and traditional.

To understand the surge of populist parties in Romania, we examine its political preferences dating back to 1990, as well as the factors that might have played a role in the emergence and strengthening of populist, nationalist, and extremist parties.

6.2 Votes share in Romania since 1990

After the Revolution, there was a noticeable eagerness for democracy within Romanian society. But during the years the Romanians' presence at the polls decreased, except when it comes to electing their representatives in the European Parliament (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The presence of Romanians at the polls from 1990 to 2024



Source: Author’s figure after Rezultate Vot (2024)

A real change in Romania is to be observed in the Europeanparliamentarian elections where the presence at the pools increased over the years. The first sign of change towards a European Romania is to be found in 1996, when the presidential elections were won by a member of the CDR¹, an alliance with a liberalist ideology, and not the PDSR², a populist party.

In 2007 Romania became a member of the EU, with all this, there are regular political movements questioning the political orientation of Romania. In 2018, for example, Romania had a Referendum for the traditional family, signalling the activism of populist groups, such as the Coalition for the Family, made up of 40 NGOs, foundations, associations and federations supporting the promotion of the traditional family (Coalitia pentru Familie, 2024). The referendum intended to modify the Romanian Constitution and define the family in a traditional way in spite of the European values and ideas encouraging the single-parent family and the women’s rights. The referendum was not validated since 78.9% of Romanian did not vote. However, of those present, 19.32% voted for amending the constitution.

So, we are wondering about the political preferences of the Romanian voters during the years. For this we follow the evolution of the votes in the locals, parliamentary, presidential and Europeanparliamentarian elections since 1990 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Parties votes share between 1990 and 2020

Year	Locals (mandates)	Parliamentarian (%)		Presidential (%)	Euro (%)
2020	2931 PNL	<i>Deputies Chamber</i>	<i>Senate</i>		
	2966 PSD	28.9% PSD	29.32% PSD		
	1771 PMP	25.18% PNL	25.58% PNL		
	1599 PPR ³	15.37% USR-PLUS	15.86% USR-PLUS		
		9.08% AUR	9.17% AUR		
2019				66.09% PNL	27% PNL
				33.91% PSD	22.36% USR-PLUS 22.5% PSD 6.44% PR
2016	2973 PNL	<i>Deputies Chamber</i>	<i>Senate</i>		
	2923 PSD	45.48% PSD	45.68% PSD		
	1869 ALDE ⁴	20.04% PNL	20.42% PNL		
	1602 PMP	8.87% USR	8.92% USR		

¹ Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR), is a political alliance built in 1991 by PNTCD, PNR, PSDR, PER, PAC and UDMR to balance the power of FSN. In 1992 the National Liberal Party-Democratic Convention (PNL-CD), National Liberal Party the Young Wing (PNL-AT) and the Ecological Federation of Romania (FER) joined the alliance (RFI Romania, 2020). Until 2000, the year of its dissolution, the CDR represented the main political force to direct Romania towards its European path.

² PDSR is a centre-left party with a socially liberal ideology. It is the predecessor of the PSD, but also the successor of the FDSN.

³ PRO Romania Party – centre-left ideology, liberalist ideas.

⁴ Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, centre party.

2014		6.19% UDMR	6.24% UDMR		
		Deputies Chamber 38.83% PSD + UNPR – PC 27.25% PNL 8.06% PDL 7.76% PMP ¹	Senate 51.07% PSD + UNPR – PC 14.86% PNL 12.83% PDL 8.94% PMP	54.43% PNL 45.57% PSD	37.6% PSD + UNPR – PC 15.01% PNL 12.23% PDL 6.82% Independent Candidates
2012	2455 – PPDD ² 2037 USL (PSD + PNL- PC) 1830 PDL 1131 PRM	<i>Deputies Chamber</i> 58.63% USL (PSD+ PNL-PC) 16.51% ARD (PDL + FC+ PNTCD) 13.99% PPDD 5.14% UDMR	<i>Senate</i> 60.10% USL (PSD + PNL - PC) 16.71% ARD (PDL + FC + PNTCD) 14.65% PPDD 5.24% UDMR		
2009				52.33% PDL 49.67% PSD	31.08% PSD+ PC 29.71% PDL 14.52% PNL 8.92% UDMR
2008	3025 PDL 2995 PSD 2874 PNL 2177 PRM	<i>Deputies Chamber</i> 33.10% PSD+PC 32.36% PDL 18.57% PNL 6.17% UDMR	<i>Senate</i> 34.16% PSD+PC 33.57% PDL 18.78% PNL 6.39% UDMR		
2007					28.82% PD 23.12% PSD 13.45% PNL 7.79% PLD ³
2004	2999 PSD 2938 PNL 2844 PD 2737 PRM	<i>Deputies Chamber</i> 36.61% PSD+PUR 31.33% D.A. PNL- PD 12.92% PRM 6.17% UDMR	<i>Senate</i> 37.13% PSD+PUR 31.77% D.A. PNL- PD 13.63% PRM 6.23% UDMR	51.23% PD 48.77% PSD	
2000	2803 PDSR 2739 APR ⁴ 2649 PD 2552 PNL	<i>Deputies Chamber</i> 36.61% PDSR+PUR+PSDR 19.48% PRM 7.03% PD 6.89% PNL	<i>Senate</i> 37.09% PDSR+PUR+PSDR 21.01% PRM 7.58% PD 7.48% PNL	66.83% PDSR 33.17% PRM ⁵	
1996	2369 PDSR 2160 CDR 268 PSDR 1307 PSM ⁶	<i>Deputies Chamber</i> 30.17% CDR 21,52% PSDR 12.93% USD ⁷ 6.64% UDMR	<i>Senate</i> 30.70% CDR 23,08% PSDR 13.16% USD 6.82% UDMR	54.41% CDR 45.59% PSDR	

¹ Popular Movement Party (PMP), centre-right ideology, conservatory social liberalism.

² People's Party- Dan Diaconescu (PPDD), left wing nationalism.

³ Liberal Democratic Party (PDL), centre-right ideology, conservatory liberalism.

⁴ The Alliance for Romania (APR), a centre-left party until 2001, and a centre-right party until its dissolution in 2002. It followed a liberal, social democratic ideology.

⁵ Great Romania Party (PRM), extreme right ideology.

⁶ Socialist Labor Party (PSM), left wing nationalism.

⁷ Union of the Democratic Party (PD) and the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR)

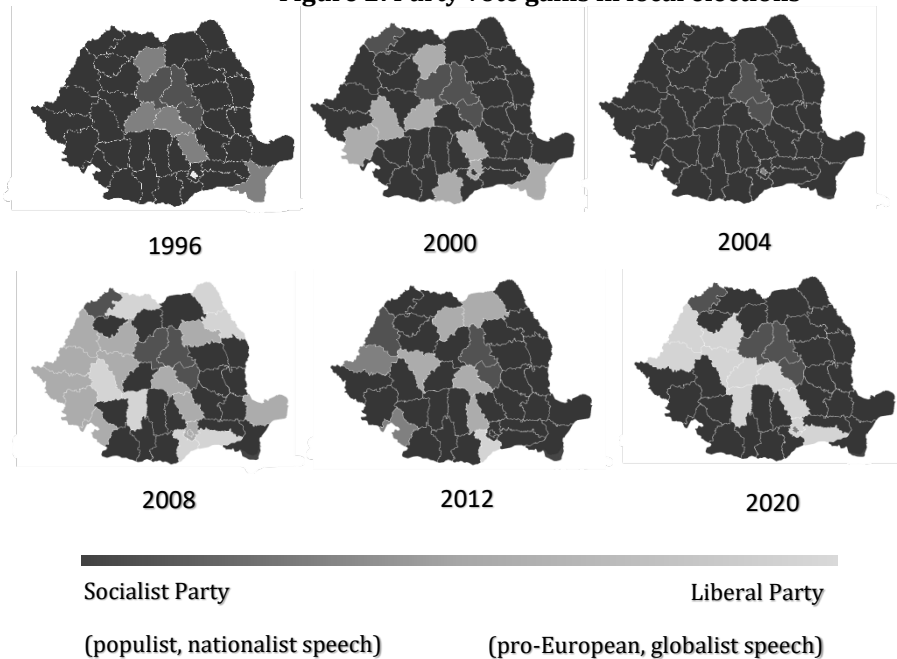
1992	<i>Deputies Chamber</i>	<i>Senate</i>	61.43% FDSN ¹	
	28.31% FDSN 10.38% FSN 20.19% CDR 8.13% PUNR	27.75% FDSN 10.17% FSN 20.05% CDR 7.73% PUNR	38.57% CDR ²	
1990			85.07% FSN ³ 10.64% PNL ⁴	

Source: Author's table after Rezultate Vot (2024)

In Table 2 we observe that despite the formation of the CDR alliance in 1991, the 1992 elections reveal a majority of nationalist parties exerting influence over both chambers of the Parliament (FDSN, FSN, and PUNR).

Another detail is that the CDR's effort to offset the influence of populist and extremist parties was successful until 1999. But the public support for CDR dropped when the government expressed its support for NATO's decision to bomb Serbia during the Kosovo crisis which raised a fear among Romanians of a conflict with their Hungarian minority. The repercussions were evident in the 2000 elections, where liberal parties saw a significant decline in votes, paving the way for the return of nationalist parties to power (See 2004 in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Party vote gains in local elections



Source: Author's figure after Rezultate Vot (2024)

In Figure 2 we can see that the Socialist Party dominated the Romanian map in the local elections since it addresses the masses and comes with social aid policies.

Then, in 2008, Romania had a populist outbreak when the PPDD party, with a nationalist ideology of the extreme left, gained the most mair mandates in the country. The results raised concerns within the political body about the future of Romania which prompted

¹ National Democratic Salvation Front (FDSN) left-wing populist party.

² Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR), a liberal party with a centre/centre-right ideology.

³ National Salvation Front (FSN), a centre-left wing populist party.

⁴ National Liberal Party (PNL), a centre-right party with a conservatory liberalism ideology.

the Liberal Party (PNL) to join forces with the Socialist Party (PSD) in 2012 to counterbalance the extreme nationalism of the PPDD.

Ideologically speaking, both PNL and PSD claim to embrace democratic values and the European project, since this is constitutionally a national purpose. But, the target audience for these parties is different, and their alliance and further cooperation caused confusion in the Romanian electorate that now have little trust (37%) or very little trust (55%) in all political parties (IRES, 2026). Given the political crisis, we focus further on other crises that may have influenced voters choice during the years.

6.3 Crises, voters' and parties reactions in Romania

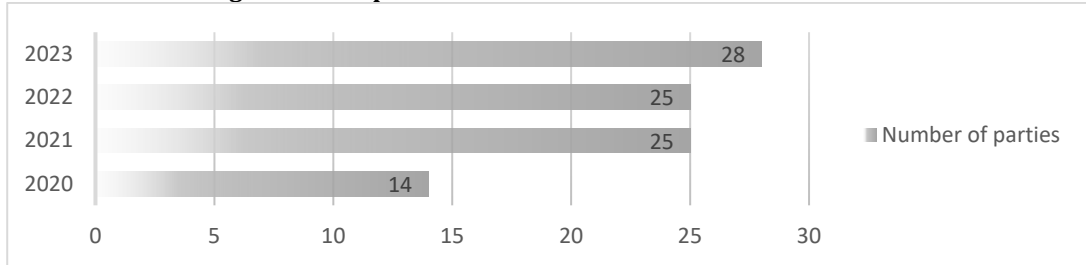
We start with the migrant crisis from 2015 which translated in an anti-immigrationist social movement of a part of the Hungarian minority. UDMR, representing the Hungarian minority in Romania, did not comment much on this subject, which is why in 2022 a new vocal party emerged, The Transylvanian Hungarian Alliance (Erdélyi Magyar Szövetség), through the merger of the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania and the Hungarian Civic Party. The leader of the new party shows his admiration for the anti-immigrationist speeches of Viktor Orbán. But he argues that his reactions are about the "illegal migration, which started in 2015, which is not in the same principles and values and rules that were established within the European Union" (Digi24, 2022).

Then, in 2017 Romania went through a political crisis. This is when the president of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), that was ruling back then, brought in the public space the concept of 'parallel state' that was blamed for all the shortcomings and problems of the Romanians and the poor governing. It referred to a group of Romanian elites to whom the rules did not apply, who governed the state from behind the scenes and which created a hole in the state budget. This idea conquered the anti-elite masses but also confused the Romanian public. During these disputes, the PSD government fall several times until 2019, when the PNL has won more votes in the European Parliament and the presidential elections, and one year later also in the local elections.

With the intention to win the masses, in 2019 the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) was founded. It is an extremist party supporting the traditional family, nation, internal affairs and religion, and with a highly populist speech in the 2020 parlamentarian elections AUR gained ~ 9% of votes in both chambers of the Parliament. This signaled the return of populism in Romania.

In other parts of the Europe everything began with the populist discourses of the European states during the migrant crisis from 2015 (Ayhan, 2024). The waves of Eurosepticism from the very heart of Europe, from the discourses of Marie Le Pen (Thiebaut Lovato, 2024), from the motivations of the Conservative Party of the United Kingdom that made Brexit possible (Curtice, 2023), from the speeches of populist governing parties from the Eastern Europe, have touched the Romanian public. This is how the more we approach 2024, the year of local, parlamentarian, presidential and Europarlamentarian elections, the more populist parties are founded. The electoral support gained by AUR in the parliamentary elections of 2020 indicated the existence of a segment of society that identifies with populist speeches. So, we examine the Bucharest Court data on new party formations between 2020 and 2024 (see Figure 3).

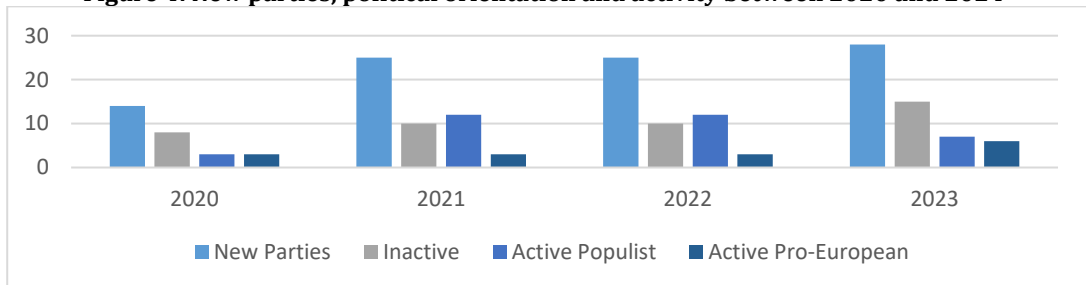
Figure 3: New parties in Romania between 2020 and 2024



Source: Author's figure after Tribunalul Bucuresti (2024)

In this period we witness a gradual increase in the number of newly founded parties. Notably, a majority of these parties exhibit a nationalist and populist orientation (see Figure 4). It is only in 2023 that more pro-European parties were founded, focused rather on ecology and sustainability than on Europeanization as a lifestyle.

Figure 4: New parties, political orientation and activity between 2020 and 2024



Source: Author's figure after Tribunalul Bucuresti (2024)

Since 2020 in Romania have been founded 34 new active populist parties, contrasting with only 15 active pro-European parties. Thus, we focus on other crises, the discourse of populist parties and society's reaction to them.

6.4 The discourse of populist parties in Romania

When analyzing the rhetoric of the populist parties in Romania we distinguish a classic speech, calling for the grace of the nation, and the well-being of all while blaming the system and the governing parties for all the shortcomings, and a concise speech, addressing specific topics raising social fears. The latter made it difficult to manage the recent crises, and triggered other crises based on fear (Gavrilov, 2022).

The classic speeches come from parties like the National Renaissance Alliance (ARN), arguing that *"Romania has no right to remain silent to the repeated attempts of the rulers to weaken the authority of the natural Romanian family and to strengthen a police state"* (ARN, 2023). In the same vein the Romanian Left National Party (PNSR) demands *"free means of transportation for pupils and students in Romania!"* (PNSR, 2024). The Social Democratic Party (PSD) adopts a similar dialogue, pleading for the welfare of the needy and comes with solutions like free transportation for the vulnerable and help for those dependent on social aid programs.

Then we have the National Movement Party (MN) arguing that we witness a foreign occupation that *"means an education from which the pages of history and culture of national identity are broken and replaced with the history of other people and a so-called sex education. ... the foreign occupation when the Băstroe channel destroys the Danube Delta, when we were imposed in the past years almost mandatory vaccination and the green certificate, when the multinationals defy Romania and outsource their profits, when the country's agricultural land is*

sold to foreigners, when the capital of foreigners suffocate the Romanian companies, when we are imposed the lowest minimum wage in Europe and our brothers are sent by to work worldwide”.

Likewise, the Sovereign Romania Movement Party (MRS) puts a special accent on *“fighting to regain the independence and sovereignty of the state policy, for the protection of the traditional family, of the Romanian producers, of a society dynamic based on integrity, professionalism and the Romanian values that created Romania”.*

Another subject approached by the populists is the national pride. For example the Alliance for the Nation Party (APP) promises *“a model of society in the spirit of national pride, respect for the homeland, family, faith, the cultural and social tradition of Romania, the Romanian model of ethnic and confessional coexistence, rejecting any act of discrimination against the Romanian people, regardless of whose side it may come from”.* In line with this, the Alliance of the Sovereign People (APS) makes a permanent call for unity, sovereignty and nation’s rights: *“we urge you to be sovereign. Justice is in your hands”* (APS, 2023).

All populist speeches evoke dissatisfaction and amplify certain fears. For example, the president of SOS Romania party constantly argues that *“Romania is nothing but a “colony” in the EU”,* that is not independent, that its territories are under threat given the Hungarian minority. Then, emphasizing the right of a nation to decide its own destiny, she argues that Romanias’ union with Moldova must have been done a long time ago regardless of NATO, EU and USA opinions (Digi 24, 2023). In the same spirit the Nation, People Together Party (NOI) assert that *“Romania behaves like a country of edge, when it actually is in the middle”* (Digi 24, 2022).

The range of populist topics expanded during the COVID - 19 crisis when the populist parties used fear to gain the public’s attention while making it hard for the authorities to manage the crisis. In line with this we have the Patriots Party (PP) saying that: *“The medical dictatorship is and will be the most dangerous virus of all time!”, “ The European Union is the dictator of Europe and Romania”, “ Stop the blackmail of Romanians with experimental serums!”* (Dinca, 2022).

Then, parties like AUR and SOS Romania make anti-vaccination campaigns. The negative impact of such activism is to be seen in the epidemics of misles in Romania, that on January 3, 2024 registered 2805 cases, and 3 deaths (National Institute of Public Health, 2024).

Authorities’ efforts to deal with the COVID-19 crisis have raised fears about the individual rights to master his own destiny. These fears were incorporated in the populist speeches and correlated with the impact of globalization on the national lifestyle and with the identity crisis. Given the circumstances, the Romanian Family Union Party (PUFR) said they will *“promote young people and fight for family rights. The party will have a pronounced nationalist tint that will position against globalist ideas”.* Similarly, the Patriots of the Romanian People Party (PPR) say *“no, to the globalist system that aims to delete the identity of people”* (PPR, 2024). Alike, the Law, Education Unity Party (LEU) argue that they *“are an alternative to the globalist current that has proposed to destroy the identity and culture of the people”* (LEU, 2024).

In the same vein, Action Party for the Welfare of Romanians (PABR) argues that *“we are witnessing the failure of multiculturalism and exacerbated intra - European centralism. The national identity and solidarity are fundamental values of our nation, values that have been severely affected in recent decades. That is why we advocate for their restoration within the nation as well as to return to identity and social patriotism”.*

In paralel we have the Erdélyi Magyar Szövetség (EMSZ) which take an atiglobalist position as well arguing that *“in today’s world, in which values are lost, in which globalization is increasingly present, the world more materialistic and self - centered, communities are facing the danger of their disintegration”* (Zakariás, 2023, apud Ghilas, 2023) pushing on the minorities’ fears of being under threat of disappearance.

In this context, some parties have linked globalization to other fears like the national pride and independency. For example the new party RoExit, argues that the *“multinationals take advantage of us. We cannot restore agriculture and production if we stay in the EU. We will have a strong economy if we stop the orders from Brussels”.*

Then, we have the Qanon Patriots Party (PPQ) calling the society to get back to the survival instincts for governing the country: *“We had presidents with higher professional preparations. Are you happy? No! Why? Because we do not look at their honest fight for survival, justice or family!”*.

The content analysis helped us identify keywords, like: family, religion, God, nation, sovereignty, globalization, values, identity, unity, patriots, truth and justice. These words are present in populist speeches although the topics adapt to crises and the problems rising social discontent and fears. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant focus was on the imposed measures and the apprehension of losing the autonomy to determine one's own fate. Then, during the war in Ukraine the focus was on national security, access to resources, unity, the violation of Romania's borders and sovereignty, stimulating the fear of war. And in between, most of the speeches address the identity crisis and the impact of globalization on social values, relying on the empathy of those dissatisfied with the impact of multinationals and globalization.

7. Discussion

The study identifies three major topics of discussion in the discourse of populist parties: change, globalization and identity crisis. All topics are approached with fear and an alarming note.

Referring to change the populist parties emphasize only the drawbacks, while the positive aspects are taken for granted. And since the normal reaction towards novelty is to approach it with caution and fear (Kahleman, 2011: 68), in the moment we are consciously reminded to fear we associate novelty with insecurity.

When discussing about globalization the populist parties overlook its impact on the economic growth, and highlight only its impact on culture, identity and the crises. They blame the identity crisis on globalization, which intensifies the effect of change, giving a feeling of "lost" even to the younger generations in search for development and personal growth (Erikson, 1994).

In the end the populists call for the closed model of social organization, without highlighting the disadvantages of such a system.

8. Conclusions

The current study addresses the escalating prevalence of populist supporters and vocal populist parties in Europe. To comprehend the phenomenon, the research focuses on the case of Romania, studying the impact of crises on the political discourse, the social action, and the interdependent relationship between the existence of populist parties and social fears.

The results show that the new European lifestyle and Globalization have caused an identity crisis in Europe, where people go through a transition from the national identity to a globalist one, which is quite difficult to grasp (Chopin, 2018).

In the same idea, the intensity of change enhanced the waves of crises in different fields. These crises reinforce the association between the new lifestyle and insecurity, which is used by populist parties to develop the social resistance to new while using the cognitive ease to make the voters believe their statements. With the help of repetition, familiarity and rhyme they grow in people the perception of relatedness and understanding, thus feeling represented.

The content analysis helped us identify in the populist speeches' keywords like: identity, globalization, nation, multiculturalism, traditional values, tradition, family and religion. In most speeches, they appeal to return to traditional values, to fight against the globalization, multinationalism and multiculturalism.

With these in mind, we propose the following series of solutions for the pro-European parties for preserving and perpetuating the current system:

1) Not to engage in populist speeches in order not to confirm the agenda of the populist parties (Eatwell, 2000, apud Muis and Immerzeel, 2017);

2) To emphasize the good aspects of the current system and to explain what it would mean for society to lose the things we take for granted;

3) To understand the problems of the current society and of those who feel represented by the populist parties, and to address their problems through governing plans.

Research Data

The research data used for this study is available at: doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25175663.v1

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THE ANATOMY OF SOCIAL MURDER: LESSONS FROM GREECE

Filippos KOURAKIS

Ph.D. Student Panteion University, Athens, Greece, Court of First Instance, Nafplion, (Greece)

E-mail: fkourakis@gmail.com

Abstract: *This essay examines the tragic death of Antonis Karyotis at Piraeus Port in Greece on September 5, 2023, delving into its significance as a reflection of broader social and political issues. It posits that Karyotis's untimely demise, epitomizes Friedrich Engels' concept of 'social murder'. Additionally, the essay employs Michel Foucault's biopolitical framework to scrutinize how power operates through the management and regulation of populations, further elucidating the complexities surrounding Karyotis's death. By contextualizing this incident within the broader societal landscape of Greece, the essay highlights the escalating racist violence and mistreatment of migrants that have intensified post-2008 economic crisis. This crisis not only exacerbated economic hardships but also fueled social tensions, leading to heightened hostility towards marginalized groups. Furthermore, the essay draws attention to the deteriorating conditions of the working class within the labor market, exacerbated by stringent economic policies implemented in response to the crisis. In conclusion, the essay underscores how Antonis Karyotis's death serves as a poignant reminder of the systemic economic and social inequalities plaguing Greek society, with the state implicated in perpetuating and exacerbating these disparities. It calls for a critical examination of power dynamics and a collective endeavor towards social justice and structural reform to address these entrenched issues.*

Keywords: Social Murder, Working Class Demise, Greece, Biopolitics, Antonis Karyotis.

1. Introduction

The tragic incident at Piraeus Port in Greece on September 5, 2023, involving the death of Antonis Karyotis, has sparked widespread anger and condemnation. Antonis, a 36-year-old man from a poor family in Crete and under psychiatric care, intended to board the Blue Horizon ferry to Crete. However, after disembarking and attempting to re-enter, he was forcefully prevented by a crew member, leading to his fall into the harbor and subsequent drowning. This essay analyzes the event within the broader context of societal and political issues in Greece, particularly regarding the treatment of the working class and marginalized groups. It argues that the Greek state's policies and practices contribute to what Friedrich Engels termed 'social murder', where violence is normalized as an institutional tactic. The essay begins by linking the event to the escalation of racist violence in Greece, especially against migrants, in the midst of the post-2008 economic crisis. The Greek state has faced criticism for its handling of migrant issues, with reports of violence against migrants and poor treatment of foreign nationals in prisons and detention centers. It then proceeds to analyze the prevalence of literal death in Greek daily life, as well as the biopolitical underpinnings of the event and the broader state of the working class. It argues that the Greek labor market has undergone significant changes, with laws allowing extended working hours and weakening workers' rights, reflecting a return to conditions described by Marx. The poor and marginalized, including prisoners, immigrants, and the working class, are often neglected or exploited under these conditions. The essay concludes by stating that the case of Antonis Karyotis highlights these broader issues of economic and social inequality, state practices, and societal attitudes toward marginalized groups in Greece.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research approach

This essay adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from sociology, political economy, and philosophy. It seeks to examine the death of Antonis Karyotis not as an isolated incident, but as a manifestation of broader societal and systemic issues within

Greece. The analysis is grounded in a qualitative examination of various sources including news reports, academic articles, and government documents.

To understand the complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors, the essay is anchored in several theoretical frameworks. First, it utilizes Engels' concept of 'social murder'. This framework provides a lens to examine how state policies and societal structures contribute to preventable deaths of the working class (and, more broadly, marginalized groups in this case). Second, the essay employs a Marxist analysis of labor. This perspective is used to explore the dynamics of the Greek labor market, especially in relation to the working class and marginalized communities, and more specifically to contextualize Antonis' death within the current downfall of labor rights in the Greek working-class sector. Third, the essay draws upon Foucault's biopolitical theory. This theoretical framework is instrumental in examining the way Greek state policies differentiate between various groups, often favoring some while leading to the systematic neglect and exploitation of others.

2.2. Data collection

Data collection involves a thorough review of primary sources, such as government records, legal documents, and first-hand reports from witnesses of the incident, as well as secondary sources, such as academic literature on Greek socio-political dynamics, news articles, and reports from human rights organizations. Also, the essay uses media analysis to examine the portrayal of the incident and its aftermath in both Greek and international media, understanding public perception and response.

2.3. Limitations

By employing a multi-theoretical and data-driven approach, the essay aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that situates this incident within the wider tapestry of contemporary Greek society's challenges and systemic issues. However, the essay acknowledges the limitations inherent in its analysis, including potential biases in source materials, the evolving nature of the incident's legal and social ramifications, and the constraints of analyzing recent events with ongoing developments.

3. The death of Antonis

On September 5, 2023, a significant incident occurred at the Piraeus port in Greece, subsequently eliciting anger and condemnation within the Greek population. This incident revolves around the tragic loss of Antonis Karyotis, a 36-year-old man, who, on the specified date, reached the Piraeus port with the intention of boarding the Blue Horizon, a ship scheduled for a voyage to the island of Crete. The man had bought a ticket and boarded the ferry, said Shipping Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis (Le Monde, 2023). For reasons that remain elusive, Antonis disembarked the vessel but later sought to re-enter. At this juncture, a crew member forcefully obstructed his reboarding attempt, pushing him into his immersion in the harbour waters. The ship continued on its way without stopping to offer assistance. A few minutes later, Antonis drowned. The official confirmation of his death was subsequently established when his body was transported to Nikaia Hospital in the proximity of Piraeus.

Greek media reports described Karyotis as originating from an impoverished family of ten in Crete, having been under psychiatric care for an extended period and sustaining himself by taking on various sporadic jobs. Karyotis's psychiatrist, as mentioned in the Kathimerini newspaper, revealed that he often travelled from Crete to Athens, as he derived a sense of comfort from being on the move. The startling incident was captured on video by several passengers¹, who subsequently shared it on social media platforms. This video rapidly gained widespread attention, igniting public indignation within Greece. Within these recordings, the

¹ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vzb9WFJNBbA&ab_channel=GFSNews .

anguished pleas of other passengers can be discerned as they repeatedly ask the crew to halt the ferry¹, only to be met with indifference.

The Piraeus coast guard's logbook documented an interaction with the boat's captain at 9:13 pm (ibid), during which the captain reported a man falling overboard but did not refer to the crew's involvement. Six minutes later, assistance reached the scene, but it was already too late. Around 9:40 pm, the Piraeus port police ordered the vessel to halt its course. The coast guard subsequently obtained statements from at least three passengers, each of whom recounted the sequence of events. Approximately by 10 pm, the vessel reversed its course toward Piraeus. Subsequently, the captain and three additional crew members, including the crew member responsible for Antonis's expulsion from the ship, were arrested by the police and were brought before the court. There, they were formally charged with homicide and complicity in murder. On September 11th, the captain and the crewmember who pushed Antonis off the ship, were put in pre-trial detention.

On Monday, September 11, the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy of Greece, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, submitted his resignation. This decision came in response to the public uproar triggered by his comments in the aftermath of the tragedy. During an appearance on the television channel Open he had stated (The Guardian, 2023) that 'there are those who mourn the victim and those who mourn the people who work to earn a wage, to live decently ... and are now accused of murder', referring to the arrested crew members.

The incident triggered spontaneous protests in several ports serviced by the *Blue Horizon*. A protester's sign characteristically read 'Let's not get used to death' (Le Monde, 2023). It is this idea of normalization of death within the Greek social and political infrastructure that I believe is worth discussing. In order to understand the political and social impact of this incident, it should be analysed in the context of four underlying structural factors that shape the political and social landscape of the contemporary Greek state. Specifically, it is argued that, by subjecting working class people to harmful and violent conditions, the Greek state commits what Friedrich Engels has called 'social murder' (Engels, [1845] 2009). Violence becomes invisible in its denial, and it is thus normalized as an institutional tactic.

4. Racialized violence amidst the post-2008 Crisis

The escalating levels of racist violence in Greece over the last fifteen years are closely tied to significant political and economic shifts (Papageorgiou, 2017). The Greek economic crisis, which followed the global recession of 2008, was unprecedented in terms of both its duration and the scale of decline among developed nations. Within the European Union, Greece was the hardest hit, enduring a prolonged and severe crisis with no parallel (Matsaganis, 2018).

Before the 2010 crisis, the Greek economy's trajectory made austerity measures seem inevitable. However, the austerity policies implemented were regressive and exacerbated the recession's impact on income distribution. A significant consequence has been the dramatic increase in unemployment among primary earners, heightening the risk of poverty. With the social safety net proving insufficient and long-term unemployment expected to remain high, the challenges faced by adults and children in households without jobs have emerged as Greece's pressing social issue (Matsaganis, 2013).

The government's response to the social ramifications of the crisis was either misguided or inadequate². Although welfare reforms led to certain improvements, most budget cuts were indiscriminate, leading to difficulties and disruptions in health and social services. The deregulation of the labor market was driven by the belief that reducing worker compensation and weakening labor institutions would boost competitiveness. However, this approach failed; while the trade balance improved mainly due to reduced imports, there was little increase in exports. Meanwhile, the situation for workers in terms of pay and conditions

¹ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp_hhYwIlg2A&ab_channel=KontraChannel.

² For all the relevant data, see Matsaganis, 2013.

has deteriorated. Although reform in public administration was essential, it was narrowly focused on reducing the public workforce rather than comprehensive modernization. The necessary sustained effort to overhaul the Greek state is yet to materialize (Matsaganis, 2013). Furthermore, substantial cuts in public spending, public employment, increased value-added tax rates, and reductions in social benefits led to a surge in poverty and ongoing social unrest, rising political tensions between the government, opposition parties, and trade unions, resulting in a highly unstable political environment.

Migration became linked with rising criminality and was perceived as a threat to the jobs of Greek citizens, also challenging notions of Greek national identity (Tsitselikis 2013). Migrants were depicted as culturally distinct and inferior, seen as less developed economically and holding non-western values deemed incompatible with Greek or European culture (Triandafyllidou & Kouki 2013). This antagonistic portrayal escalated during the economic crisis, with media and political narratives – from both mainstream and far-right parties – blaming migrants for societal problems like unemployment, economic and social exclusion, and urban disturbances (Cheliotis 2013; Triandafyllidou & Kouki 2014). Within this context, negative perceptions towards migrants grew, with a significant portion of Greek society viewing them as invaders and job competitors, making it harder for Greeks to find employment, a view which is still prevalent amongst the public (Bailey-Morley and Lowe, 2023).

Violence against migrants surged alongside the ascent of Golden Dawn. This violence manifested as physical assaults, property attacks, and verbal aggression, predominantly targeting Muslim, non-white migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Political entities and institutions justified the use of violence through three persistent discursive strategies: denying the systemic nature of anti-migrant violence, framing incidents as ‘isolated events’, and casting doubt on claims of mistreatment (Karamanidou, 2016). They also divorced violence against migrants from racism, justifying it as a response to perceived threats posed by migration. This perspective tolerated violence as a reaction to the fear and insecurities provoked by the perceived threat of the migrant Other. Simultaneously, it aligned with neoliberal governance strategies, particularly in times of crisis, by preserving in-group cohesion through the targeting of marginalized groups like migrants (Cheliotis, 2013).

As the number of migrants in Greece grew, criticism of both migrants and the government’s handling of the refugee response spread. The 2019 elections brought the centre-right New Democracy party to power, reintroducing a highly securitized narrative around migration, utilizing the lack of EU support to deflect criticism (Bailey-Morley & Lowe, 2023: 20). The government also tapped into anti-Turkish sentiment to shift blame and maintain a favorable image in the ongoing competition with Turkey.

5. Recent developments in the economy

In general, the Greek economy has shown signs of growth in recent years. The anticipated economic expansion is forecasted to be 2.3% in 2024 and 2.2% in 2025 (European Commission, 2023). However, nominal wages, adjusted for inflation, have not kept pace¹. In many cases, they have decreased due to persistent price increases. This trend is also evident in the labor market, where an increasing number of employers report challenges in recruiting staff due to worker concerns about insufficient wages. Numerous positions remain unfilled in vital sectors for the Greek economy, including food services, tourism, and construction. Simultaneously, Greek consumers are compelled to reduce their purchases of essential goods to cope with the ongoing wave of price hikes.

Greece, like many European countries, faces a housing shortage exacerbated by a surge in real estate investment, partly due to its golden visa program (Mellersh, 2023). This program, attracting foreign investors from countries such as Israel, Russia, and China, has significantly increased property purchases in Greek cities, leading to soaring rental prices. Data from the

¹ <https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/15/cost-of-living-crisis-in-greece-despite-economic-recovery>

Ministry of Migration and Asylum shows the program added nearly €1 billion to Greece's economy in early 2023 (ibid). However, high rents are displacing residents. Eurostat data reveals that Greece leads the EU in housing cost overburden rate, with a significant portion of the population spending over 40% of their income on housing, a predicament more pronounced among renters, refugees, and asylum seekers (Eurostat, 2023). The HELIOS program, designed to aid refugees, is now limited due to reduced state support, leaving many at risk of homelessness (Mellersh, 2023). Athens' recent tourism boom post-pandemic has revitalized its economy, which suffered during the economic crisis and COVID-19 lockdowns. Yet, this resurgence has a downside: the transformation of many central apartments into short-term rentals or foreign-owned properties, driving up living costs and reshaping neighborhoods traditionally inhabited by working-class and migrant communities (Gencturk, 2023). This shift, combined with the allure of Greece for Western 'digital nomads' during the pandemic, has placed additional economic pressure on local residents, aggravating the housing crisis and contributing to a decline in home ownership rates in Athens, which once ranked among the highest in Europe (ibid). Furthermore, the housing market crisis in Greece, is significantly impacting public services. Essential public servants like doctors and teachers, assigned to tourist-heavy areas like islands, struggle to find affordable housing. This predicament often forces them to resign or request transfers to less expensive regions. The absence of government intervention in Greece's real estate market, particularly the lack of regulatory measures like rent price caps or social housing development, is intensifying the housing crisis (ibid).

6. Rule of law challenges

Greece is currently contending with serious rule of law challenges (US Department of State, 2022), related to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of foreign nationals in prison and immigrant detainees, as well as racial police violence against third-country nationals. Moreover, there have been incidents and allegations of violence by government authorities directed towards migrants and asylum seekers (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2023; Pawson, 2023). Unfortunately, non-governmental and international organizations have reported government inadequacies in investigating abusive police practices and forced returns of asylum seekers and holding those responsible accountable challenges (US Department of State, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In parallel, the current government has significantly increased its recruitment of police officers, elevating the country to the fourth position in the EU concerning the ratio¹ of police officers per citizen, while foreign nationals in overcrowded Greek prisons constitute approximately 60% of the prison population². Thus, we witness the gradual displacement of the rule of law by the penal state, which employs the power of policing to punish and contain marginalized and disadvantaged populations and thus offer a form of relief to the public angst of the 'foreign enemy'.

In the following days after Antonis's murder, leaked recordings of radio conversations emerged, revealing racist attitudes among the ship's crew (The Guardian, 2023b). In one excerpt, the ship's captain is heard expressing the belief that the passenger, later identified as Greek, was a foreigner: 'I thought he didn't have a ticket [...], I thought he was black, a Pakistani... He was sitting there outside, going round and round, but he didn't show me any ticket. The only thing he told me was, 'I am going to travel'.

7. Death and its denial

¹ <https://landgeist.com/2022/12/14/police-officers-in-europe/#:~:text=We%20can%20see%20that%20southern,high%20number%20of%20police%20officers..>

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Percentage_of_prisoners_with_foreign_citizenship_in_the_reporting_country_2020-2021.png

In broad terms, Marx and Engels viewed the continuous growth of capital as inherently lethal, as the ‘accumulation of misery’ for the working class is ‘a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth’ for the capitalist class (Marx [1867] 1990, 799, quoted in Holdren, 2023). The perpetual movement of capital, motivated by the quest for greater wealth, signifies more than just a financial cycle; it serves as a constant social mechanism, which is ‘not an external cause of working-class death but rather should be understood as inherently an ongoing process of killing’ (ibid).

Death has emerged as a prevalent occurrence in Greek society. To begin with, incidents of deaths in prisons are frequent, and there is a lack of thorough investigations into the underlying causes of each fatality, even when it involves instances of individuals taking their own lives (Council of Europe, 2022: 38, 75-77). This hinders the potential to learn from these incidents and implement measures to prevent future deaths. The situation in immigration detention centers is not different. In 2021, Macky Diabate, a 44-year-old Guinean national held in Kos detention center, died of a treatable abdominal infection called peritonitis, having had sought medical attention for days but ignored. Additionally, detainees had their phones tampered with or broken to prevent documentation of their situation, affecting their ability to share legal documents with lawyers and seek advice (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Furthermore, the sinking of the fishing vessel *Adriana* on June 14, 2023, off the coast of Pylos resulted in the loss of over 600 lives. Survivors and reports suggest the vessel may have been towed by a Greek coast guard boat, which the authorities deny. Phones of survivors were confiscated without proper documentation (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Over 20 interviews with survivors, along with a review of court documents and coastguard sources, uncovered evidence of missed rescue chances and disregarded offers of aid. Survivors' testimonies indicate that Greek coastguard efforts to tow the trawler may have led to its sinking, a claim disputed by the Greek coastguard.

On a separate occasion, the 28th of February 2023 marked the occurrence of the most fatal railway catastrophe in Greek history, claiming the lives of 57 individuals. Investigations revealed that the IC62 passenger train was permitted to traverse an incorrect track, disregarding signals indicating danger due to the simultaneous presence of a freight train on the same route. Initially attributing the crash to ‘tragic human error’, the Prime Minister has subsequently expressed regret for the collision, acknowledging the potential prevention of the incident through the implementation of appropriate safety measures (The Guardian, 2023c).

The Greek state has also been involved in a series of life – threatening practices concerning immigrants. Specifically, it has been employing the practice of pushbacks, a tactic which has led to many immigrants’ lives being lost. From August 2021 to July 2023, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provided emergency medical assistance to 7,904 asylum seekers on Samos and Lesbos (MSF, 2023a). During this period, MSF documented violence and pushback practices at the Greek border. Asylum seekers described being forcibly returned to Turkey, facing violence at sea and on land. This includes being surrounded, destabilized, assaulted, threatened with firearms, and having their boats damaged (ibid). After arrival on the islands, they were intercepted, detained, and often subjected to abuse before being forcibly transferred to Turkish waters. Despite the ever-mounting body of evidence on Greek violations (ECRE, 2023), Greek authorities have failed to hold those responsible accountable, perpetuating a cycle of violence and impunity.

A notable instance is the Farmakonisi case of January 2014, where the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a landmark judgment, condemning Greek officials for failing to conduct rescue operations and for inadequacies in the ensuing investigation of the tragedy, especially how victims' testimony was treated (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The government's eternal and staunch denial of the practice of pushbacks against immigrants, from the previous government to its current successor (Solomon, 2020) is emblematic of this culture of systematic denial.

Literally, the working class's demise is associated with exposure to physical mortality due to neglect, evident in unattended medical emergencies resulting in fatalities in immigration detention. It's also seen in suicide attempts within prisons and immigration detention centers. Physical death can result from tragic state neglect, like railway and shipwreck incidents, or through careful actions such as pushbacks. It's also observed when state actors or those employed to enforce social control directly engage in violence leading to death, as seen in the incident of Antonis' demise. All these incidents of murderous situations facilitated by the Greek state crucially share the element of denial as their linking point.

In another segment broadcasted by the Greek TV channel ANT1, a different crew member can be heard advising his colleagues not to disclose what they had witnessed: 'you should always have one thing in mind: we never say what we hear and what we see', he says (The Guardian, 2023a). This strategy of rendering raw violence invisible is not coincidental or a one-time event, caused by the crew member's fear of getting caught. It is embedded in a systematic denial of violence that the Greek state employs in its course of governing those at the margins of society. Even at the suspicion that the passenger attempting to enter the ship was a foreign national (crucially, not a possible tourist consumer but a 'social waste', a 'black, a Pakistani'), untampered violence was first executed and then denied.

8. The biopolitics of killing the poor

It is worth mentioning that in 2015, a ship from the same company allowed well-known TV presenter and celebrity Eleni Menegaki to delay its departure by 40 minutes¹. The ship eventually set sail at 08:30, instead of its originally scheduled time of 07:50 in the morning. This incident, as tragically ironic as it may be, further highlights a gravely important issue: the state and its apparatuses can prioritize some lives at the expense or neglect of other lives. Foucault (1998: 138) explains that, within a biopolitical framework, '[o]ne might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death'.

Safeguarding and promoting the elite's interests often involves the exclusion or abandonment, to the point of killing, of the working class, who is portrayed as undesirable and/or threatening. As Foucault contends (2004: 256), 'killing' contains 'every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection and so on'. In other words, the defence of the population deemed worthy of protection is made possible through the rejection or abandonment of a population determined to be undesirable or a threat. 'In the biopower system', Foucault (ibid: 257) contends, 'killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race'. In Foucault's biopolitical framework, current issues are less about sovereign authority and more about managing the right to life and death as a means of societal protection. This concept moves beyond the sovereign's traditional power of deciding life or death to a more nuanced approach of enabling or denying life, emphasizing population management rather than individual focus.

Foucault also discusses the role of state racism in this context, not just as a sovereign act but as a government strategy to distribute life within a framework of value and utility (Foucault 2004: 258).. This form of racism seeks to purify the population by differentiating between lives deemed worthy or unworthy, blending various forms of power like security mechanisms and disciplinary techniques. In this context, the dynamics of neoracism reflect those in neoliberalism; while neoliberalism governs the economy indirectly through population management, neoracism directly targets specific population groups (Rasmussen, 2011: 46–7 in Koros, 2021: 248)

¹ <https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/best-of-internet/to-blue-star-perimene-ti-menegaki-40-lepta-prin-apo-xronia-kai-tora-o-kathusterimenos-epibatis-to-plirose-me-ti-zoi-tou/>.

Foucault's concept of 'killing' framed as the abandonment and exclusion of specific lives, in the pursuit of safeguarding those lives deemed worthy of protection, provides a valuable foundation for contemplating how the Greek state, along with its numerous interconnected biopolitical mechanisms, functions to eliminate those individuals considered undeserving of protection: prisoners, immigrants, sexual¹ and gender minorities, and the working class in general.

9. Killing the poor

Greek tourism plays a substantial role to the Greek economy, amounting to 20% of Greece's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Karakatsani, 2023). In stark antithesis to the idyllic image of Greece as a holiday paradise, exploitative work conditions, particularly in recent years, have become alarmingly prevalent (FRANET, 2014). It is noteworthy that, in this context, heightened levels of exploitation are currently legitimised by law. In September 2023, the Greek Parliament approved a Labor Ministry bill permitting full-time employees to take on a part-time secondary job, allowing them to work up to 13 hours a day under specific conditions (Kathimerini, 2023). This legislation also grants employers the ability to institute a six-day workweek if necessary. Additionally, within the first year of employment, an employee can be dismissed without prior notice or compensation unless otherwise agreed. The bill also introduces a probation period of up to six months, mandating employers to provide detailed work terms. Moreover, the bill criminalises occupation of workspaces during strikes, by imposing a minimum monetary penalty of 5,000 euros and a minimum six-month imprisonment term for those impeding employees from working during a strike, essentially weakening the right to strike. Portrayed as advantageous for workers (ibid), these laws, in reality, roll back labor regulations to a condition reminiscent of the period delineated by Marx more than a century ago. During that time, individual capitalists sought methods to circumvent work-hour limitations that had emerged as 'the outcome of prolonged class struggle' (Marx, [1867] 1990: 395). They achieved this by mandating that workers work a cumulative total of ten daily hours stretched over a span of fifteen hours, resulting in more time commitment from the workers without violating the law (ibid: 403). Within capitalist structures, certain individuals have their fundamental human needs overlooked. As Simon Clarke articulated (1993: 281), capitalism functions as a 'system of production in which the production of things is subordinated to the production, appropriation, and accumulation of surplus value'. This arrangement effectively separates the creation of goods from the actual necessity for those products. Consequently, human well-being is, at best, a secondary concern within the framework of capitalism.

This can be seen in both the exploitative and miserable conditions of workers in the Greek tourism industry and Antonis' death. Economic hardships have led seasonal workers in the Greek tourism industry to accept extremely deplorable conditions, like waiters in Rhodes serving customers while standing waist-deep in water². More generally, adverse working conditions, unsuitable accommodation, frequent back-to-back and night shifts, double and triple duties and undeclared work are characteristic features of the working conditions of the Greek tourism industry. As Engels had noted already in 1845 for the English working class, the Greek state 'places workers under conditions in which they cannot live – forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence'.

The Marxist notion of a relative surplus population, characterized by an excess of available labor relative to the available job opportunities, proves pertinent in establishing a connection between the exploitation of workers within the Greek tourism sector and the tragic death of Antonis. The overarching dominance of society by the pursuit of surplus value in

¹ On that, see the killing of Zack Kostopoulos, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/03/greek-court-acquits-four-police-officers-over-death-of-lgbtq-activist>.
² <https://www.keptalkinggreece.com/2023/07/03/rhodes-beach-bar-waiter-wading-water-sea/>.

capitalist systems tends to foster a sense of inhumanity and apathy towards the constituents of these societies. Furthermore, this phenomenon engenders discernible patterns over time, as the relentless drive for accumulation reinforces the inclination for individuals to instrumentalize one another, consequently giving rise to novel modes of organizing predicated on such instrumentalization. This instrumentalization extends beyond the exploitation of workers by capitalists; it encompasses a broader concept of individuals leveraging others as mere instruments to achieve their own objectives (Holdren, 2023).

As Beatrice Adler-Bolton has put it, 'under capitalism, you work, you earn a wage, and then you are entitled to the survival you can buy' (2022). Antonis, could not buy his survival, as he had not profit-making potential for the capitalist class of the Greek state. The grim and haunting picture of the crew member pushing off Antonis to the sea, is a picture of rich symbolism. Antonis is being cast into the sea as a sort of impediment to financial accumulation, as his persistence to board impedes the ship to depart and the Greek economy to run. In this juxtaposition, individuals in need are perceived as a threat to the state's potential for exponential economic growth. Similarly, 43 years ago, the Dead Kennedys sardonically sang about the request of the wealthiest to eradicate the impoverished population of America using a neutron bomb, portraying them as mere obstacles to the nation's progress¹.

This fantasy also affects the emotions of 'ordinary citizens' who may perceive people in need as consumers of valuable time, due to the establishment of a neoliberal grammar in daily life due to austerity (Kyriakopoulos, 2016: 655). A deep rooted connection is forged between the stereotype of wasteful and needy individuals and the contrast with those who profit from exploitative conditions, which harm both individuals and the environment². On account of this apotheosis of profit making over (undeserving) human lives and nature, any form of exclusion becomes a sign of indifference towards those who cannot align with the prevailing vision of success. Antonis was one of them. His death was not so much a product of the (indeed) general coarsening of attitudes toward the poor and the marginalised, but mainly an outcome of the structural shifts of the Greek political economy of the last fifteen years, which, as stated, are associated with austerity measures, racialized violence, labor market reforms, and grave rule of law challenges, all of which have facilitated social murder.

10. The Aftermath

The 'shameful event does not represent the country we want', the Prime Minister Mitsotakis said, stating in addition that the perpetrators deserve to be punished (Anadolu Ajansi, 2023). Unfortunately, and ironically, the aforementioned incident appears to align with contemporary Greece's values and priorities. Probably, the main perpetrator of the crime will get a sentence that will lead to his imprisonment for some time. So, eventually it is likely that the PM's wish for punishment will come true. However, even if it does, justice will not have been served. A state which kills the poor will never be a state of justice.

11. Conclusion

The death of Antonis Karyotis is more than a singular tragedy; it is a symptom of the profound maladies afflicting contemporary Greek society. As this essay has demonstrated, Antonis's death is emblematic of a wider systemic issue rooted in the Greek state's approach to governance, labor, and social welfare. The policies and practices that have evolved, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, reflect a state apparatus that prioritizes economic growth and stability over the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens. The normalization of what Engels termed 'social murder' is evident in the treatment of marginalized groups, including immigrants and the working class.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgpa7wEAz7I> .

2 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/2015/countries/greece#:~:text=Environment%20and%20tourism&text=Such%20tourism%20has%20also%20a,destinations%2C%20and%20overcrowding%20on%20beaches..>

The tragic incident at Piraeus Port is a stark reminder of the consequences of a society that marginalizes and neglects its vulnerable populations. Antonis, a product of the very societal structure that ultimately failed to protect him, was not just a victim of an isolated act of violence but of a broader systemic failure. The state's role in perpetuating such inequalities, through both action and inaction, raises critical questions about the ethics of governance and the responsibilities of a state towards its citizens. Furthermore, the response to Antonis's death, including the public outrage and the subsequent resignation of Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, reveals a societal recognition of these systemic issues. However, justice and change extend beyond individual accountability. They require a fundamental reevaluation and restructuring of societal priorities and state policies. As long as state policies disproportionately impact the poor and marginalized, tragedies like Antonis Karyotis's death are not mere anomalies, but rather predictable outcomes of a fundamentally flawed system. Critical criminologists must persist in their structural critique of the symbolic aspects of current penal practices, highlighting how dominant narratives about deserving/undeserving and hardworking/dangerous social classes align with and ideologically justify a system of racialized capital accumulation that fundamentally undervalues the poor and their labor (De Giorgi, 2018; 2007).

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TRANSMIGRATION OF CRIMINAL GANGS AND PROLIFERATION OF ILLICIT ACTIVITIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON SECURITY IN EAST CAMEROON

Hanse Gilbert MBENG DANG

Senior Lecturer (MC), Habilitation to Supervise Research (HDR), University of Ebolowa (Cameroon), E-mail: hansegilbert@yahoo.fr

Abstract: *This article highlights the phenomenon of cross-border crime, which is illustrated by the persistence of acute illicit trafficking across borders. Thus, illicit trafficking is seen from the outset as illegal and clandestine trade (Koffi Annan, 2000). With the cavalcade of recurrent cross-border movements along Cameroon's eastern border since the 1990s, illicit trafficking infiltrates and breaks down borders to inexorably infiltrate Cameroonian societies and infect their political, economic and cultural functioning. From then on, the perpetrators of these acts put all their intelligence to work in the service of crime and delinquent acts to create confusion and disorder in order to accumulate large advantages by operating on the fringes of the law while respecting those of their illicit universe. Also, this contribution analyses the consequences of transmigration mobilities (hostage takers, coupeurs de route, terrorist acts) on the peace and security of the eastern fringe.*

Keywords: East Cameroon, transmigration, criminal gangs, illicit activities, insecurity.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of hostage-taking for ransom has unquestionably grown in Cameroon (CNDHL, 2018: 174). This criminal activity is now prevalent in the eastern facade. Indeed, since the major global upheavals of the early 1990s, there has been an upsurge in crises in Africa in general and in the Central African sub-region in particular. Bordering Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic have been the scene of these various crises. This socio-political situation has prompted several foreign nationals and rebel gangs to penetrate Cameroon's eastern borders, taking advantage of the porous nature of the latter. East Cameroon, on the border with the Central African Republic, receives several types of cross-border migratory flows. These include seasonal, animal, forced and criminal migration. The central argument is that cross-border mobility is a source of insecurity in East Cameroon. In other words, using a systemic approach, the aim is to show that migratory flows are accompanied by serious security problems. This obliges the Cameroonian government and international and local institutions to take alternative measures to avoid the risk of deportation, the importation of Central African socio-political disputes and cross-border insecurity onto its territory. Despite all the measures taken, the flow of immigrants, refugees and criminal gangs is at the root of the proliferation of illicit trafficking, transnationalization and the systematization of violence and cross-border crime. All in all, it is clear that the various forms of mobility mentioned above have socio-political, socio-economic, environmental, diplomatic and security implications for East Cameroon. Since 1990, and even more so between 2012 and 2021, the high number of Cameroonians kidnapped and released after financial negotiations at the border between the two countries is proof enough that the phenomenon has become a lucrative business, maintained by shadowy players and sometimes with the complicity of hostages. The business is also a consequence of the many political crises in the Central African Republic, which have led to the emergence of armed gangs who scour the border towns and increase the number of kidnappings for ransom. We take a closer look at a lucrative business that continues to sow terror in the region of the rising sun.

Using a diachronic approach based on empirical documentation in the form of books, articles, press clippings and newspapers, direct and semi-directive interviews, and field observations of various actors and protagonists, this contribution shows how mobility has

transformed the eastern part of Cameroon into a space for the transnationalization of illicit activities and the systematization of violence through the mutualization of criminal organizations. It also analyses the impact of these illicit activities and the transmigration of criminal gangs on security and social cohesion in the East.

2. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons

The focus is on the factors, characteristics and modes of acquisition of small arms and light weapons, in order to highlight the real impact of their proliferation on security in East Cameroon.

2.1 Factors and characteristics of small arms and light weapons

According to the United Nations, small arms and light weapons include bladed weapons (truncheons, cutlasses or machetes) and weapons of calibers immediately below those listed in the UN Register of Conventional Arms, such as mortars of less than 100 millimeters (UN, 1999:10). Specifically, light weapons include heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, missile launchers and rocket launchers, etc., while small-calibre weapons include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. In the 2000s, it was estimated that over 900 million small arms were in circulation worldwide, of which 5 to 6% were in Central Africa, including Cameroon (Owona Alima Kisito, 2007: 213). According to the United Nations, in 1997 these weapons accounted for 10% of the world's illicit market (Diplomatie n°05, 2011: 57). What's special about the plethora of these weapons is that they are easier to operate, transport and cheap. But what explains the proliferation of such weapons?

Looking at African society, several factors are behind the exponential proliferation of weapons. Alongside historical and socio-political factors, there are institutional factors. The latter are the focus of our attention, especially since until 1990, there was little or no international legal instrument to regulate the production and marketing of conventional weapons (Njimambou Aliou, 2009: 52). Unfortunately, it was not until 1991 that the United Nations created the Register of Conventional Arms, the aim of which was to guarantee transparency in arms transfers (Dicod, 2005: 85). In practice, this provision does not translate into adequate regulation, since it does not refer to all types of weapons. The register therefore remains restrictive.

With this in mind, the AK-47¹ invaded Africa like a gust of wind, as it was not subject to rigorous coercive regulations¹³⁸. The notable absence of rigorous international standards regulating the transfer and marketing of the AK-47, and the ease with which it can be handled, facilitate the spread of this weapon around the world (Njimambou Aliyou, 2009: 56; Owona Alima Kisito, 2007). This is how it finds its way into the hands of robbers, and fuels many African civil wars through armed militias and other criminal gangs. What's more, another factor that facilitates the proliferation of these weapons is the lack of a reliable instrument for tracing and marking them (Sali, 2022: 244).

It's worth noting in passing that this glaring lack of legislation to regulate its circulation has prompted the United Nations to think about a legal framework. As indicated in the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action, the international community has begun to draw up an international instrument on these issues (ISS, 2004). In this case, a text on traceability and marking has been put in place, which indicates that tracing enables the control of the various circuits taken by the weapon, from the manufacturing plant to the final use, via intermediaries and other transfers. As far as marking is concerned, the text helps to trace the weapon in a register. However, while it is true that the UN General Assembly adopted the International Instrument on the Traceability of Small Arms and Light Weapons in December 2005, it still

¹ The AK-47 is commonly known as the Kalashnikov. It was invented in 1945 and manufactured in 1947 by General Mikhail Kalashnikov.

contains significant gaps. Traffickers take advantage of these loopholes to orchestrate insecurity. All of which makes controls difficult and encourages the rapid and easy proliferation and circulation of SALW.

In Cameroon, the law governing small arms and light weapons dates back to 1973, in the form of Decree no. 73/658 of October 22, 1973, amending the Decree of December 20, 1920 on firearms and Ordinance no. 7 of 1958 on firearms. The situation was made even more delicate by the adoption in September 1997 by the National Assembly of Law 623/PJL/AN on private security companies, whose implementing decree specifies that firearms and ammunition are weapons in the second and third categories, including revolvers, pistols and shotguns.

In order to effectively combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Cameroon, the 1973 legislative and regulatory framework needs to be reformed, especially as the existing framework was paving the way for such proliferation. Such a reform should define the contours of a national policy on the subject, which will enable statistics to be kept on the circulation of small arms and light weapons, as well as related crimes and offences (ISS, 2004).

As a result, the proliferation of these weapons is fuelling conflict zones. In these areas, a Kalashnikov is sold for around 10,000 CFA francs (Onana Mfegue, 2004), which can inevitably fall into the hands of criminals of all kinds. And the "coupeurs de routes" (road cutters) who operate in every corner of Cameroon, with a strong presence in the North and East of the country, use these weapons. They have weapons galore, as demonstrated by this Cameroon Tribune investigation: in 1999, gendarmerie units seized from "coupeurs de route" a stock of 322 weapons of war comprising 85 Kalashnikov rifles, PM7.62mm short version, 37 MAT 49 9mm machine pistols, 45 MAS 36 37.5mm rifles, 23 standard 7.62mm FALs, rocket launchers, grenade launchers and ammunition (Cameroon Tribune, n°6781, 1999: 45; *Cameroon Tribune*, n°6795, 1999, 8-9). These weapons therefore take different directions. These include: the hands of children (child soldiers), as in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998 and Rwanda in 1994; the hands of religious extremists such as Shebbabs (Somalia), Boko Haram (Nigeria), the "coupeurs de route" in Cameroon; the hands of highwaymen, as in the case of hostage-takers and Central African rebels. All things considered, if these weapons are proliferating exponentially around the world, how do these brokers get from one country to another? To answer this question, we need to explain how they are acquired.

1.2. Methods of acquiring small arms and light weapons

Studies carried out on small arms and light weapons around the world indicate several modes of acquisition. However, we focus on official and illicit acquisition methods, before presenting the various transfer techniques used by users.

From the official point of view, these are supplies made by internationally recognized governments. Thus, state acquisitions can be both legal and illegal (Owona Alima Kisito, 2007). Each state has its own regulations for acquiring weapons within its territory. African states in general, and those of Central Africa in particular, modulate and shape their legislation as they see fit. It is with this in mind that the regulations governing arms transfer controls and the laws on various subjects in this field, such as possession, arms registration, sales and so on, vary and differ from one country to another (Njimboue Aliyou, 2009: 58). In line with international standards, the state concerned buys arms in reasonable quantities to ensure its defense and security. The aim is therefore to ensure the internal security of the state. In the present case, this is not a cause for concern. However, the state may make irresponsible or "grey market" purchases (Owana Kisito Alima, 2007). These types of purchases are, in many respects, authorized by the United Nations. But they are sometimes of dubious legality because they often take unorthodox routes, since from the point of view of International Law, weapons purchased in this way are prone to certain risks. These include the significant risk of misuse, for example in the repression of populations; and the significant risk of detour to unauthorized recipients.

Even today, it is commonplace in Africa for the state to import large quantities of weapons, but ultimately lack the means to control or guard stocks. Large quantities of weapons disappear into the hands of criminal gangs, causing suffering and sometimes even death. Cases of irresponsible procurement are numerous in Africa, especially in countries affected by armed conflict (Adam, 1997: 105). There are also cases of arms purchases made by the state, but in total disregard of international legislation or restrictive measures imposed by the United Nations. In other words, black-market procurement. Examples of illegal procurement also abound on the African continent, particularly in the Central African sub-region.

On the other side of the acquisition spectrum, there's the illicit route. This is the most decried and widespread form of acquisition in all countries. "Illicit arms acquisitions are carried out by non-state structures (militias, armed gangs, rebellions, insurgents, etc.) or simply by unauthorized individuals. These traffickers and criminal gangs use various means to obtain weapons" (Owona Kisito Alima, 2007:33). Brigands use a variety of means to acquire weapons. By way of illustration, brigands launch surprise assaults on police stations, gendarmerie posts or any other place where weapons are kept (armories) and collect the entire arsenal, including ammunition (Feukouo, 2009:20).

In addition to break-ins at security posts, there are also attacks on these forces of order by brigands (Ayissi, 2001). These assaults occur either in cabs or in homes. There are also various accusations of complicity by the forces of law and order in the rental or sale of weapons. These weapons feed criminal networks. These networks can also obtain their supplies directly from local manufacturers (artisans), including production is clearly on the rise and responding perfectly to strong demand.

2. Arms transfer techniques in eastern Cameroon

Taking advantage of porous borders and geographical proximity to Eastern Cameroon, arms traffickers use a variety of means and techniques to conceal and smuggle weapons across borders. The first technique used by traffickers is decomposition and concealment (Owona Alima Kisito, 2007). As the name suggests, this technique consists of breaking down and dismantling the weapon, then handing over the components to friends or collaborators in the criminal trade who are making a journey, concealing the parts in their luggage. Once at the destination, the components are reshaped and the weapon is reconstituted and can now be used for robbery or murder (Njimboue Aliyou, 2009: 60). As for the technique of concealment, it involves hiding weapons and/or their components, as well as ammunition, in merchandise (flour or rice sacks) intended for sale to the public.

Crises and wars are undoubtedly at the root of refugee movements around the world. With the Central African crises, East Cameroon has not been spared. These refugees, considered as vulnerable people, are cared for by state and non-state institutions. However, in many respects, they are transmission belts for arms trafficking.

All things considered, civil wars in Africa always end up producing large numbers of refugees who, more often than not, if not all the time, take with them light weapons that are easy to transport and conceal because of their lightness (Nkoulak, 2009). These weapons, which, as we said earlier, escape customs and police controls, can be passed from one country to another as the refugees move. Because of the large number of refugees it hosts, Cameroon is affected by the phenomenon of arms dissemination, with regrettable consequences in East Cameroon. The eastern customs sector is constantly recording huge seizures.

2.1. Small arms and light weapons: a lever for security and social peace

The truth is that the weapon is a lever for security, insofar as it is with it that the forces of law and order and defense ensure security in the country. They are also a leaven in the sense that they sow the seeds of violent passions and insecurity when bandits use them to spread terror. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has always had a negative impact on

human security and development (UN, 1999). The widespread availability of these firearms plays a direct role in exacerbating the spiral of violence and hostilities.

As a general rule, the legal use of weapons is a means of self-defense. But its primary role has given way to other roles with criminal ends. Such is the case with its proliferation in East Cameroon, where hard-to-identify individuals are casting a shadow over the population's security. In short, the trade in small arms and light weapons is not controlled upstream, leading to transnational crime. According to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), efforts to curb the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons are hampered by the lack of effective tools within countries to determine their origin and trace their supply chains. Especially at a time when the world is experiencing waves of revolutions in certain countries, this would have multiplied once again the various networks of illicit arms trafficking (Gambo, 2014: 51).

He was a former "Séléka" rebel clandestinely in possession of his own weapon. In fact, this "Séléka" militant was a Central African refugee living in Cameroon at the Garoua-Boulai site. On December 28, 2013, he was 13 km from the town when rocket fire was fired at the "anti-balaka", which was later turned against him for false handling. Transported by his fellow soldiers, he died in the Garoua-Boulai district hospital (Gambo, 2014: 52). The proliferation of illicit weapons thus ensures sub-regional instability in general and the eastern part of Cameroon in particular. Illegal possession of weapons by Central African nationals is recurrent in the eastern part, complicating social peace as it is with these weapons that they engage in assassinations, trafficking and other activities.

2.2. The expansion of other illegal trades: a threat to societal security in East Cameroon

Illegal trafficking is not just about arms, but also about drugs and medicines, people and human bones, poaching and smuggling.

Drugs and counterfeit medicines are absolute products, i.e. prohibited by law, whereas relative products are legal. Here, we first highlight the types and circuits of drugs in circulation, and then discuss their devastating effects.

The most popular types of drug in eastern Cameroon are Indian hemp and Tramadol. In fact, Indian hemp is a substance that causes changes in states of consciousness (Oyono, 2001: 8). Known by the scientific name of "*cannabis sativa indica*", Indian hemp, according to the scientific classification of plants, belongs to the *cannabaceae* family (*Larousse Dictionary*, 2006: 337). According to the Larousse dictionary, Indian hemp or cannabis is an annual herbaceous plant of rudimentary appearance with a stem bristling with solid, rigid hairs. It can grow from 1.5 to 5 metres high, depending on climate and soil type (Gasprini, 1996).

Since 1997, in Cameroon in general and in the eastern part in particular, a hectare of cannabis has provided an income 12 times greater than a hectare of maize, and a day devoted to cannabis cultivation has generated an income 4 to 26 times greater in the context of associated cultivation (OGD, 1997). Cannabis cultivation is amplified by cross-border mobility between Cameroon and CAR. As a result, there is a growing number of entrepreneurs dealing in these illicit products.

As Jean-François Bayart has pointed out (Bayart, 1997), the illicit trade that has been rife in the towns of eastern Cameroon for decades, with its crime-inducing effects, is tending inevitably towards the "narcotization" of Cameroon's eastern fringe. The growth of this illicit trade in the eastern part of Cameroon is due to its proximity to the border areas of neighboring countries such as the Central African Republic, which are hotbeds for the production, consumption and transition of psychotropic products. Among narcotic substances, cannabis is the most popular in the Central African sub-region (Oyono, 2001: 9 and Sali, 2022: 261).

Drug trafficking in eastern Cameroon is not without consequences. The trade and illicit circulation of drugs fuel cross-border crime (CNLD, 2016). Indeed, drug trafficking has always been a factor that undermines security. With the hyper-structured organization of traffickers,

it is now becoming more than just criminal networks or organized crime. This suggests "transnational criminal systems" (Brun, 2019).

In East Cameroon, even banned drugs are a commodity for "narcotraffickers" in the economic sense. They are produced, traded and consumed by individuals of various nationalities. As a result, drug use is on the increase, taking advantage of a number of factors, including the emergence of alliances between drug traffickers and members of Central African armed groups. This factor aggravates the rebellions of criminal gangs or terrorist groups who form "grey zones" to succeed in their evil deeds (Labrousse, 1996: 3). It is therefore easy to see that most robberies are due to the consumption of drugs, specifically Indian hemp and Tramol.

2.3. Poaching: a threat to protected species and a breach of peace and security

The recurrence of illicit trafficking in ivory and pangolin scales, their intermingling and their negative impact on the protection of the wildlife environment continue to fuel debates around the world (UN, 2000).

Eradicating this phenomenon requires substantial resources and concerted action on the part of the international community, all the more so as the use of ultra-powerful weapons and sophisticated tactical equipment by certain poachers demonstrates the capabilities and financial resources of these groups and the danger they represent for the Central African sub-region and for Cameroon in particular¹. The trafficking of drugs, weapons, ivory, people and human bones in the eastern part of Cameroon has become a worrying security problem.

In eastern Cameroon, cross-border crime is the result of an upsurge in organized crime involving the trafficking of people and human bones (UNODC, 2011). This is, in fact, a global phenomenon that is constantly flaring up across state borders. According to UN and Council of Europe statistics, human trafficking generates some \$32 billion in annual sales, and is the third most widespread form of trafficking in the world, after drugs and arms (UN, 2000). This illicit and criminal traffic is characterized by inhumane practices that render borders vulnerable and violate established legal and regulatory standards.

In addition, smuggling involves the illegal transport of goods or people, particularly across borders, in order to avoid paying taxes or to bring prohibited products into a country, or conversely, to bring them out despite the ban (Verna, 1993: 2). This makes trafficking easy. Human trafficking involves the use of violence and threats to get hold of a person and torture them in order to gain possession of their organs. Progressively, the networks have taken on considerable proportions, which is why the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that at least 22,000 people were victims of inhumane treatment worldwide in 2006 (*Diplomatie* n°05,2011 : 56).

In this transnational criminal enterprise, it should be noted that 2/3 of the victims are women, as 79% of these people are victims of sexual exploitation (*Diplomatie* n°05, 2011). These criminal acts are not accidental for the perpetrators, as they are a weapon of war to terrorize the population, exploit them, humiliate them and undermine their morale, in order to defy States and the international legal framework that governs vulnerable people. This, at least, is what happens at border crossings, where vulnerable people are once again the first victims at every checkpoint. Similarly, women are sometimes robbed by smugglers and forced into prostitution in order to pay off their tormentors. They are also forced into prostitution, a repressed illicit trade that turns women into a commodity for everyone to have and do with as they please. This leaves the way wide open for transnational sexual predators (Nebeu, 2015: 34). Once these women arrive in the host cities, they are subjected to rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, domestic work and other criminal or non-criminal labor activities (Dusch, 2002).

In general, the persistent phenomenon in the eastern part of Cameroon is, far from being these human exploitations, a problem of organ trafficking. Indeed, since the socio-political

¹ Order No. 082/PM of October 21, 1999 creating a national anti-poaching committee.

upheavals in the Central African Republic, caused by the return of refugees who are difficult to capture and identify, the recurrence of information in the national media has not ceased to highlight the eminence of the phenomenon in the various localities of Eastern Cameroon. Trafficking in people, organs and human bones is becoming commonplace. This criminal but lucrative trade is favored by criminal groups.

All in all, the insecurity observed in the various localities of East Cameroon is also consubstantial with the trafficking of organs and human bones, which the media report daily in tandem with its recurrence. In these circumstances, the desecration of graves appears to be both an unseemly and degrading act. An unseemly act insofar as it does not conform to respect for the sacred, or to the rules and customs of society. It is in this sense that the sacred is trivialized. It is degrading in that it morally debases the image of the deceased. It is committed in defiance of a society's customs towards its dead. It is an illicit act dangerous to the security and social peace of individuals, insofar as it can inevitably target an individual, but also a community. The target is the healthy individual, especially children and women. The idea is to sneak up on a healthy person and kill him or her, in order to gain possession of the bones. The man is transformed into wood, burned or incinerated to obtain the bones, which are presented as charcoal. Here, the man represents the wood and the bones are the charcoal. This can involve an entire community (Esquere, 2007).

The highly prized trade in human bones is taking on considerable proportions in the eastern part of the region. Hardly a month goes by without the police and security forces catching the grave robbers. Both nationals and foreigners are involved in this disastrous business. The money made from this criminal enterprise is used to bribe, counterfeit and launder, while creating new platforms to multiply their activities. In essence, the insecurity generated by trafficking in "white gold 185" feeds on war, porous borders and the weakening of states, in the sense that these factors make trafficking transactions fertile. And, "as long as border controls are not properly enforced, as long as there is mobility of people and goods, and poverty, there will always be foreigners with multiple identities, and it will be difficult to remedy this effectively" (Sali, 2022: 283). This exacerbates cross-border banditry driven by criminal mobility, leading to hostage-taking and terrorist acts on the eastern borders.

3. Transmigration of armed gangs and the emergence of cross - border crime in the eastern fringe

The transmigration of armed gangs between Cameroon and the Central African Republic has been accompanied by a range of criminal activities (Nana Ngassam, 2014: 8) in the eastern part of Cameroon. These include transnational and cross - border crime. Transnational and cross-border crime involves fairly stable organized criminal gangs of international scope, whose actors are of various nationalities and whose crimes are perpetrated in a given state or have repercussions in one or more states adjacent to the state under attack. The latter, on the other hand, is a phenomenon encompassing a range of criminal acts whose perpetrators and repercussions extend beyond the borders of contiguous states (Mve Ebang, 2009). In essence, from the 1990s to the beginning of 2022, these mobilities have inevitably given rise to acute cross-border insecurity, manifested in acts of cross-border banditry, hostage-taking and road-cutting.

3.1. Exacerbation of hostage-taking and terrorist acts

The phenomenon of hostage-taking in the world in general, and in Central Africa in particular, has a long and varied history. Indeed, since the 1990s, the kidnapping of people by criminal gangs has become and is becoming a veritable industry with highly lucrative revenues (Fiorina, 2013: 1). Hostage-taking is the arrest and detention of an innocent person in response to the execution, by third parties, of an order or condition set by the kidnappers (Encyclopédia Universalis, 1990). She is considered a hostage, a pledge to obtain what one wants. An ancient phenomenon, hostage-taking has evolved over the course of history, taking on considerable

proportions depending on the stakes involved for criminal gangs. By the way: "In ancient times, hostage-taking was an institution designed to guarantee the execution of military or political treaties. Unlike today, hostages were not taken, but handed over" (Fiorina, 2013: 15).

So, far from being a prisoner, the hostage is a captive who must not suffer any torture or ill-treatment. They must simply be held by the hostage-takers (Saïbou Issa, 2007: 13) until further notice, at the risk of seeing them escape. The Central African crises have spawned a multitude of criminal gangs. The chances of a world of peace in the eastern part of Cameroon have dwindled with the presence of facets of crime characterized by acute hostage-taking. They are developing a culture of blackmail, ransom, moral coercion and physical violence as a means of putting pressure on families and states, with child abductions and the like. To achieve this, hostage-takers establish a relationship of terror in which they create a certain triangularity between themselves, the victims and the politicians or non-politicians, so that the latter can agree to dialogue or ransom (Sali, 2022: 285).

With political instability on the rise, and the authority of neighboring states disrupted by ever-increasing crises, the "Kidnapping business" is making a comeback. Kidnapping is a criminal industry that has gained ground in these parts of the country by Central African rebels whose only hope is terror.

In this context, kidnapping is motivated by several factors, both political and financial. In fact, it's a whole interweaving of motivations, insofar as a kidnapping can pursue both political and economic objectives. Politically, it can be seen as a challenge to the powers that be, with the aim of destabilizing them by undermining the population's well-being. This will lead to challenges to the government's management of the city. In economic terms, kidnapping helps cross-border bandits to finance the rebellion (Saïbou Isaa, 2006: 134). This is how Central African politico-criminal groups feed their coffers through kidnapping, in addition to the other criminal activities already mentioned. The targeted kidnappings of Cameroonian fellow citizens by CAR rebel factions from 2014 to 2015 are legion, and this reinforces the analysis of the prevalence of the kidnapping business. In addition to these hostage-takings, there was another type of criminality such as "coupeur de route", which was prevalent in the eastern part of Cameroon.

3.2. The proliferation of criminal groups known as "coupeurs de route" and their impact on security

The phenomenon of "coupeurs de route" in Cameroon in general, and in the northern and eastern parts in particular, goes back a long way. In fact, these criminal hordes have been present in these parts of Cameroon since colonial times, with the aim of creating panic and fear in order to control the social life of wealthy populations and gain possession of their property. During the pre-colonial period of Peuhl domination, the vastness of the Adamaoua Emirate and the continuous conquests inevitably gave rise to a culture of ransom and violent appropriation of wealth. Clearly, conflict situations, like jihad, were accompanied during this period by systematic and uncontrolled pillaging (Onana Mfegue, 2004: 144). It was against this backdrop that the development of the informal economy gradually took shape within the lamidale structures, whose chiefs sought to make their fortunes through levies, raids and captures.

The operation of road cutters rhymes almost naturally with acts of brigandage, if indeed history records that bands of robbers and pillaging soldiers scoured the roads of the Kingdom of France (Tourelle, 2006), committing acts of crime with violence and armed robbery by criminals assembled in troops on the roads. These were bandits who practiced highway robbery. They are thus called "coupeurs de route" (road cutters) because of their method of ambush on the roadway, which most often characterizes their mode of operation (Saïbou Issa, 2004). This method consisted in obstructing the road by throwing cut tree trunks onto the road, to prevent the movement of passengers.

Criminal groups have formed in the Central African Republic, and it is these groups with links to East Cameroon that are infiltrating the borders. In the localities of Paouo, Bozoum and

Bouar, there is a large base of coupeurs de route, Zarguina, which formed between 2000 and 2008. Alongside this large base, there is that of Baaba Laddé, Zarguina-Rebelle which formed from the period 2008 to 2012 in the localities of Berbari, Okabo (Chauvin and Seignobos, 2013: 121). These two groups are, in fact, a real lead in the wing for the eastern part in view of the contiguity that characterizes these bases with the border towns of Garoua-Boulai through which a plethora of these highwaymen enter. This is the case of the unidentified armed rebels in the Central African Republic who burst into the town of Garoua-Boulai on the night of October 24 to 25, 2014 in the village of Yokosiré (Sali, 2022: 296).

Their modus operandi was to block the road. Two trucks fell into the trap: one from the far north and the other from the coast (Belomo Essono, 2007). The truck from the coast was carrying mineral water for the Minusca troops in CAR. The two truck drivers and their motorcycles were taken hostage (Sali, 2022: 296). The recurrence of such a phenomenon on the roads of the East led the administrative authorities to set up a security system in the travel agencies. This consisted in providing each coach with elements of the Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (B.I.R) to accompany travellers. In other words, the situation was as complex as it gets. This lack of road safety inexorably leads to capital flight, as investors have no desire to move to insecure areas (Lamine Cissé, 2007 : 26) for any kind of investment.

All things considered, and based on the above ideas, it is reasonable to argue that the logging phenomenon has had major consequences (Lamine Cisse, 2007). In addition to the aforementioned consequences, we note the destruction of basic infrastructures, wildlife and protected species. The terror of the coupeurs de route is a heavy burden on the population. The negative actions of these criminal gangs have had a negative impact on economic exchanges, on the movement of goods and people, and consequently on social peace (Fogue Tedom, 2007: 34) in Cameroon in general and in its eastern part in particular, with attacks by Central African criminogenic groups that have formed in areas close to the eastern borders.

These groups have profoundly disrupted social peace, insofar as they have created a climate of fear among traders and the general population living in areas where coupeurs de route are active. In some mining areas of eastern Cameroon, the road cutters ambush gold miners. The landlocked nature of these gold mining sites makes it easier for the assailants to operate, as the roads and tracks used by artisanal miners serve as traps for the road cutters. The vulnerability of artisanal miners, who are obliged to possess either raw gold if they have not been able to sell it, or cash, makes them veritable prey (Jowe Yamo, 2016).

4. Conclusion

Moreover, cross-border mobility between Cameroon and its neighbors disrupted by various crises and conflicts has, in the eastern part, led to cross-border crime with multiple consequences. They have inevitably led to various forms of trafficking. Thus, taking advantage of porous borders that are difficult to secure, criminal gangs are infiltrating the eastern part of Cameroon, impacting on the peace and security of the population. It is in this context that the various illicit trades and crimes are most often carried out by criminal groups operating on different spatial scales. As we have illustrated, the latter are referred to as transnational or cross-border crime. But if you think about it, alongside highwaymen such as "coupeurs de route" and hostage-takers whose targets have been wealthy individuals, there are also acts of criminality whose effects are perceptible at political, socio-economic, physical and environmental levels. The variable-geometry criminality observed in East Cameroon is the result of the mobility or migration that has taken place in its eastern facade since the outbreak of socio-political upheavals in Central Africa.

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THE ROLE OF FAMILY DIALOGUE IN STRENGTHENING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN LIGHT OF THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT. ANALYTICAL STUDY

Khaoula NACHI¹, Kaltoum MESSAOUDI²

¹ PhD researcher, Mohamed Khider University- Biskra (Algeria)

E-mail: khaoula.nachi@univ-biskra.dz

² PhD Lecturer, Mohamed Khider University- Biskra (Algeria)

E-mail: kaltoum.messaoudi@univ-biskra.dz

Abstract: *Family dialogue plays an important role in shaping social community in light of the digital age, since the fact that family is a basic unit in building society in terms of influence and vulnerability in light of technological shift and the challenges facing family dialogue. Thus, it requires awareness and efforts for adaptation, and communication, which necessitates the need to set rules and limits to deal with it. Digital media has provided individuals and groups with spaces for communication and expanded the scope of social interaction between social actors on various social issues. Therefore, the importance of the study lies in the role of family dialogue in building strong relationships between family members and how these relationships can be used to promote community dialogue in the digital age. Therefore, the study aims to understand how family dialogue can contribute to strengthening social relations and communication in Digital society and how to use modern technology safely and responsibly in family dialogue.*

Keywords: family, family dialogue, social community, social relationship, digital environment.

1. Introduction

Family dialogue is the communicative process between family members, through which the individual within his family learns effective communication skills and expresses opinions mutually regarding those issues that are covered in the media or elsewhere, forming public opinion and the emergence of multiple visions about them within society.

Family dialogue today is witnessing a mixture of challenges and opportunities that may affect its quality within the family, that is, what is negatively reflected on the level of interactive relationships within its general framework, such as preoccupation and excessive reliance on social media that all societies witness, as this affects relationships and reinforces a type of isolation among family members. Isolation in oneself and a lack of some social skills and effectiveness of communication. Despite that, family dialogue has a role in promoting societal dialogue by building strong relationships between family members, which makes its role important in promoting societal dialogue through its impact on social relations in society in general. When the family is continuous and interactive, it contributes to building a strong and cohesive society. Therefore, family dialogue can contribute to improving the quality of social and family life and strengthening social relationships.

2. Problem of the study

Family is the basic unit in society. It is the place where values and principles are formed, and social relationships are learned, which are among the most important foundations for building a cohesive and prosperous society. The family is the first place in which the individual learns how to communicate and interact socially, as family dialogue has a role in developing communication skills and forming one's intellectual identity toward specific issues and topics. Through family dialogue based on understanding and respect, strong bonds are built between members of the same family, and this contributes to transferring these social skills to society,

meaning that it reflects positively on social relations. The problem of the research is: how does family dialogue contribute to strengthening social relations in light of the digital era?

3. The importance of the study

- The topic helps in better understanding the nature of family relationships and their impact on social relationships by analyzing the role of family dialogue. We can also
- Identify the most important factors that affect the strengthening and improvement of these social relationships.
- The study of the role of family dialogue helps in improving family relationships, as understanding how positive communication between family members can lead to building healthy relationships within the family and then being reflected in social relationships and ties, developing coping skills and building positive relationships.

4. The aims of the study

- The study aims to understand the importance of family dialogue in building and strengthening social relationships by analyzing how it affects improving communication and social interaction.
- It aims to determine the role of family dialogue in establishing the principles and foundations of respect and trust among family members, strengthening it in social relations, and developing dialogue skills and strategies that enhance family dialogue.
- Educating society about the importance of family dialogue in how it improves family and community life.

5. Procedural concepts

5.1 Family

Due to the importance of the family within the social structure, scholars have defined it in many fields and specializations. Sanaa Khouli defines it as “the first natural and social environment for the individual, and it is based on terms that are acceptable to the collective mind” (Khouli, 1979: 34). The family indicates that the environment determines the actions and behaviors of its members, as it is what adds to the characteristics of society.

Ahmed Zaki Badawi defines family as “it is the first social unit that aims to preserve the cause of the human species. It is based on the requirements accepted by the collective mind and the rules decided by the various societies. The family system is considered the nucleus of society” (Badawi, 1983: 152).

Family is that social framework and the first institution to prepare the individual’s life and determine his pattern of behavior. It prepares the individual to integrate into social life and to carry out his roles within those standards and laws that customarily prevail in society.

Mohamad Atef Ghaith said “is a regular social and biological group consisting of a man and a woman with a regular bond between them consisting of a man and a woman who are related by marriage and have children among them. The most important functions that this group performs is to satisfy emotional needs and create the appropriate social and cultural climate for the care and upbringing of children” (Atef: 176).

Mossa Sarhan defines it as “that vessel within which the child’s personality is formed collectively and individually, and it is that functional unit consisting of a wife, husband, and children, linked by blood ties and common goals” (Al-Khashab: 43)

It is clear from the above that the family is the environment in which the child’s personality develops personally and socially. It is the first environment that the child encounters, interacts with, and acquires the most important principles of his personality so that it gives him the characteristics and qualities that make him a member of society.

5.2 Family dialogue

Family dialogue is a process of communication-based on understanding that occurs between family members, through which ideas and opinions are exchanged, aiming to build healthy and strong relationships between family members. It is also considered an important method and tool for solving problems, dealing with them, and confronting the challenges facing the family, which helps strengthen social relationships.

Family dialogue is “interaction between members of the same family through discussion and talk about everything related to family affairs, including goals, components, obstacles, and solutions are developed for them, by exchanging collective ideas and opinions on several axes, which leads to creating familiarity and communication” (Moneim, 2016)

Dialogue is also defined as “interaction between members of the same family through discussion about everything related to family affairs, including goals, components, and problems, to be resolved. This is done through the exchange of collective ideas and opinions on several axes, which leads to an atmosphere of familiarity and communication.” (Hessa, 2010: 67).

5.3. Social relations

Social relationships are links and interactions that exist between members of society, as they include all interactions and communications that individuals carry out with each other within the workplace, or society in general. Social relationships are considered essential for humans, in addition to helping them communicate, interact, and build relationships. It plays an important role in shaping an individual’s identity.

Social relations are defined as one of the “patterns of social behavior,” which is the interaction between individuals or groups, in which conditions of spatial separation between them appear more clearly than temporal succession, and stillness appears more clearly than movement, and the state of a relatively long-term social relationship is called a social relationship (Zaki 1993: 394).

Social relationships arise between individuals as a result of their interaction on certain topics, as they are of great importance in shaping public opinion, such that “it is not possible to imagine anybody or institution moving on its path successfully unless it strives to organize its social relationship” (Hadi, 2016:159).

Therefore, social relationships play an important role in shaping an individual’s identity, enhancing his social affiliation to his community, and also contributing to the development of his personality through interaction with other people and the exchange of ideas and experiences.

5.4 Community dialogue

Community dialogue is an interactive process based on communication and exchange between community members, to contribute to building relationships, which includes effective participation as it contributes to solving problems and achieving positive change in society. It is also based on differences and dealing with and adapting to them.

It means “any negotiation, consultation, or any other type of interaction within society, undertaken by all or some of society’s groups, to formulate recommendations and make decisions that achieve the interest of the society in question. In its broader sense, covers topics of any nature, but it aims to focus on topics related to society, such as the economy, education, health, working conditions, and other matters that affect society as a whole” (Sharara, 2016: 19).

Community dialogue is a pattern of behavior, a tool for organizing social relations, and a mechanism for exchanging ideologies on specific topics through communication between all actors within society, from decision- makers and representatives of authority to other societal institutions, which aims to instill a culture of participation and acquire social skills with the aim of social cohesion. Building positive relationships and community development. “Dialogue

matures ideas and decisions, deepens, purifies of any deviation, stagnation, or impurities that attach to them, and moves the mind towards creativity, renewal, and liberation” (Al-Hazzani, 1437p).

5.6 Digital environment

The lives of individuals and communities are greatly affected by the digital environment, as it gives them access to all their needs. It provides them with access to information and helps them carry out work and tasks faster and efficiently. The digital environment enables the individual to interact and communicate with others.

The digital environment consists of digital elements and factors that affect the lives of individuals, as it includes various means of modern technology such as computers, software, the Internet, and social networking sites, as well as e-commerce and artificial intelligence, which has brought about a major information revolution in the life of the individual and other digital technologies. In other words, the digital environment is “a result of various technological applications in institutions, and human interaction and the extent of his acceptance of modern technological changes” (Lahawati Atika, 2014: 49).

However, the digital environment also faces challenges and a range of risks such as privacy and digital security issues. The increasing reliance on technology and its impact has been reflected in the individual’s life in various areas of life, as it has affected various social relationships and family ties. Today, it has become important to educate individuals and train them on using technology safely, ensuring the protection of personal data and privacy, and providing equal opportunities for everyone to benefit from and make positive use of social media.

6. The social importance of family dialogue within society

“Dialogue is an important means of developing society and changing for the better. Dialogue leads to intellectual openness, and there is no doubt that this helps create stronger opportunities for communication in a world in which relationships are intertwined, and interests are linked, and it has become assumed, or even impossible, for one part of the universe to be isolated from the other. Accepting the other and intellectual openness to him is necessary for coexistence” (Al-Faifi, 2010: 09)

Family dialogue is considered a first test for individuals in developing dialogue skills through interaction with family members and then society. Through communication and to listening in order to understand others. These social skills can help the individual participate in community dialogues and contribute to finding solutions to social issues.

Family dialogue contributes to building social relationships through open communication between actors with respect, trust and understanding. These positive principles and values are reflected in community dialogues and thus enhance social relationships with others through effective participation in social life through discussion and dialogue within the family environment. The importance of participating in various social and political issues and solving social problems lies in making the individual an effective element in society contributing to the decision-making process and forming public opinion on issues of community building.

In general, “dialogue preserves order, as it strengthens the spirit of community and cooperation among individuals, eliminates selfishness and excessive self-love, and spreads the spirit of familiarity and love, which leads to cooperation and the preservation of order” (Fadat, 2004: 51).

Family dialogue works to strengthen social ties. Family is solely responsible for developing communication and dialogue skills and teaching the basic mechanisms and principles of dialogue through the process of socialization, which forms in the individual the methods and laws of dialogue, and these behaviors and methods appear through social interaction and public relations in society.

Based on what was mentioned, family dialogue is of great importance within the social structure by strengthening social relations through the social integration of individuals within society. When dialogue is available in a healthy family environment in which individuals learn how to deal with opinions and viewpoints and accept differences in ideas, it is necessary that these positive values are reflected in community dialogue, as the social importance of family dialogue lies in.

7. The culture of family dialogue and its role in strengthening social relations

Family dialogue is based on “behavioral and verbal interaction and communication between family members, which seeks to achieve a goal, which is a sign of family maturity and indicates a belief in the culture of dialogue” (Ratiba & Bouchool, 2020: 5).

Family dialogue has a culture that includes a set of principles and values that are later reflected in social relations, thus enhancing communication and interaction, whether between family members or members of society.

Considering that the family is responsible for the individual’s behavior and building his social personality so that, he becomes a social individual and an active element within his society, the family must activate the culture of dialogue through.

7.1 Understanding and communication

The process of communication between parents and children, especially during the process of socialization, makes the individual’s style open to accepting and respecting opinions ideas and different points of view. The style of understanding, communication, and searching for points of intellectual sharing and consensus through social interaction is a must in strengthening social relations. Proper communication and understanding may give the individual the freedom to express his thoughts and viewpoints without authority and tyranny, to remove the barriers of fear and dread. This is due to the process of proper upbringing, which in turn is reflected in the family and then social relationships that the individual shows in his various social situations.

7.2 Respect

Respect is the basis of all relationships, whether on the family or community level. The individual must learn how to respect the opinions of others, accept viewpoints on certain topics, and accept discussion in a manner far from fanaticism. This principle must be acquired by the individual through his family. Socialization must establish the principle of respect during dialogue and acceptance of the other’s opinion within or outside the family environment because every individual within society has a cultural and intellectual background that distinguishes him from others, and therefore this difference and the diversity of individual differences must be respected, because each has its own style of speaking and its own way of dialogue. The aim of build positive relationships and peaceful coexistence within society in order to maintain stability and security. The respect that exists within the family towards the diversity of these cultures and accepting them as subcultures reflects positively on society, and this may be a positive point for social change and the development of social dialogue. improving family life in particular and community life in general.

7.3 Good listening

Focus and good listening are among the basic principles for establishing a positive dialogue within the family, as the family must accustom its members to listening while talking. Getting used to this principle within the family may be transferred by the individual to society as a positive value by respecting others and not interrupting them, as we are witnessing during this period the absence of... Respect between people in light of the loss of the value of polite dialogue, and therefore there must be flexibility in family dialogue.

Family is the only one responsible for consolidating this value in its members, so that family dialogue then has an effective role in the value of its members, to reflect positively on the level of interactive relationships, such as sharing ideas and solutions collectively, and avoiding offensive and emotional criticism that makes the dialogue lose its importance, which makes social relations unstable between people. Individuals, in addition to learning the method of dialogue and practicing it in social life, is one of the most important factors that achieve harmony and understanding between members of society and create an environment conducive to the stability of relationships.

7.4 Building social identity

Family dialogue helps in strengthening social relations by building social identity within the family environment. The family is a place and field for social interaction. It transmits social values from generation to generation through dialogue and consolidates them, thus exchanging ideas and experiences. Individuals can learn to exchange different cultures, customs, and languages through Effective dialogue, interaction and continuous communication, as this contributes to the formation of social identity as a result of positive family dialogue within the family, which is later reflected in the relationships of individuals in their social environment.

The role of the family in building the individual's identity and social relationships cannot be denied, despite the challenges it suffers today that almost undermine its functions in the era of social and cultural changes. Family dialogue has an important role in developing these relationships through values and defining the social relationships that would make the individual an effective and contributing element. In developing his community through his dialogues through social affiliation.

In order to strengthen social relations within society, the family must activate a culture of dialogue within its family environment through the process of socialization. Among the factors that reduced the process of family dialogue is the spread of modern media and communication, which led to the weakening of family ties through negative consumption of them by individuals. The necessity of activating the culture of dialogue and making the family aware by developing its awareness of the importance of the culture of dialogue and that it has an important role in strengthening social relations by reflecting its sound principles on societal dialogue is necessary today, as it would preserve the stability and development of society and develop the human resource.

8. Developing family dialogue strategies to support social relationships

The challenges that family faces today, especially in light of the digital environment, are among the greatest challenges, as the media has affected the methods, forms and quality of family dialogue. This change has touched the basic building block of society. This digital change has had both positive and negative repercussions. Therefore, it has become necessary to develop and enhance skills and strategies for family dialogue with the aim of building positive relationships and developing the social spirit.

The family entity represents the basic unit in society. The more sound the family relations are between its members, the more it is reflected outside the family and the positive interaction outside society. However, society today lives in light of the changes and influences of modern media, especially at the level of the network of social relations, especially as the family is witnessing a decline in its role in the process of Socialization in accordance with the variables and values of modern society, as the media has become a new partner for the individual through virtual relationships, as the pattern of interactions between members of the same family has changed, not to mention society. Modern media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it develops and enables the spirit of social communication without spatial and temporal restrictions, and on the other hand, it makes society suffer from the tearing of the

social fabric and the disintegration of the network of social relationships inside and outside the family.

What the family is suffering today from a decrease in the frequency of communication between individuals and a decrease in the volume and frequency of interaction between individuals is due to a number of reasons, the most prominent of which is the impact of technology on the network of social relations, which has created a crisis of communication within society and the family alike, and accordingly, strategies for dialogue must be developed. Families in the digital age, including:

- Determine the time allocated for dialogue to protect individuals from digital distraction, and focus on building family relationships away from social isolation, isolation, and isolation within oneself. Where “isolation, autism, or the user with a computer is considered one of the most important issues affecting societies and the most controversial topics among experts and researchers in the use of Internet sites as a result of the absorption that characterizes them in using these sites and switching between them” (Hamid, 2001: 211)
- Paying attention to direct and effective communication through clear expression and mutual respect. Family, through the process of raising the individual, must encourage its children to communicate, dialogue, and talk about their inclinations and problems directly without compensating them with virtual relationships through social networking sites, as the lack of family dialogue leads to an imbalance. In the network of family relationships, and from there it is reflected in the individual in his social relationships within society because the lack of these communication skills affects the building of his social personality.
- Taking advantage of technology to enhance dialogue, as we cannot deny the importance, positivity, and impact of media and communication on the individual and improving his relationships and social interaction, because today these media have been imposed on the individual. It is necessary to coexist with it and benefit from it in positive ways. “At the present time, it is difficult for us to separate the two sides of the relationship in order to overcome the problems that the individual and society face in the future because there is an overlap between technology and the culture of individuals and societal elements” (Mulkiya, 2019: 114). Through this, it is evident that there is a connection between the individual’s needs and the level of income technology. The individual must improve its use and allocate time for it so that this does not affect the aspect of his relationships and communication skills.
- Educating society about the importance of family dialogue; That is, increasing awareness of its importance in strengthening social relations and improving the quality of family and community life. If family dialogue is sound, society may be sound, and if dialogue within the family environment is weak, the network of social relations will disintegrate, given that the family is the basic unit for building a society, so family dialogue matures the areas of social relations.

Based on what was mentioned above, effective family dialogue skills are essential for improving family relationships. In general, applying these strategies in the digital age can enhance social relationships and contribute to social interaction to achieve development. In light of this, the family must have an active role in society and reflect their various values and social skills for achieving progress and social development.

9. Obstacles and challenges of family dialogue and their repercussions on social relations

Family dialogue is considered a behavior, a practice, and an indispensable human need within social life, as the family is considered the only one responsible for normalizing the individual with the sound principles and values of effective dialogue. Despite the importance of the family’s role in developing social relations, it can have a negative role in family dialogue,

which reflects negatively on the various social relations networks. We try to summarize them as follows:

- **The overuse of media and communication:** (Constant preoccupation and constant dependence on social networking sites hinder dialogue and communication. The lack of realistic face-to-face communication leads to weak family cohesion, and thus these means affect the development of the individual's communication skills, whether in their family environment or abroad.
- **Lack of communication and understanding:** If family is not encouraged within the environment and develops the spirit of communication and interaction among its members, this can affect social relations and lead to the disintegration of the social fabric consisting of the network of interactions and relationships and the distancing of individuals from each other.
- **Mistreatment and domestic violence:** Sometimes family is a source of mistreatment, cruelty, neglect, weak communication links between its members, and the absence of a culture of dialogue. Therefore, these reasons affect the level and quality of relationships, as it is necessary to “spread the culture of dialogue, which is achieved through education, education, awareness, and enculturation.” Because they all represent the mechanisms, methods and techniques of dialogue through which we address problems and resolve disputes in sound ways and positive means (Nabhan, 2008: 58).

These reasons lead to adverse results that affect the individual's life, disorder and weakness of his personality, making him an introverted element withdrawn into himself, making him an isolated member from social relations and the field of interaction and building relationships within his society. These reasons create a crisis of communication and communication within the family and are reflected in his behaviors that appear in his attitudes.

- **Lack of respect and listening:** The lack of family dialogue leads to conflicts and tensions in relationships within the family. Like other systems, it was affected by a number of changes that affected its pattern and the pattern of social relationships. The introduction of technological devices affected the communicative relationships between individuals, especially between parents and children. “The role of the family in developing the methods of dialogue among its children is a pivotal and fundamental role that should not be ignored or underestimated. This is because the family, including it, has the ability to guide, adjust, and advise, and it can train the child in calm dialogue, dialogue with others, and get used to the methods of etiquette. Dialogue and its behaviors” (Al-Ashi, 2016: 4).
- **Cultural differences and social values:** today families live in a state of cultural changes and multi-valued societies, as these challenges lead to a change in the pattern of family relationships and social ties due to the cultural overlap that we live in today, which has become a mixture that combines the values of authenticity and modernity, which has made the family today suffer from some kind of conflicts. At the level of relations, especially in the field of dialogue about the modern value system, it today faces these challenges by understanding and finding an optimal way to dialogue, deal with these differences and accept these cultural diversities.
- In order to overcome these obstacles and negatives and their impact on social relations in general, we must focus on developing dialogue and communication skills, not excessive use of means of communication, and allocate time for family dialogue, support and attention. Thus, this leads to a decrease in stress and improves the quality of family relations, building social relations and accepting cultural differences and viewpoints. Different in different social situations.

10. Conclusion

In light of the above, we point out that family is in dire need, more than ever, to highlight its role through family dialogue and its importance in building and strengthening social relations, which has become an absolute necessity that must be activated and developed in the

face of the challenges and changes facing this social institution. In light of this era, which faces a group of dynamic variables, especially the widespread spread of media and communication, which had a significant impact on the group of family ties and social relationships, as this culture had an impact on the level of the individual's behavior in his various social situations.

Therefore, family dialogue based on sound rules and principles plays an important role in building strong and sustainable relationships between family members, and then translating them into specific social behaviors and situations. It shows the person's style and communication skills through his interactions. Despite the challenges that family dialogue faces in this era Digital technology has caused a kind of crisis in family communication and its lack, but this can be overcome by employing this technology and its various means in a positive way, which gives the individual a positive value that makes him an effective element in making decisions and directing public opinion in common interests among actors within society. In addition to social integration into societal dialogues, which made him an individual open to different opinions, cultures, and political orientations. Today, we do not deny its importance in facilitating the individual's life and connecting him to his social environment through the process of social interaction regarding the issues of the community, building a network of social relationships, creating a kind of freedom of expression, and building a social personality.

Family dialogue has an essential role in the cohesion of community unity and the stability of relationships through its social importance and its development from various societal institutions. Today, the family must be aware of the extent of the impact of dialogue and its method on public relations in society through social interaction and the individual's behavior in promoting social integration, dealing with respect, and solving social problems. In constructive ways to contribute to the development and development of society, as well as the development of the human resource.

11. Study results and recommendations

- Rational use of technology and social networking sites, as a family must control their use and determine times for using them, as misuse of them creates a gap in communication and interaction, whether inside or outside the family.
- Spreading the culture of family dialogue among various groups and practicing it within the family and social environment, as this helps in the development and development of society and consolidates the culture of dialogue through the process of socialization.
- Activating the role of the social worker in the field of family and social relations to protect the family from fragmentation in the midst of the challenges and changes it is suffering today that have affected various fields of social interaction.
- Strengthening ethical rules in how to use technology.
- Educating the family about the importance of dialogue within the family environment because it has repercussions and influence on its members in their various social situations and interactions.
- The family must pay attention to its role and function in the field of building relationships due to the absence of dialogue in the recent period of time due to the spread of means of communication and information, which has led to the weakening of social ties and family relations.

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THE IMPACT OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PHENOMENON OF DIVORCE IN ALGERIAN SOCIETY

Henen OULHI

Lecturer, PhD. University of Souk Ahras (Algeria)

E-mail : h.oulhi@univ-soukahras.dz

Abstract: *This study aims to explore the impact of social media on the phenomenon of divorce within Algerian society. The study's sample, consisting of 89 individuals, comprised social media users. The researcher employed a descriptive analytical methodology and used questionnaires as the primary tool for data collection. To address the research questions, the researcher utilized simple frequency tables, compound frequency tables, graphical representations, reliability coefficients, one-way ANOVA, T-tests, chi-square tests, and concordance coefficients. The findings revealed that social media significantly influences the phenomenon of divorce. Among the key recommendations of the study were: the instillation of virtuous values within the community; encouraging the productive use of free time in developing talents and engaging in sports; and raising family awareness about the dangers and negative impacts of continuous use of modern communication methods, which could lead to family breakdown and divorce.*

Keywords: Social media, divorce, Algerian Society, media literacy, family relationships.

1. Introduction

In recent times, social media has experienced a substantial spread, emerging as the predominant medium that commands influence across all societies. Its users have burgeoned into the billions, marking its substantial impact, particularly within societies and Arab families, in profound and alarming ways. This is attributed to its countless engaging tactics, appealing to a wide spectrum of followers from various professions and walks of life. This dual nature serves to enhance individual culture and promote positive values while, conversely, facilitating the spread of detrimental behaviors. These negative influences have led to increased violence, crime, and the disintegration of numerous Arab families, significantly altering the perspectives of Arab youth. (Sami, 2000: 35) Social media has enabled global connectivity through diverse technological platforms. Particularly notable is the advent of social media platforms that have revolutionized communication from physical to virtual realms, rendering individuals as simultaneously producers, transmitters, and recipients. These platforms have created an electronic network ecosystem allowing users to engage, share images, videos, etc. Among these users are couples who utilize these platforms for communication among themselves, friends, and family, sharing daily updates. Consequently, social media has a pronounced effect on marital relationships within society. While some use it for constructive dialogue and engagement, others exploit it for creating inappropriate relationships that can lead to familial discord and disintegration. The dynamics of family relationships stand as a crucial element influenced by societal changes. The nature of these relationships has evolved, differing significantly from past eras due to contemporary challenges and the pressure to conform, impacting the family unit deeply.

In our examination of the widespread use of social media, it's clear that these platforms have become inseparable from our societal lives. In fact, the engagement with these sites often escalates to a point that could be described as addictive. Unquestionably, social media holds a significant, dual-edged role in influencing both the positive and negative aspects of families, peoples, and entire nations. The influence of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram is vast, affecting all areas of modern societal life, reaching into the core of family units, which are fundamental to societal structure. These platforms have been instrumental in shaping individuals' perceptions, cultural understandings, and value systems, including those values

related to social behavior and family relations. However, there's been a noticeable decline in these traditional roles, with the internet now facilitating family communication patterns, dominating the once warm familial atmosphere. Social media sites effectively "steal" conversations from family members, as everyone is engrossed in their screens, incessantly messaging and forming new relationships outside the familial sphere. This dynamic has significantly widened the gap between parents and children, as well as between spouses. To understand the effects of these platforms on marital relationships, to the extent of contributing to divorce, the primary question arises: How significantly does the use of social media contribute to the proliferation of divorce within Algerian society?

1.1. Research questions

The study seeks to explore:

- What drives individuals to engage with social media platforms?
- What effects do social media platforms have on family dynamics?
- How significantly does social media use influence marital relationships, specifically divorce?
- What recommendations could mitigate the divorce rates attributed to social media usage?

1.2. Research hypotheses

- A statistically significant correlation exists at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance between individuals' motivations and their social media usage .
- A statistically significant relationship is present at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance between social media use and family relationships.
- There is a statistically significant association at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance between social media usage and marital relationships (divorce).
- Statistically significant differences are observed at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level in the surveyed individuals' perceptions of social media's impact on divorce within the Algerian society, based on variables such as age, gender, monthly income, education level, and marital status.

1.3. Variable definitions

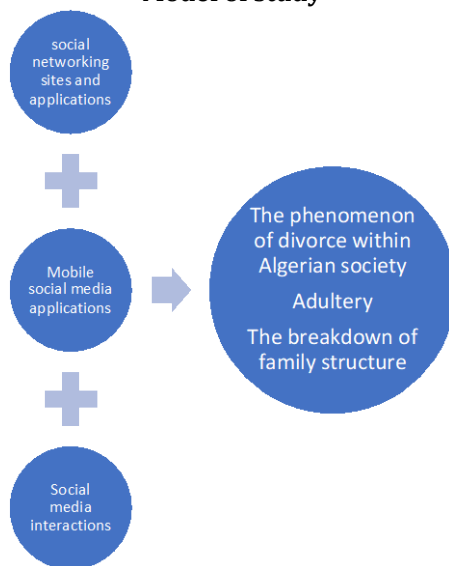
1.3.1. Independent variable: Social media platforms.

- Internet-based social networking sites and applications, including: "Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, chat rooms, email, blogs", and TikTok.
- Mobile social media applications like: "WhatsApp, Viber, IMO".
- Social media interactions facilitated by TV and radio programs that enable phone interactions, enhancing the understanding of social networking.

1.3.2. Dependent variable: The phenomenon of divorce within Algerian society.

- Family dynamics
- Marital relations
- Adultery
- The breakdown of family structure

Model of study



Source: Developed by the researcher

2. Exploring theoretical frameworks underlying the study

2.1. Impacts of social media platforms

Social media platforms wield a significant array of impacts, both adverse and beneficial. Here's an outline of some of their key positive and negative influences:

2.1.1. Positive influences

Narrowing Global Distances: Social media platforms have marked a technological breakthrough, enabling not only the visual connection with distant family members but also facilitating remote business meetings and the completion of tasks that previously seemed challenging.

Acquiring Knowledge and Building Friendships: These platforms offer extensive resources and tools for gaining knowledge from around the globe. They also foster the ability to create friendships worldwide, broadening individuals' social networks.

Rekindling Old Friendships: For those who believed their connections with past friends were lost, social media provides a powerful means to reestablish these relationships. It offers a pathway to reconnect with long-lost friends, proving that some bonds withstand the test of time.

2.1.2. Adverse impacts of social media platforms

The influence of social media on family dynamics and individual behavior encompasses various detrimental aspects, highlighted below:

- **Erosion of family bonds:** The structure of the Arab family has experienced a decline, with a shift towards individualism among members and diminished familial interactions. This has exacerbated relations within the family unit, including between spouses and among parents and children, partially attributed to prolonged engagement with television and computer games, alongside exposure to harmful content that adversely affects individual behavior within the family context.

- **Communication gap between spouses:** A noticeable trend among couples within Arab families is the preoccupation with personal devices, whether mobile phones or computers,

leading to a significant communication gap. This focus on personal digital worlds detracts from the time available for discussing family issues and children's needs, contributing to family disintegration and a lack of awareness about potential threats to the family due to insufficient dialogue and problem-solving efforts. (Gabriel et al., 2002: 43-44)

- **Rise of consumer culture among families:** The widespread use of modern communication technologies has fostered a consumer culture, particularly evident among the youth, who aspire to possess beyond their families' financial means. The desire to continually upgrade mobile devices to newer models with advanced features, largely to maintain social media engagement, is encouraged by major mobile companies releasing new, technologically superior devices periodically. This pursuit places a significant strain on the financial resources of Arab families, potentially leading to economic difficulties that could threaten the family's stability as a whole.

2.2. The Impact of social media on spousal relationships

The family serves as the core of reciprocal social interactions, with each member fulfilling specific roles and responsibilities aimed at addressing the collective social, psychological, and economic needs. Social media and smart devices can sometimes become substitutes for fulfilling needs unmet by one partner in the relationship. This dynamic can lead to increased emotional distance, escalating conflicts, and adversely affecting the family environment. Such a scenario undermines children's feelings of stability and psychological safety. The irrational use of smart devices within the household poses a threat to the integrity of close family ties, particularly when a family member excessively engages with the internet. This overuse can breed suspicion between spouses, especially in light of accessible social vices and unethical websites, potentially leading to acts of marital infidelity. Furthermore, this situation might provoke one spouse to monitor the other's online activities, driven by feelings of mistrust, disregard, neglect, or the overall cooling of mutual affection. (Jafar, 2017: 159-176).

3. Research methodology

This segment outlines the methodological framework of the research, detailing the chosen research approach, the statistical techniques applied for data processing, the identification of the research population and sample, the development of the research instruments, and the validation and reliability verification processes, organized as follows:

3.1. Study approach and classification

This section is divided into two key areas: the research methodology and the research variables. Here is an explanation of each:

3.1.1. Type of study

The study is descriptive, aiming to delineate the properties of either a community or a sample, or the interrelations among observed phenomena, situations, and events as noted by the researcher. The goal is to deepen understanding and gauge how variables inherently contribute to outcomes, offering insights about a sample or community that elucidate key relationships to broaden our understanding and address the questions posited at the research's onset (Bruce, 2010: 120) through responses derived from the study tool. Moreover, analytical statistics were employed to deduce outcomes related to differences in the average responses of the study sample participants based on the study's variables.

3.1.2. **Research approach:** This study adopted a survey methodology with the objective of examining the degree of social media's influence on the divorce rate among the Algerian populace.

3.2. Study population and its sample

- The study's population targets the general public within the People's Democratic Republic.
- The sample was chosen through a random selection method due to the lack of an established framework for the study's population, comprising 89 social media users aged 18 years and older.

3.3. Procedures for conducting the research

This section encompasses the following key procedures:

3.3.1. **Data collection instrument:** The researcher utilized an electronic survey as the primary tool for data gathering from respondents. The survey comprised several questions designed to thoroughly explore the different themes of the research.

3.3.2. **Collection of field data:** The researcher undertook the task of field data collection over the months of September and November 2022. This involved distributing an electronic questionnaire among the study participants via various social media channels, with Facebook and Instagram being particularly chosen due to their high prevalence among the Algerian population segments.

3.4. Determining the reliability coefficient of the research instrument

The reliability coefficient of the study tool was calculated using the split-half method, and the overall reliability of the study tool was found to be (0.750). This coefficient is considered acceptable and suitable for the purposes of the study. (Gavard et. al., 2012: 153).

4. Results

4.1. Questions testing results

Table 1: Illustrates the motivations for individual engagement with social media platforms

Traditional Media Usage (TV, radio, newspapers)							
	Very Little	Little	Moderate	A lot	Very Much	Total	Mean
Frequency	12	21	43	8	5	89	2,697
Rate	13,3	23,3	47,8	8,9	5,6	100,0	
(Social Media Usage (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook)							
Frequency	2	1	18	33	35	89	4,101
Rate	2,2	1,1	20,0	36,7	38,9	100,0	
Hours Spent on social media							
Frequency	2	2	34	27	24	89	3,775
Rate	2,2	2,2	37,8	30,0	26,7	100,0	
Influence by social media							
Frequency	7	14	37	22	9	89	3,135
Rate	7,8	15,6	41,1	24,4	10,0	100,0	

Source : Developed by the researcher

From the previous table, we can observe that:

The statement "Use of social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook)" ranks first with an average approval rating of 4.101.

The statement "Extent of hours spent using social media platforms" ranks second with an average approval rating of 3.775.

The statement "I am influenced by social media platforms" is in the third position with an average approval rating of 3.135.

The statement "Use of traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers)" ranks fourth with an average approval rating of 2.697

Table 2: Showing who uses social media more

	Men	Women	Do Not Know	Total	Mean
Frequency	17	41	31	89	2,157
Rate	18,9	45,6	34,4	100,0	

Source: Developed by the researcher

From the data in the previous table, it's apparent that women have a higher rate of using social media for obtaining information about issues and events, with 45.6% of the study sample agreeing that women use social media more. Meanwhile, 34.4% of the study sample are uncertain who uses these sites more, and the smallest percentage belongs to men, who are perceived to rely on them at a rate of 18.9% according to the study sample's opinion.

Table 3: The Purpose of using social media sites

For entertainment and to pass the time					
	Yes	No	Total	Mean	Level
Frequency	65	24	89	1,270	Very low
Rate	72,2	26,7	100,0		
To keep up with news					
Frequency	61	28	89	1,315	Very low
Rate	67,8	31,1	100,0		
To meet new people					
Frequency	9	80	89	1,899	Low
Rate	10,0	88,9	100,0		
To communicate with family and friends					
Frequency	39	50	89	1,562	Very low
Rate	43,3	55,6	100,0		
To express my opinions more freely than in reality					
Frequency	22	67	89	1,753	Very low
Rate	24,4	74,4	100,0		
To establish romantic relationships					
Frequency	2	87	89	1,978	Low
Rate	2,2	96,7	100,0		

Source: Developed by the researcher

The data from the table indicate that the calculated mean scores for the purposes of using social media ranged from 1.270 to 1.978, with the goal associated with establishing romantic relationships receiving the highest mean score, albeit considered low, at 1.978. Following this was the objective of meeting new people, which held the second position with a low mean score of 1.899. Expressing one's opinion more freely than in real life was third with a very low mean score of 1.753. The goals associated with communicating with family and friends, and staying updated with news, had very low mean scores as well, ranking fourth and fifth, respectively. The purpose of entertainment and leisure time utilization was at the bottom, with a mean score of 1.270.

These results are consistent with the findings of Khadija Laour and Kenza Bouhenni (2018-2019) on the impact of social media use on marital relationships, as concluded from a field study on a sample of newly married couples in Jijel province, which showed that most couples use social media primarily to keep up with the latest news.

Additionally, these findings align with the research conducted by Sakina Mahmoud Al-Tahami (2022), which examined the influence of these platforms on family relationships. According to the study, 34.1% of participants used these sites to learn about and follow current

events worldwide, while 22.7% used them for social interaction, and 20.5% for entertainment and leisure purposes.

Table 4: Types of topics that capture your interest on social media sites

	Frequency	% Rate	Mean	Rank	Level
Social Issues	38	42,2	3,831	1	High
Sports-Related	15	16,7		2	
Entertainment-Related	13	14,4		3	
Religious Topics	12	13,3		4	
Science-Related	7	7,8		5	
Political Topics	3	3,3		6	
Economic Topics	1	1,1		7	
Emotional Topics	0	0		8	
Total	89	100,0		-	

Source: Developed by the researcher

The data from Table (4) shows that the frequency of topics of interest on social media ranged from 38 to 0. The social topics were the most popular, achieving a high percentage of 42.2%. Sports topics were next, with a percentage of 16.7%, placing second. Entertainment topics were in third place with 14.4%, which is close to the percentage for religious topics at 13.3%. Scientific, political, and economic topics had similar percentages, ranking fifth, sixth, and seventh respectively. Emotional topics were at the bottom, with a percentage of 0%. All these percentages resulted in a high mean score of 3.831.

Table 5: The effect of social media usage on family relationships average magnitude

The use of social media leads to the neglect of social relationships with family and friends								
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Level
Frequency	1	6	11	35	36	89	4,112	Very high
Rate	1,1	6,7	12,2	38,9	40,0	100,0		
Social media has a negative influence on the thoughts and behavior of individuals								
Frequency	2	5	17	44	21	89	3,865	High
Rate	2,2	5,6	18,9	48,9	23,3	100,0		
Social media addiction leads to alienation from actual reality								
Frequency	1	2	5	38	43	89	4,348	Very high
Rate	1,1	2,2	5,6	42,2	47,8	100,0		
Social media negatively affects family cohesion								
Frequency	1	4	11	42	31	89	4,101	Very high
Rate	1,1	4,4	12,2	46,7	34,4	100,0		
Social media influenced the family responsibilities of spouses								
Frequency		11	14	38	26	89	3,888	High
Rate		12,2	15,6	42,2	28,9	100,0		
Social media had a more negative effect on couples								
Frequency	1	6	13	40	29	89	4,011	Very high
Rate	1,1	6,7	14,4	44,4	32,2	100,0		
The lives of couples have become subject to comparison with others on social media, such as celebrities, friends, and through advertisements								
Frequency		4	15	31	39	89	4,180	Very high
Rate		4,4	16,7	34,4	43,3	100,0		
Social media sites have become the primary effective means of communication between individuals, replacing face-to-face interactions								
Frequency	2	2	6	43	36	89	4,225	Very high
Rate	2,2	2,2	6,7	47,8	40,0	100,0		

Source: Developed by the researcher

From the previous table, we can observe the following:

- The statement "Addiction to social media leads to a detachment from actual reality" holds the highest average agreement score at 4.348, placing it in the first rank.
- The statement "Social media sites have become the effective medium for communication among individuals, replacing actual face-to-face interactions" is in the second rank with an average agreement score of 4.225.
- The statement "Couples' lives have become subject to comparison with others on social media, including celebrities, friends, and ads" is in the third rank with an average agreement score of 4.180.
- The statement "Social media negatively affects family bonds" is in the fourth rank with an average agreement score of 4.101.
- The statement "Use of social media causes neglect of social relations with family and friends" is in the fifth rank with an average agreement score of 4.112.
- The statement "Social media has had a more negative impact on the relationships of couples and friends" is in the sixth rank with an average agreement score of 4.011.
- The statement "Social media has impacted the familial responsibilities of spouses" is in the seventh rank with an average agreement score of 3.888.
- The statement "Social media negatively influences the thoughts and behaviors of individuals" is in the eighth rank with an average agreement score of 3.865.

These findings are in line with the study by Khadija Laouer, Kenza Bouhenni (2018-2019), which explored the impact of social media use on marital relations and found negative consequences on marital relationships. Moreover, these findings correspond with the study by Nie and Erbing (2009), titled "Social Media Sites and Society," which indicated that increased use of social media decreases a person's ability to engage in social interactions with family and friends.

Additionally, the results concur with the research conducted by Mustafa Sahari and Kheireddine Bouhada (2021), which investigated the impact of social media on family relations and found that social media adversely affects family ties. This is exemplified by the shift away from family discussions and exchange of ideas towards social media platforms, particularly Facebook, which has become the prevalent space for such exchanges, thereby diminishing the family's role in providing guidance and advice.

Table 6: The reason for one spouse's frequent use of social media sites

	Frequency	Rate	Mean	Level
Seeking emotional connection due to failure of the marital relationship	19	21,1	1,787	Very Low
Pressures of work and home	49	54,4	1,449	Very Low
Due to loneliness and the partners being (occupied (emotional gap	42	46,7	1,528	Very Low
Being influenced by the content on social media (celebrities, actors, ads)	38	42,2	1,573	Very Low
Because of the work environment	18	20,0	1,798	Low
Curiosity	4	4,4	1,955	Low

Source : Developed by the researcher

The data from Table (6) shows that the average scores for the reasons behind one spouse's frequent use of social media ranged from 1.955 to 1.449. The highest reason was curiosity, which had a low average score of 1.955. Following that was the reason associated with the work environment, ranking second with a low average score of 1.899. The search for emotional connections due to a failed marital relationship ranked third with a very low average score of 1.787. The reasons for being influenced by social media content (celebrities, actors, advertisements...), and due to the loneliness and busy schedules of the spouses (emotional

void), came in with very low, closely ranked average scores, placing fourth and fifth. The reason of work and home pressures came last with an average score of 1.449.

These findings are consistent with Abir Hassan's (2016) study titled "The New Dimensions in Online Marital Infidelity and Its Potential Risks to the Egyptian Family, and a Proposed Role to Mitigate It from the Group Work Method Perspective". The study's findings indicated that 100% of the surveyed subjects believe that the global spread of immorality through the promotion of the "adultery project" amongst populations and the globalization of prostitution on the internet, along with a wife's neglect of her husband and her preoccupation with home and parenting duties, and the deceit by pornographic sites propagated by the enemies of the state to covertly undermine values and morals, disintegrate the family structure, create moral chaos, cause boredom with the wife and emotional detachment, leading to a decline in marital satisfaction, weakening of the religious moral compass, and consequently a diminished fear of God, are among the most significant reasons for a husband's infidelity on the internet.

Table 7: The effect of social media use on the marital relationship

Social media plays an effective role in increasing the rates of divorce								
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Level
Frequency	1	5	20	42	21	89	3,865	High
Rate	1,1	5,6	22,2	46,7	23,3	100,0		
Social media has contributed to the proliferation of lying and infidelity among spouses								
Frequency	1	6	15	37	30	89	4,000	High
Rate	1,1	6,7	16,7	41,1	33,3	100,0		
Social media has led to a lack of real communication between spouses								
Frequency	2	8	16	35	28	89	3,888	High
Rate	2,2	8,9	17,8	38,9	31,1	100,0		
Social media has played a role in decreasing the cultural level of the community								
Frequency	4	15	31	20	19	89	3,393	Medium
Rate	4,4	16,7	34,4	22,2	21,1	100,0		
Spouses around you are influenced by social media								
Frequency	2	7	36	29	15	89	3,539	High
Rate	2,2	7,8	40,0	32,2	16,7	100,0		
Addiction to social media and traditional media may be a cause of divorce								
Frequency	1	6	29	37	16	89	3,685	High
Rate	1,1	6,7	32,2	41,1	17,8	100,0		
Social media is linked to an increase in divorce and family issues at the present time								
Frequency	2	5	16	43	23	89	3,899	High
Rate	2,2	5,6	17,8	47,8	25,6	100,0		
Traditional media is linked to an increase in the phenomenon of divorce and family issues at the present time								
Frequency	6	27	26	19	11	89	3,022	Medium
Rate	6,7	30,0	28,9	21,1	12,2	100,0		

Source : Developed by the researcher

"Social media websites have facilitated the spread of lying and betrayal among spouses" ranks first, with an average agreement level of 4.000.

"The prevalence of social media is closely related to the current increase in divorce rates and family conflicts" follows closely behind, with an average agreement level of 3.899.

"The popularity of social media leads to a reduction in real interactions between spouses" ranks third, with an average agreement level of 3.888.

"Social media plays a significant role in increasing divorce rates" is in fourth place, with an average agreement level of 3.865.

"Dependence on social media and traditional media could be a key factor leading to divorce" is fifth, with an average agreement level of 3.685.

"Respondents indicate that their partners are negatively impacted by social media" ranks sixth, with an average agreement level of 3.539.

"Social media plays a role in lowering societal cultural literacy" ranks seventh, with an average agreement level of 3.393.

"Traditional media is related to the increase in divorce rates and family problems today," ranks eighth, with an average agreement level of 3.022.

These conclusions align with the research of Sekina Mahmoud Tahami (2022), which focused on the impact of these platforms and networks on family relations. It was found that 28.4% of respondents believed that using these platforms led to distancing from family members, and 14.8% of participants stated they did not spend time sitting down to listen to personal issues of family members.

These findings are also supported by the study of Mustafa Sahari and Kher Eldin Bouhadda (2021), which investigated the impact of social media on family relations—based on a field study of a family sample in the Medea province of Algeria from January to June 2021. The study revealed the substantial negative impact of social media on family interactions, primarily manifested in the reduction of family conversations, which was once a prominent feature in Medea families, and an increase in family conflicts in Algeria, especially the significant rise in divorce rates. According to the 2018 report by the Algerian Ministry of Solidarity and Family, there was a significant increase in divorce cases in 2017, reaching 8,000 cases, many of which were rooted in the use of social media, particularly Facebook.

Table 8: Predominance in initiating divorce

	Frequency	Rate	Mean	Level
Male	30	33,3	1,944	Low
Female	34	37,8		
Undecided	25	27,8		
Total	89	100,0		

Source : Developed by the researcher

The preceding table's data reveals that women exhibit a higher propensity to initiate divorce, with 37.8% of the study's respondents concurring with this finding, closely followed by men, who constitute 33.3% of the sample. The category 'Undecided' garnered the least percentage, at 27.8%, based on the viewpoints of the study's participants.

This data corroborates the study conducted by Tony Docan-Morgan & Carol A. Docan in (2007), which delved into the ramifications of infidelity, deemed among the most severe repercussions associated with Internet use. According to their findings, the severity attributed to women engaged in/targeted by online infidelity surpasses that associated with men.

Table 9: Mechanisms most negatively influencing divorce

	Frequency	Rate	Mean	Level
Social Networking Sites (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok...)	82	91,1	1,157	Very Low
Conventional Media (Television, Radio...)	0	0		
Uncertain	7	7,8		
Total	89	100,0		

Source: Developed by the researcher

According to the data from the table above, the influence of social media (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok...) on divorce is significantly high, with 91.1% of study participants

agreeing, while traditional media (TV, radio...) had zero impact. The remainder of the sample indicated 'Don't Know,' accounting for 7.8% of the study participants' perspectives.

These findings correlate with Helmy Sari's study (2005), titled "Internet Culture and its Role in Social Communication." The study concluded that the intense engagement with social media platforms is the leading cause of psychological and social isolation, which, in turn, is significantly associated with symptoms of enduring anxiety, frustration, and stress.

Table 10: Recommended Measures to Diminish Divorce Rates Attributable to Social Media

	Frequency	Rate	Mean	Level
Fostering Intellectual Consciousness	61	67,8	1,315	Very high
Embracing Etiquettes of Social Discourse	28	31,1	1,685	Very Low
Optimizing Social Media Engagement	38	42,2	1,573	Very Low
Elevating the Sanctity of Matrimony	38	42,2	1,573	Very Low
Pursuing Hobbies and the Arts	7	7,8	1,921	Low
Augmenting Religious Convictions	13	14,4	1,854	Low

Source : Developed by the researcher

From the data presented in the table 10, the following observations can be made:

- "Participation in Hobbies and the Arts" leads the rankings, achieving an average agreement score of 1.921.
- "Reinforcing Religious Foundations" holds the second position, with an average agreement score of 1.854.
- "Observing Etiquette in Social Conversations" stands in the third place, with an average agreement score of 1.685.
- "Elevating the Sacredness of Marriage" is placed fourth, sharing an average agreement score of 1.573 with the next statement.
- "Mindful Usage of Social Media Platforms" also occupies the fourth rank, with an average agreement score of 1.573.
- "Cultivating Intellectual Enlightenment" is in the fifth slot, marked by an average agreement score of 1.315.

These outcomes correspond with the findings of Ahlam Matalqa and Raeqa Ali Al Omari's (2018) research, which sought to understand social media's impact on family relations as perceived by students at Yarmouk University, through various lenses. Consequently, the researchers suggested setting up educational workshops and seminars for collegiate youth to underscore the constructive use of social media, guiding students in choosing content congruent with the principles of our Islamic faith, its moral values, and the cultural norms of our Muslim communities, while also highlighting the platforms' adverse consequences.

4.2. Hypotheses Testing Results

Primary Hypothesis: *There exists a statistically significant link, at an $\alpha= 0.05$ level of significance, between the motivations of individuals and their social media usage.*

Table 11: showcases the relationship between individuals' motivations and their social media usage.

		Social Media Utilization (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook)
Motives behind individuals' engagement with social media Pearson	Pearson correlation	,506**
	sig	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	
	Value	1,135
	sig	,000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source : Developed by the researcher

From the analysis, a clear positive link is observed between the motives driving individuals towards social media platforms and their active usage, with the Pearson correlation coefficient registering at (0.506**) and the Contingency coefficient at (1.135), both at a significance level of (.000). This indicates that an increase in individuals' motives for engaging with social media platforms leads to a heightened usage of these networks (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook).

Based on these insights, the primary hypothesis that posits a relationship exists between individuals' motives and their social media usage stands validated.

Second Hypothesis: *A notable statistical link exists at the $\alpha= 0.05$ level, highlighting the connection between social media usage and its negative repercussions on marital relations.*

Table 12: Investigating the connection between social media usage and its negative repercussions on marital relations.

		Adverse Effects of Social Media on Couples
Axis Two: The role of social media usage on familial dynamics	Pearson correlation	,707**
	sig	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	
	Value	1,337
	sig	,000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source : Developed by the researcher

It becomes apparent from table () that there exists a statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage and its negative implications on marital dynamics (.707**), with a contingency coefficient figure of (1.337) at a significance level of (.000). This suggests that the more social media is utilized, the greater its negative effects on marital connections are observed.

Reflecting on these outcomes, it is plausible to affirm the second hypothesis which posits a linkage between social media usage and its adverse implications on marital connections.

Third Hypothesis: *A meaningful statistical relationship is observed at the $\alpha= 0.05$ level of significance between engaging with social media platforms and the incidence of divorce.*

Table 13: explores the linkage between engagement on social media platforms and the prevalence of divorce.

		Social media is a critical factor in the escalation of divorce occurrences
Effect of social media utilization on the marital connection	Pearson correlation	,735**
	sig	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	
	Value	1,539
	sig	,000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source : Developed by the researcher

According to Table (13), there exists a statistically significant and robust positive correlation between social media engagement and the occurrence of divorces (.735**), with the contingency coefficient standing at (1,337) at a significance level of (.000). This signifies that an uptick in social media usage correlates with an increased rate of divorces.

Reflecting on these outcomes, the third hypothesis, which suggests a correlation between social media engagement and the divorce phenomenon, is corroborated.

Fourth Hypothesis: *There are significant statistical discrepancies at the $\alpha= 0.05$ level concerning the participants' perceived impact of social media usage on divorce rates in Algerian society, based on variables such as age, gender, monthly income, educational attainment, and social status.*

Table 14: T-test for Independent Samples on the Gender Variable's Effect Gender

Gender	Frequency	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-value	Degrees of Freedom	Sig
Male	30	45,8667	5,88823	,225	87	,822
Female	59	45,5932	5,16326			

Source : Developed by the researcher

The analysis reveals no statistically significant correlation between gender and the influence of social media use on the incidence of divorce, as the significance level (.822) surpasses the threshold of ($\alpha=0.05$), indicating a lack of association between these factors.

Table 15: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the Impact of Variables (Age, Monthly Income, Educational Attainment, Marital Status)

		Frequency	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	Sig
Age	18to 28 years	35	45,5429	4,76101	1,152	,319
	29to 39 years	39	45,9744	5,61711		
	40to 50 years	13	45,0769	5,42312		
	Over 50 years	2	46,5000	14,84924		
	Total	89	45,6854	5,38642		
monthly income	Below 18000	34	45,8824	4,40911	,859	,648
	19000-29000	8	52,2500	2,86606		
	30000-40000	17	46,6471	5,51068		
	41000-51000	12	42,0000	5,76825		
	Above 52000	18	43,9444	4,98789		
	Total	89	45,6854	5,38642		
	Primary	1	57,0000	.	1,677	,054

educational level	Middle School	2	47,5000	,70711		
	High Schoo	2	50,0000	5,65685		
	College	47	45,4043	5,49173		
	Postgraduate	37	45,4054	5,15029		
	Total	89	45,6854	5,38642		
marital status	Single	55	45,5818	5,15569	1,378	,157
	Married	32	46,1250	5,65543		
	Divorced	2	41,5000	9,19239		
	Total	89	45,6854	5,38642		

Source : Developed by the researcher

The analysis reveals that:

There are no statistically significant individual differences relating to age and the influence of social media on divorce rates.

There are no discernible individual differences linked to monthly income levels and the effect of social media on occurrences of divorce.

No significant individual differences are noted with regard to educational attainment and the impact of social media on divorce rates.

There are no significant individual variations associated with marital status and the effect of social media on the incidence of divorce.

Reflecting on this data, the fourth hypothesis, which argues for significant statistical differences at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level in the responses regarding the effect of social media usage on divorce rates in the Algerian community across variables such as age, gender, income level, education, and marital status, must be rejected.

5. Discussion of Results

The study yielded several key findings:

- The diversity of social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook) has catered to varying tastes, making social media one of the most significant influencers in attracting audiences and shaping their directions.

- There's a growing reliance and dependence on various social media platforms for communication, news following, or e-commerce, highlighting their importance in our daily lives.

- Social media significantly impacts many aspects of our lives, changing people's lifestyle patterns as this progression continues. With the increasing dependence on the internet, the use of social media platforms has become an essential part of daily communication and information reception for many around the world.

- The reliance on traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) has decreased due to its alignment with contemporary trends. It's predicted that print journalism may become extinct in the coming years, especially with the advancement of new generations and the domination of new media.

- Women's usage rate of social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram) is notably high, with a relative variance in the extent of use for each site.

- The primary objectives of using social media include establishing romantic relationships, which ranked first, followed by meeting new people. Other goals such as expressing opinions more freely than in reality, connecting with family and friends, staying informed with news, entertainment, and spending leisure time, indicate the significant role of social media as new, impactful, and widely spread communication means.

- Social topics dominate the types of content that interest individuals on social media, ranking first, followed by sports topics in second place, and entertainment topics in third. Religious topics came next, with scientific, political, and economic topics ranking before last, and emotional topics in the last position.

• The most significant negative impacts of social media on family relationships include:

- Addiction to social media leading to detachment from reality.
- Social media becoming the main form of communication between individuals, replacing real-life interactions.
- Couples comparing their lives to those of others on social media, including celebrities, friends, and advertisements.
- Social media negatively affecting family bonds.
- Social media use leading to neglect of social relationships with family and friends.
- Social media affecting the family duties of spouses.
- Social media having a negative impact on individuals' thoughts and behaviors.

• The main reasons one of the spouses turns to social media extensively include curiosity, work environment, seeking romantic relationships due to marital relationship failure, being influenced by the content on social media (celebrities, actors, advertisements), the emotional void due to the spouses being busy, and work and home pressures.

• The most significant negative impacts of social media use on marital relationships are:

- Social media contributing to the spread of lying and infidelity among spouses.
 - Social media being linked to an increase in divorce and family problems currently.
 - Social media causing a lack of real communication between spouses.
 - Social media playing an effective role in increasing divorce rates.
 - Couples being influenced by what is displayed on social media.
 - Social media contributing to lowering the cultural level of society.
- Women are more likely to initiate divorce, surpassing men in their capacity to make the decision to separate.

• Social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok) have created a rift in the relationship between spouses, leading to family disintegration and divorce. The internet has created new virtual families, providing each spouse with their real world at home and a virtual world outside.

• The study suggests a set of proposals to address the phenomenon of divorce caused by social media, notably including:

- Practicing social dialogue etiquette, reducing social media usage, and opening personal communication channels between spouses.

- Encouraging real-life communication over online interactions and striving to understand each other beyond virtual representations. Women, in particular, are advised not to focus solely on the idealized lives depicted in Instagram stories, which often represent a fantasy rather than reality. This is especially crucial as many influencers, including married ones, go through difficult phases of depression and divorce, negatively impacting their image among followers.

- Rational use of social media, selecting only content that is beneficial for personal growth and development, such as acquiring new skills or languages, and avoiding unethical content that could negatively affect future behaviors. Social media should be approached as a tool for improvement, with users having control over what they consume, rather than being dominated by it.

- Implementing monitoring on social media accounts, especially requiring documentation for account creation, to encourage responsible behavior.

- Engaging in hobbies and crafts to divert attention from potential controversies and occupy time productively through activities like reading, theater, cinema, sculpting, drawing, etc.

- Using social media to spread marital culture, awareness, and religious teachings to enhance dialogue and understanding between spouses, steering clear of extremism and trivial content.
- Building shared personal convictions between spouses to avoid harmful comparisons and foster a solid foundation for the relationship.
- Allocating sufficient time for family, avoiding filling emotional voids with phone use, which can lead to emotional detachment, infidelity, and disloyalty in the relationship.
- Reinforcing traditional roles within the family, with men taking full responsibility and women embracing their roles, maintaining balance and mutual respect.
- Turning to religion and strong faith as the foundation for a lasting marital relationship, avoiding dubious social media practices.
- Emphasizing pre-marital education and possibly raising the legal age for marriage to address the issue of immature unions.
- Ensuring careful selection of partners and fostering mutual understanding and honesty between spouses, with consideration for each other's feelings.
- Reducing time spent on social media and avoiding groups and sites aimed at making new acquaintances, focusing instead on meaningful connections.
- Maintaining strong faith and selecting partners who share similar values to ensure the durability of the marital relationship.
- Improving living standards for individuals and families by increasing wages, combating the high cost of living, and promoting religious awareness of the importance of family cohesion.

6. Recommendations

The research offers the following recommendations:

- Instill good values within society and try to incorporate various activities into their daily routine to distract their minds from the harm and dangers posed by social media.
- Utilize free time for developing talents and engaging in sports, which is a responsibility of the relevant authorities to provide individuals with opportunities to strengthen their talents.
- Educate families about the dangers of continuous use of modern communication tools and its negative effects that could lead to family destruction and divorce.
- Enhance the positive values brought by modern communication means and benefit from the positive aspects they offer, such as culture dissemination, transferring useful information, good programming, and developing intellect, thought, perceptions while avoiding anything that promotes negativity, lethargy, and violence.

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PROMOTING THE WELL-BEING OF OLDER PEOPLE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK

Mădălina-Ioana RAȚIU

PhD student, „Babeș-Bolyai” University from Cluj-Napoca (Romania)

E-mail: madalina.ratiu@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: *This paper addresses the contribution of social work programs to the well-being of older people. Well-being is a complex phenomenon, dependent on the simultaneous interaction of several factors, such as personal, cognitive, emotional, social, and other factors. It was found that the level of well-being is higher in elderlies who do not feel alone and have enough opportunities for communication, who actively participate in social life and live with their family. In addition, social work plays an important role in promoting the well-being of the elderly by offering support, protection and by facilitating access to various types of services, activities or therapies that add value to their quality of life.*

Keywords: social work, state of well-being, elderly.

1. Introduction

We are currently facing the challenge of an aging population and need to adapt to ensure the quality of elderlies' life. Even though we live longer, we are not always happier (Chong, 2007: 4). Suicide rates among the elderly are the highest, and many seniors feel lonely or separated from loved ones.

The role of social workers is to help transform society into a more compassionate world for older people. They must be in touch with their needs and aspirations, empower them and promote intergenerational harmony. Through the exchange of experiences and good practices, a supportive environment can be created for the elderly, suggests the previously mentioned author.

There are three types of main objectives of social work interventions for the elderly: ameliorative, preventive and developmental (Suneetha & Babu, 2015: 5). To overcome economic problems and benefit from adequate social support, older people could start a second career that suits them and is in line with their interests. Just as people's lives are usually about planning, old age should not be either neglected from this point of view, but on the contrary, measures should be developed to overcome the stress caused by economic, social and psychological problems often associated with retirement/old age, note the aforementioned authors. Social work helps older people form task-oriented groups, occupational groups, recreation groups, help groups or support groups that usually start with a few older people meeting in the community. "The social worker acts as a facilitator in the effective functioning of the organisations by conducting regular meetings, discussions on mutual interest subjects, lectures on health issues, cultural programmes, training in arts and crafts, discussions on local issues, celebrating religious and national festivals, arranging visits to the homes of the fellow aged, whose mobility is restricted due to ill-health, etc. These programmes make the elderly get a feeling of security and helps in better wellbeing.", Suneetha and Babu, (2015: 5) point out.

2. Factors influencing the well-being of the elderly

In general, well-being is a construct made up of a number of elements that must merge and function concurrently to bring this well-being complex phenomenon to fruition. In the specialized literature we often find well-being associated with a feeling of satisfaction with the quality of life, personal fulfilment, joy and even the feeling of a life lived with meaning and purpose.

From a psychological point of view, "well-being is associated with the phenomena of self-actualization, personal growth and fulfilment", but well-being is also influenced by the

person's level of cognitive functioning, emotional stability and psychological well-being that person has (Kovalenko & Spivak, 2018: 1).

It seems that older people who have an active social life, who are not alone but live with their family, who are open to various experiences, who carry out activities that are meaningful to them or to those around them, have a higher level of well-being (Kovalenko & Spivak, 2018: 2). Therefore, the well-being of the elderly is also influenced by access to social and family networks, support and assistance from these networks, access to health services, access to quality social services that adequately respond to the beneficiaries' needs (Ghența et al., 2022: 14).

Hillerås et al. (2001: 3) find in the specialized literature that the state of happiness and the activities practiced among older people can influence their level of well-being. Moreover, the authors highlight that the participation of the elderly in recreational activities with friends and family is the most common factor that induces a state of well-being.

However, Ghența et al. (2022: 2-3) note in relation to quality of life that it differs between elderly people living in communities and those in institutional care. The former gives greater importance to social integration, while the latter focus on the quality of the surrounding environment. Additionally, for older people in institutional settings, significant priorities include control over their lives, structure of the day, sense of self, activities, and relationships with staff and other residents.

3. Social work of the elderly

The practice of social work with the elderly involves an exciting, challenging, but also rewarding field of work. At the same time, this practice requires high skills and detailed knowledge of the issues that affect the lives of older people (Hughes, 2020).

Working as a social worker with the elderly means coming into contact with the unique needs of each beneficiary, stemming from their unique environment and requiring individualized solutions. One of the goals of social work is to provide the recipient with the opportunity to continue to develop and change, and this process is a long-term one that requires acceptance. Social workers concerned with the problems of aging need to address the barriers to change, Brearley (2023) argues. Social work aims to help the beneficiary to discover which patterns from the past can be identified in the present, a fact that facilitates the acceptance of the present and even of death, notes the author.

On the other hand, the social work field has considerable potential to engage older people in a wide range of intervention programs, such as social action, family therapy, relationship counselling, trauma counselling, and conflict mediation (Hughes, 2020).

Social workers are an integral part of the process of making assessments of older people's ability to manage themselves at home, the nature and extent of care support they need, and the contributions needed from family or other carers (Lymbery, 2005). In cases where the problems faced by the elderly come from deteriorating physical health, social workers must have a general understanding of the causes and effects of the conditions that lead to these problems (Lymbery, 2005). The same is the case with cognitive problems, and among the most common problems faced by social workers among the elderly are dementia and depression, which are complex conditions, caused by an accumulation of factors that manifest simultaneously.

In addition to the physiological and psychological aspects that social workers have to take care of when it comes to the elderly, they are also responsible for protecting the elderly and providing a safe space for those who have been victims of abuse. Furthermore, social workers must manage investigative processes in cases where the safety of abused elders is threatened and ensure that they can maintain their autonomy (Lymbery, 2005).

4. Perspectives on the involvement of social workers in promoting the well-being of the elderly

The mission of social workers is to face conflicts and challenges in order to achieve the goals of improving the life quality of the elderly. In practical contexts, there are ways in which they can move towards achieving these goals (Tanner, 2005: 14). First, they can begin by understanding the lives of beneficiaries as prerequisites for assessing the services they would need, in terms of support and resources appropriate to their needs. When older people experience difficulties, the consequences for their social roles, relationships and activities need to be explored. The support options provided by social workers should help them maintain roles and activities that are meaningful to them and respect their preferences for relational boundaries and the desire for reciprocity (Tanner, 2005: 14).

Social services for the elderly in Romania have undergone significant transformations in recent years, in response to the European Union's increased interest in the phenomenon of aging and its social and economic impact. The major changes were motivated by the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the social work system, as demographic changes put pressure on the social protection system and require balanced solutions to meet both the expectations of the elderly and the limits of the public budget. In this context, Romanian long-term care policy should focus on creating an enabling environment for older people, in line with the call for a positive concept of aging, promoting active and healthy aging by optimizing health, encouraging inclusion and facilitating well-being during old age, highlights Chirugu (2023: 7-10).

According to the study "Impact of Health and Psycho-Social Status on Wellbeing of Elderly: Need for Social Work Intervention" developed by Suneetha and Babu in 2015 in India, it was observed that most of the elderly do not participate in social activities and fall into young-old age group. Moreover, they do not use their free time in a useful way. Furthermore, the study indicated that there is a significant association between psychosocial changes and the health status of older people and vice versa, influencing their well-being. Even though the aging process cannot be stopped, being aware of the changes and adopting a healthy lifestyle can reduce their impact on well-being. The authors draw the attention of social workers that it is essential that they provide support in terms of nutritional counseling, information about social services, preventive measures, recreational activities, suggestions about financial support systems, measures to improve family dynamics, creating awareness about stress reduction and adjustment.

In Nigerian society, most of the elderly are primarily cared for by the family, reflecting one of its traditional roles. Participants in the study conducted by Omosefe and Mukhtar (2023) feel an improvement in psychosocial well-being when they receive support from family, friends and neighbors. However, research indicates that low emotional support from family, including emotional abuse, can negatively affect the psychosocial well-being of older people. Social work practice among the elderly in Nigeria aims to improve their quality of life and promote their independence and dignity. The purpose of social workers in Nigeria is to work closely with the family and oppose the concept of *ageism*, advocating respect for the right to self-determination regardless of age. They work in solidarity with other professionals to combat the social conditions that contribute to the exclusion and stigmatization of older people, with the aim of building an inclusive society.

Therefore, social work, integrated within the national social protection system, encompasses both social services and social benefits granted in order to develop individual or collective capacities, with the aim of satisfying social needs, improving the quality of life and promoting the principles of social cohesion and inclusion. At the same time, social work intervention aims to support people in difficulty in obtaining the necessary conditions for a dignified life, facilitating the development of their own individual capacities and skills (Enache, 2019).

5. Discussions and openings

Studies show that older people are not always as happy as life satisfaction measurements suggest. Suicide rates among the elderly are the highest of all age groups in most parts of the world (Chong, 2007: 17-18). From a social health perspective, a significant number of older people are single, divorced or separated, and this trend is likely to become even more pronounced in the future. In this context, it is highlighted that social workers have a very important responsibility, that of contributing to the creation of a compassionate world for the elderly. As providers of social services, social workers are in a good strategic position to understand the needs and aspirations of older people, to encourage and support them, but also to promote intergenerational harmony. In addition, social workers must explore the causes that negatively affect the psychosocial health status of the elderly and propose preventive measures.

As future directions, it is desirable that social workers step forward and engage in different levels of intervention, from the level of individual cases to the level of national and international policies, which optimize the provision of social services for the elderly. Moreover, research in the field could highlight the need to popularize more experiences and good practices in the provision of social services for the elderly. Furthermore, information about the needs and expectations of older people should increasingly be a concern of social work research in order to create an open, supportive environment for these professionals.

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SATISFACTION WITH SHARED PUBLIC TRANSPORT. CASE STUDY: TIMISOARA

Ovidiu-Florin SENDRONI¹, Marius VASILUȚĂ-ȘTEFĂNESCU²

¹Student at Sociology, West University of Timișoara (Romania),

E-mail: ovidiu.sendroni00@e-uvt.ro

²Associate Professor PhD, West University of Timișoara, Romania,

E-mail: marius.vasiluta@e-uvt.ro

Abstract: *Public transport in a city is a vital aspect, having multiple benefits for the environment, society and economy. But in order to effectively provide this service, it is essential that people using public transport are satisfied with its functionality, comfort, accessibility and safety. The purpose of this research is to analyze the level of satisfaction with public transport in Timișoara. The research question aims at whether the people of Timisoara are rather satisfied or dissatisfied with public transport. We adopted a quantitative method, collecting data through a questionnaire administered by field operators. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, t tests, and ANOVAs. The results showed that the perception of travelers towards public transport in Timișoara tends towards satisfaction, and that age can weakly influence satisfaction towards public transport. This study also provides recommendations on increasing the general satisfaction level with public transport in Timișoara.*

Keywords: public transport, passenger satisfaction, Timișoara

1. Introduction

Public transport provides an accessible and efficient mode of transport in urban and suburban areas, facilitating the mobility of the population and access to various social and economic activities, along with the shift from the use of private motorized vehicles to the use of public transport and non-motorized modes of travel, such as walking and cycling (Tuan, Van Truong, Tetsuo & An, 2022). Thus, by using public transport, traffic congestion can be reduced by up to 36% (Aftabuzzaman, Currie & Sarvi, 2010), which can reduce environmental and health problems (Lopez, Jin, & Al Faruque, 2020; Farokhi & Johansson, 2015). Moreover, the level of development of public transport has a significant inhibitory effect on carbon emissions, especially if it complies with measures. Regarding regulations beneficial to the environment or are they using electric vehicles (Jing, Liu, Yu & He, 2022; Bhattacharya, Govindan, Dastidar & Sharma, 2024; Basso, Kulcsár & Sanchez-Diaz, 2021).

In addition to the positive effects it has on the environment, studies have also demonstrated a positive impact on society. According to the American Public Transportation Association (n.d.), investments in public transportation lead to job creation and job support. Thus, more than 36,000 jobs are supported for every million dollars invested in public transport. In addition, it provides access to jobs, especially for people in entry-level jobs who cannot afford a car, or for vulnerable people such as those with disabilities (for more details see Otovescu, 2006, 2009).

In fact, public transport contributes significantly to social equality by providing travel opportunities for vulnerable groups such as the disabled, the elderly and those without vehicles (Tuán, Truong, Shimizu & An, 2022). Thus, public transport systems can reduce social inequalities by removing barriers to participation in activities essential to well-being especially in large cities, where many residents depend on this mode of transport due to limited financial accessibility. Therefore, improving these systems can reduce vulnerability to poverty caused by lack of access to transportation and provide more employment opportunities and health services (Bocarejo & Urrego, 2022).

According to Albalade, D., & Bel, G. (2010), public transport has a positive impact on a city's economy through its relationship with tourism. Given the significant contribution of tourism to the social dynamics and economic success of a city, and the fact that most tourists use public transport, it indirectly contributes to the city's economy. This contribution becomes even more important in the context of 2019, one of the years of the Covid-19 pandemic, a period that strongly affected all tangential areas of transport (Burgos & Ivanov, 2021), including the field of tourism (Chowdhury, Paul, Kaisar & Moktadir, 2021). However, tourism represented approximately 4% of the total gross added value in the Romanian economy (Eurostat, 2023), and at the European GDP level, tourism contributed approximately 2,100 billion dollars (Statista, 2023).

Public transport can have a positive effect on the individual, as demonstrated by the research of Ettema, Gärling, Olsson & Friman (2010). By measuring SWB (Subjective Well-Being – the extent to which a person positively assesses the overall quality of their life.), more precisely by measuring personal perception towards the public transport system, it has been observed that satisfaction with it can influence the quality of life. The results of the study were confirmed 10 years later by Olsson et. all. (2020), who demonstrated that the level of quality of public transport contributes to the improvement of the quality of life, being equally important for all generations.

But the mere presence of public transport is not enough. To ensure satisfaction in public transport travel, it is crucial to better understand which external factors are essential and which are sufficient to create a satisfactory travel experience for users of public transport services (Sukhov, Lättman, Olsson, Friman, & Fujii, 2021). Therefore, it is important to consider certain factors that influence public transport satisfaction.

2. Functionality

Perhaps some of the most influential factors influencing satisfaction with public transport – the overall level of fulfillment of a customer's expectations, measured as the percentage of customer expectations that were actually met (Tyrinopoulos & Antoniou, 2008) – they are temporal or those related to the functionality of public transport, such as the duration of the trip or their punctuality. Along with the cost and frequency of travel, these are also the issues that public transport policies tend to focus on (Ettema, Gärling, Olsson & Friman, 2010). After all, the feasibility of the means of transport is an element that, in addition to the traveler's satisfaction, can also influence his behavior, along with the desire to use such means in the future (Tsonas, Assaf, Gillen & Mattila, 2017). For example, if they know that a means of public transport usually arrives faster than stated in its schedule, then they will also try to get to the station faster, even if it would be an inconvenience. The importance of the feasibility of means of transport becomes more accentuated when the trip is associated with professional and study commitments, becoming a particular priority for young people and middle-aged people who have such obligations (Tavares, Lucchesi, Larranaga & Cybis, 2021).

3. Accessibility

Another essential aspect that influences the satisfaction of the traveler is the accessibility of public transport, which refers, first, to the distance between the place of departure and the transport station. This perceived distance is critical when low transport accessibility impedes access to economic opportunities such as jobs or other income-generating activities, as it can lead to residential stress and lower housing satisfaction, up to the point at which it can trigger residential mobility (Olfindo, 2021). However, there are other factors that can determine whether a public transport is affordable or not, such as the cost of travel (Jamei, E. et. all., 2022). Another way in which accessibility can be perceived is through the boarding and disembarking conditions, which, according to studies, are a crucial factor in keeping and attracting passengers to use the public transport service, which directly influences passenger satisfaction (Ha, Ibrahim, Lo & Mah, 2019).

4. Comfort

Passenger comfort can contribute to travel satisfaction and can be assessed by: seat availability (De Palma, Kilani, & Proost, 2015; Hörcher, Graham & Anderson, 2018), size and legroom, appropriate climate control for local conditions (such as heating in winter and air conditioning in summer), and smooth acceleration and deceleration. Also, vehicle technology can influence the perception of comfort, by reducing unpleasant odors and disturbing noises (Tavares, Lucchesi, Larranaga & Cybis, 2021).

5. Safety

Another important element related to the field of transport is road safety (Choi, 2021) or the degree of safety they feel when using public transport (Ha, Ibrahim, Lo & Mah, 2019; Lois, D., Monzón, A., & Hernández, S., 2018). The need to evaluate this element is given by the fact that public transport is closely related to human lives, on a large scale, because it is used by a large number of passengers at the same time (Joewono, & Kubota, 2006).

6. Socio-demographic characteristics

Other important factors that can influence satisfaction with public transportation are the traveler's socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education, and occupation (Abenoza RF et al., 2017). Silveira, TC et al. (2019) showed that there are gender differences in perception. According to this study, women are more critical of the service expected and provided. Instead, they place more importance on most service characteristics compared to men. On the other hand, men tend to place more importance on service performance attributes such as reliability, frequency, and travel time, while women tend to place more importance on comfort, such as vehicle interior conditions and safety (Silveira, TC et al., 2019). Also, age is another socio-demographic factor to consider in assessing satisfaction with public transport. For example, in terms of comfort, older adults appear to be more affected by external factors than the two younger groups. At the same time, young adults seem to be less influenced by the operational characteristics of the service in evaluating comfort (Tavares, Lucchesi, Larranaga & Cybis, 2021).

7. Research methodology

Since we aimed for the highest possible validity of the data, we used a quantitative research method. More precisely, we used the social survey method, using the questionnaire as an instrument. The study sample consisted of 907 respondents. We managed to obtain this number of respondents through 46 operators, students at the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, within the Western University of Timișoara. They collected the data between November 13 and December 3, 2023. More specifically, they went in pairs of at least 2 people to seven connection points frequently frequented by public transport, established in advance with the Timișoara Public Transport Company (STPT). Thus, the operators collected data from the areas: 700 Square, Posta Mare, County Hospital, Mocioni Square, North Station, Council of Europe Square and Soarelui area. The type of sampling used was the random one. Thus, we obtained data from people aged between 14 and 91 years, respectively data from 458 men (50.5%) and 449 women (49.5%).

The main objective of the study is to identify the degree of satisfaction of the people of Timișoara with public transport. And as for the research question, it aims at whether the people of Timișoara are rather satisfied or dissatisfied with public transport. Therefore, to measure this satisfaction, we used a scale taken from the specialized literature, found in the study *Assessing travel satisfaction in public transport: A configurational approach*, published in 2021 by Sukhov, Lättman, Olsson, Friman, & Fujii. The scale was slightly adapted so that its statements were measured by means of a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 refers to very low satisfaction, while 5 refers to a very high one, at the expense of a Likert scale with seven points.

We made this change to be able to reduce the time to complete the questionnaire as much as possible, since they were applied in public transport stations and there was a possibility that the respondent had to interrupt the completion of the questionnaire, as he was obliged to leave immediately to catch means of transport.

By operationalizing the general objective, the following secondary research objectives can be identified:

1. Evaluation of factors influencing satisfaction with public transport in Timișoara, focusing on payment methods, distance to transport stations, driver behavior, punctuality, waiting times, air quality and vehicle noise levels.

2. Investigating the relationship between satisfaction levels and specific dimensions of public transport, such as comfort, information provision and courtesy.

3. Analyze the modal choice preferences of the inhabitants of Timișoara and identify the factors that influence the selection of their mode of transport.

4. Assess the popularity and effectiveness of different payment methods for public transport and identify potential areas for improvement.

5. Exploring the demographic characteristics of public transport users in Timișoara and their impact on satisfaction levels, especially by gender and age.

6. Identify areas of public transport infrastructure and services that require attention and improvement based on user satisfaction levels and usage patterns.

7. The proposal of recommendations to increase the degree of general satisfaction with public transport in Timișoara, including strategies to address areas of dissatisfaction and to promote underutilized modes of transport and payment methods.

These research objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of public transport in Timișoara, identify areas for improvement and provide recommendations to improve the overall transport experience for residents.

To ensure that we have achieved our overall objective, we have formulated the following specific objectives and assumptions:

Ob1. Identifying satisfaction with aspects of the public transport system:

Ip1.1. Travelers who use public transport in Timișoara have a high degree of satisfaction with the elements related to courtesy.

Ip1.2. Travelers who use public transport in Timișoara have a high degree of satisfaction with the elements related to functionality.

Ip1.3. Travelers who use public transport in Timișoara have a high degree of satisfaction with the elements related to security.

Ip1.4. Travelers who use public transport in Timișoara have a high degree of satisfaction with the elements related to information.

Ip1.5. Travelers who use public transport in Timișoara have a high degree of satisfaction with the elements related to comfort.

Ob2. Identifying the link between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and satisfaction with public transport:

Ip2.1. There are statistically significant differences between respondents according to their gender in terms of satisfaction with public transport.

Ip2.2. There are statistically significant differences between respondents based on their age in terms of satisfaction with public transport.

Ip2.3. There are statistically significant differences between respondents according to the most frequently used means of transport in terms of satisfaction with public transport.

Ip2.4. There are statistically significant differences between the respondents according to the payment method predominantly used, in terms of satisfaction with public transport.

8. Research results

Following a frequency analysis, it emerged, that among the first most satisfying aspects of shared public transport in Timișoara is the way to pay for the trip ($m = 3.82$; $Std = 1.103$), the

distance from home to at the nearest transport station ($m = 3.69$; $Std = 1.129$), respectively the driver's attitude and behavior ($m = 3.63$; $Std = 1.164$). At the opposite pole, respondents are less satisfied with the punctuality of means of transport ($m = 2.79$; $Std = 1.103$), the waiting time between connections ($m = 2.92$; $Std = 1.129$) and with air quality ($m = 2.96$; $Std = 1.164$), respectively the noise level ($m = 2.96$; $Std = 1.143$) from public transport (see table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on public transport satisfaction items in descending order

Public transport satisfaction items (Attributes)	N	Mean	Std
How I pay for the trip	907	3.82	1.103
Distance to nearest transport station?	907	3.69	1,129
Driver's attitude and behavior?	907	3.63	1,164
The quality of lights in public transport?	907	3.55	1,143
Written information provided on public transport?	907	3.41	1,149
The announcements within the means of transport?	907	3.40	1,181
The boarding and disembarking conditions of public transport?	907	3.39	1,093
Length of trip?	907	3.33	0.979
The usefulness of the information provided at bus stops?	907	3.27	1,162
Security	907	3.26	1,024
Comfort level?	907	3.19	1,114
Cleanliness inside public transport?	907	3.17	0.98
The usefulness of the information on the website of the STPT company?	907	3.15	1,203
The usefulness of public transport mobile apps?	907	3.14	1,178
Frequency of departures of means of transport from the station?	907	3.13	1,168
The physical space inside public transport?	907	2.97	1,109
Noise level in public transport?	907	2.96	1.107
Air quality in public transport?	907	2.96	1,088
Latency between links?	907	2.92	1,157
Punctuality of means of transport?	907	2.79	1,228

We continued to conduct descriptive analyzes on the scale dimensions. Thus, we noticed that, depending on the mean, the lowest value was registered by comfort ($m = 3.13$; $Std = 0.81$), while the highest was obtained by the degree of courtesy ($m = 3.45$; $Std = 0.75$). Regarding the satisfaction index with public transport, it registered the value of 3.25. In other words, as a rule, the people of Timișoara have a neutral opinion, which tends towards satisfaction vis-à-vis the means of public transport. Continuing the analysis, following some t-tests, we observed statistically significant differences between this index and the dimensions related to comfort, information, and courtesy; the mean of the first two being lower than the value of the public transport satisfaction index, while the value of the last dimension is higher. In other words, in relation to the general level of respondents' satisfaction with public transport, aspects related to information and comfort can be improved, while those related to courtesy are optimal (see table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on scale dimensions in descending order and t-test significance threshold values

Scale dimensions	N	Mean	Std.	The significance threshold value of the t-test
Courtesy	907	3.45	0.75888	<0.005
Functionality	907	3.28	0.73946	0.230
Security	907	3.26	1,228	0.845
Information	907	3.19	0.82765	0.021
Comfort	907	3.13	0.81230	<0.005

Following some frequency analyses, we noticed that the most frequented means of public transport is the bus ($N = 823$; $m = 90.7\%$), followed by the tram ($N = 662$; $m = 73\%$), respectively by the trolleybus ($N = 497$; $m = 54.8\%$). Continuing the analysis, in an independent sample t test, we noted that there are no statistically significant differences between people who use the bus, tram or trolleybus in terms of satisfaction with public transport ($p > 0.05$). Also, in the case of other means of transport provided by STPT, we noticed that they are less used. In fact, almost all respondents claim to use the VeloTM bicycle ($N = 849$; $m = 93.6\%$), the TroTM scooter ($N = 836$; $m = 92.2\%$) and the vaporeto ($N = 874$; $m = 96.4\%$) less than a once a week. Carrying out the same analyzes in the case of the routes used, we noticed that the most frequented route is the strictly urban route ($N = 873$; $m = 96.3\%$), followed by the urban-rural route ($N = 328$, $m = 36.2\%$), respectively of the strictly rural one ($N = 161$; $m = 17.8\%$). We did not proceed with an independent sample t test analysis because there is a very high discrepancy between people who strictly use urban routes and those who also use rural routes.

Following a frequency analysis, we noticed that the most used means of payment is the STPT subscription ($N = 415$; $m = 45.8\%$), followed by contactless payment via bank card ($N = 181$; $m = 20\%$). At the opposite pole, the least used means of payment is represented by the tariff application "Electronic Wallet" ($N = 21$; $m = 2.3\%$). Following an ANOVA analysis, we observed that there are no statistically significant differences between people who use the subscription, ticket and contactless card, respectively other payment methods in terms of public transport satisfaction.

By means of some frequency analyses, we noticed that the majority of respondents do not belong to a category that benefits from discounts or freebies for using public transport ($N = 457$; $m = 50.4\%$). Conversely, among those who benefit from such discounts or freebies, most claim to be pensioners ($N = 183$; $m = 20.2\%$), followed by students ($N = 155$; $m = 17.1\%$). Beneficiaries of special laws register the lowest share ($N = 4$; $m = 0.4\%$). Continuing the interpretation, following a t-test, we noticed that there are no statistically significant differences between those who benefit from discounts/freebies and people who do not have such benefits, in terms of public transport satisfaction.

In terms of proximity to the nearest station, most respondents mention that it takes about 5 minutes ($N = 242$, $m = 26.7\%$, $md = 5$). However, there are also cases where respondents claimed that the travel time from home to the most frequently used station is greater than 30 minutes ($N = 22$, $m = 0.23\%$). In fact, the longest walking time from the respondent's home to the most frequently used station is about 90 minutes. The respective case claims that he lives in the Steaua-Fratelia area, but also that he uses rural transport routes almost daily. Regarding the journey from home to work/school/college, etc., most respondents say it takes about 30 minutes ($N = 171$, $m = 18.9\%$, $md = 30$). In the case of the return trip, most respondents claimed that it also takes about 30 minutes ($N = 186$, $m = 20.5\%$, $md = 30$). The longest round trip clocks in at 150 minutes. This respondent claims that he lives in Moșnița Noua and uses rural routes almost daily. Also, taking into account the respondent's age, he most likely uses public transport to go to school.

In order to verify whether there are differences between respondents according to their socio-democratic characteristics in terms of the degree of satisfaction with public transport, we performed a t-test between male ($N = 484$, $m = 3.27$) and female gender ($N = 449$, $m = 3.23$). Following this analysis, we did not notice significant differences between the two groups ($p = 0.228$). However, following a correlational analysis, we noticed that there is a link between the age of respondents and satisfaction with public transport ($p = 0.019$). This correlation is directly proportional, meaning that satisfaction with public transportation increases with age. On the other hand, the strength of this correlation is very weak ($r = 0.078$), which means that there will not be very large differences between the satisfaction of younger and older people in terms of satisfaction with public transport.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

The analyzes carried out on the variables regarding public transport in Timișoara revealed some key perspectives on the satisfaction levels and usage patterns of the inhabitants.

First, it is evident that certain aspects of public transport are particularly satisfying for residents, particularly payment methods, proximity of transport stations to homes and driver behaviour. Instead, there are areas of dissatisfaction such as punctuality, waiting times between connections, air quality and noise levels in transport vehicles. In addition, while overall satisfaction tends towards neutrality, with the value of the traveler satisfaction index having a value of 3.25, specific dimensions such as comfort and information provision require improvement, while politeness is perceived as satisfactory.

In terms of modal choice, buses are the most used mode of transport, followed by trams and trolleybuses. However, other transport options offered by STPT are underutilized, suggesting potential areas for promotion and improvement.

Payment methods vary in popularity, with subscriptions being the most frequently used, followed by contactless payments via bank cards. The least preferred method is the "Electronic Wallet" application, indicating the need for re-evaluation or marketing efforts.

Socio-demographic characteristics such as gender do not significantly influence the level of satisfaction, while age shows a weak correlation, with satisfaction increasing slightly with age.

In conclusion, although there are aspects of public transport in Timișoara that are satisfactory, there are also areas that require attention and improvement. Addressing the issues of punctuality, convenience and information provision could increase overall satisfaction and contribute to a smoother transport experience for residents. In addition, promoting underutilized modes of transport and payment methods could lead to a more diverse and efficient transport network in the city.

We suggest that to improve passenger satisfaction in local public transport contexts, it is crucial to first focus on understanding how satisfaction with various service quality characteristics are interconnected to provide the greatest value.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the research report, we formulate some recommendations to increase the degree of general satisfaction with public transport in Timișoara:

1. Improving punctuality: Addressing dissatisfaction with punctuality should be a priority. Implementing a strategy to increase the timeliness of public transport services, such as optimizing schedules, increasing fleet capacity during peak hours and using real-time tracking systems to provide accurate arrival times to passengers.

2. Reducing waiting times: reducing the waiting time between connections by making routes more efficient, improving frequency and improving coordination between different modes of public transport. This can be achieved through better planning and integration of services.

3. Improving comfort: Since comfort has been identified as an area with room for improvement, efforts should be made to improve the comfort level of public transport vehicles. This could involve improving seat comfort, ensuring adequate ventilation and temperature control, and reducing noise levels inside vehicles.

4. Information provision: Improving the provision of information to passengers, including real-time updates on timetables, service disruptions and alternative routes. Using digital displays, mobile apps and announcements to inform passengers and reduce uncertainty during their journey.

5. Promotion of underutilized modes of transport: raising awareness and promoting underutilized modes of transport such as bicycles, scooters and vaporetto through marketing campaigns, incentives and infrastructure improvements. Encouraging multi-modal transport options to give passengers more flexibility and choice.

6. Diversification of payment methods: offering a wider range of payment options to meet passenger preferences. Although subscriptions and contactless bank card payments are

popular, efforts should be made to promote the use of e-wallets and explore innovative payment solutions to improve convenience and accessibility.

7. Addressing air quality issues: measures to improve air quality in public transport vehicles by implementing better ventilation systems, reducing emissions from vehicles and promoting green transport technologies. This will contribute to a healthier and more pleasant environment for passengers.

8. Improving driver training: Investing in training programs to improve the attitude and behavior of drivers towards passengers. Focus on customer service skills, professionalism and empathy to create a positive and welcoming atmosphere on public transport.

9. Accessibility improvements: make public transport services accessible to all members of the community, including disabled and elderly passengers. Implementation of measures to improve accessibility in stations, stops and on vehicles, such as ramps, priority seats and audiovisual announcements.

10. Continuous Feedback and Evaluation: Mechanisms to collect feedback from passengers on their satisfaction levels and preferences with public transport services. Using this feedback to identify areas for improvement and make data-driven decisions to improve overall service quality.

By implementing these recommendations, the public transport authorities in Timișoara can contribute to improving the overall level of passenger satisfaction and to provide residents with a more efficient, comfortable and pleasant transport experience.

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CYBERBULLYING IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Cosmin-Constantin SICREA

Ph.D. Student, Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
University of Craiova (Romania), E-mail: cosmin_sicrea2005@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The cyberbullying phenomenon is increasingly present online, especially on social networks. With a relatively young history, the psycho-social implications on cyberbullying victims are becoming increasingly evident in contemporary society. The risks of exposure to cyberbullying increase with the exposure of young people to the online environment. Although it is more common among teenagers and young people, the risk of cyberbullying of adults by distributing compromising content that could put the victim in a negative light cannot be excluded. In the absence of legal mechanisms at the European level meant to limit the phenomenon, the only effective method of prevention remains parental control by monitoring online traffic and the contents that children and adolescents access from electronic devices (tablet, phone, computer), and reporting to the police any attempts to cyber bully adults. Not infrequently, the conflict situations resulting from cyberbullying end up manifesting in the real life of the aggrieved person. The aggressor often crosses a fine line from deviant behaviour to delinquent behaviour by threatening or blackmailing the victims. Stakeholders in the field of cyberbullying prevention are most often represented by non-governmental organizations, which, however, are outnumbered by the phenomenon, especially since the police arrive late to intervene in such cases. Victims, out of fear, often end up hiding their situation from family, friends and the police.*

Keywords: deviance, cyberbullying, vulnerability, social media, online

1. Conceptual delimitations, general considerations

In recent years, the term that refers to cyberbullying has been increasingly used, especially in the media, becoming associated with the phenomenon of suicides among young people and teenagers. Until 2010, specialized studies highlighted the fact that there was no direct link referring to cyberbullying before 2004, a fact that reminds us of a relatively young phenomenon studied by specialists. There is no universally accepted definition, however, most definitions describe a *systematically repeated activity that is carried out by electronic means with the intention of causing psychological or somatic suffering* (Peebles, 2014).

A common definition of aggression involves a systematic and repetitive exposure over time to negative actions on the abused person. In order to be able to use the term harassment and aggression, there must be a relationship characterized by a power imbalance between the aggressor and the person attacked (Olweus & Limber, 2018: 5). Cyberbullying is increasingly recognized as a serious public health problem affecting both adolescents and children. Most of the time, existing studies have focused on the national or local effects of cyberbullying, with the global perspective being less addressed (Zhu, 2021).

Cyberbullying is defined by Smith as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or a person using electronic means of contact, repeatedly directed against a victim who becomes vulnerable in the online environment (Sathyanarayana Rao et. al, 2018).

The development of social networks and the dissemination of private content have brought to the fore a problem that society has faced for decades. The progress of technology is often equated with the progress of human societies. New technologies such as the Internet have radically changed the way people interact. Although these developments have allowed human race to make great progress in many areas, they have also allowed the perpetuation of various forms of distance aggression (Donegan, 2012: 34). Bullying is by no means a new phenomenon, is not characteristic only to our days, having a historical origin. For example, in Christianity, the Bible is full of references that highlight different forms of violence or even aggression. Specific biblical examples include episodes such as the rivalry between Cain and Abel, the rivalry

between Joseph and his brothers, the fight between David and Goliath or the parable of the good Samaritan. Christians were harassed and persecuted in the Roman Colosseum by Saul, an avowed persecutor of the early Christian Church (Allanson et al. 2015: 31). Nowadays cyberbullying is spread through digital devices, which means that bullying most often takes place outside school, while traditional bullying is commonly found inside school. Most of the time cyber aggressions are characterized by a "power" obtained by the aggressor in the digital environment due to its anonymous character. Victims of cyberbullying end up feeling threatened even in the comfort of home, while in traditional (school) bullying this is not possible (Englander, 2017).

Although the phenomenon is at the confluence of technology and medicine, scientific literature has been present since the 2000s, quite late compared to other studied phenomena (Aboujaoude, 2015: 11).

2. Methodology

The article has two main components:

a) The theoretical section aims to explain concepts such as bullying, cyberbullying, in a general, historical, evolutionary context.

b) The practical, applied section aims to analyse the existing specialized literature in a context of the effects of cyberbullying on the integrity and safety of the victimized person as a long-term phenomenon with multiple implications.

c) Conclusions

3. The cyber bully, deviant or delinquent?

When we talk about cyberbullying, we generally have two well-defined positions: that of the aggressor and that of the victim. Taking into account the complexity of the phenomenon in question, it is absolutely necessary to ask ourselves questions about the aggressor's behaviour in the online environment. A question inevitably arises *"Does the aggressor exhibit a deviant behaviour, or is he or she a delinquent?"*

The sociology of deviance faces two basic and interrelated problems: *How and why do certain people engage in deviant acts?* The significance of these two issues, the nature of the theories and research surrounding them, and their implications for the future direction of the sociology of deviance are explored. The goal is not to look at social definitions or deviant behaviour separately, but rather to consider both situations in the aggregate, to specify the interaction and to integrate explanations of social behaviour (Akers, 1968). There is much confusion about what this fine line means, namely deviant versus delinquent behaviour.

The links between criminality, control and rules have been explored since the 1960s and 1970s by functionalists. A society's symbolic boundaries were thought to emerge in the control of deviance, of traits that take shape in the dialectic between law enforcers and law-breakers, insiders and outsiders, us and the others. Deviants provided symbols of contrasts and antitheses that revealed the form and structure of society, namely capitalists defining communists; radicals defining moderates; the poor defining the rich; the unrespectable defining the respectable; and homosexuals defining heterosexuals (Rock, 1998: 586). One of the fundamental notions in the initial development of the sociological study of delinquency was the notion that "delinquency is a group phenomenon," that is, delinquent behaviour involves groups of teenagers in general. This "group premise" was actually one of the major justifications for sociological claims in the field. Moreover, the most popular theoretical works on delinquency since the mid-1960s have studied "gangs" and "delinquent subcultures" or "countercultures" as the primary unit of analysis (Erickson & Jensen, 1977). However, deviance is defined and applied as a cultural representation. At the levels of individual concepts and broader postmodern theories of deviance, it focuses on a social construct (Adler, 2006: 131-132).

In recent years, there has been a significant change in the conception of deviant behaviour and deviant people in general. Prior to what is designated as a new perspective, it was commonly assumed that there was something inherent in deviants that distinguished them from non-deviants. Thus, from Lombroso to Sheldon, criminals were viewed as biologically and somatically different. After decades of research, no biological characteristics have been discovered that distinguish criminals from the rest of the population. Therefore, few theorists now even entertain the idea that all criminals have mental deficiencies and constitutional alterations. The forging of an analytical identity of criminality continued in Sellin's proposal to abandon legal criteria altogether in favour of norms of conduct. This is because laws vary and can be arbitrary in any society, a purely legal definition of criminality is not adequate in this context. All the more so as the criminal scope varies from one society to another, just as in the case of the norms of conduct (Gibbs, 1966: 9-10).

So, we can issue a first answer regarding our question: *"Does the aggressor have a deviant behaviour, or is he or she a delinquent?"* In essence, the cyber aggressor can have both deviant and delinquent behaviour depending on the severity of the actions they initiate in the online environment and the existing legal norms. There are situations where the absence of legal rule in a certain state "transforms" the cyber aggressor from a dangerous delinquent into a simple "non-integrated" individual with deviant behaviours.

4. Effects of cyberbullying on victims

Cyberbullying ends up having a significant negative impact on both the victims and the victims who become bullies in their turn. Depression, insecurity, anger, worry, shame or low self-esteem are just some of the problems encountered among people subjected to cyberbullying (Völlink, 2012, p. 8). Victims of cyberbullying experience a variety of emotional experiences that may lead to an increase in emotional distress (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). So the effects of bullying are felt both psychologically and somatically through stomach aches, headaches, sleep disorders, muscle pain, weight loss and other physical ailments. They end up being a biological response to stressors. There are also specific characteristics associated with intimidating episodes that over time have an increased emotional impact on mental health (Aluede, 2008). When the body fears to be in danger, it releases hormones that inspire it to either fight or flee. This type of response can cause long-term suffering for the cyberbullying victim. Parents should be able to notice these changes in their children's behaviour even if the changes are subtle or not shared with the family (<https://www.webpurify.com/blog/cyberbullying-statistics/>). Nearly half (46%) of 13- to 17-year-olds have been bullied physically or online, and physical appearance is a relatively common reason (Pew Research, Dec. 15, 2022 https://enough.org/stats_cyberbullying).

On the other hand, the high level of anonymity in text-based chat communication increases the chances of teenagers becoming victims of aggressive actions due to the fact that conversation participants are able to "talk" anonymously without revealing their true identity or real physical characteristics (Katzner et al. 2009: 26). According to a 2019 study conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), around 27% of young people aged between 15 and 29 in the European Union experienced some form of cyberbullying between 2014 and 2019. Whereas the prevalence of cyberbullying is similar for women and men, the data is very different for sexual harassment, with a much higher percentage of women being affected. The percentages also increase when the victim is part of a minority (disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). The European Union Member States with the highest number of registered cases of cyberbullying are the Netherlands, Germany and France. A meta-analysis of studies and surveys conducted in Europe specifically referring to cyberbullying found that Poland has the highest incidence at 31.5 % of the global average, followed by the Czech Republic at 18.6% and Romania at 15.4% (The European Christian Political Movement). Of course, we must not fall into the "trap" of cold statistics regarding the phenomenon only through the lens of numbers, as it is necessary to have a discernment of its complexity, taking into account the

fact that most of the time the victims are not only the persons directly involved but also their family. For this reason, precisely certain approaches forwarded by authors such as Olweus, Espelage and Hong emphasize the need to integrate interventions aimed at direct traditional violence against the person with preventive measures aimed at their cyberbullying (Pyżalski et al, 2022). Even though common forms of cyberbullying involve the use of mobile phones (bullying via phone calls, text messages, bullying with pictures/videos, including so-called "happy slapping") or the use of the Internet (bullying via emails, chat room, instant messaging and on websites, including blogs), should not be seen as an activity that does not endanger the integrity of the harassed person, and it is more than necessary to report these situations to the police (Ferrara, Ianniello, Villani, et al. 2018).

Cyberbullying remains a major problem and most of the time such behaviours are difficult to control especially as this activity is carried out on fake accounts with pseudonyms and poor localization. Police often report a lack of clear guidance, training and support enabling them to understand and properly address this behaviour (Patchin, 2013). Many questions remain unanswered about the appropriate balance between accountability, prevention, and addressing cyberbullying for all its stakeholders (e.g. parents, schools, law enforcement, etc.). An "attractive" form of cyberbullying is increasingly present in the online environment in the form of challenges that the victim must "pass". Thus, the aggressor ends up putting the victim's life in danger from a distance without the victim realizing it, especially in the case of children and teenagers. For instance, "Blackout Challenge" is increasingly present in the online environment, having gone viral on social networks, along with the Tide Pod Challenge and the Benadryl overdose trend (Gulf News Report, 2018). Through the blackout online "game", children around the world have suffocated themselves with household items until they passed out, "filming the adrenaline rush" they had after partially regaining consciousness by posting the videos on social media. These games are a modern adaptation of past challenges to the idea of suffocation that has existed for decades in society and now ends up being "delivered" to young children through social media ignoring the risk of death they are subject to (Carville, 2022). Another fairly common situation is when the aggressor collects data from the victim, potentially compromising personal data with the aim of obtaining benefits later. So, the aggressor ends up practically blackmailing the victim until the latter gives in and follows the instructions exactly. Studies of female rape confirm the tendency of others to judge victims as responsible—or partially responsible—for their experiences of sexual, physical, or virtual (online) violence. Such preconceptions can be understood using a theoretical framework highlighted by the attribution theory described by Heider in 1958. It explains how people use logic, the way they feel in interpreting certain events in their lives. So, a person behaves in a certain way because of a situation or another person (Zhong, 2020: 3).

In relation to online sexual assaults, 4 main categories of aggressors are described. First, experienced offenders generally have multiple victims, systematically chosen based on particular characteristics. They meet their victims on the Internet and in the first instance build a relationship with them in the virtual environment before having an actual meeting in real life. Experienced criminals generally use an ideal virtual identity. The second type is represented by cynical abusers, who have contact with one or more victims, whom they previously knew in real life. Their relationship with their victims is generally reciprocal, meaning the child or adolescent willingly interacts with the abuser. The experience level of the abuser is considered medium and is generally characterized by excessive affection manifested in the virtual environment in order to later create an attachment relationship in the real world. The third category is represented by the emotional abusers who show strong attachment to the victim, showing feelings of love and affection. They are considered to have a low level of experience and generally have a demeaning behaviour. The fourth type described is that of sex offenders. Similar to romantic offenders, they use their own identity and meet their victims online to develop a possible offline relationship. They are distinguished from emotional abusers by their motivation to have sex without emotional or attachment implications. Their relationships are

generally short and mutual. Such persons do not specifically target children or adolescents, but will engage in a relationship with a minor to satisfy their sexual desires. This type of aggressors has a low level of experience in stalking their victims (Paquette, Fortin & Perkins: 2020).

It should be highlighted that sexual cyberbullying does not always involve actual sexual contact. There are situations in which abusers establish friendships with recruited victims who end up voluntarily sending intimate content to the abuser. As a result of such practices, we are witnessing an increase in cases of child pornography on the Internet, through the sale of materials obtained from the victim to sites with pornographic content.

Regardless of which group we belong to (parents, teachers, psychologists, lawyers, etc.) the crime of cyberbullying continues to have an upward trend despite the prevention measures promoted by certain profile organizations. Identifying cyber bullies is difficult and sometimes too late, when the victim has already been traumatized or worse, killed. Parental control on the content and pages accessed by the child or teenager by establishing a relationship of trust with them remain among the few real ways to prevent the phenomenon among children and teenagers.

5. Conclusions

Cyberbullying remains by far a serious social issue both inside and outside school, irrespective of the bullied person's culture or background. Unlike "regular" bullying, online bullying takes place continuously without any real control over the bully. Most of the time the latter becomes "invisible" to the authorities, teachers or the victim's family. More frequently encountered in children and adolescents, the phenomenon should not be completely excluded from among adult victims. Research has shown a number of serious consequences of being a cyberbullying victim, consequences that can leave scars on the person or their family. We should not ignore the fact that there are situations where face-to-face bullying and online bullying may occur simultaneously. With the development of social networks and digital forums, comments, photos, posts and content shared by people may often be viewed and used by strangers or acquaintances of the victim. Cyberbullying behaviour has negative effects on both the victim and the bully. The negative effects increase along with the frequency, duration, and severity of cyberbullying. Victims who frequently experience cyberbullying may end up with a decreased academic performance, depression, anxiety, and negative externalizing behaviours, as well as an increased risk of suicide by engaging in certain "challenges" launched by the bully.

Parents play a crucial part in preventing cyberbullying and related harm. By monitoring the devices used by their children and establishing some rules for their interaction on social media platforms, they can protect them from cyberbullying. Parents should also learn the signs that may suggest their children are being cyberbullied, such as increased device use, anger or anxiety after using a device, or hiding devices when others are around.

Constant communication with children regarding cyberbullying is an important component in preventing the phenomenon. Cultivating an open dialogue about cyberbullying can encourage a child to report a potentially dangerous online situation to an adult. In conclusion, the question remains "What can the online environment turn you into?" Aggressor or victim?"

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EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES: ENHANCING LAGS CAPACITY IN ROMANIA VIA SOCIAL ECONOMY VENTURES AMIDST AND BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

Anda Marina LUPUȘOR¹, Ionela Andreea STOICOV²

¹PhD Student at Sociology, West University of Timisoara (Romania),

E-mail: anda.nastasie85@e-uvt.ro

²PhD Student at Sociology, West University of Timisoara, (Romania),

E-mail: ionela.stoicov@e-uvt.ro

Abstract: *Since the first years of operation of Local Action Groups, LAGs have started to have a positive impact on the social and economic development of rural areas, giving priority to marginalized communities and disadvantaged groups. Through resilience and adaptability, they also had a positive impact through entrepreneurship actions, by collaborating with local entrepreneurs and from the social economy sector, by creating jobs for people with reduced opportunities or social barriers, from these environments. Starting from the research question regarding the share of social economy and entrepreneurship initiatives within the Local Development Strategies proposed by the Rural Local Action Groups in Romania, the main objective of the study was to identify the social economy and entrepreneurship measures implemented in the SDL of the LAGs aimed at the general population but also Roma communities and vulnerable groups. We used a qualitative research method, more precisely the focus group interview method. The findings shed light on the nature of social economy initiatives, the challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurs, and the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in fostering socio-economic development.*

Keywords: Local Action Groups (LAG), social economy, entrepreneurship, community development.

1. Introduction

The present study analyzes partial data obtained in a larger and more complex research. More precisely, we will analyze only the data related to the field of social economy and entrepreneurship in the context of the activity of rural LAGs in Romania. Community development initiatives play an essential role in addressing societal challenges and promoting sustainable development agendas at the macro level, but particularly in rural areas (Ryan, 1987). An effective way in which such initiatives can be carried out is through Local Action Groups (LAGs). These can be classified as public-private consortia, which use cooperation between local public administrations, entrepreneurs, social organizations, and citizen representatives to develop LEADER development strategies at the local level (Metis, AEIDL, CEU, 2010). Once these strategies are outlined, the LAGs commit to their implementation, using public funds, and coordinate the animation and development of projects, encouraging local actors to propose initiatives to support the strategy, focusing on the development of projects rather than their selection (Barone, Gaeta, Ghinoi & Silvestri, 2023). Thus, in a broad sense, they can be perceived as a variant of the tertiary sector, being a tool for strengthening social inclusion and cohesion (Delin, 2012).

Since its introduction in 1991, the concept of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the European Union has been a notable success, evidenced by its continuation and expansion over time. The implementation of the LAG has generated significant results in the development of rural areas, providing an effective framework for collaboration between different actors and promoting local and innovative initiatives. Thus, this model has become a valuable tool in promoting cohesion and sustainable development in rural communities in Europe (Pártlová & Hron, 2016). In Romania, Local Action Groups (LAGs) are at the forefront of these efforts, covering all regions of the country. Their activities, challenges and achievements shape the

landscape of community development in Romania, especially in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including Roma (Parno & Vasilută, 2021) and in promoting inclusive growth, constituting a dynamic public-private partnership that brings together a variety of actors from the rural environment, with the aim of promoting their development (Alec, Fîntîneru, Badea & Baci, 2015).

This study deepens the analysis of community development initiatives in Romania, with a special focus on the essential role played by LAG organizations. Through a meticulous examination of LAG activities, challenges and achievements, this research sheds light on the complicated dynamics underlying community development efforts in the country.

Representing various stakeholders, such as LAG representatives, beneficiaries, local council members and NGO affiliates, study participants provide diverse perspectives on LAG initiatives. Ultimately, the importance of the LEADER program lies in the involvement of all local actors, both from the public and private sectors. And this involvement can only be achieved by considering their ideas, knowledge, and experience to define valid territorial projects (Costa, de Matteis, Preite & Tafuro, 2016). Thus, by organizing comprehensive focus groups and convening participants from different regions, this study ensures inclusion and broadens the scope of involvement, gaining a spectrum of perspectives and experiences.

The results of the study cover the diverse nature of LAG activities, from accessing funds for territorial and sustainable development to stimulating collaboration with various stakeholders. Despite facing formidable challenges such as rural depopulation and bureaucratic hurdles, LAGs have demonstrated resilience and adaptability, achieving commendable achievements such as establishing multi-purpose centers and supporting entrepreneurship.

Looking ahead, LAGs are poised to respond to the evolving needs of vulnerable groups, promote sustainable development and strengthen collaboration with stakeholders (Duqueno, 2020). The focus will be on learning from past experiences, encouraging innovation and prioritizing support for marginalized communities. Overall, this study examines the indispensable role of LAGs in fostering inclusive and equitable community development, supporting strategic planning, collaboration, and innovation as essential drivers of progress.

Through a comprehensive examination of LAG activities and collaborations, this research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on community development initiatives in Romania and to support future policies and practices in this critical area.

2. Social economy

According to the definition proposed by (Amin, Cameron & Hudson, 2002), the social economy refers to non-profit actions that aim to combat social exclusion by producing and selling goods with social utility on market, without the involvement of the state or the private sector. By meeting social needs and often including the socially excluded, the social economy generates jobs and promotes entrepreneurship. Another definition proposed by Moulart and Ailenei (2005) considers the social economy as the various practices and ways of using economic resources to satisfy human needs, which are not included either in the scope of profit-making enterprises or in that of governmental institutions in the strict sense of the term. Essentially, the social economy comprises the voluntary, nonprofit, and cooperative sectors, which are formally independent of the state. Their market activities are tools for achieving social development goals that go beyond the limits of the market itself. Thus defined, the social economy should logically be considered as a third sector. Although there are slight differences in how it is explained, in essence, the social economy responds to the social needs of a community, through economic practices, measures, actions.

Regarding the characteristics of social economy organizations, according to Tomas Carpi (1997), they share common social and organizational characteristics: they are private in nature; membership is voluntary; prioritizing collective goals, such as social goals, job creation, member well-being and organizational sustainability, over profit-making; the absence of a regular hierarchical structure in members' interactions; the emphasis on the human dimension;

their main purpose being to meet the needs of members; and their principle of institutional organization is democratic.

In the context of LAGs, in addition to increasing the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, protecting the natural and rural environment, they can also bring results in the sphere of the social economy and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, by managing economic activities in rural areas, which lead to the improvement of the quality-of-life community members. For example, in a study carried out by Florescu and Rahoveanu (2021), which analyzed the impact that European funding had on the development of the rural environment in the area of influence of a Local Action Group from Olt County, one of the priorities of this LAG was poverty reduction, promotion of social inclusion, and economic development in rural areas. In order to achieve these priorities, the measures taken aimed to develop the villages in the region, by developing the social infrastructure and providing support for the creation of new economic activities, from which the local community can benefit and participate, in particular, marginalized people, socially excluded or in precarious economic situations. Thus, funds worth over 1.8 million euros were allocated to achieve the proposed objectives.

3. Entrepreneurship

Within capitalist societies, entrepreneurial activities are crucial to progress because new businesses stimulate economic growth and job creation. Because of this, the economic evolution of these societies depends largely on the ability of potential entrepreneurs to access and effectively use the available social and economic resources (Aldrich, 2005).

The concept of entrepreneurship is extremely diverse and can be approached from several perspectives. According to Naude (2008), within the economic field, there are a variety of definitions that explore the nature and role of the entrepreneur from an occupational, behavioral or outcomes perspective. The occupational definition places the entrepreneur in a self-employed context. This approach starts from the premise that a person can be either unemployed, self-employed, or full-time employed, and the entrepreneur is the one who chooses to be independent and run his own business. From a behavioral perspective, definitions describe the entrepreneur in terms of the perceived roles or functions they perform. Also, entrepreneurship can be defined according to the results that various forms of entrepreneurship can have on the economy. Thus, the various forms of entrepreneurship can contribute to economic growth, job creation, innovation, and the development of local communities. Therefore, understanding entrepreneurship in this sense involves analyzing its impact on the economic and social environment in which it operates.

Regarding the impact of entrepreneurship, studies have confirmed the positive impact it has on economic development (Galvão, Marques, Ferreira & Braga, 2020), on reducing carbon emissions and reducing problems climate, by implementing sustainable environmental practices (Gaweł, Benešová & Kotyza, 2024), respectively on vulnerable groups and areas (Chen & Barcus, 2024; Lang & Fink, 2019).

However, entrepreneurs face challenges, especially in rural areas, where they are less common or even absent in urban environments, since many rural communities and small towns are located in geographically isolated areas and far from business networks important. This limits access to human resources and a diverse workforce, broad buying and selling markets, and institutional support mechanisms for small businesses. Also, the small size and density of the population, together with limited local demand, make achieving economies of scale difficult for rural enterprises. Moreover, in many cases local economies in rural areas are dependent on a single industry or agriculture, exposing these places to higher sector-specific risks than their urban counterparts (Fortunato, MWP, 2014)

A solution by which these difficulties can be overcome is through Local Action Groups (LAGs). First, thanks to the fact that they can join these groups (Duquenoy, 2020), local entrepreneurs can have the support of other members, along with the necessary funds to continue their activity and make a positive contribution to society local. However, even if they

are not part of a LAG, local entrepreneurs can collaborate with them. Thus, by cooperating with such a group, which seeks to actively respond to the problems of the region of interest by making significant investments in development, local entrepreneurs can be supported in the establishment of green markets, education and the purchase of equipment (Božić, & Srbljinović, 2021). Also, through Local Action Groups (LAGs), entrepreneurship can be positively influenced by modernizing businesses, increasing profitability and the number of jobs, as well as offering entrepreneurial opportunities for a significant segment of the population (Chatzichristos & Perimenis, 2022).

4. Methodology

As part of the research approach, we used a qualitative method, more precisely the interview method, more precisely the focus group interview, with an interview guide as the instrument. For this, we believe that a semi-structured format was most appropriate and useful. This format allows for a combination of open and specific questions, giving participants the freedom to share their experiences while ensuring relevant topics are covered. It also facilitates further research on interesting or valuable information provided by participants. Here is how we structured the focus group:

The people selected for participation were members of the LAGs, including representatives of the LAG management, local public administration, non-governmental organizations, and companies, as well as the beneficiaries of the LAG projects. The participants had a good knowledge of the activities of their own organization and of the LAG of which they are a part, because we aimed to discuss, together with other specialists, about their own activities and those of the LAG, projects, etc.

We considered the four focus groups to cover the geographical distribution at the national level of the LAGs, with a corresponding allocation of the development regions. Thus, one focus group was dedicated to the North-West region, one to the South-West region, one to the North-East region and one to the South-East region.

We had in mind to have a minimum of 20-24 people recruited at national level, with a focus group consisting of a minimum of 5-6 relevant people from the territory of the LAGs, distributed in each of the four geographical regions mentioned previously and representing the categories of members of the GALs.

The present study analyzes partial data obtained in a larger and more complex research. More precisely, we will analyze only the data related to the field of social economy and entrepreneurship in the context of the activity of rural LAGs in Romania, thus restricting the number of targeted questions, results, and specific objectives to the following:

OB.a. To identify social economy and entrepreneurship measures implemented in LAG SDLs targeting the general population but also Roma communities and vulnerable groups, including challenges faced and significant achievements.

OB.b. Exploring specific pandemic and post-pandemic social economy and entrepreneurship support actions undertaken by LAGs or NGOs focusing on vulnerable/Roma groups that have generated interest among LAG members and the general population.

The research question in this case is "To what extent are social economy and entrepreneurship initiatives found within the Local Development Strategies proposed by the Rural Local Action Groups in Romania?"

5. Research results

Within this study, 4 focus groups were organized, each with a number of 5 participants, so we obtained 21 responses to the 12 topics proposed for discussion. The participants, 9 of the female gender and 12 of the male gender, do not have the same profile, in the sense that we tried to obtain different perspectives depending on the profile of the respondents, and here we are talking about either people who work at the level of GALs (with functions such as: executive

director, LAG manager, responsible project evaluator within the LAG, president, legal responsible), representatives of some NGOs:

"... I represent the Frumușița Community Resource Center Association. We are members of GAL Eremia Grigorescu from Galați county. We are an organization that deals with the Roma from the communities covered by the Eremia Grigorescu LAG and not only that, we operate at the level of Galați County..." (FG2, R2, M.).

"President of the Civitas Association together for the community, we unfold the activity in Solovăstru commune..." (FG4, R1, M.).

representatives of local councils:

"Mayor of Sulită Commune, Bătășani County, member of the Colinele Moldovei GAL". (FG3, R5, M.).

"For us, everything is a challenge because our role is to find resources and financing for everything the community needs. Unfortunately, more and more difficult, but it really was welcome the support received through the GAL." (FG4, R3, M.).

or beneficiaries of implemented projects:

"We accessed financing for a furniture production workshop through Codri de Aramă. We received support from Codri de Aramă. We are waiting to see what other funding will be available. In continuation, we want to develop We reached somewhere around 10 employees, we left with 2 and we got to 10." (FG3, R4, M.).

"I am a beneficiary of the Bison Land GAL. It's on the northeast side, like region, right around the city of Târgu Neamț I am the beneficiary of a project on non-agricultural. We are manufacturers of cotton socks and women's tights. We have accessed the project in 2018 and somewhere at the end of 2019 we completed the last installment of payment." (FG3, R5, M.).

Regarding the profile of the respondents, the majority, respectively 71%, are the representative members of the LAGs, and the rest, 29%, represent beneficiaries of the LAGs, mayors (representatives of local councils) and representatives of NGOs.

Regarding the organization of the focus groups, they were held online on the Google Meet platform, with different profile people from a macro region of the country (Southern Region of Muntenia, Western Region, Eastern Region, respectively Eastern Region). The meetings were set in advance, to ensure the availability and involvement of the respondents during the focus group. They lasted around two hours, during which ideas were developed, and the participants had the opportunity to learn new things or different perspectives from colleagues with the same interests from the same territorial region. We obtained the consent of the participants to record (audio and video) the discussions, so that the information provided by them can be used and processed in the present study under the protection of anonymity.

While some of the LAGs we contacted have territorial coverage of localities and small towns from a single county, others have a wider area, including localities from two counties:

"We have 12 communes from Galați County and 3 from Vaslui County." (FG2, R4, F.),

"We currently cover 10 communities in Mureș County and Harghita County." (FG4, R2, F.).

or even three counties:

"Gal Valea Someșului means 20 UATs, one of which is a city. It means parts of three counties: Cluj, Sălaș and Maramureș." (FG1, R5, M.),

But there were also LAGs whose composition included only localities from a single county. If we refer to the number of territorial administrative units at the level of LAGs, it varies between 7 and 20. It is obvious that their structure is not fixed and that, over time, some localities may leave or enter a LAG, this aspect being also mentioned by their representatives. Moreover, a large part of the respondents specified the composition of their LAG, mentioning the UATs (Territorial Administrative Units), the NGOs that represent the interests of the vulnerable groups (pensioners, Roma communities) involved, private companies, cooperatives, PFAs, but also the existing minorities in the area (Ukrainian and Hungarian minorities were mentioned from the NW part of the country) by the representatives of two LAGs.

Being asked what the areas of activity are, among the answers of the respondents there are many overlaps, which denotes similarities at their level, so that the areas of activity of the specified LAGs are:

Accessing Funds for Territorial Development, Rural and Sustainable Development - Through this field of activity, actions are initiated to access the funds allocated for development of the territory, focusing on rural and sustainable development. The allocation of these funds aims to improve infrastructure, promote sustainable practices, and stimulate economic growth in rural areas.

Rural Development and Farmer Support - Within this segment, efforts are focused on rural development and farmer support. In particular, LAGs are committed to supporting small farming communities, implementing projects that support Roma people and the elderly. These projects aim to increase the quality of life of these groups and promote sustainable agriculture.

Social Assistance and Social Centers - Initiatives in the field of social assistance have developed, but continue to develop, with an emphasis on new approaches and the creation of social centers. The objective of the LAGs is to provide the necessary support to vulnerable communities, including the elderly, through programs and services that improve their quality of life.

However, the diversity of projects carried out by certain Local Action Groups (LAGs) is highlighted by addressing several fields relevant to socio-economic development. These projects targeted vocational training, education, entrepreneurship development and improving health in the community.

A notable aspect is the fact that certain LAGs did not have projects focused exclusively on Roma communities, but were dedicated to all, depending on the needs and opportunities identified in the entire community. Through professional training projects, courses and training programs were offered to support the socio-professional integration of young people, including those from the Roma community. These initiatives have had positive results, including facilitating the establishment of businesses for young Roma and offering complementary education and after-school programs.

Thus, the LAG exemplified below implemented vocational training programs that had a significant impact in the community, training a considerable number of trainees in various fields. Through these efforts, it contributed to the development of the skills and qualifications necessary to support the insertion in the labor market and the improvement of the quality of life.

However, it is recognized that there is still room for improvement and expanding the impact of these projects, reflecting a continued concern to develop and optimize initiatives to support disadvantaged communities.

"Until now, we at GAL Eremia Grigorescu, have not had projects strictly focused on Roma. We have [...] a project with activity in the area of entrepreneurship, in the area of training professional, education and health. We worked on all four levels. We had gratifying results, including the entrepreneurship part, we managed to support young people Roma who managed to open businesses. We advised them, we took them to [...] Startup Nation. We opened their taste for entrepreneurship. We also had programs on the education side second chance and after school programs. On the professional training side, we had around six jobs that we managed to offer to students. We formed around 200 students and have also completed the courses. There are results, but there is room for better."(FG2, R5, M.)

However, there are certain difficulties or barriers, especially of an economic nature, that prevent organizations from reaching their full potential. But despite financial limitations, the associations managed to access several projects, each addressing different needs in the community. These projects have had a significant impact, covering various aspects such as sanitation, sports infrastructure, and school equipment.

Moreover, by funding several smaller projects instead of large projects, which would be fewer in number, some respondents noted that they can maximize impact. This approach

allows for a more efficient response to the diverse needs of the community and to support a larger number of beneficiaries. Although they are aware that the funds available are not sufficient to meet all the needs in their area, they make constant efforts to support development initiatives and encourage local entrepreneurship as well as economic development.

"We have now established at the meeting with the GAL management and with the partners in the GAL, we have taken on a private 50-50, Because we, in fact, have fewer and fewer sources of funding and what we do, we do for the community. Indeed, the private sector needs to develop to bring an increase to your budget and employment, but you don't always have the concrete solution. What remains behind us as UAT will always benefit the community. Obviously, we are interested, we try to do the right thing. Our funding sources are quite limited, quite since small. The finances we offer are quite small, but in return, from our financing, each town hall bought certain things they needed in the previous installment, but did not put money from them from the local budget, because there were other uncovered holes, and then any money is welcome. One piece of equipment, one machine for snow removal, for local services, so we accessed three projects. The first was the one for 37,000 euros, in which we bought a trailer, a tractor, with which sanitation works were practically carried out. The second project was the synthetic field, rehabilitated, and the third one we took to the education side, namely the equipment of the kindergarten and classrooms from grades 1-4, so we tried to make each project go in a different direction, to cover all the gaps. We financed a maximum of 100,000 euros per project, precisely so that we can finance as many beneficiaries as possible, because the needs are great. In our area we were on this tranche, 33,000 inhabitants, and the project part with all the bonuses we received was 2,000 euros and the money is not enough for our area, but we are trying, we told you, with the little money which we have to finance start-ups, company development, etc.

The positive experience of a beneficiary, who became an entrepreneur within the funding project, can be seen in her optimistic attitude towards the development of other projects in the future. This expresses the desire to continue to develop their business and open new activities in a large available space. Even though she does not yet have a clear idea for future projects, she is open to funding opportunities and wants support to implement her new initiatives. She is aware that financial resources are essential for the success of future projects and hopes to find adequate sources of funding to materialize her plans. Even though it admits that it no longer has sufficient financial resources to finance future activities from its own funds, it remains open to ideas and action plans, confidently awaiting future opportunities.

"[...] on the 1st floor and on the ground floor a rather large space. I want to open another business there. I am waiting for other funded opportunities. I don't have a clear idea, I know what I want, but until you have a financial base that gives you hope that you can implement the next project, you can't talk much about it. There is ample space, and the funding must be commensurate. We have already built the building, which is quite large, from our own funds. I don't really have the financial strength to finance the activity on the ground floor. Maybe you have ideas ideas? No, they are definitely ideas. There are also some action plans, but we are waiting."(FG3, R9, F).

Regarding the interaction with other entities, there are several non-governmental organizations active at the national level, which are willing to get involved and collaborate with other organized structures, such as: town halls, other NGOs, LAG Associations. In view of such collaboration, the importance lies in finding a common element and a common way of implementation, given the existing willingness and common desire, both on the part of these organizations and on the part of other entities involved in the process.

"They are NGOs active at the national level, willing. Availability and desire also exist on the one hand and the other, the important thing is to be realistic enough to find a common element, a common way to implement."(FG2, R1, F).

"Yes, there are also external organizations and during this programming period, we had one example - Rome Policy. We collaborated with them, took some steps, but we're coming back to Consensus 2003, which implemented various types of projects."(FG2, R3, F).

"Yes, we do have an association that carries out activities. Actually, I think there are more. About one, we had the opportunity to meet even the people who deal with such a thing. It is it's about the association from Dorohoi, It's not in our territory, but in general carries out activities with vulnerable groups in the territories, in this case around Dorohoi in Botoșani county up to the municipality, although there are some NGOs at the municipality level as well Botoșani who carry out activities with vulnerable groups."(FG3, R1, M).

A relevant example of an organization that has implications beyond the territory it occupies is represented by an NGO that operates a recovery and rehabilitation center for people with disabilities, offering other services such as a restaurant for people from vulnerable groups, an enterprise of social economy and specialized services for disadvantaged children and families.

"They have a recovery and rehabilitation center for people with disabilities, they have a restaurant for people from vulnerable groups, have a social economy enterprise, of which six people are disabled, have specialist services for children and families. It is the most important organization and the most involved at the moment in area, there is a municipality 10 km from us, the distance is not very long [...]."(FG1, R3, M).

Many such organizations that focus on children have been exemplified, so we can underline the existence of a significant number of organizations that focus their efforts on supporting Roma children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These organizations offer assistance and support on multiple levels, including education, culture, and personal development. Through specific programs and activities, these organizations try to ensure equal access to education and promote social inclusion for children from marginalized backgrounds. They also invest in the personal development of these children, offering them opportunities to develop and grow in a safe and supportive environment. Therefore, through such programs, organizations outside the territory also contribute to reducing social inequalities and creating a more promising future for vulnerable children, regardless of their ethnic origin or socio-economic circumstances.

"Activities were carried out at schools, social assistance (services) was given to individuals disadvantaged. Qualification courses were held on the digitization side, and they had 265 beneficiaries included in this project."(FG1, R5, M).

"But in general, there are activities to help families who really have serious problems, for example, they intervene in various cataclysms, fire, the house falls, someone gets sick ... there are several associations at the Botoșani county level that are really involved in problems, especially targeted at a certain category of people who need help. At the level of projects involved with a specific target group, there are generally projects right on European funds, because in general the funds are not that close at hand any NGO can carry out activities in the territory."(FG3, R1, M).

"In the territory of which we are a part, they carried out special activities on the social side The Corona Foundation in the case of domestic violence, having an important contribution in what concerns the protection of women and children in these situations of risk."(FG3, R6 F).

Thus, the data reveal the presence of NGOs active at the national level, indicating the desire to collaborate with other organized structures such as municipalities, other NGOs and LAG associations. Collaboration is highlighted as essential, requiring a realistic approach to find common ground for implementation (FG2, R1, F).

Data analysis highlights the importance of collaboration between external NGOs or other social economy organizations and local entities in addressing social issues and promoting community development. By leveraging each other's strengths and resources, these partnerships can lead to more impactful interventions and sustainable outcomes. However, funding limitations require collective efforts to overcome obstacles and generate positive change in SDL development.

However, the insights provided represent valuable lessons for future efforts, underscoring the importance of continued efforts to improve social infrastructure, promote

social inclusion, and promote community development. Through collective action and persistence, LAGs can continue to make sense.

In conclusion, primary data provide valuable insights into the plans and priorities of organizations associated with Local Action Groups (LAGs) regarding community well-being and development. The analysis reveals several key themes, including challenges related to funding procedures, diverse plans, focus on social services and support for vulnerable groups, maximizing impact with limited resources, anticipating future funding and projects, strategic planning and adaptation, and the importance of the multi-fund component.

6. Conclusions

The study explored the dynamics of social economy initiatives within Local Action Groups (LAGs) and their impact on rural development and entrepreneurship, proposing a sociological perspective starting from qualitative data obtained through focus group interviews. The findings shed light on the nature of social economy initiatives, the challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurs, and the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in fostering socio-economic development.

The dynamics of the social economy within the LAGs

The concept of social economy, as elucidated by Amin, Cameron, and Hudson (2002) and Moulaert and Ailenei (2005), emphasizes the importance of non-profit actions aimed at addressing social needs and stimulating community development. The social economy, comprising the voluntary, non-profit, and cooperative sectors, operates independently of the state, with an emphasis on collective goals and democratic institutional organization.

The study showed that LAGs play a key role in promoting social economy initiatives, especially in rural areas. By channeling European funding towards poverty reduction, social inclusion and economic development, LAGs facilitate the creation of social infrastructure and the establishment of new economic activities. These initiatives not only generate employment but also empower marginalized individuals and communities, thereby enhancing overall well-being and quality of life.

Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

Entrepreneurship is emerging as a key driver of economic growth and innovation within capitalist societies. However, rural entrepreneurs face unique challenges arising from geographic isolation, limited access to resources and sector-specific risks. Local Action Groups (LAGs) offer a viable solution, providing support networks and financial assistance to local entrepreneurs, thus stimulating economic activity and job creation.

The study highlighted the diverse nature of entrepreneurship, ranging from self-employment to innovative ventures. Despite the challenges inherent in rural areas, entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience and adaptability, leveraging collaborative partnerships with LAGs and other stakeholders to overcome barriers to growth.

Partnerships, collaboration, and community development

Collaboration emerges as a central theme in promoting socio-economic development within rural communities. Local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and LAGs work together to identify common goals and implement targeted initiatives to meet community needs. These partnerships facilitate access to funding, expertise, and resources, thereby maximizing the impact of development projects.

The study highlighted the importance of inclusive approaches to community development, with a focus on supporting vulnerable groups such as Roma communities and disadvantaged youth. Through vocational training programs, educational initiatives and social assistance projects, LAGs strive to promote equal opportunities and promote social inclusion.

In conclusion, the study data highlights the critical role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in promoting social economy initiatives, stimulating entrepreneurship, and stimulating community development in rural areas. By capitalizing on partnerships and European funding, LAGs contribute to poverty reduction, social inclusion, and economic growth, thus improving the overall quality of life of residents. Furthermore, continued investment in social economy initiatives and supportive policy frameworks are essential to sustainably address the socio-economic challenges facing rural communities.

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THE ROLE OF ASSOCIATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE NEGOTIATION AND INTEGRATION OF MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE INTO CIVIL SOCIETY

Enache TUȘA

Lecturer, Ph.D., Ovidius University of Constanta (Romania), E-mail: enachetusa@gmail.com

Abstract: *We propose for this issue a text in which we present the analysis of policies and mechanisms designed to prevent violence and abuse of individuals or communities, we will develop research on the level of Regulation of the interests of minority communities in South-Eastern Europe within the systems the politics in which these minorities live. In the text of our research, we will address the role that associations, foundations and NGOs representing the interests of minority communities have, but also the actions that these entities carry out to improve the condition and relations with civil society and with the system of political institutions. The importance of civil society in the contemporary political context is paramount because there are important efforts to undermine the role of civil society and to dilute the contribution to social and institutional modernization. Minority communities have a major interest in maintaining and involving civil society because of the strength with which it imposes social and political reforms that Community members need for social integration. In this research we present how institutions and associations contribute to the development and involvement of civil society in administration, but also the framework of regulations and legislation. In our study we will analyze civil society in Southeast European States that have developed their own models of interaction with the institutions that govern and that should balance political decisions. Therefore, civil society develops instruments and engagement strategies aimed at representing with interest and dignity the interests of the governed. We will look at how diverse social, cultural, linguistic and economic contexts influence how these minority communities perceive governance and integration into the social body. We present various contexts in which political systems try to regulate Community demands and efforts to limit the factors generating social-community tensions. We analyze the mechanisms by which certain entities and public opinions develop society and generate premises that favor the modernization of societies and the political system despite the fact that in some societies institutional systems try to restore traditionalism and undemocratic practices within those societies.*

Keywords: civil society, minorities, institutions, communication, civil rights

1. Introduction

In a recently published work Geert Hofstede stated: The world is full of confrontations between people, communities and peoples think and behave differently. At the same time people, communities face common problems that require cooperation and intelligence to solve (Hofstede, 2012: 15). In this way we will analyze the proposed theme

The society in which we live is one characterized by the existence of a multiculturalism anchored in the idea of ethnicity and having cultural valences. Multiculturalism, as the existence in the world of a multitude of languages, cultures and ethnicities, presupposes tolerance and in cases where it does not exist, conflicts arise – whether ethnic or cultural-religious (for more details, see Otovescu, 2008)

Information theory (which reduces everything to the transmitter, receiver, channel, message, and code) cannot be a pertinent socket for thinking of communication in all its forms, for not everything is material in communication. In contemporary society, communication has become a central topic of debate. Everyone asks: Why are there so many communication problems? How can communication between individuals, between groups, within organizations be facilitated?

Since we have decided to analyze the multicultural society, the conflicts that may arise in this context, but also the most appropriate way to manage them, by referring mainly to organizations that act and have competence in regulatory mechanisms as well as negotiation techniques in the event of conflicts, both globally and regionally (Otovescu, 2021).

The subject is topical given that conflicts continue to persist or arise at international level, their management being a thorny issue that is subject to all sorts of debates on the one hand, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the measures taken by the international organizations created for this purpose, and on the other hand, in many cases of internal conflicts of an identity nature, the right of these fora to interfere in the internal affairs of troubled states is called into question (Otovescu, 2013).

The main coordinates in the development of this research are related to the conflicts caused by cultural differences and ethno-political identities, outlining the current dimensions of the problem. At the same time, there is also the prospect of the most common ways of managing or resolving crises.

Another important work, centered especially on the issue of multiculturalism and the idea of minority and tolerance in this context, is the book *What do we do with foreigners? Pluralism vs. multiculturalism*, written by Giovanni Sartori, an essay on multiethnic society, and multiculturalism. From this paper I was able to extract important information about multicultural societies and how a society of this kind promotes ethnic and cultural differences (Sartori, 2007: 24).

Psychology is at the heart of many communication issues. Communication is a fundamental human activity. On the other hand, the meaning, value, appreciation and evaluation of a communication depend essentially on the subjectivity of the persons who use it. We know very well that a communication conveys different meanings depending on the subjects who “deal” with it, as well as on the contexts in which the communication and its protagonists enlist. Therefore, the study of communication has often intersected with theories of human subjectivity and thus with studies of psychology. First of all, communication is a personal skill, it cannot be separated from man, as it is with tools and tools, because of this, we learn to communicate to ensure the necessary skills that allow us to understand how we both think and feel ourselves, and those with whom we enter into interpersonal relationships.

Communication training also gives us greater freedom to properly direct our own behavior and understand the behavior of others. Fundamental way of psycho-social interaction of people, carried out in articulate language or other codes, in order to transmit information, achieve stability or change in individual or group behavior. As for multipartism after communism, we must consider three perspectives. First, the communist regime produced a leveling, a homogenization of society and left individuals without their social or institutional identities.

In post-communist democracies, there is a lack of substance to partisan competition, lack of affiliations and firm political commitments. Secondly, we must consider modernization. Industrialization is the work of the communist regime, and the success of communism in modernizing societies has helped to make the transition easier. “The communist regime created the ground for the democratization of the societies of central and eastern Europe, loading individuals with that social and ideological baggage upon which the parties could fold.” (Radu, 2017).

Thirdly, we must consider the comparative side, in the sense that the communist experience is not uniform in Europe. Bringing democracy into question without taking into account the existence of political parties is not only wrong, but also an incomplete approach to democracy as a real socio-political process. The existence of political parties in a democratic society is a prerequisite for the proper functioning of the political system, so the connection between democracy and multiparty is indisputable, depending on each other.

2. The theoretical basis of the analysis

Thus, post-totalitarian societies do not have the same social and political structures, and the society that emerged from communism in the same period had other developments in terms of their political functioning. Huntington said: "Prolonged periods of suppression of political parties generate forces that burst with explosive energy when totalitarian rule ends." It refers to those parties in a state of "submersion" that come to light, reinventing themselves. Huntington also points out that the more unexpected the end of a totalitarian regime, the more extensive and varied political participation is. (Huntington, 1968: 405)

After 1960, the number of ethnocultural groups mobilized for the purpose of official recognition of their specific characteristics and related rights has increased spectacularly so that their identity and culture are preserved. It is precisely the fact that these groups, which make up the present multicultural societies, have certain claims which are opposed to a political will, that represents, in the opinion of most analysts of the phenomenon, the source of the worst internal and interstate conflicts of an ethnic nature since the second World War. (Salat 2001:17)

After the "progressive disintegration" of the Soviet Union, in some cases the conflicts that arose were formally resolved, while in the Member republics that became independent, new conflicts arose. In about 80% of the cases analyzed, it was found in the same study that the ethnocultural group contesting, that is, the one claiming something, lives in conditions of discrimination (be it ethnic, economic or political) having historical roots or more recent origins. In the rest of the cases, representing 20%, the triggers for ethnic conflicts are a series of disputed territories, the struggle for supremacy, the struggle for control of resources. (Calvocoressi, 2000)

An important factor in the emergence of ethnic conflicts is the fact that in international relations the sovereignty of States and the inviolability of borders are immutable principles that must be respected. Because of this, specialists are often unable to make known the current tension between a state and subnational ethnic identity and, consequently, to develop practical solutions to this challenge of contemporary international politics. An example is the situation after the collapse of the colonial system when, despite the support of the principle of national self-determination, the new borders between States have been drawn according to the interests of the areas of influence of the great powers, the demographic and cultural characteristics being flagrantly violated. This inevitably led to unimaginable violence in the name of the legitimate desire for nation-building. This explains the growing number of autonomy claims and secessionist movements in the world, whose method of settlement is currently not regulated by international norms (Salat, 2001)

According to Donald Horowitz (author of the monumental work *Ethnic groups in conflict*), ethnic conflict and its evolution can be attributed to developments in international relations over time. The first evolution to which Horowitz refers is related to the doctrine of national self-determination which, having its origin in the principle of popular sovereignty of the eighteenth century, played an essential role in the foundation of nineteenth-century nationalisms. This doctrine provided the ideology of the unification of Germany and Italy, led to the dismantling of empires, and, in the Wilsonian interpretation of the term, contributed to the redefinition of the borders of Central and Eastern Europe. The doctrine returned to attention after World War II during the decolonization process in Africa and Asia. (Biancchini, 2003:74).

Although it has often responded to historical needs, the application of the principle of national self-determination, which implies "the right of nations to choose their own political status and the path of economic, social and cultural development", has not only resulted in the settlement of ethnopolitical conflicts.

Its involvement frequently stopped at the old, colonial borders, where deeply divided societies remained to confront the question of who do the new States that have gained their independence really belong to?

While some groups claimed power, others believed that the process of applying the principle of self-determination was incomplete and that it must be persevered until the

independence of all ethnocultural communities was acquired. According to Horowitz, the exercise of national self-determination on a large scale and therefore also in the process of decolonization had consequences, including in Western Europe and North America. The granting of sovereignty to the former Belgian colonies (Zair, Rwanda and Burundi) contributed to the Flemish mobilization and the emergence of the autonomous movement of this Community in Belgium. The emancipation of African peoples played an important role in the movements in the United States against racial discrimination as well as in the mobilization of the French-speaking communities of Quebec, whose members began to call themselves „negres blancs d’Amerique” (Salat, 2001: 67).

The spread of egalitarian ideology also contributed to the multiplication of situations of ethno-political conflict. Promoting the norms of equality and equity resulted in the widespread refusal of ethnic subordination, as well as the spread of the tendency to compare the situation of their own ethnic group with the standards of neighboring groups. This resulted in a better awareness of the disadvantages of their own group, which could easily lead to the outbreak of conflict. The current state system, which originated in European feudalism and the colonial system, also plays an important role, providing a favorable framework in which ethno-political conflicts arise and unfold, the ongoing concerns for the capture of control in the state and the exclusion of all rivals are often at the root of ethnic conflict (Carpinschi, 2001:12)

In a context in which “globalization and multiculturalism raise many problems”, the theory of modernization argues that the phenomenon of ethnic conflict is the collateral product of modernization. The first to establish this in a study published in 1961 was Karl W. Deutsch argues that „ *the process of social mobilization – the transition of an overwhelming majority of a country’s population from a traditional to a modern form of life – is directly linked to ethnic conflict*” (Deutsch, 1961:45).

In his view, ethnic conflict is the product of the competition between the rate of social mobilization and the rate of assimilation, the proportion of the population mobilized but not yet assimilated being the “first cruel indicator” of the group conflict. More recent and elaborate versions of the modernization theory emphasize that individuals involved in the economic and political processes of modernization are more prone to conflict not because of their differences but because they become more and more similar, want the same things, they have identical ambitions, pursue similar goals.

Theories that emphasize economic interests are part of the category of materialistic explanations, which have several variants, some equating the threat of ethnic conflicts with the manipulation of elites in order to divert public attention from the real adversary. Others argue that ethnicity is a faithful expression of group economic interests, while others emphasize the role of group economic interests or the role of incompatible economic interests of „entrepreneurial minorities” and „host society”. (Salat, 2001:87).

3. The culture of multicultural pluralism

J.S. Furnivall (analyzed by Sinescu) believes that a society characterized by cultural pluralism lacks shared values, cultural differences are dominant, and contacts between members of different communities are reduced to economic relations and exchanges. Thus, the political system can only be maintained through the use of force, which is why these types of highly unstable societies have a high conflict potential. It was also stated that, in the context of modernity, ethnic, cultural or religious pluralism has more and more consequences manifested especially in the sphere of values, world and life concepts, religious and ethical practices (Sinescu & Trofin, 2011:104).

Another exponent of cultural pluralism, M.G. Smith (analyzed by Salat) believes that the existence of culturally divided societies is linked to the parallel existence of several groups that have mutually incompatible institutional systems. These systems each tend toward internal integration and consistency, leading to the formation of several closed socio-cultural units within a single political Community. In Smith’s view, the political order designed to ensure

the unity and stability of such a society can only be based on the subordination of one (cultural) segment of the society to the other. Thus, Smith and Furnivall share the same views and are on the line of Mill's skepticism about the low chances of democratic governance in ethnocultural-divided societies, considering that societies characterized by cultural pluralism are prone to ethnic conflicts. (Salat, 2001: 67).

Viewed from a comparative perspective, the above-mentioned theories are based on contradictory concepts, and David Horowitz believes that the deficiencies of these theories do nothing but represent valuable indicators for a comprehensive and comprehensive theory of ethnic conflict. A more comprehensive theory should be based on explaining the connection between the interests of the masses and those of the elites, it should also exemplify the role that Community anxieties play in the relief of conflicts, as well as the role of other elements of group psychology. It is also necessary to clarify the functions and importance of symbolic controversies in the evolution of ethno-political conflicts. Horowitz analyzes as sources of potential conflict the mechanisms of collective psychology to compare the state of rival communities, along with the policies of domination and the mechanisms for legitimizing group ideology, he studies in depth the logic of secession – which often leads to consequences opposite to those desirable.

He devotes extensive chapters to electoral systems in which ethnic parties also run, assesses the chances of multiethnic coalitions and alliances and parties that include representatives of several ethnicities, follows the paradigms of militarization of ethno-political conflicts, while also assessing the effects of military intervention in the case of conflicts that have already reached the stage of armed violence. (Malcolm, 1998: 76).

On the other hand, Gurr and Harff distinguish four types of ethnocultural communities: Ethno-nationalist communities, indigenous peoples, elites acting on behalf of ethnocultural and ethno-class communities. Ethno-nationalist communities are relatively large regional ethnic groups that live within a country with the majority population and differ from this majority population by their way of life or by particular cultural features. The political movements of these groups are supported by the hope of achieving a higher degree of autonomy or independence. Usually, these groups, which Gurr and Harff call ethno-nationalist communities, were themselves, at some point in the course of history, "founding nations of the state" or had broad autonomy within a state structure. For example, Corsicans or Bretons, although they lost their autonomous status centuries ago, keep alive this idea of regaining autonomy, an idea that still motivates their political movements today. These types of communities are or may be parties to protracted ethno-political conflicts, such as independence movements or irredentists. (Marian, 2012: 45)

Multicultural societies have historically been marked by various ethnic conflicts as well as secessionist processes, especially characteristic of the late 20th century, all of which are fueled primarily by the collective identities of different ethnicities. However, ethnicity does not necessarily lead to conflicts, since the desire to create one's own state on the territory it occupies is not characteristic of all ethnic groups, some opting to increase autonomy within the state within which it coexists, without challenging its legitimacy (Nye, 2005: 88).

The development of ethnic conflicts comes amid the end of the cold War, as the end of bipolar brings about the emergence of non-state actors that accentuate fragmentation trends at global, regional or local level. Such trends have been particularly noticeable in federations of States such as Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia, but also in some unitary States where groups characterized by ethnic differences coexisted. As a result, in the context created by the end of the cold War, we are witnessing the shaping of a complex Yugoslav crisis, strongly marked by the conflict between Serbs and Croats. Some of the worst fighting took place between Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslims in Bosnia, the most ethnically and religiously heterogeneous of the former Yugoslav republics. In the summer of 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declare their independence from Yugoslavia, ethnic Serbs and Croats start fighting in Croatia, leading to the

UN imposing an embargo on arms supplies to all former Yugoslav republics. (Bianchini, 2001: 84).

With the declaration of independence, Slovenia and Croatia reject not only the federation in its form at the time, but also any possible modification. Slovenia, homogeneous, compact and quite isolated, has started to take steps to comply with the decision taken. Each Yugoslav Republic had "its own distinct defense forces from the federal army, whose units were isolated from each other and from their reserves; its attempts to take over Slovenia were cut short." On the other hand, the history of Croatia, which represented one fifth of the territory of Yugoslavia, bore the mark of fighting between Croats and Serbs in World War II „instigated by rival Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches to which almost all Croats and Serbs belonged” (Calvocoressi, 2000:201).

As I have shown in the study on tolerance in a multicultural society, the concept of tolerance and multiculturalism are intrinsically linked because tolerance is a sine qua non condition for the creation and existence of a multicultural society. Tolerance means respecting the values of the other and in no case does it mean indifference. The tolerator has personal beliefs and principles that he believes to be true but agrees that others have the right to have their own beliefs, even if from the tolerator's point of view, they are seen as wrong (Glenny, 2021).

Following the dissolution of the old empires, many multi-ethnic and multicultural nation-states were created. These new states are relatively weak economically and militarily, many of them do not have a developed civil society and host populations characterized by a wide variety of ethnic, cultural or religious traditions, all of which are clear premises for potential conflicts. Such a situation is also found in Kosovo, where tensions in the area have always been attributed to the rivalry between Serbs and Croats, the Second World War having a significant role in fueling this rivalry, as it deepened the differences between Serbs and Croats, as between Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo. In Romania, where the need for democratization of society was acute, the option for a way of voting that would allow parliamentary representation of all political options in proportion to the electoral force of each was the optimal solution. In addition, the adoption of a RP-type vote marked, even in this respect, the break with the communist regime, which is a relative majority (pluralistic) type of vote, and Romania's reconnection to the pre-communist democratic traditions (Radu, 2018).

When a word is fashionable, as is the case today with the word "communication", when the activities or events it represents multiply, the meaning tends to widen because of the very interest it enjoys. Thus, with the diversification and massification of communication, politicians, known artists and, in general, any person whose career depends to a lesser or greater extent on the opinion the public makes about it, turn to the services of specialists called communication advisors.

In this case, we must understand through communication the transmission of an image, the transmission that is carried out mainly through the media, that is, the representation we make about a person in question, to be strong and at the same time favorable: otherwise, we will say that the person concerned does not have „public access” that „ails to communicate” (Nicoară, 2002).

In Romania there is no communication culture, professional communicators are journalists, television "stars" and political analysts who do not exceed, in understanding the media phenomenon in general and the TV one in particular, the common level of the model proposed by information theory. For them, as for politicians, television communication means nothing more than „transmitter-receiver-message" and possibly in cases of extreme refinement, „channel" and „code" (Pedler, 2001).

Both the development of the communication capacity and the psychological characteristics of individuals are shaped by the process of socialization; it provides individuals with the cultural heritage, different from one society to another, through which they can

assimilate specific ways of thinking, action and conduct that allow them to integrate harmoniously into the social collective and into the distinct groups.

Socialization deals with how different forms of culture, such as creeds, traditional lifestyles, moral rules of life or different kinds of habits, those which are external to the individual become internal parts of the psychological organization of the individual through a deliberate or unplanned learning process or as a result of the social influences of institutional or non-institutional agents. From another point of view, the influence of the media can be exercised in the short or long term.

4. The individual and institutions and civil rights

The effect of the media differs according to the different levels at which they act: Individual, group, culture, society. The messages transmitted through the media touch only to a small extent individuals taken in isolation, or at least do not cause, except with a few exceptions, considerable upheavals. A viewer who witnesses a confrontation between two politicians on the small screen will not change his intention to vote at the end of this debate unless he belongs to the group of undecideds. But political debates can exert an influence on the behavior of public opinion, not an individual phenomenon, but a collective one, a group one (Noelle-Neumann, 2004: 44).

Mass communication involves professional communicators, specialized in the transmission of messages through different media, as well as a communication control system, as this is done through institutions operating under rules. The most well-known scheme for analyzing mass communication is the one proposed by American researcher Harold D. Lasswell. It starts from the idea that in any communication action one must take into account the five fundamental questions: Who?; what does he say?; on what channel?; to whom? and with what effect? The first question, who?, corresponds to „control analysis and studies on message conditioning”; (Miftode et. al, 2004: 108). The second question consists of the analysis of the content of the communication, the study of the messages and their orientation; the third question concerns the channels of communication; the fourth question is about audience analysis and how to receive the message, and the fifth is about analyzing the effects and effectiveness of the media.

In terms of ethnic Community, it is defined as a group of people living in a given country, or locality, having an ethnic origin, religion, language, and traditions of their own. They, United by characteristics of ethnicity, language and traditions, develop an acute sense of solidarity, in order to preserve their own traditions, maintain the form of worship, ensure the education and upbringing of children, in accordance with the spirit and traditions of their ethnicity (Miftode et.al, 2004:123).

The term minority, as defined by M.J. Deschenes, in a study presented to the Human Rights Commission in 1985, designates “a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, whose members have different ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics from those of the rest of the population and are animated by the will to preserve their culture, traditions, religion or language.” (Rex,1998:106). In explaining the concept of minority, it points out, therefore, that these communities are characterized by the fact that “they have religions different from the host society”, which are often developed as “world religions” (Nicoară, 2002: 67).

The issue of minorities is related to democracy and the implementation of the rule of law, the recognition of the specific rights of different minorities and the guarantee of these rights being a basic criterion of democracy. At a time when the process of democratization in Central Europe was in full swing and the European order agreed in Yalta was falling apart, the issue of national minorities was once again one of the most important aspects of the political reality on the continent. The revival of nationalism after 1989 meant, in the history of mankind, a return of nations as a “revenge of the concrete against the communist ideological abstract” (Kiss, 1993:176)

The implosion of the communist system broke up the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which regrouped several ethnicities that considered themselves distinct nations. Therefore, after the collapse of communism, the question was posed from the point of view of the significance of the idea of existence as a minority, since the minority also implies a quantitative aspect, the term suggesting a certain degree of inferiority or underestimation. It creates the impression that “in modern history the nation functions as the norm, and nationalities, national and ethnic minorities appear as a kind of deviant phenomena, accidents, anomalies.” However, „there is no need to think too deeply in order to recognize that in our world the minority situation is actually a universal state. We can all be included, each from one point of view or another, in a minority” (O’Sullivan et al. 2001:104).

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Most of the time, communication within such groups develops in the context of the formulation of certain claims and is materialized by the adoption of solidarity positions or by the expression of a common political will. On this basis, Austrian specialist in international law Felix Ermacora pointed out that the difference between ethnic and national minorities consists precisely in the “demand for political participation”, in his opinion the national minority being a group of persons who, beyond the characteristics of ethnic minorities, are not only a group of persons, but also a group of persons who, in addition to the characteristics of ethnic minorities.

It constantly tends to acquire the rights that make it possible to participate, as a group, in the political decision-making process either within a given territory or within the entire country, without being joined by the other ethnicities of that state. (Ermacora, 1995: 32).

At the end of World War I, the principle of nationalities triumphed as a result of the collapse of the great multinational empires in central and eastern Europe and as a result of the Russian revolution, nationalism evolving “as a plural phenomenon, manifested on large cultural spaces, as an expression of specific traditions and mentalities”. In the European space, the reconstruction of the map based on national borders deprived nationalism of its liberating and unifying content. For most nationalities, there were minorities left outside the borders of the national state, as is the case with Hungarians in Romania as well as Slovenes in Austria. In addition, there were some nationalities without States, both in Eastern and Western Europe, for example Macedonians and Catalans. (Hobsbawm, 1997:17).

After World War I, the drawing of new frontiers brought about the emergence of national minorities, communities characterized by a relatively strong national identity and a community consciousness through which they felt closely connected to other countries. (MacMillan, 2015: 56)

Later, in the post-World War II period, significant changes took place globally, but also internally, regarding the issue of minorities, and a series of laws and policies were adopted to reduce or eliminate discrimination of any kind in this field. Even in monoethnic or mono-cultural countries such rules on the cultural autonomy of minorities have been adopted, and in many societies, there can already be talk of legal pluralism aimed at ensuring protection for minority groups. At the same time, the principle of equality before the law is part of any modern constitution, with a focus on civil rights as well as on securing jobs by offering equal opportunities in the field of education and professional qualifications (Miftode et al., 2003:85).

In international law we are witnessing some significant improvements in the rules on minors, the right to political citizenship and freedom before the law being considered insufficient for the real protection of ethnic minorities. The peculiarities of the evolution of inter-ethnic relations, especially between minorities and the majority, greatly influence the way in which minority issues, be they ethnic, linguistic or religious, are addressed and solved.

Consequently, linguistic, cultural and religious rights, the rights of education and instruction in the mother tongue, personal autonomy and local autonomy are gradually guaranteed and ensured. Inter-ethnic tolerance and social justice have seen notable progress in recent decades: „Finland, Ireland and Canada officially recognize linguistic duality; in Spain there are four official languages; cultural and linguistic rights are mutually recognized in Germany and Denmark, targeting those minorities” (Miftode et al., 2003: 67).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, I can state that the constant involvement of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as all the efforts of these two organizations directed towards the solution of the conflict in the area, came against the background of a feeling of concern present in the ranks of the entire international community, concern that took shape with the escalation of conflicts that brought with it the risk of its expansion among other countries as well. The extremely dramatic humanitarian consequences, as well as the attitude of some leaders to ignore diplomatic efforts aimed at a peaceful solution to this crisis, but also the destabilizing role of the Albanian militant forces in Kosovo have fueled this concern more and more, causing a reaction of NATO, the UN and other international bodies.

If in Croatia (1991) and in Bosnia (1992) the crisis reached the form of open armed confrontations, other areas untouched by the war, such as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or the provinces of Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina in Serbia, present a particularly high conflict potential. This aspect represents the very difficult efforts, the task of any institutional initiative, aimed at ensuring peace in South-Eastern Europe. In the case of Macedonia, for example, „the internal tensions of these years were internationalized by the exaggerated reactions from across the borders”. In the winter of 1992-1993, UN humanitarian aid convoys to Muslim enclaves in Bosnia are blocked by Serbian forces. The UN declares several Bosnian cities „Safe Areas” (The resolution 819 (1993) și 824 (1993) of the UN).

The Vance-Owen peace plan, which proposes the division of Bosnia along ethnic lines, is rejected by the Bosnian Serb Parliament and the Croats, initially allied with the Muslims against the Serbs, begin their own campaign of ethnic cleansing. The beginning of 1995 found the main actors of the Yugoslav drama in a total deadlock, and the reaction of the international community was largely in similar terms.

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THE CONTEMPORARY COUPLE: JEALOUSY, TRUST AND VIRTUAL LIFE

Florența-Larisa SIMION

Ph.D. student, The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, SNSPA (România), E-mail: petrescu_larysa@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This highlighted sociological research analyzes the way in which current couples manifest jealousy as a cause of separations from the couple. I also want to discuss stalking, but also about how a person develops from the jealousy of a child to that of an adult. Jealousy is an interesting phenomenon, seen from two angles (normal/abnormal), but the behaviors through which jealousy is manifested are many: it can start from simple ideas, accusations, words, up to a revenge plan, acts of aggression (physical/verbal), crimes, obsessive following of the partner (former or current – stalking) in the worst case. There are not few cases when many couples broke up because of jealousy. Jealousy can or cannot be the reason for a breakup?" We can find various answers to this question depending on each couple and how they live with each other. The problems arise when, due to an exaggeration of the use of a social network, one of the partners begins to create a "virtual life", to be captured by the attention of another partner met on the Internet. The sociological side can be identified by the simple fact that such problems lead to a social disorganization, a permanent fear of the pursued person, to carry out their daily activities. The deviant side of this phenomenon, if we analyze stalking on social networks, for example, can be as dangerous as that based on physical pursuit.*

Keywords: family, trust, jealousy, virtual life.

1. Introduction

I consider it necessary to analyze this phenomenon (jealousy) and to identify the forms and causes that can generate some deviant behavior in the couple relationship, such as suspicions, lack of trust, breakups, infidelity and violence in the couple because all these elements "...are significant parts of the conceptual core of the social psychology of the couple and the family. (Turliuc, 2009), aspects that lead to incompatibility with existing social norms at the level of society. On the one hand, jealousy can appear at the level of some members of the couple who live in the same place; we assume that proximity may or may not help in better communication, without suspicion. On the other hand, when one of the partners is far from each other, communication problems can arise.

On the one hand, each individual is different, having perceptions of what it's like to "be jealous": from the analysis of the "Oedipus complex" formulated by Sigmund Freud, as a form of possessiveness of the child over the parent of the opposite sex, to live an episode of infidelity through an own experience, at the age of maturity.

On the other hand, social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram) are some of the communication methods often used in everyday life, and couples use them to discuss and convey their impressions about various aspects when one is not present. next to the other. Social networks can be tools conducive to the emergence of jealousy in couples.

2. Conceptual delimitations

Moreover, considering the current study, I intend to position the concept of "jealousy" in relation to adulthood in order to follow the phenomenological course regarding the consequences of this phenomenon. At the same time, theories regarding the development of adults help to better understand jealousy by identifying patterns of thought, emotion or behavior.

The author Ursula Șchiopu states that "jealousy is an affective state that is always defined by the desire to lose what you possess, love or power, but also by the exaggerated attention given to the rival or the rivalry situation" (Șchiopu, 1997)

Adrian Nuță defines jealousy as "a set of emotional experiences, thoughts and actions that appear and develop when a significant relationship is perceived as being threatened by a rival. To be jealous you have to have someone (something), in the sense of having the feeling that that something (someone) belongs to you. Another person threatens to deprive you of that something/someone. Jealousy is distinctly different from envy, which is about what another has and you don't." (Nuță, 2005)

Analyzing this case, we identify feelings of loss or abandonment, the pain of losing a loved one, and jealousy expresses an accumulation of emotional feelings, but I believe that envy can be related to jealousy by the simple fact that the existence of a rival brings with it a state of anxiety, inability to be calm in the relationship because you can feel inferior to people of the same sex who could play the role of a rival. It is true that envy, most of the time, involves a material component (what you have, I don't have), but it is also possible to associate it in the case of couple relationships (the desire to couple with someone else's partner).

3. Jealousy as an effect of childhood disappointments – Oedipus complex

Acts of "jealousy" can have their beginnings during childhood, jealousy presenting another facet in addition to the one previously mentioned. More precisely, most of the time, a child can become jealous, involuntarily, of one of the parents, and later, in adulthood, of colleagues, friends, the loved one depending on the environment of origin, family, care from the parents, the feeling of "envy" being noted. Of course, jealousy is manifested by the fact that the individual believes that the partner belongs to him in one way or another. Referring to jealousy, "envy" implies, on the one hand, the aspiration for a certain good (the material part), on the other hand, the desire to know a person in a relationship with another.

Historically, Sophocles created in the 5th century, one of the most interesting mythological legends of all time, "the story of Oedipus". The dramatic story of Oedipus and his relatives has been the source of inspiration for many representative Greek literary works over the centuries.

The tragic events that mark the path of Oedipus' life, emerge from the predictions of the oracle who told him that he will kill his father and marry his own mother. This whole story is highlighted by Sophocles in a bivalent way: of the drama in all the power of the word, but also of the inner pain of the hero who cannot change his painful destiny.

In fact, the field of psychoanalysis seized the subject when Sigmund Freud analyzed the mythological facts of Oedipus as part of the behavior of children, in full development. Freud mentions, in this sense, in his book entitled "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1899), the notion of the "Oedipus complex" as the manifestation of the child (aged between two and seven years) to unconsciously reject his parent of the same sex with him, due to an emotional closeness to the parent of the opposite sex.

In the work of the historian Cătălin Stănculescu entitled, "The myth of Oedipus and the complex of Oedipus in mythology" we learned that Freud considered that these manifestations have a transitory character, and that these phases disappear with the passing of the years, through the idea that both girls and boys they tend to imitate their same-sex parents after the age of six, when they begin to become aware of their existence and spend more time participating in various common activities.

The "Oedipus complex" includes a child's possessiveness towards the parent of the opposite sex, which turns the other parent into a rival; an example that I consider significant is that of the child's jealousy when he sees his parents holding hands. This type of jealousy manifests quite aggressively at the level of the age range mentioned above and it is important that the erotic connection of the child created with the parent of the opposite sex is also analyzed after the age of seven, because, at maturity, the individual to be able to integrate socially, not to remain with some feelings of guilt, of insecurity in front of family relationships, friendship and, why not, in front of a couple relationship.

4. Analysis of theories about adult development

Moreover, considering the current study, I intend to position the concept of "jealousy" in relation to adulthood in order to follow the phenomenological course regarding the consequences of this phenomenon. At the same time, theories regarding the development of adults help to better understand jealousy by identifying patterns of thought, emotion or behavior.

4.1 The theory of adult development

Alex Ayres (2022) presents us with the fact that "Theory of Adult Development" encompasses stages of growth in which individuals begin to become aware of the world from a multidimensional perspective and gain a more complex understanding of themselves and others around them.

Adulthood is more than physical maturation, but is defined by stages of adult development. There are three stages of adulthood, including early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood, in which major physical, cognitive, and social changes occur.

Early adulthood is the period from age 18 to mid-30s. This is when people are healthy and physically fit. Young adults will complete their education and begin a career. Cognitive development in early adulthood is characterized by impulsive behavior and increasing epistemic understanding. Sometimes people will get married and start a family during this time.

Mid-30s to mid-60s is considered middle adulthood. During this time, aging becomes more visible with wrinkles, gray hair and health problems. At this stage, a person can fulfill their career goals and children will grow up.

Late adulthood or old age begins in the mid-60s until death. During this time, physical capacity declines and most individuals retire. Some people in this stage spend time with grandchildren, get involved in their hobbies and explore other interests. Mental health may decline during this period due to decreased social interactions and prejudices due to old age.

Alex Ayres (2022) stated that there are several theories that explain the unique stages of adult development and describe the physical, cognitive and social changes that occur. Four theories that explain the developmental stages of adulthood include the following:

Levinson's theory of adult development explains the stages of development described by structural life changes that occur throughout a person's life and a growing cognitive structure.

Vaillant's theory of adult development explains six developmental stages of self-discovery and the formation of a unique identity.

Neugarten's theory of adult development describes the Social Clock Theory, in which individuals achieve milestones according to societal norms.

Kegan's theory of development explains the stages of cognitive growth in which individuals become aware of their own identity and sense of self.

4.2 Levinson's theory of adult development

Levinson published *The Seasons of Man's Life* in 1978, where he described the developmental stages of adulthood. Stages are described by life structures and cognitive growth. Levinson proposes that young adults perceive dreams of their future selves as motivation for their life choices of marriage, education, and career. Once these goals are achieved, they are modified based on how well they meet expectations.

Levinson's stages are punctuated by periods of transition lasting about five years and periods of stability lasting about seven years. He defines these stages according to specific age ranges described as follows:

The transition to early adulthood lasts from ages 17 to 22, when a person leaves home and family and establishes independence. During this time, people begin to make decisions about their careers and education. This stage is considered transitional from adolescence to adulthood.

Entry into the adult world occurs from 22 to 28 years. During this time, people begin to solidify their goals and decide on a career. People can start dating and form intimate relationships that lead to marriage.

The 30s transition occurs from 28 to 33 years of age and is defined as a period of reflection and reevaluation. People will reevaluate their choices and make decisions guided by their attitudes and perceptions toward their relationships and careers.

Settlement takes place from age 33 to 40, when people become more involved in the community. People will reinvest in their families and commit more to their careers.

The middle transition lasts from 40 to 45 years and is marked by a period of family and career reassessment. Sometimes people make sudden changes and express past regrets about pursuing their interests and talents. This time is marked by a sudden realization of one's mortality and results in a cognitive shift in which the meaning and purpose of life is evaluated. This is often referred to as a midlife crisis, where there is a desire to achieve or gain things that were previously desired.

Entry into middle adulthood occurs from 45 to 50 years of age. During this time, people commit to making decisions and act on the choices made based on the reflection period in the previous stage.

Late adulthood occurs from 60 to 85 years of age and is divided into two periods, the stable period and the transitional period.

4.3. Vaillant's theory of adult development

Vaillant's book, *Aging Well*, was published in 2002, where he describes six stages of adult development. In these stages, individuals achieve social and emotional growth defined by factors such as lifestyle and well-being. His studies were conducted over an extended period of 80 years, providing a more detailed insight into the aging process.

The six stages of adult development outlined in Vaillant's theory include the following:

-Development of an identity - individuals establish their independence and begin to define themselves as an entity separate from their family, defining their values and beliefs.

-Development of intimacy - individuals develop intimate relationships in which they make lifelong commitments to another person and define themselves in their relationship

-Consolidation of the career - the identity of the individual is defined by the social context of one's career

-Generativity - individuals take on mentoring roles within the community and become more altruistic

-Becoming the keeper of meaning - individuals perceive their knowledge and expertise as contributing to society and become more aware of a wider social field in the transmission of knowledge and traditions

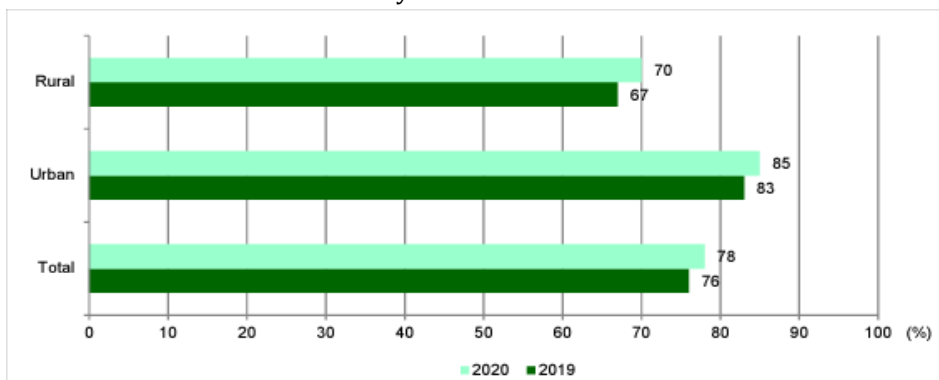
-Achieving wholeness - individuals find acceptance in their existence and their place in the universe.

5. Statistics regarding access to the Internet and social networks analyzing separations at the couple level

5.1 Internet use at the level of 2020.

The researchers of the National Institute of Statistics, started an analysis in 2021 in which they analyzed information technology by using the Internet as an integral part of social life. A first indicator through which the degree of internet usage was analyzed is the socio-demographic variable of the residence environments, according to figure no. 1 (see below).

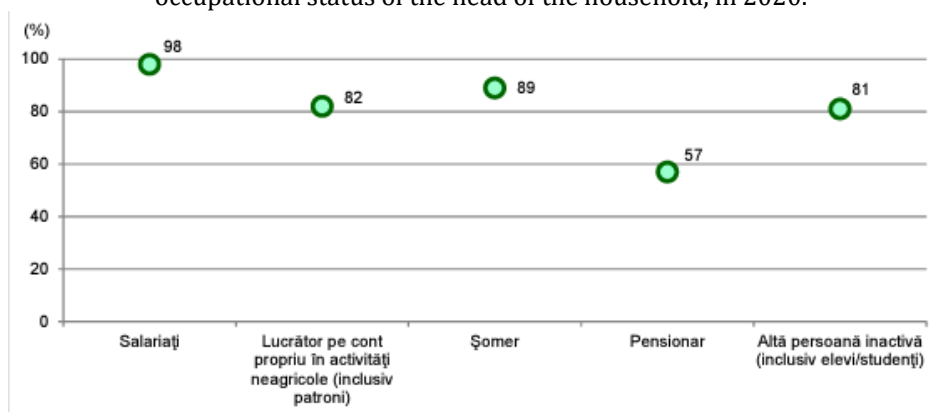
Figure no. 1 The percentages of households that have access to the Internet, by residence, in the years 2019 and 2020.



Source: National Institute of Statistics. Survey on access to information and communication technology in households - 2021

Thus, at the level of the years 2019-2020, it was demonstrated that the Internet is used predominantly in the urban environment in a percentage of 85%, compared to the rural environment which presents a percentage of 70%.

Figure no. 2 The percentage of households that have access to the Internet, according to the occupational status of the head of the household, in 2020.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Survey on access to information and communication technology in households - 2021.

From a statistical point of view, the frequency of Internet access within households is higher in the case of the young population (99% - 16-24 years and 95% - 25-34 years). Also, for the year 2020, we learn that 86% of individuals between the ages of 16-74 who used the Internet are men, and 83% of users are women.

Therefore, the data highlighted above show the fact that people with access to the Internet are predominantly young people who have the highest percentage of its use.

5.2 The number of divorces for the year 2021

In 2021, according to figure no. 3 (see below), we understand that "the number of divorces pronounced by final court decisions or by administrative means was 27,024, an increase of 4,239 divorces compared to 2020. The divorce rate increased from 1.03 divorces to

1000 inhabitants in 2020, to 1.23 divorces per 1000 inhabitants in 2021." (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

Figure no. 3 The number of divorces and divorce rates by residence, in 2021 compared to 2020

	Divorțuri			Rata divorțialității ²⁵ (divorțuri la 1000 locuitori)	
	2020	2021	Diferențe (±) 2021 față de 2020	2020	2021
Total	22785	27024	4239	1,03	1,23
Urban	14734	16809	2075	1,18	1,35
Rural	8051	10215	2164	0,83	1,06

Source: National Institute of Statistics. Demographic events in 2021.

To the same extent, according to the analysis of the National Institute of Statistics (2021), the separations that take place at the level of couples present an impressive percentage if we take into account the socio-demographic variable of the residence environments. More precisely, in 2021, the number of divorces in urban areas was 1.6 times higher than in rural areas.

At the same time, "...the distribution by age group and gender of people who divorced in 2021 shows the following aspects: • on average, divorce occurs with the highest frequency among men in the 40-44 age group (19.5% of divorces) and in the case of women in the 30-34 age group (18.2% of divorces), followed by men in the 45-49 age group (16.7% of divorces) and in the case of women, age group 40-44 years (18.0% of divorces). (National Institute of Statistics, 2021)

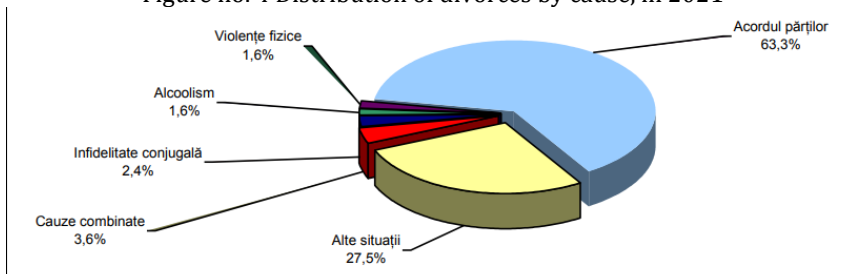
From the two topics analyzed in point I and point II, respectively, we understand that the Internet is used by young people between the ages of 16-34, and couples from cities have a higher number of divorces. What is interesting is the fact that young people are leading in terms of Internet use, but also in the case of divorces - young women (age between 30-34 years) present a higher percentage of separation.

For the purposes of the research, the connection between the two mentioned demographic events (the use of information technology and divorce at the level of the years 2020 - 2021) is of interest for the current research because they can deduce a refutation of one of the hypotheses of this study, "the more couples live together on a longer duration, the more the degree of trust between the partners increases".

From a statistical point of view, we found out that the two phenomena coincide, the use of the Internet is predominant in the case of young people, and also the number of divorces is often found among young people. Therefore, it is interesting that couples in cities present a large number of divorces, a distrust towards their partner, taking into account that the opportunities to meet, to discuss on the Internet are much wider than in the countryside.

It turns out that the residential environment represented the culmination point for one of the hypotheses to be disproved: we assume that the urban environment offers more financial opportunities, the degree of internet usage is higher, there are more ways to spend free time, proximity is a advantage for some couples, the neighborhoods being adjacent to the countryside, where in some cases it is a longer journey to the city, if one member of the couple lives there. Of course, there are couples who live in the countryside and have an amazing couple relationship, but the opportunities in the urban environment would have represented an opportunity for the separations to be diminished.

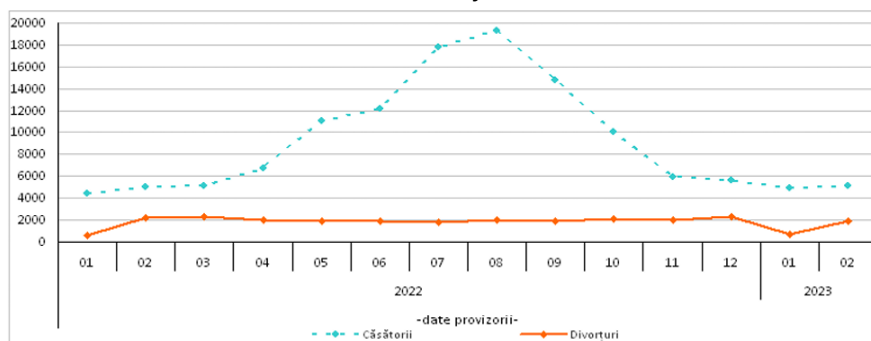
Figure no. 4 Distribution of divorces by cause, in 2021



Source: National Institute of Statistics. *Demographic events in 2021.*

According to figure no. 4 (see above), in addition to three other causes that are the basis of divorces in 2021, "marital infidelity" presents a percentage of 2.4% in addition to alcoholism and physical violence. We would have expected the last two to have a higher percentage, but infidelity has been gaining ground in recent years.

Figure no. 5 Evolution of the number of marriages and divorces, between January 2022 and February 2023.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, *Natural population movement in February 2023*

On another note, there is an evolution in the number of divorces currently, analyzing figure no. 5 (see above); especially, in February 2023, it was found that the number of divorces decreased, and that of marriages increased.

5.3 Statistics of social networks for Romania - January 2022

The use of social networks has an important impact on the behavior of people everywhere. According to Kepios data (2022) "...in January 2022, there were over 13 million social network users in Romania. Their number was equivalent to 69.7% of the total population. Kepios analysis reveals that social network users in Romania increased by 1.3 million (10.8%) between 2021 and 2022." (Baselinker & Kepios, 2022).

5.3.1 Facebook users in Romania - January 2022

At the gender level, at the beginning of 2022, 50.5% of Facebook's audience in Romania was made up of women, while 49.5% were men. These data indicate that Facebook had 9.90 million users in Romania at that time, according to Kepios (2022). Instagram users from Romania - January 2022

Also, in the case of Instagram, statistical data indicate that at the beginning of 2022, there were 5.40 million users in Romania. To the same extent, it should be mentioned that in 2022, 51.9% of the Instagram audience in Romania was female, while 48.1% were male.

Therefore, analyzing the statistics, we understand that women use the two social networks in a greater proportion compared to men.

6. Stalking: following the intimate partner

Stalking is a form of abuse, through which a person obsessively follows their intimate partner, past or present. The people in question have an obsessive, persistent behavior that we can compare to harassment in a couple. This behavior manifests itself by stalking someone, sending unwanted messages, gifts, or actually following them to their home or workplace. According to Michele Galietta, a clinician and professor of psychology at the City University of New York, "there is no standard typology of stalker." (Galietta, 2018). Christine Ro (2018) stated that "stalking behavior falls under the umbrella of symptoms for various disorders. According to a 2012 study published in the journal "Aggression and Violent Behavior," «motivations for stalking include an illusory belief in romantic destiny, a desire to save a relationship, a sadistic drive to torment the victim, or a psychotic over-identification with the victim and the desire to replace her. » And stalkers can receive many types of diagnosis, including psychotic disorders, personality disorders such as narcissistic personality disorder, delusional disorders, etc." (Christine Ro, 2018)

From the results of the study entitled "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Tracking and Victimization of Intimate Partner Violence - National Survey on Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence, United States, 2011" we can identify interesting elements regarding the abusive acts that take place between partners who have broken up or still together. We also found out that approximately 60.8% of the women who participated in the research claimed that they had a relationship with a harasser. And research highlights the fact that up to 80% of people in abusive relationships eventually start stalking the person in the relationship.

Furthermore, "The results presented in this report indicate that a significant number and proportion of US female and male adults have experienced sexual violence, stalking, or intimate partner violence during their lifetime or in the 12 months prior to the survey of 2011. Because of the wide range of short- and long-term consequences associated with these forms of violence, the public health burden of sexual, stalking, and intimate partner violence is substantial." (Matthew J. Breiding & al., 2014)

Stalking is a phenomenon that deserves to be discussed in a framework whose starting point is jealousy in couples. This type of harassment can be manifested both physically and online, so that the injured person can suffer.

7. Conclusions

Also, stalking your partner on the Internet reflects a harsh reality of today's couple relationships. Mistrust in the couple makes its presence felt. We also identified the fact that, currently, social networks highlight some limits that appear in front of a couple relationship: for example, the virtual identity is not always the real one; people tend to choose a certain identity for fear of being rejected or because they don't feel comfortable in their own relationship (divorce). In another vein, the previously found elements related to infidelity are perpetuated in today's society. Jealousy is a common phenomenon in today's families, infidelity being the first cause.

According to the data presented in the chapter "Statistics regarding access to the Internet and social networks analyzing separations at the couple level", we found that the hypothesis "the longer couples live together, the higher the degree of trust between partners." was refuted because the connection between the two demographic events mentioned in that chapter (the use of information technology and divorce at the level of the years 2020 - 2021) is close from a statistical point of view. The use of the Internet is predominant in the case of young people, and also the number of divorces is common among young people. Therefore, it is

interesting that couples in cities present a large number of divorces, a distrust of their partner, taking into account that the opportunities to meet.

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READING IN THE CONCEPT OF INTELLECTUAL SOCIAL DISEASE AND EDUCATIONAL DELUSION

Amel KEZIZ

Ph.D, University Center Of Illizi, Illizi, 33000, Algeria

E-mail: Keziz.amel@cuillizi.dz

Abstract: *This study is one of the studies that are looking for new concepts in sociology and sociology of education, as our study in this topic focused on new concepts put forward, namely intellectual social disease and educational illusion, this makes us ask questions about upbringing in the family with children, which extends more to the areas of the social system than the educational value per se. Therefore, we want to focus on the normative imbalance that the family suffers from in the field of interaction with others and with its children, with values that reflect an educational culture that may not be permanent, such as the unrealistic interaction which expresses the concept of educational illusion.*

Keywords: community, delusion, group, interaction, social disease.

1. Introduction

Sociology and education are two basic pillars in society, as they are concerned with the study of social changes brought about by society, and their implications for social relations and life relations related to the identity of society, which is a wide field of life, so individuals are a reflection of a set of values and rules that form the concept of society belonging to the social sector.

In the light of talking about society as an educational society, it is expressed as a civilized society through the act of education among individuals. Therefore, our lives cannot be imagined without the educational values that govern our actions and interactions. Likewise, there is no human project unless it is linked to society and the group. Which includes the social project is a social project, and it is spread far and wide.

On this basis, this article is considered the embodiment of an idea that searches for a new concept of social and educational issues, and the goal of searching for intellectual and social diseases and educational delusions that we want to search for their meanings, which indicates the corruption of the network of social relations.

However, the problem of the study that we focus on is defining the meaning of the cultural educational project, and how we can reproduce trust within educational groups and focus on the cultural educational project as a scientific fact.

Hence the basic questions that can be asked are as follow: What is the educational illusion? What is the social intellectual disease? And what are the indicators that can be adopted for this concept?

2. The social approach to understanding society at Malik Bin Nabi

Malik bin Nabi defines society in his book “The Birth of a Society” as the network of social relations (in the origins of human society, and the network of social relations). Basically, Ibn Nabi stated that there are two origins of society: natural or primitive society. And historical society (Yusuf, 2021: 59).

It also gives definition to the diverse civilization. He acknowledged that civilization activates social capabilities to face the crucial problems of society, and pointed to the balance between the moral and material aspects of human life. Since society justifies human activities in the world of history, society is the primary force in any civilizational process. (Badrane, 2013: 07)

This power can only be achieved through education, and education is an important part of society in forming societies, building their cultures, and developing their relationships between individuals and groups alike. Education is the main engine for the development of nations. Without it, society becomes weak and fragile. The strength of any society lies in the intellectuals and scholars, and the strength and development of society increases whenever the percentage of ignorance in it decreases. A society armed with the weapon of science and education is strong and helps nations and society advance and advance. (Fatima, 2022: 29)

Therefore, Malik bin Nabi believes that the development of this society requires the strength of the network of social relations, and any weakness in this network leads to the infection of society with diseases, and this in turn leads to the destruction of this field, even if it was. Has all resources related to people, ideas and things, so he says in this regard;

"If society develops in any way, then this development is quantitatively and qualitatively recorded in its network of relationships, and when the tension in the threads of the network subsides, it becomes unable to carry out the joint activity effectively, and this is a sign of that. Society is sick and it will end. The network has completely disintegrated, because this heralds the destruction of society, and at that time there was nothing left of it except a memory buried in history books " (Amrawi & Zakia, 2019: 83)

3. Education and Culture from Malik Bin Nabi's Perspective

He viewed culture as a social psychologist who knows the secret of the human soul, which is inevitably affected by the social environment in which it exists. This environment is nothing but the actual embodiment of an integrated system of cultural values, which together form the required educational model for both the individual and society. (Malika, 2019: 82)

The problem of culture in Algeria, in particular, is not so much a problem of understanding the cultural model that exists in reality as it is a problem of finding and promoting this model. What is the cultural project that Algeria aspires to achieve in practice? This means that it needs to promote a new civilization that contributes to achieving the meanings of urbanization in human life, to enable the Algerian to resume his historical journey by rebuilding the civilization to which he belongs. From these angles, "Malik bin Nabi" discusses the concept of education through the problem of culture.

He defines education as a process that represents the cultural elements absorbed by the individual social environment in which he lives. Besides, culture is nothing but the psychological and social climate in which one lives. Through this process of interaction, the individual absorbs the cultural elements as a form of contribution to the construction of self and society at the same time. Therefore, "Malik bin Nabi" stressed that the first step that must be achieved for the education of the individual is the formation of the elements of culture in a way that forms the cultural system of society within an achievable educational curriculum.

3.1. This goal is broken down into subgoals, including:

- Education must foster a sense of nationhood and promote national unity.
- Education should meet the economic and social needs of national development, equipping the youth of the country to play an effective productive role in the life of the nation.
- Education must prepare children for those changes in attitude and relationships that are necessary for the smooth process of a rapidly developing modern economy.
- Education must provide opportunities for the fullest development of individual talents and personality.
- Education should promote social equality and foster a sense of social responsibility. (Agatha, 2002: 02)
- Education should respect, foster, and develop Kenya's rich and varied cultures.
- Education should foster positive attitudes to other countries and to the international community.

3.2. To implement clear-cut strategies of value-rich education policy, it seems necessary to solve a number of tasks:

- To define whether particular values are valid only within particular social groups, cultures or traditions.
- To find and articulate some overarching principles by which the conflicting values may be united and consoled.
- To decide whether there should be the basis of shared values in our society which will create the common framework for education, or there should.
- Be a choice for parents to make concerning the schools with various value grounds.

4. The family and the production of the educational illusion

There is a set of social practices. This approach explicitly draws on concepts from the sociology of the family to show how social thinking can contribute to discussions about how people act. We argue that this step has important advantages. Conceptually, he offers a broader definition of "family", i.e. one that is not artificially narrowed and thus allows for unsupervised relationships between parents and children that should be taken seriously and have profound moral/moral significance. The Family Practices Framework deepens our understanding of what the family is in everyday expectations and behaviors, and thus relates the abstract concept to the way social actors use it: since the 'family' is necessarily a social construct, this is of central importance. We use this framework to explain the moral significance of family relationships, in particular, why moral relationships arise and to demonstrate that this cannot be reduced to blood relations or to past choices.

In the book (Educational Culture, 2020), I defined social intellectual illness as: the formation of a group of unconscious symbols of actions practiced in different social situations that hinder interaction. Social and limit the effectiveness of the formation of social relations and social communication between members of the group.

It can also be defined as:

“The individual's loss of the meaning of urban coexistence between groups as a result of not accepting some social changes at the individual level and group, which is also a reaction to unacceptable actions and interactions in the mind of the individual”.

As for the concept of educational illusion, through our previous studies, we were able to define it as a temporary act that carries a specific meaning (respect, appreciation, calmness, fear, ...) in a group (kinship, neighborhood, fellowship, school...) or it is an imaginary educational act Not authorized to achieve the goal of education.

It can also be defined as: “The perception of the temporary upbringing used by the individual or the family as a non-native identity whose goal is not education as a value, but a social arrangement or the creation of illusory perceptions of the child's actions that lose their meaning with the demise of the given situation.

5. From intellectual social disease to social and educational delusion

The individual who imagines a personality approaching idealism among people and his areas of interaction, which he does not interact with as his original identity, makes the process of liberating the human mind limited to discovering its gaps and negatives, so these individual lives the idea of social and psychological perfection and the wrong thought that in turn produces a set of ideas and meanings that translate Actions and interactions that impede social stability.

This makes the individual lose his realistic view of his life and upbringing. So, he begins forming an inferior view of the other and society.

Also, that mother who wants to give an image of her son's idealism to her neighbor or friend, when his real actions are otherwise, That child lived a temporary threat to save his mother from an embarrassing situation, according to her opinion. All these examples are very simple, but they are the beginning of the formation of intellectual diseases that do not establish the principle of evaluating and correcting ourselves. Our mistakes...

An individual who cannot face himself is an individual mired in idealistic ideas that fall short of effective interaction in his life. Hence, the social-intellectual disease is also caused by an illusion in our thoughts and actions, which will reflect negatively on many social or educational fields. It can be said that the educational crisis is embodied in many interactive social areas in the daily life of the individual, and we will analyze this based on the idea: Education is a continuous process for the individual that is not limited to age. Education in this dimension contributes to an understanding of the educational act, and an understanding of what we call the concept of "educational delusion" and "intellectual social disease". The actions of its members achieve both human and social development.

Society today suffers from an intellectual conflict that prevents the achievement of the goal of the educational process. Therefore, the application of some simple and profound values and actions reflects the forms of family education for us. For example, making a child say morning and evening greetings to family members is the same act that will be reproduced, since there was no other member not from the same family, throwing dirt in the place designated for him, or even praying, as it has been normalized, he will not be able individual to abandon it. They are all works that start from imitation, imitation, and course.

The family and civil society as a whole have a very important influence on the education process and the transfer of educational actions to the individual. Counseling, for example, is one of the most prominent meanings related to correcting some educational procedures. It was true, yes, it is subjective evidence that often tends to the subjectivity or narcissism of the individual, which is one of the characteristics that we mentioned in the concept of socio-intellectual illness.

6. Results

A society that harnesses the educational culture of the individual on the basis of social values and standards, with which he interacts with the other, creates a practical education that refines the nature of actions and interactions, based on fixed or hypothetical values.

This is what makes it a purposeful and effective process that raises individuals to a kind of social stability for the educational act. However, the latter may permeate anomalies in the interaction at the level of understanding the community or the individual of the educational act, making it a society that achieves certain goals that prevent the achievement of the goal of education and awareness of the culture of the society.

➤ What is education and the socio-educational approach?

The management of the educational community proceeds first from the idea that the individual is the basis for building and developing a civilized society, through the principle of virtue and action. Talking about virtue is an expression of every action or life practice to form an effective social identity.

➤ The negative effects resulting from the disease of social thought

Socio-intellectual disease has many negative effects at the individual or group level. The degree of influence of the latter varies from one individual to another based on the level of social awareness and social trust. Among these effects we find:

- The lack of a social culture in accepting the other, which results in social stigma and marginalization.

- Instability at the level of the network of social relations, and the emergence of private interest at the expense of the common interest.

The false consciousness, It produces a crisis of confidence that affects the production of awareness.

Social and Educational Problems (Deviations, stigma, etc). The Social Domination and oppression at the level of all Spheres of Social life, the lack of Credibility in defining Objectives and Solutions/rights, as well as, duties. Civilizational Hope Project to reduce Disease Social Intellectual. Thereon, the Civilizational Hope Project, which means "civilization", is closely related to the life of the individual in many areas of interaction. The Civilizational Hope Project

Stems from major interactive dimensions centered on restoring confidence in the network of social and human relations, and is based on:

- Confidence in the processes of social interaction between members of the same group, and as an extension of the rest of human groups.

- Collective conscience, which means feeling one's positive role and avoiding selfishness.

The educational act, the educational act is all that the educational community offers in the field of education from the experiences of human society, it is governed by the culture of the educational community through its effective institutions, and the educational act is not only related to the school. An educational field, but rather extends beyond that, as it is an expression of human life based on the collective conscience and trust in the culture of society based on education and the standards and values of society that are active in the development and development of society.

- Credibility is, in fact, a major criterion in shaping trust in social life, but it depends on the individual's intellectual field, which must be linked to the individual's ability to bring about positive change without regard to material considerations, while he is met with a moral reward.

Avoid aimless imitation because it produces sensitivity at the level of the network of social relations, which leads to narcissism in social work.

- Eliminate data that constitute the intellectual social disease that constitutes an explicit threat to the standard of human life, which makes social relations unstable in terms of values, and adopt imaginary methods that do not reflect the standards of the educational community.

Simply put, The Hope Project is a reconsideration of all our daily interactions and areas of our lives that we have worked on due to their complexity despite their simplicity last.

And as an Islamic society, we must refer to God's Book and His Prophet's Sunnah, which translate for us many values capable of reviving a true and honest society, contributing to the elimination of those problems and their causes that we have expressed. Intellectual social disease. The personal and group level that led to the emergence of problems, the interruption of social relations, the lack of confidence and excessive narcissism.

As a researcher in sociology, and according to my experience, we have noticed that people are creative in producing problems and making proposals. And confidence in him and his achievement, but in the simplest situations, that discourse withdraws into non-application, and his thoughts become an illusion captive to his idea, its truthfulness at times, and its denial at other times, as if he lives in an internal struggle whose effects appear at the level of his actions.

The focus is on the concept of trust and the crisis of trust. In the light of this, it can be seen as a way to reflect on aspects of our lives, our religion and our values that were based on goodwill, free taking the hand of those in need without waiting for a return. .

The Hope Project in our model is about you as an individual and how you can change your behavior to improve your actions. The most important thing is to believe in yourself and your ability to change and to raise your children with these values.

- Crisis of trust in the network of social educational relations

Saying that society is "intellectually ill" makes the researcher look for people who scrutinize the meaning more than they scrutinize the concept of the physiological term. I have no doubt in my choice of this concept, because individuals are not physically ill; That's right, they mean a loss of confidence and credibility in your social perceptions, which is a very sensitive point that makes you grow old and attractive. We can only say why we don't stop before we stand up for our ideas ourselves. Why don't we admit our mistakes? And please bring it back with us. And why doesn't he take the opportunity to correct alternative thoughts and ideas, when he is branded with us by actions that reflect gossip.

I take it that intellectual illness exists? In fact, something has been discarded.

The conversation concludes with a side of us, which is acceptable and subjective by which we judge. You can accept constructive advice or criticism.

As a researcher in the field of sociology, I do not find an appropriate conclusion to such topics covered. Every attempt we make to understand an educational phenomenon puts us in front of

a set of determinants that need in-depth study and study. Society is an endless expanse of social phenomena that need understanding and scientific abstraction.

In fact, our conversation about the educational society is not easy because of the totality of social changes. The changes that occur in the social structure and the changes that they bring about in the understanding of the educational field, and therefore this society, in turn, is the result of those changes that occur at the level of group dynamics, and the social and cultural standards that the civilizational project carries, therefore, a prominent role in clarifying the indicators of transcending that traditional era that it hinders the attempt to understand society and education, and gradation as an understanding of the educational act, which contributed to determining modern trends in achieving the requirements of comprehensive development that focus on the development of the individual.

However, social phenomena and problems are, in fact, a form of expression of the existing crisis in the network of social relations, which has caused anomalies of interaction in the spheres of an individual's life. It had an impact on building the educational community, causing disease at the level of individual thinking, which formed the interactive crisis.

It can also be pointed out that the individual is the element that controls his social status, through awareness of his functions and roles, especially those related to the interactive educational aspects in the various social institutions, and from here every individual can build a project as he called "Jaroudi" the project of hope, which works as a blueprint Social contributes to rebuilding the trust that most human groups lack. It also contributes to eliminating the determinants of false awareness, educational illusion, and intellectual and social diseases.

As a summary of what was previously presented, the basic idea is the objective presentation of the individual's actions, interactions, social culture, and values that determine his interactive path. On this basis, it can be said:

The cultural and educational project is a community project that starts from individual awareness to collective awareness.

- Objectivity in dealing with educational issues.

Building a social and educational vision about the education process in terms of its relationship to the individual and can be compatible with social, educational, economic, political and cultural institutions, etc.

- Cultural and social capital are two essential factors in building a civilized educational project based on essential interactions.

Society sometimes makes us feel very inferior to ourselves and ourselves, as their point of view permeates our objectivity in life. Sometimes their words overturn our ambition. Imagine and think.

You find them behind single women and behind married women. Behind the educated and uneducated, and behind the mother and those who are deprived of motherhood; simply overdue the most accurate and most important / simplest, plus the essential things from our life, etc.

In fact, thinking about those meanings that stigmatize the other, despite his naivety, has an impact on the social life of the individual. We may consider it a positive motivator for us, and it may be frustrating for us. In this complicated life with luxuries that we have not touched, we should be supportive of each other and not hinder the other's life with our individual opinions... Each of us should be responsible to society to achieve a life that we value.

This is the reason why this intellectual social disease, which formed meanings and actions at the level of our daily and life interactions and practices, gave and shaped manifestations of hypertrophy of narcissism emanating from the ego to return to the ego, and it became a threat to educational and social institutions, which began to lose confidence in their social and interactive relationships.

Hence, it is good for us to ignore everything that harms our life and ambition and invest it in reconsidering the formation of cultural and even social capital, to facilitate our understanding of society on the one hand, and on the other hand, to form psychological and

intellectual immunity not to accept the trivialities and delusions that many live with. It is true that the matter may not be that easy, but we only need an individual and collective attempt to reform our thinking, adjust what can be modified, and move away from social hypocrisy... We care about his situation and circumstances, and if we want advice, we have to ask ourselves, if you give us this advice, how will the response be? We did...it is only our thoughts resulting from what we live in these societies.

In the end, it can be only said that, we begin to change our thought, or rather, we return to the origin of our thought. The wealth of our minds lies in our culture. So, if it can be said: Recognizing the nature of the social structure is necessary to understand the progress and development of societies, especially with regard to the educational process, as it is a wide field closed with many elements, each of which expresses a specific pattern of interactions of individuals, expressing the educational community as a basic unit in the continuity of the active group, and thus reflecting nature of development. In human thought in the field of education across different periods of time (ancient and modern civilizations), this is why this part of the book aims to define the educational community, by giving a glimpse into the cultural perception of education.

Education is part of social activity rather it is the basis on which this activity is based in its various aspects. By providing the conditions and means that enable community organizations to exercise their responsibilities in the field of teaching knowledge, skills, methods of thinking and the system of values that they adopt in coexistence with themselves and with others and their areas of interaction.

It is necessary to point out three main parts in the development of educational thought in its phenomenological context, as follows:

- Understanding the historical field around the study community through its culture. Its traditions, customs and symbols interacted.
- Understanding the goal of education, as it is often related to the nature of society and social thought according to each time period.
- Taking into account the scientific orientation in each historical period and making it logical to continue studies of educational thought in order to understand the studied phenomenon.

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A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG ALGERIAN YOUTH: EXPLORING THE CITY OF MAGHНИЯ.

Djamila BENHAMEL¹, Abdelilah BENCHERKI²

¹ Lecturer, PhD, Department of Social Sciences University Centre of Maghnia (Algeria)

E-mail : hameldjamila@yahoo.com

² Lecturer, PhD, Department of Social Sciences University Centre of Maghnia (Algeria)

E-mail : abdelilah.bencherki.cumaghnia@gmail.com

Abstract: *The issue of preventing the consequences of falling into the danger of abuse has become an urgent necessity, and a task entrusted to all social institutions without exception, to ensure the stability of society, through concerted efforts, awareness, sensitization, and adherence to religion and the value system. In this context, this study came to know the Algerian youth's representations of the phenomenon of drug abuse, through a field study that touched on a segment of the youth of the city of Maghnia, relying on observation and interview techniques. The results concluded that drug abuse is considered one of the aspects of deviant behaviour and a violation of the value and legal system of society. Customs, traditions, values and laws. Among the factors that have increased the severity of this phenomenon is the decline in the authority of social control at the level of several institutions, and the ease of obtaining this drug, which explains its large spread in society.*

Keywords: Drugs, abuse, addiction, youth, representations.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of drug abuse has become a global phenomenon that is not limited to a specific society only, and is no longer a social problem, but rather an economic, psychological, physical, and even moral problem, "Due to its highly varied nature in different sociocultural contexts, drug abuse may be seen as normative, marginal, deviant or criminal behaviour." (UNDCP, 1996: 43)

Treating the problem requires searching for its causes, especially since it has begun to affect an important segment of society, namely the youth and adolescents, and even the group Feminism: Relying on these psychotropic substances has become a danger that threatens societies to the point of being used as a hidden weapon between countries targeting this important group in society to break their effectiveness, activity, and strength and paralyze their movement in society.

This phenomenon has become something close to what is normal after it was limited to certain groups and carried out in a very secretive manner, and thus it has taken a different path in recent years, in light of the increase in crime rates, as many international organizations and governments have called for combating this scourge, through policies and laws. (Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014; UNODC, 2023; UNODC, 2021)

To put an end to it, or prevent it. In this context, we pose the following question: What is the nature of Algerian youth's representations of drug use?

2. Research objectives and method

The study aimed to seriously research and innovate the issue of drugs, in parallel with recent developments. We conducted a field investigation in two areas in the city of Maghnia, each area in which we observed approximately four sessions, as follows:

The first area was "Messali Al Haj Street" - Al-Hamri - in an area located in front of the football field. The study was conducted through observation and interviews with members of that street, and our sample in that place consisted of 15 males and females.

As for the second area, it was the Maghnia University Center, two different places in terms of the degree of awareness. We relied on observation and interview techniques to collect scientific material, and on the descriptive and analytical method to diagnose this phenomenon.

3. Research topics

- Drug abuse and addiction: the factors that push an individual to abuse drugs, the social characteristics of addicted individuals, and the extent of the drug's effect on humans.
- Society's view of drug users: the quality of life of the user, the causes and factors of abuse, the view towards the person who uses drugs, the characteristics of the user.
- Drug abuse and crime: The relationship between drugs and committing crimes, the extent to which drug abuse contributes to violence.
- Drug abuse and mechanisms to combat it.

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of the abuser

According to the respondents, a person who uses drugs is characterized by a set of characteristics or behaviours. That is, the individual who uses drugs has a relationship with other individuals who use drugs, and the successive relationship with the world of abuse. Among these descriptions are, irritability, suffering from a frequent runny nose, trembling, and a constant cough.

All of these symptoms appear to be symptoms. Influenza or a cold may also be accompanied by other symptoms, such as fatigue and a constant feeling of fatigue, or the presence of other health problems, such as redness of the eyes, frequent tears, and a feeling of sleepiness. Drug users can also be identified by the appearance of signs of injection use in the arms, weight loss, sleep disturbances, and lack of interest in personal hygiene and general appearance.

Distinguishing between some of the sensory-behavioural symptoms of the person using it, such as changing many of the values that the person believed in before using it, frequent protests against some of the foundations and rules on which the family, family system, or other things are based, increased controversy and discussion with other individuals, entering the world of illusions, isolation, and introversion. Frequent forgetting and lying to justify actions and other characteristics.

However, these characteristics cannot always be characterized by the person who is a drug user, as he cannot truly be known by mere observation at times. The sample also focused on the psychological aspect of the user, which is: anxiety, depression, weak self-confidence, inferiority, weak faith, and the tendency to sleep a lot through the use of hypnotic or sedative substances.

4.2. Society's view of the drug user

Some view the person who uses drugs as a threat to society and causes material and human losses, to the point of describing him as a deviant and criminal person, while others view the drug user with sympathy and compassion and consider him a victim of living conditions, and help and assistance must be provided to him.

The research sample also saw drug users as two categories: one that must be deterred and is considered a danger to society and its institutions, through abuse, promotion and trafficking. As for the second category, the user may be a victim, so to speak. He may fall under the pressure of friends, or head towards the world of drug use out of curiosity and exploration.

The sample members also focused on the psychological aspect of the person who abuses, as people who abuse differ among themselves. There are those who suffer from a lack of awareness and family and neighbourly guidance... and there are those who suffer from weak religious conscience.

4.3. Drug abuse and its relationship to violence and crime

The sample viewed the drug user as a deviant person who may sometimes assume the personality of a criminal. He is a person hostile to society and its institutions, as he can practice coercion, violence, and even crime against others if he needs money. Over time, he becomes an aggressive person through abuse, and practices various types of violence on others, especially domestic violence, as most behavioural disorders occur in the family sphere. He also becomes impatient, and can even hate himself as a result of what he has become, psychological violence that he practices on himself, such as neglect, deprivation, isolation, and abandonment. The reality shows that many violent crimes are attributed to drug users.

It can be asserted, therefore, that there is a relationship between drug abuse and the commission of various types of violence and crimes, as the person who uses drugs is considered a deviant person, who practices various types of violence, and commits various crimes when he needs money. Abuse leads the person to violence and from there to crime. One of the most famous attempts in this regard is research conducted in Baltimore, United States of America, on a sample of 354 heroin addicts, consisting of 195 black people and 159 white people. 243 people were questioned from among the sample, and among the results: an increase in the rates of crimes that they committed almost daily when they started. Their addiction to heroin, the rise was associated with addiction, and the decline was associated with quitting abuse. (Ballet et al. 1983).

4.4. Drugs between abuse and addiction

***Motives for taking:**

Some samples believe that drug abuse is caused by the weak religious conscience of the users and their sitting with bad companions and invalid company, as well as the feeling of emptiness, the love of imitating others and staying up late outside the home, not adhering to and not adhering to the teachings of the Islamic religion in terms of following its commands and avoiding its prohibitions. All of this leads them to deviance. And corruption.

This is what most social and psychological studies have tended to, stating that sitting with bad friends and the desire to experiment is the most important factor and incentive that pushes individuals to use, and one of the most important factors influencing the behaviour of adolescents and young adults in the United States at the present time is the influence of peer groups. The company of others who use marijuana creates... person to use it, and the presence of friends who use marijuana provides the curious person with a favourable social opportunity (National commission, 1927: 43)

Abuse is also caused by hasty decision-making, a lot of psychological pressures and problems, and a feeling of alienation within the family and society, and thus their desire to escape reality and resort to drugs as a refuge.

While some of the respondents had another view, which is that drug abuse is caused by the disappearance of family ties and weak family communication, which makes him enter the world of drug abuse little by little, until he becomes addicted to it, and thus drug abuse is a desire to fill his voids. One of the important results that Hunt D.G. concluded in this regard is that if the relationship between parents and children is dominated by abandonment or disintegration, the likelihood of children engaging in abuse increases, and if it is dominated by authoritarianism on the part of the fathers, abuse by children is average, and if it is democratic, abuse is weak. (Hunt, 1975)

On the other hand, a good economic level may be one of the reasons for abuse, as it prompts the individual to buy the most expensive drugs, and pushes him to love curiosity and experimentation.

The uneducated and unaware group can also be considered one of the groups most inclined toward abuse, due to their ignorance of the issues resulting from this act, and thus they resort to it as a means of confronting and solving problems.

On the other hand, drug abuse by a family member is considered one of the most important factors that contribute to the individual's abuse, to the point that some members of the same family sometimes share in drug use.

***Drug addiction:**

It was noted that most of the samples saw frequent and continuous drug use that would lead them to addiction in the long run, especially in the absence of internal or external oversight and in the absence of awareness, sensitization, advice and guidance.

The comfort and momentary euphoria provided by drug use leads to addiction. This state that the user reaches leads him to obtain it by any means, and to increase the dose of drugs consumed, including cases in which the body becomes addicted to some components of medical drugs, which requires control of such psychoactive substances. Among the disorders that Arab medicine treats in India with opium are insomnia, nervous excitability, and diarrhea. Among the properties mentioned for opium are that it is a sedative and a pain reliever. This type of medicine is still practiced in India as part of folk medicine. (Lowinger, 1973)

While others believe that addiction is caused by a lack of control over doses, especially if they try many types of drugs and it is no longer enough for them, so they resort to more, which may even lead to death.

4.5. Suggestions and solutions:

There is a sample of respondents who believe that the most important preventive strategies that help to get out of the world of addiction are to provide a helping hand to the addict, support, and encouragement to overcome this crisis, that is, treatment instead of punishment, since the addict is a patient who must be treated.

While others see that enacting strict laws, intensifying efforts, and not remaining silent are one of the solutions to reduce and eliminate this phenomenon.

While others suggested other solutions, such as the role of the mosque as an educational and upbringing institution in prevention, awareness, information, and sensitization of such afflictions, and their impact on the individual, his behaviour, and his psychology.

Preventing this scourge is also linked to the role of various media outlets, including awareness-raising and awareness programmes, and their influence on directing public opinion.

5. Conclusions

The process of detecting an individual's drug abuse is an important step towards treatment, and knowing all aspects of the problem psychologically, socially, health-wise, economically... in order to avoid its various effects.

The problem of drug abuse has become widespread, threatening the security and stability of peoples, especially as it transforms individuals from users to addicts. Psychological disorders appear in the abuser that may create aggression towards others, and may sometimes reach the level of mental illness or may push him to commit suicide. In response to his motives, needs, and desires, he either succeeds in achieving them, or fails in achieving them, and his conflicts begin with himself and with others, and thus different and hostile behaviours appear.

For the individual and society in general, drug abuse is one of the aspects of deviant behaviour and a violation of the moral and legal system of customs, traditions, values and laws... abuse damages the health, psychological, social, economic and mental aspects, and among the factors that increased the severity of this phenomenon is the decline in the authority of social control at several levels. institutions, and the ease of obtaining this drug, which explains its large spread in society.

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IMPLICATIONS OF MEDIA EXPOSURE, YOUTH VIOLENCE AND GANGSTERISM IN NIGERIA: THE AGONY OF A MORALLY DISLOCATED SOCIETY

Kevin Akpanke AKAN¹, Olawale James GBADEYAN², Samuel Osadola OLUWASEUN³

¹Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Federal University Oye-Ekiti (Nigeria)

Email: kevin.akan@fuoye.edu.ng

²Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Federal University Oye-Ekiti (Nigeria)

Email: Olawale.gbadeyan@fuoye.edu.ng

³History and International Studies, Federal University Oye-Ekiti (Nigeria)

Email: Oluwaseun.osadola@fuoye.edu.ng

Abstract: *The influence of media exposure and youth violence has been of global concern. Scholars, researchers, policy makers and implementer as well as social influencers are on their toes trying to find solution to these twin problems because of its effect on the youth and society. This study focused on implications of media exposure, youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria: the agony of a morally dislocated society. youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria: the agony of a morally dislocated society. The study adopted qualitative method of data collection. The study was carried out in thirty-two (32) media outfit covering Television, Radio, Print and Online frames. The study reveals that, the media has the role of socializing, educating, entertaining and advertising and these roles keep the public abreast on the latest developments in the society. When these functions are abused or neglected, it tends to encourage youth violence and gangsterism in our society. The study recommended that: Government and media regulatory agencies must through effective law making and implementation addressed the root causes of mismanagement of media content to forestall youth violence in Nigeria. Conscious effort must be made by the government through its agencies to make laws as well as punish violators of uncensored movie content to avoid or reduce its influence on youth violence in Nigeria. Sanction and severe punishment should be meted on agent of sponsored news content capable of inciting youth violence in Nigeria. Selective media contents should be discouraged so as to ease the tension and aggression that leads to youth violence in Nigeria. Training and retraining of media practitioners will reduced the overzealousness of media practitioners` aggressive news content and eventually clamp down on youth violence in Nigeria.*

Keywords: implications, media exposure, youth violence, Gangsterism, Nigeria

1. Introduction

It is a globally known fact that mass media and journalism are the watchdogs of the people. It acts as an intermediary between the people and the government. These media houses frame news contents and air them to the public, thereby engaging in socializing, educating, entertaining, and advertising or marketing goods and services. These global practices/duties have over time been under-performed, over-performed or even neglected. In most countries within the American continent, the media is held with extreme value and inviolability owing to their roles in such societies (Akan, Gbadeyan and Ojizele, 2022). In Europe, the totality of man`s existence hinges on the media for their daily life activities like weather forecast, trading, news, entertainment, studies and equipping members of the public with government policies, guiding the public on norms and values in the society. Most of these, the media does via print or electronics which is often online or offline. The Arctic and Antarctica rely on media coverage and news content for their daily lives, like in all continents of the world. Personal experience and public opinion shows that the media shapes issues about beliefs and attitudes; exerts influence on elite and policy makers and policy outcome. In Africa, there are seen to be involved in surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission and entertainment and there have being communicating their various messages through television, movies, advertising, radio, the internet, magazine and newspapers (Akan and Egbo, 2022). The media in Central, South and

West Africa like their counterparts in other continents engage in information, interpretation, instruction, bonding, diversion and gate keeping function in the society. In the course of doing these, notable violations have struck their functions that attract sanction and revolt from the youths in form of violence. In Nigeria to be typical, some media houses and practitioners` have received bound many times as a form of sanction as well as irate youth revolt in many instances to show their displeasure and dissatisfaction. These incidences are common place among sentimental and profit oriented media houses and their practitioners`. In most part of northern and southern Nigeria, the media have caused or aggravated disorder leading to violence that deprived the citizens and society of peace and other valuables maybe due to selfishness, carelessness, negligence, greed, corruption and or overzealousness (Gbadeyan and Osadola, 2023). All these have compounded to make most members of the public loose interest in media content. Most have criticized the movie and advertisement contents while other hold it that the media have failed woefully in their educative and socialization functions. From public opinion and personal experience, their job entails management of news coverage and airing it, selective/editing news content, sponsored media content, censored news content and providing same to the public. It is seemingly glaring from experience that some media practitioners are over ambitious and overzealous and have gone out of the broadcasting code of conduct in some instances to do their own will and bidding with their pay masters and sponsors. This has not gone well with the media regulatory bodies and have attracted bound and sanction. In another vein, it has arouse tension and anger on the youth in some part of this country (Nigeria) and such youths have always revolted and taken to the streets to express their anger in form of gangsterism and violent activities. This study therefore mandates itself to examine the activities involved in media exposure, youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria to depict the plight and agony of youths in a morally dislocated society like ours.

2. Problem Statement

Journalism is a global profession that train and prepare manpower in the media industry. Their mandates are universal but with unique practices based on the environment where their services are required. In Developed countries of the world where objectivity, professionalism, technological advancement and media practitioners carry out their duties with less sentiments, there is a tendency for balance reportage though with more raw content exposure than it is the case in developing countries. (Chukudeh and Akan, 2021: 7) opined that in Europe, the media is one of the main sources of socialization, education, entertainment, advertisement and marketing. In Arctic and Antarctica, the media holds the gate way to educating, entertaining and promoting commercials as well as enhancing socio-economic activities. In Africa, the media has greatly carried out its responsibilities and have seemingly achieved a lot. In North Africa for Examples, the media have helped to guide and direct the public on government policies and this has quail tension that would have resulted to violence. In Central Africa media reportage and news content exposure has spur conflicts and violence in most quarters. The picture in Southern Africa showed that media outlets have been fulfilling, specious and wanting in some areas. The experience in most parts of West Africa is that of a media filled with plausibly specious activities. These experiences are more pronounced in Nigeria. The Nigerian media is often referred to as a sensational sentimental and political media. Their activities, news contents and media exposure is flawed with a lot of anomalies. This has caused tension and havoc many times. Most violent demonstration of political, ethnic and religious outlook may have been as a result of poor media coverage, exposure and reportage. However, the media remained one of the most dependable outlets to reach a wider audience in Nigeria and other parts of the world within a short period of time. This especially is noted for its role as agent of socialization, education, entertainment and commercial activities. This study examined media exposure, youth violence and gangsterism with a view to answer bothering questions on: What are the causes of mismanagement of media content on youth violence in Nigeria? What is the influence of uncensored movies content on youth violence in Nigeria? What

is the effect of sponsored news content on youth violence in Nigeria? What is the impact of selective media contents on youth violence in Nigeria? As well as what is the consequence of overzealousness of media practitioners' content on youth violence in Nigeria? To ascertain if the media in the light of providing the aforementioned functions have failed in anyway and how those failures could have resulted to youth violence and gangsterism in the Nigerian society. Hence, this study seeks as its main objective to x-ray the implications of media exposure, youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the (Bandura, 1977:22) Social Learning Theory to explain the implications of media exposure, youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria. The social learning theory believes that people learn whatever they know from parents, teachers, mentors, friends, the environment around them and media outlets (environment). This schools of thought argued that whatever one is exposed to becomes his/her priority to learn and once he/she learns that, it stick and impulse him/her to act on it. It conceived this learning process is acquired through attention (capable of attracting ones interest), retention (ability to keep what is learnt), reproduction (the ability and capacity to repeat or perform what has been learnt) and motivation (reinforcement via reward).

While the media is seen as an agent of socialization, it contents add up bit by bit to make one develop a particular idea. In this case watching or being exposed to violent movies/news contents has a way of impacting on the viewer to make them become violent. Exposure to or mismanagement of media content may not be a direct, necessary or sufficient cause of aggression or violence but both necessary and sufficient conditions to indulge in violence. Violent media content or exposure affects our behaviour, thoughts and emotion. When all this adds up to process, it results to violence or the tendency to harm another person. This happens especially if considerable length of time is allotted by children and youths to viewing this violent content in the media space.

In Nigeria, there is presence of verbal aggression such as saying hurtful words to people, or physical aggression such as fighting, shoving and attacking someone amongst the youths. There is also evidence of the case of relational or indirect attack where lies are told about someone to cause them pain or harm. On the whole, Nigerian media mismanagement of content as well as youths regular viewing or exposure to media violence content has a likelihood or tendency to influence violence among viewers (youths) on a short or long term basis. It is a straight-jacketed belief or thinking with evidence supporting this in Nigeria and elsewhere that aggressive characters acquired from media influence or any source are regulated or enhanced by parental influence, mentors, teachers, friends, religious leaders and media content. However, constant assess to violent media content is both a necessary and sufficient condition to engage in violence without much control as no one is totally immune to the influence of media violent content. Mismanagement of media content and exposure of same to the public is capable of encouraging and escalating violence. This theory was used because it is able to explain the reason and extent of youth violence in Nigeria.

5. Methodology

The study adopted qualitative method of data collection. The study was carried out in thirty-two (32) media outfit covering Television, Radio, Print and Online frames. The media outfits are involved in news, coverage, surveillance/investigation, entertainment and report via print and electronics. Accordingly, staff from the Television, Radio, Print and online media participated in the study having being selected randomly and purposively for the study. Qualitative data was generated via Key Informant Interviews (KII) conducted purposively with sixteen (16) selected interviewees. Two sets of ten (10) participants of male and female were purposively and randomly selected to part take in Focus group Discussion (FGD) used. The

manual content analysis and ethnographic summaries were employed to analyze qualitative data.

6. Discussion of Result and Findings

What are the causes of mismanagement of media content on youth violence in Nigeria?

A participant argued that the causes of mismanagement of media content are corruption, uncensored content, sponsored content, selective media content and overzealousness of media practitioners' media content. To him, these acts has the tendency to breach the broadcasting code, attract sanction and even throw irate youth into violence if adequate care is not taken. These acts of media exposure have led to a lot of uproar and death among Nigerian youth in so many instances.

One participant observed that the causes of mismanagement of media content can be as a result of overzealousness of media practitioners', uncensored media, corruption, sponsored news content and selective media content. He asserts that media practitioners can be group based on their belief and personality. Most of them report news based on who pays them, most do what their instinct tells them, some report what they want to report while others report what they see and the way they see it. If news content is not carefully reported or balanced, the tendency for violence to erupt is high. The Endsars brutality and revolution now are typical and recent examples. Therefore the media must be very cautious and ensure that they do their work devoid of sentiments and biases. Again the media and its practitioners must avoid airing content that will threaten the frail unity that Nigeria is battling with in order not to throw the country into any violence or war.

It was conceived by one of the participants that uncensored media, ignorance, "over sabi" selective news content, uncensored news content and sponsored news content are common causes of media mismanagement in Nigeria. The participant added that these causes have most often thrown the area or state where such news aired in violence and crises. He cited instances with ethnic and religious crises in the North part of Nigeria where mismanagement of media news content due to these causes has resulted to demonstration, riot where tons of lives and properties worth billions of naira have been burnt or vandalized in so many occasions.

Another participant hold that uncensored media content, sponsored news content, overzealousness of some media practitioners' in airing unconfirmed news and selective news airing are the causes of mismanagement of media content that would have provoked violence and gangsterism in Nigeria. He noticed that balanced news reportage promote unity and socio-economic development while faulty media creates and aggravates youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria. He advocated for peaceful journalism where offensive and violence content that will threaten the unity of a state or country should be censored out of public view. One of the participant accused uncensored news, corruption on the part of the media workers, selective media content, sponsored news, bribery and corruption as well as media practitioners' sentiments as the causes of mismanagement of media content and youth violence in Nigeria. She believed that if the media addressed the causes she has mentioned above and operate on the ethics of their profession; taking into account the broadcasting code, there would not be any violence occasioned from media exposure and airing of news content.

A participant said corruption, sentiments, uncensored new, sponsored news and selective media or peaceful journalism as reasons for mismanagement of media content and youth violence in Nigeria. She noticed that most media houses be it print on electronic on or offline do the biddings of their pay masters, air what they think or whatever information they are presented with. When such news content comes on air, the public may be provoked and youths are always the first to take action. This youth action is most times are irrational, spiral and devastating to say the least.

What is the influence of uncensored movie content on youth violence in Nigeria?

One participant believed that uncensored movies enhanced violence. She lamented that even though the Nigeria film and movie censor board is there to screen and approved Movies to be aired on the public space to certain age categories and classes of person; most movie maker and media practitioners have shun or jump the process to air movies with violent or offensive content. This act is unacceptable and capable of spurring youth violence. Most youth caught in the of cybercrime and ritual killings recently said they learnt the act from movies. She concluded by say “a society that airs violent and offensive movies/ media content will definitely have a harvest of violent youths”.

It was revealed by another participant that uncensored movie content corrupts the mind. All movies are expected to be censored by a regulatory body before being aired in the public space. After approval from the regulatory body, age categories of viewers are fixed to such movies and parental guidance are advised. Most times, these regulations only exist in theory. Children and the youths explore the internets and cables watching any movies of their choice. This has encouraged violence and criminalities among Nigeria youth. He observed passionately that, there is a direct link between uncensored movie content and violence because it has strong influence on youth violence and gangsterism among youth in Nigeria.

Another participant said uncensored movies throw the society into a state of crises and violence. Most violence and crimes is a product of uncensored movies. He noticed that watching violent movies increase the inclination to engage in or practice what has been watched or learnt. This is one reason for the increase in youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria.

Another participant observed that uncensored movies/media influenced youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria. She argued the mind and brain master and store what is watched or learnt. The tendency to process and practice is not uncommon. Hence, uncensored movies do have significant influence on youth violence and crime among youths in Nigeria. He further argued that it is a serious problem in Nigeria that demands an urgent intervention.

One participant said the nexus between uncensored movies and violence is not far-fetched. She observed that parent leave electronics at home to go to work and only return home after work. The children come back home from school earlier than their parents and watch whatever they want. This is coupled with the mobile phone and internet facility at their finger-tips that avail them the opportunity to surf the net for information and desired videos. Having watched this, the tendency to engage in the act they watch is very high. This is evident in the contemporary Nigeria where youth violence is taking the front seat to erode peace, safety and socio-economic development.

It was believed by a participant that uncensored movies and news content have the chances of making one become violent. She asserts that violent movies or offensive news content can aggravate anger in a person to do the unthinkable. She cited instances of reprisal attack occasioned by a movie or news content that was aired. To her doing away with uncensored movies is doing away with violence, gangsterism, crime and all antisocial behaviour.

What is the effect of sponsored news content on youth violence in Nigeria?

It was gathered from one of the participant from the KII session that sponsored news has effect on youth violence. He believed if the opinion of the minority or the pay masters is aired against the general public, it can spur violence and crime. He said that when politicians pay media houses to air lies and falsehood, most often, the youth react against such news content violent. He also said the news aired by most media practitioners are sponsored to exhume character assassination or destroy one`s personality or even to cover up a fact. This has resulted in violence in so many quarters.

Another participant believed that sponsored new content has effect on youth violence and gangsterism because the news that is aired is aimed to achieve a particular purpose and if this news is very directional at a person or group of persons, there is always reprisal attack that never ends well.

It is conceived by a participant that sponsored news content encourage youth violence in that, it provoked and instigate someone or a group of people to revolt and defend what is said or aired in the media in a violent way. So many journalists have lost their lives in the hand of violent youth in the course of playing this dirty game. This is one of the many reasons why most media houses are always sanctioned by the regulatory agencies.

Another participant adumbrated that sponsored news content has a relationship with youth violence in that it often creates tension, disorder and violent attacks on the media houses or people who sponsored such news contents. Media houses have been burnt down or destroyed as a result of this kind of acts by violent youth. Thus, there seems to be a link between sponsored news content and youth violence in Nigeria.

A participant noted that sponsored news content have negative effect on youth violence. She observed that, media houses owners or practitioners` are looking for patronage and quick money. Anyone who can pay for their services is the right person to do business with and what he/she wants is what is aired. Most times out of the desperation to make money or please their pay masters, the news content is decided by their pay masters without recourse to the professional code or ethics. This is does not always go well for journalist, media houses and even the persons or organization whose names or businesses are painted in a bad light. When this occurs, violence is usually employed in form of revenge or revolt.

A participant said media houses with decisive pay masters end up with a bad name, lot of sanctions and court cases because sponsored news content is always directed at castigating or manipulating someone, businesses, a group of people or something competitive.

What is the impact of selective media contents on youth violence in Nigeria?

A participant believed that selective media content or news reportage gives half information or only what the media and their pay masters want to be aired to the public. Most times the general public may feel cheated or taken for granted if the media decide to filter or concealed vital required public information. This may end up with violence from the youth or aggrieved party

It was the opinion of one participant that selective news content has a hidden agenda. When media practitioners` begins to select certain news to air, it simply shows bias and most times unprofessionalism. This situation may lead to violence if a group feels that their interest is not carried along or are deprived of certain agitations. Selective media content covers up a lot of information or fact. This is unhealthy and capable of generating worries; trauma and frustration that if not well managed could result to violence.

Another participant argued that selective media may not be as negative as people see it. It is a professional practice in journalism to avoid divulging sensitive information that may cause problems in aired to the public. Selective media aim at reducing tension and create a peaceful atmosphere in the society. Unfortunately, it has it disadvantage which often times boomerang and end in violence because the public will always see it as if media practitioners collected bribe so as not to air certain news contents.

A participant conceived that selective media content impact negatively on youth violence in Nigeria. For instance, hundred people died the media reported six or decides not to report the news or even do so without the dead persons. This has a way of arousing suspicion and tension. The outcome of this kind of reportage is violence.

It was the opinion of another participant that selective media content is out of corruption or biases. Most times the media is being paid to report news in a certain way as to hide the truth from the public. When media house under report or refuse to air complete news content violence is bound to occur. It is convenient to say selective media content provoke violence, she added.

A participant observed that selective media content and youth violence are like room and parlour apartment. You can use one without the other. He said anytime the media decides to select news content, it is calling for violence or criminal aggression upon itself. To him, selective media content and youth violence goes hand-in-hand.

What is the consequence of overzealousness of media practitioners` content on youth violence in Nigeria?

A participant argued that some Nigeria journalists are too desperate to be noticed or famous. This desperation and quest often make them to report news that is offensive or capable of creating tension just to make them name go viral as objective or fearless journalist. This mindless attitude has provoked anger, cost this country tons of lives and properties worth billions of Naira in most parts of the country.

Another participant observed with obsession that overzealousness of media practitioners to report certain news content has brought about violence in most situations. He cited instances where the journalist aired the new of the massacre in Odi in Bayelsa and Zakibiam in Benue State as well as the Nigerian Army Air Bus crash that was reported by particular media houses kook line and sinker few minutes after these occurrences that sparked violence. To her, media practitioners` who are overzealous should be bound from news gathering and reportage to forestall reprisal action or even violence.

It was the view of a participant that overzealous media practitioners tend to report unrefined and unbalanced contents that raised aggression in the minds of the public. The attitude is sine qua non to violence at all times and it is not good for this country that is managing to stay together as one.

One of the participants holds that overzealous Journalist air media contents that are either offensive, unbalanced or contradictory to gain cheap popularity or achieve certain gains. In which ever eye it is seen from, this acts is provocative and enhanced violence among youths in Nigeria. This has happened several times. In facts, most of those kinds of media houses or journalists/media practitioners are always victim of violent youths themselves. They either ends up sanctioned, bound/sacked or even burnt or destroyed.

A participant conceived that overzealousness of media practitioners` contents has consequences like youth violence. He believed that youth in Nigeria are already angry and are waiting at any slightest provocation to react. Most times this media practitioners allow themselves to be used and it has sparked violence severally in this country.

Another participant revealed that, overzealousness in anything in life is bad. It shows desperation and desire to achieve something nocturnal. Having said that, it has the ability and capacity to offend others or exhume anger and violence in others, he added. He went further to say that most young journalists in Nigeria are in the habit of doing that and they always get served in their own coin. Media practitioners overzealous has killed most journalists and encouraged youth violence in most situations and this is not a good thing to do.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The media has the role of socializing, educating, entertaining and advertising; these roles keep the public abreast on the latest developments in the society. When these functions are misused or neglected, it tends to encourage youth violence and gangsterism in our society. Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are made to ameliorate the phenomenon:

- Government and media regulatory agencies must through effective law making and implementation addressed the root causes of mismanagement of media content to forestall youth violence in Nigeria.

- Conscious effort must be made by the government through its agencies to make laws as well as punish violators of uncensored movie content to avoid or reduce its influence on youth violence in Nigeria.

- Sanction and severe punishment should be meted on agent of sponsored news content capable of inciting youth violence in Nigeria.

- Selective media contents should be discouraged so as to ease the tension and aggression that leads to youth violence in Nigeria.

- Training and retraining of media practitioners will reduced the overzealousness of media practitioners` aggressive news content and eventually clamp down on youth violence in Nigeria.

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SOCIAL SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE PRACTICED AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA." FACEBOOK AS A MODEL"

Adel LOULOU¹, Sihem DIB²

¹Ph. Researcher, Mohamed-Cherif Messaadia University - Souk Ahras (Algeria)

E-mail: adel.loulou@univ-soukahras.dz

²Lecturer, PhD., Mohamed-Cherif Messaadia University - Souk Ahras (Algeria),

E-mail: s.dib@univ-soukahras.dz

Abstract: *This research aims to uncover the behavioural patterns practiced through social media platforms, especially Facebook, as the most subscribed site, it provides users with freedom of expression that may deviate from its humane origin into various forms, such as symbolic social violence against others and specifically against women, through mechanisms of symbolic violence to control them. One of the findings of this research is that the virtual world merely reflects what exists in the real world, as individuals seek to control women in the virtual world through demeaning and marginalizing actions. This negatively impacts their personality dimensions and subjects them to presumed legitimacy.*

Keywords: violence, symbolic violence, social symbolic violence against women, social networking sites.

1. Introduction

The Information Revolution and modern technologies in the field of communications have brought about many changes, not only in the field of media but also in the relational aspect between members in the virtual community. The inevitability of virtual communication has led to the widespread proliferation of violence, a phenomenon that is difficult to define in terms of its dimensions, factors, and various forms. According to the Marxist perspective, violence represents a declared aspect of social change in a binary relationship between domination or power and submission, through the transition from the material level—means of production—to the abstract level—ideas. Particularly when violence is associated with communication processes, as Marshall McLuhan believes through the theory of transitions and technological determinism, considering the medium as the conduit to social reality. Agriculture led to an agricultural society, industry produced an industrial society, and communication technologies also produced a communicative society. From visible physical violence to hidden symbolic violence that gives legitimacy to the dominant and flows through multiple meanings and symbols, and used as a means to impose harm on others, symbolically aligning with media—especially new media—as a reinforcement of dominance and submission to power. It's noteworthy that the youth are the most active users of social media, expressing prevailing societal values, especially in adolescence, characterized by enthusiasm, innovation, and rejection of constraints, unraveling those subconscious repressions and a state of rejection of living reality.

This aligns with the efforts of modern communication technologies in embedding the communicative message or idea in a way that the youth can only comprehend after it penetrates their minds, potentially committing violence against others without being aware of the action they have taken or the risks it poses to themselves and those around them. (Fazia, 2021).

Social violence is considered one of the most dangerous manifestations and forms of violence, as it involves the actual use of force or threat to achieve social goals, with political connotations and dimensions taking various individual or collective, secret or public, organized or unorganized styles. It results from pressure factors on the individual that render them incapable of accepting societal norms and regulations. It may direct deviant behavior towards women despite their status as half of society and their role within human societies. After experiencing violence in real life and public spaces, it has shifted to the virtual realm through

entertainment motives and idea exchange. Users hide behind aliases and fake accounts, providing ample opportunity for abuse with ease and freedom. If not overt, it becomes covert and gains legitimacy, becoming part of life and even a means of entertainment and venting for others at times. With the freedom afforded to users across various social media platforms, this study aims to shed light on this phenomenon by answering the following questions:

- What is meant by symbolic social violence against women?
- How does symbolic social violence against women manifest on Facebook?

1. Concepts of Study

- **Social Networking Sites:** Social networking sites are a fundamental aspect of new media and signify the transformation of society from industrial to knowledge-based, by enabling individuals and groups to communicate through this virtual space when face-to-face communication is not feasible (Al-Deehi, 2016: 438). These sites aim to establish virtual social relationships and even go beyond to facilitate the emergence of communication media. It is « a network where individuals with similar interests and inclinations gather to form friendships using the internet ». (Mouzid, 2012).

The Web Encyclopedia "Obidia" defines social networks as "a term used to describe any site on the World Wide Web that allows its users to display a public personal profile. It also allows the formation of personal relationships with other users who access that profile page. Therefore, social networking sites are used to describe socially oriented websites, live discussion groups, chat rooms, and other social realities" (Kanaan, 2014: 170).

- **Facebook:** Kenkuff Kyunt, a researcher in social networking sites, defines Facebook as one of the social networking sites where an international online community gathers to interact by exchanging photos, videos, and other information, connecting with friends, family, colleagues, and classmates. Facebook aims to create an environment where individuals can regularly log in to track the activities of friends and colleagues, exchange their own activities, interact around common interests or hobbies, send messages, and join other groups and networks. (Hattimi, 2015).

Facebook is considered one of the most important social networking sites, launched by Mark Zuckerberg in February 2004 when he was a student at Harvard University. He named it Facebook, which means "book of faces that goes beyond the known printed directories known as face books," which were distributed to students to help them identify their classmates' names. It's worth noting that there was an important idea behind Facebook. Its members would use their real names, and the authenticity of their identities would be confirmed by the fact that their profiles as students were linked to school-issued email addresses. The site initially did not allow the use of pseudonyms or fake names, making its members accountable for their actions (Al-Saadi, 2016: 163).

- **Definition of Violence:** According to Ibn Manzur in his book "Lisan al-Arab," violence is described as the violation of order and the extreme of gentleness, and it is against gentleness. It is violent if it is not gentle in its matter. And to "incapacitate the matter" is to take it forcefully. In a saying: "God gives to gentleness what He does not give to violence." It is from intensity and hardship (Manzur).

In English and French, it is derived from the Latin word "Violence" and "Violentai," which denote the illegitimate use of force. Violence is the use of force without legal sanction, rejecting law, justice, and submission to any authority. It encompasses punishing, raping, interfering with the freedoms of others, and is also "a violent force exercised against a specific person" (semestre, 1993).

As for terminology, scientists have varied definitions of "violence," but they generally agree that it is a complex social phenomenon and a mechanism for self-defense against the risks humans face for survival and continuity in life. This defensive mechanism is one of the

instinctual energies latent in living beings that awaken and activate in defensive or aggressive situations, where humans and animals are considered equal.

Adler defines violence as "a compensatory response to a sense of inadequacy or weakness (Al-Zain, 1986)."

Because we are born into a social world, we accept a number of norms and assumptions that impose themselves on us automatically and easily, almost without instruction (Bourdieu, 1992: 141-143).

Levinas states: "Every act in which the individual behaves as if he were alone, as if the world around him exists only to receive this act and perform violence" (Lévinas, 1948: 20).

According to the Dictionary of Social Science Terminology, violence is defined as: "A strict expression of force exercised to compel an individual or group to perform specific actions desired by another individual or group. Violence manifests physical force (such as beating, imprisonment, or execution) or takes the form of social pressure, with its legitimacy based on society's recognition of it (et al., 1985)."

- **Symbolic Violence:** Pierre Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as any influence that succeeds in imposing specific meanings, and in imposing them through legitimate meanings that obscure the power relations that underpin its power, adding power relations to this specific symbolic self, meaning the specific symbolic self. (Bourdieu, 1994).

According to Bourdieu, the purpose of symbolic violence is to impose domination and control over others, while the response of the other party is voluntary based on belief in the legitimacy endorsed by the individual.

Bourdieu also views symbolic violence as "invisible, subtle violence that affects the ideological and mental level, successfully imposing social representations by giving them legitimacy of domination" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). Naturally, practiced violence is invisible and unseen, imposed on individuals through these social representations, which serve to legitimize dominance and control by forcefully imposing meanings with legitimate authority.

- **Symbolic Violence via Facebook:** Symbolic violence is present in various forms of media content in all its types and levels. Violence manifests in all forms of communication in modern life, including mobile phones, video games, and the internet, all of which have become carriers of violence infiltrating us as the predominant element in the content of older forms of communication. (Al-Ousi, 2012).

- **Concept of Violence against Women:** It is any violence related to gender that likely cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering for women. (Ahmed, 2017).

- **Definition of Media Violence:** Media violence is defined as the depiction of overt physical harm that harms, kills, or threatens to do so. Some acts are defined as involving violence by using it to spread fear and express a stance, usually political. (Berger, 2012).

Media violence is also considered psychological, intellectual, and moral violence, including any media act containing aspects, behaviors, words, symbols, relationships, values, and morals that contradict the smooth behavior and sound nature of human beings. It has been defined by the Canadian Centre for Media Studies in a study on violence on Canadian television as any psychological or moral assault or any act that causes an unwanted psychological state such as anxiety, fear, insult, mockery, loss of value, or affection, harm to reputation, or feelings of guilt... any condition that generates non-physical pain (Fadil, 2015).

2. Symbolic Interactionism from Pierre Bourdieu's Perspective

Pierre Bourdieu is a renowned French sociologist known for his work in sociology and philosophy. He was particularly interested in studying media and symbolic interaction in various contexts. Bourdieu views symbolic violence as: "a gentle and subtle violence, imperceptible to its own victims, practiced through purely symbolic means, such as communication, knowledge transmission, particularly through processes of recognition, or at the utmost borders of emotions and intimacies."

Bourdieu elaborates on this in his book: "I want to unravel a series of mechanisms showing that the media practice a kind of symbolic violence that is harmful and damaging. Symbolic violence is violence exercised with the complicity of those subjected to it, as well as those who practice it, to the extent that those subjected to it, as well as those who exercise it, are not fully aware of this violence or of their submission to it." (Bourdieu, 2004: 46)

His perspective on symbolic interactionism in media, as outlined in his book "On Television and the Manipulation of Minds," can be summarized as follows:

A. **Social Context:** Bourdieu believes that media is not just a neutral tool for information transmission but reflects power structures and social inequalities in society. He sees media as part of the field of power and influences the shaping of symbols and codes that are associated with culture and identities. Hence, the dominance of power over individuals and the acquisition of legitimacy therein lead individuals to submit obediently to this dominance, considering it as the status quo. In his view, the media becomes a means of exerting control over individuals by conveying ideas or images and explaining them in a way that aligns with the interests of the upper class. This is due to the low cultural level of individuals. Therefore, Bourdieu calls for raising the educational level of individuals and granting the media more freedom for media democratization.

B. **Symbolic Capital:** Bourdieu uses the concept of "symbolic capital" to describe the economic and social forces that own and control media and symbolic production. He believes that individuals and institutions with strong symbolic capital can shape and direct symbols and codes according to their interests.

This aspect parallels Bourdieu's Marxist framework, which believes that those who own the means of production or the infrastructure are the ones who assert themselves, their opinions, and control over the superstructure.

C. **Reproduction of Power:** Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of studying how power and domination are reproduced through media. He considers that media can contribute to reinforcing the dominance and cultural superiority of certain social classes over others.

D. **Journalistic Field:** Bourdieu sees media as a kind of "journalistic field," where various parties and individuals compete to control the production and dissemination of information and symbols. There can be tensions between news content and the political and economic inclinations of media owners.

E. **Representation and Symbolism:** For Bourdieu, media is not just a conveyor of information but engages in a process of representation and reality-shaping. Media can significantly influence how events and phenomena are portrayed, thus shaping public awareness.

In general, Bourdieu's perspective on symbolic interactionism in media highlights the role of media as a means of conveying and shaping symbols and representations within social, economic, and political structures.

The image presented by the media, amplified and endowed with dramatic qualities, does so using grandiose words. Ordinary words fail to surprise anyone, and thus, words dominate the image, rendering it meaningless without the interpretation it requires to be read.

4 . Media Content and Manifestations of Symbolic Violence via Facebook Against Women:

Social media platforms such as Facebook have become prominent players in human life and constitute a significant part of its social interactions. Symbolic violence and its practices are notably influenced by the presence of social media platforms, which can have a significant impact on human relationships and life stances.

Humanity has embraced modern life and entered the indicators of the knowledge society as a culture dominating social life, and Facebook has become a prominent aspect of human life. This is reflected in media content on Facebook through patterns and behaviors practiced by individuals within a socially diverse life characterized by diverse cultures. This is

reflected in the practice of symbolic violence, with individuals subject to symbolic violence in cultural and educational practices prevalent in our lives.

Factors related to the impact of social media platforms on the practice of symbolic violence include:

a) Dissemination of negative symbols and content: Individuals can use social media platforms to disseminate negative and abusive symbols and content, which can be part of practicing symbolic violence against others.

b) Reinforcing discrimination and bias: Social media platforms contribute to reinforcing discrimination and bias against certain categories of individuals, including women, minorities, and marginalized groups.

c) Social pressure: Individuals may experience social pressure to share their opinions or behave in certain ways on social media, which can be a source of symbolic violence.

d) Proliferation of media: Social media platforms enhance the rapid spread of content, which can increase the impact of offensive symbols and words.

e) Influence of digital identities: Social media platforms can contribute to building digital identities that include practices of symbolic violence and encourage them.

Therefore, there is encouragement to promote awareness of the importance of using social media platforms positively and responsibly, and to promote healthy digital culture and combat practices of symbolic violence. It is important to understand that the impact of social media platforms on the practice of symbolic violence requires critical thinking and efforts to encourage respect and mutual understanding across these platforms.

Symbolic violence against women on social media refers to the use of symbols, ideas, and symbolic language to promote and reinforce bias and violence against women. This type of violence can take various forms and shapes, but it can be psychologically, socially, and culturally devastating for women. Here are some examples of symbolic violence against women on social media:

a) Incitement of hatred and violence: This phenomenon involves using social media to incite hatred and violence against women. This can be done through posting abusive comments, threats, or inciting physical violence.

b) Linguistic bias: Symbolic violence against women can manifest in the use of racist, derogatory, or offensive language towards women. This includes using derogatory and arrogant words and phrases.

c) Sexual objectification and harassment: Symbolic violence can also include posting unwanted sexual content or sexual harassment on social media.

d) Portrayal of women in exceptional or negative ways: Portraying women in exceptional or negative ways on social media can reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions about women's roles in society.

e) Spreading false information: Social media can be used to spread false information targeting women and tarnishing their reputation.

f) Gender stereotyping: Symbolic violence can also result from categorizing women based solely on their gender characteristics, without considering their individual abilities and talents.

g) Cyberbullying: This includes sending hurtful messages or derogatory comments to women's accounts on social media. This can be regardless of the subject - whether it's because of their appearance, opinions, or success.

h) Online harassment: This may include sending unwanted sexual messages or threats online. This is sometimes referred to as online sexual harassment and can be disturbing and harmful to victims.

i) Promotion of pornographic images and videos: This includes posting pornographic images or videos of women without their permission or filming them without their knowledge, which violates their privacy and dignity.

j) Use of vulgar language and insult: This includes using vulgar words or insulting expressions towards women on social media with the aim of defamation or harm.

k) Spreading negative gender ideas and beliefs: This may include spreading negative gender ideas and beliefs that diminish the value and dignity of women or portray them negatively.

l) Promoting violence against women: This can include encouraging physical or psychological violence against women on social media, which increases the risk of real violence.

These examples illustrate how social media platforms can be used as a tool to spread symbolic violence against women. This type of violence can be significantly harmful and can lead to reinforcing discrimination and shaping public opinion negatively. Communities and social platforms need to direct their efforts towards combating this type of violence and promoting awareness of its importance.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the preceding discussions, we can infer that symbolic violence in the virtual environment is an extension of symbolic violence in the real world. Its contents vary, employing methods such as belittlement, mockery, insults, and it permeates with both verbal and non-verbal symbolic load to convey a reading of a reality that carries hidden harm to the other in symbolic connotations embraced by the virtual space.

The inevitability of virtual communication that we are subjected to in our daily lives has led to the emergence of a state of chaos and endless exploitation of images of violence. Social symbolic violence against women is particularly evident when re-examining a concept oriented to both the real social situation and the virtual world. We find that what is available in the real world shapes and reflects on the virtual reality. Violence against women in its various forms also manifests in virtual life, and symbolic violence, despite the novelty of the term, has existed since ancient times. However, it has evolved in terms of media and channels that feed it, making it more covert through its embodiment across social media platforms.

Many previous studies have confirmed that social networking sites (Facebook in particular) help in the production and reproduction of symbolic violence in all its forms and manifestations. The confrontational narrative used by social media platforms contributes to dehumanizing and distorting specific groups, polarizing them.

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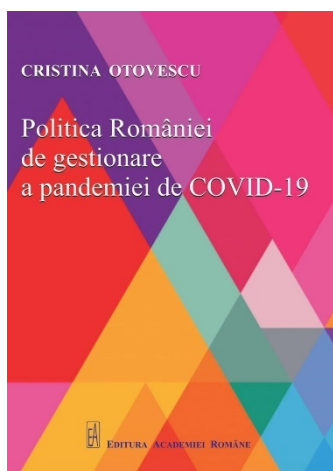
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BOOK REVIEW: Cristina Otovescu (2022). *The Policy of Romania to Manage the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Romanian Academy

Mihaela Luminița SANDU

Lecturer, Ph.D. Ovidius University of Constanța (Romania)

Email: mihaela_naidin@yahoo.com



The book entitled „*Romanian pandemic management policy Covid-19*”, written by Cristina Otovescu and published by the Romanian Academy Publishing House, it is a profound and detailed analysis of Romania's response to the global crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

„*Romania's policy for managing the COVID-19 pandemic*” is a remarkable and timely book, which analyzes in detail how our country approached the major challenge represented by the emergence of the new group virus and the alarm reactions in the Romanian public space.

The author offers an exhaustive look at all aspects of the Romanian policy to combat the pandemic.

The book is structured in five main chapters, each addressing different aspects of pandemic management, from the emergence of the virus and initial reactions, to government strategies and the

long-term impact on Romanian society.

The first chapter of the book, „*The appearance of the new influenza virus and the alarm reactions in the public space in Romania*”, explores the origin and characteristics of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and brings to light how it arrived in Romania „*In Romania, certain journals and television stations informed public opinion about the calamity that fell on the heads of the Chinese, affected en masse by the terrible flu, which, on January 24, 2020, claimed the first 26 victims (p.17)*”.

This chapter focuses on two essential components: the dynamics of journalistic information and the involvement of specialists in the fields of epidemiology and public health.

In the first subsection, the author examines the role of the media in shaping public perception and reactions to the emergence of the pandemic. The manner in which the news media were initially the main sources of dissemination of data about the virus is analyzed, providing essential details about symptoms, modes of transmission and recommended preventive measures. Cristina Otovescu emphasizes the importance of the accuracy of journalistic information, considering their significant impact on the behavior of the population. The dual role of the mass media is also highlighted: on the one hand, it contributed to public awareness of the seriousness of the situation, on the other hand, it had the potential to induce panic and misinformation in the absence of rigorous verification of sources.

This detailed presentation of relevant scientific information helps readers better understand the nature and impact of the virus on Romanian society.

In the second subsection, the author addresses the decisive contribution of public health specialists and medical authorities in the response to the pandemic. Emphasis is placed on analyzing the discourses and recommendations made by epidemiologists and infectious disease physicians, which provided a solid scientific basis for understanding and combating the virus. Also, Cristina Otovescu explores the role of the Ministry of Health in coordinating the response at the national level, highlighting the communication strategies adopted and the measures implemented to limit the spread of the virus. By analyzing the positions of these key actors, the

paper highlights concerted efforts to navigate an ever-changing epidemiological landscape, marking the transition from initial reactions to strategies adapted to the dynamic context of the pandemic.

Second chapter, „*Romania in a state of emergency and on alert – an inevitable crisis*”, it explores how public opinion and the media reacted to the outbreak of the pandemic and provides an exhaustive and multidimensional analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Romanian society, focusing on health, demography, moral and political systems. This section also reveals the evolution of the pandemic in terms of statistical data and its impact on the social structure.

The sub-chapter on the crisis in the public health system reveals the immense pressures on the health infrastructure in the face of an increasing number of COVID-19 cases. This context has highlighted pre-existing vulnerabilities in the system, including a lack of medical staff and adequate equipment. The demographic crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic through increased mortality and declining birth rates, has heightened concerns about the long-term sustainability of Romanian society. The moral crisis, reflected in the ethical dilemmas and social tensions generated by the isolation measures and restrictions imposed, has tested social cohesion. In parallel, the political crisis, characterised by challenges in managing the response to the pandemic and communicating effectively with the population, has highlighted the need for strong and responsible leadership in times of crisis.

The author presents a statistical analysis of the dynamics of infections and the impact of the pandemic on the demographic structure and social life, critically analyzes the contradictory and alarming information that has circulated in the media, influencing public perception and generating a state of panic.

The analysis of statistical data on COVID-19 cases in the period 1 March 2020 - 31 August 2021 provides a clear perspective on the dynamics of the pandemic „*In March 2020, the crisis was caused by the penetration of the new influenza virus in Romania, being just another episode, indeed the most serious, in a long process of crisis that the medical system in our country has been experiencing for a long time (p.26)*”. This section presents an evolution of case types, providing a solid basis for understanding how the different waves of the pandemic have affected Romania. The data highlights the rise and fall of cases and the impact of the introduction of vaccination on the dynamics of the pandemic.

The emergence of the Delta strain and the devastating consequences of the fourth wave of illnesses marked a new critical phase of the pandemic in Romania, testing the limits of the health system's capacity and societal response to an impending medical disaster and a particularly serious humanitarian situation.

The introduction of the Omicron variant and the onset of the fifth wave of the pandemic posed a new challenge, bringing with it an unprecedented infection rate and testing the effectiveness of preventive measures and vaccination campaigns „*It had a rapid speed of transmission, arousing huge fears among doctors, as it had a wide spread among children, the young population (p. 90)*”.

By integrating these sections, the chapter succeeds in providing a global perspective on the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania, highlighting the interconnections between the different crises and challenges, as well as the responses to them. It reveals the complexity of crisis management, which requires not only a rigorous medical and scientific approach, but also a deep understanding of social, economic and political dynamics.

Chapter three, entitled „*The role of government in the crisis period and the strategy to combat the effects of the pandemic,*” provides a comprehensive analysis of how government institutions have responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper explores the dynamics between policy and scientific perspectives, institutional support structures, regulatory frameworks, and the strategies and measures adopted to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on various levels.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the scenario methodology, which allowed the government to assess the various possible pandemic trajectories and develop appropriate responses. This approach balanced the political perspective, focused on maintaining social and economic stability, with the scientific perspective, focused on reducing the spread of the virus and protecting public health.

The following section details the role of institutional structures in coordinating and implementing crisis measures. Emergency committees, intersectoral working groups and collaboration with international health organisations are highlighted, underlining the importance of an integrated approach.

The chapter goes on to examine the regulatory framework adapted to deal with the crisis, including the introduction of military ordinances. This section discusses the necessity and impact of suspending or limiting democratic rights and freedoms in the context of the state of emergency, highlighting the tensions between the need for health security and the protection of individual freedoms.

The paper then goes on to detail the government's main lines of action in managing the health crisis:

- Monitoring travel flows to prevent the introduction and spread of the virus.
- Preparing and supplying hospitals, including managing accommodation capacity and stocks of protective equipment.
- Protection of medical staff by providing necessary equipment and psychological support.
- Social protection of the population, through support measures for vulnerable and economically affected people.
- Supporting the economic environment through financial incentives and business support measures.
- Health education and information for the population to promote preventive behaviour and combat misinformation.

The reactions expressed by the opposition political parties and the criticism of the measures implemented by the government in the context of the pandemic are a reflection of the diversity of opinions and the intensity of the public debate that has taken place on the management of the crisis. In the same vein, the Court of Auditors' findings on the management of public resources during the state of emergency underline the imperative of transparency and accountability in the management of funds, highlighting the importance of these principles in building public confidence.

Romania's and Europe's post-pandemic reconstruction efforts, underlined by the European Union's Joint Recovery and Resilience Programme initiative, also highlight the commitment to supporting economic and social recovery, while promoting the green transition and digitisation. Emphasising innovation, sustainability and social cohesion, this strategy aims to minimise the long-term impact of the pandemic and lay the foundations for robust and inclusive economic growth.

The fourth chapter „*The role of specialists in crisis management and public health rescue measures*”, highlights the importance of collaboration between politicians and health experts to formulate effective strategies to combat the pandemic. The author discusses value priorities, the differences in vision between politics and science, and proposes mass testing as a strategic solution.

The contribution of doctors to the management of the crisis was vital, as they proposed essential strategic measures such as controlling the flow of travellers across borders, mandatory and regular testing of medical staff, and extensive testing of the population „*Doctors and other specialists considered that the fight against the pandemic in Romania necessarily involved a process of mass testing and retesting of people nationwide, as it helped to discover those infected, isolate and treat them, and stop the chain of serial contamination*” (p. 177). These actions, together with the combination of preventive and medical-scientific methods of

treatment, formed the backbone of efforts to combat the pandemic. The role of doctors was thus essential in establishing and implementing health safety protocols.

Sociologists and social workers have made significant contributions by analysing and explaining the social problems amplified by the pandemic, as well as making recommendations for alternative social policies. They have highlighted collective livelihood needs in the context of restrictions and proposed social intervention strategies to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups.

Psychologists have also played a crucial role, providing support for managing increased stress and anxiety in the population and educating the public on the importance of adapting to unpredictable risks and crises „...*adapting individuals to the conditions of living in isolation from their peers imposed by the action of the new influenza virus, in our case, during the years 2020-2021, is a therapeutic formula advocated in psychology and psychiatry...*(p. 199)”. This contribution highlighted the need for a holistic approach to pandemic management, including the mental health dimension.

In the context of these multidisciplinary efforts, the position of the Romanian Academy on the economic and social recovery of the country has underlined the importance of close collaboration between specialists in various fields to formulate viable long-term solutions. The Academy promoted the need for an integrated approach, combining scientific knowledge with social and humanistic knowledge, to ensure a sustainable and inclusive recovery.

In summary, crisis management and public health rescue measures during the COVID-19 pandemic benefited from unprecedented collaboration between specialists from different fields, each making essential contributions to limiting the impact of the pandemic. This multidisciplinary approach highlighted the value of integrated thinking and close collaboration in tackling complex challenges, laying the foundations for more effective strategies in managing future public health crises.

Finally, **chapter five**, „*The role of population. What Romanians felt and experienced during the pandemic and what they thought the future would be like*”, provides an insight into Romanians' personal experiences and emotional states during the pandemic. Otovescu explores fears, grievances and hopes, putting the social and psychological impact of the pandemic into context.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing the role of the population and its perceptions provides essential insight into the social and emotional dynamics that have shaped the collective experience in Romania. The study of the emotional state of the population revealed an increase in feelings of isolation and loneliness, shaping a true epidemic of loneliness, which went hand in hand with health challenges.

Fear of death, a feeling intensified among the population during the pandemic, has invited wide-ranging reflections for a psychosociological theory of fear, addressing the ways in which society and individuals manage and respond to existential threats. This deep-seated fear has influenced social behaviours and perceptions towards safety and public health measures.

People's assessment of the situation in the country, which includes levels of trust in state authorities and collective grievances, varied throughout the pandemic, reflecting tensions between individual needs and government actions. The experience of the pandemic also catalysed a process of introspection and reassessment of values and beliefs, leading to the formation of new attitudes and perspectives on community life and health.

The thoughts and opinions expressed by Romanians at the end of 2020 and during 2021 highlighted an evolution in the perception of the crisis, marking a transition from immediate reactions to adaptation and anticipation of the future. This period was characterised by an oscillation between hope and uncertainty, as people tried to navigate the complexity of information and predictions about the pandemic.

The socio-political and epidemiological premises of 2022 in Romania were mixed, with expectations of an improvement in the health situation, reflected in a decrease in the fatality rate and an improvement in the epidemiological situation. At the same time, the context was

marked by optimism and public demonstrations expressing the desire for normality and improved dialogue between the state and citizens. This period has highlighted society's ability to mobilise and seek constructive solutions to overcome the crisis.

One of the great strengths of the book is its balanced and objective approach to the subject. Autoareal does not limit itself to a chronological presentation of events, but provides a detailed analysis of the policies and measures adopted by the authorities to limit the spread of the virus. It explores both positive aspects, such as the implementation of restrictions and information campaigns, and critical aspects, such as the management of medical equipment stocks or the effectiveness of testing and vaccination.

In conclusion, *„Romania's policy for managing the COVID-19 pandemic”* is an indispensable book for anyone who wants to understand in depth how Romania managed the pandemic and is a significant contribution to understanding the complexity of responses to a public health crisis of the magnitude of COVID-19. The author provides an objective perspective on the events and critically addresses the policy and decisions made during this tumultuous period. The book not only informs but also challenges the reader to reflect on lessons learned and how we can improve preparedness and response to future public health challenges.